



THE PUTNAM VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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OUR AMERICAN HISTORY
A FREE PROGRAM SERIES - OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Very Special People

The Struggles, Loves and Triumphs of Human Oddities

With Researcher and Educator
Jon Fiorella

Saturday, April 8, 2017 at 10:00 am

*“They are very special people - burdened by their strangeness,
but gifted with a rare dignity and courage.”*

- Frederick Drimmer

This is the story of the *real people* that *exhibited* and *were exhibited* in the circus sideshows. The individuals presented are all authentic, although in many cases their conditions may have been exaggerated to draw customers to their performances. Categories included dwarfs, giants, conjoined & parasitic twins, armless & legless wonders, “pinheads,” fat people, thin people, hairy people, bearded ladies and the list goes on. They were usually represented as “freaks,” “monsters,” “human enigmas” or just “strange people.” The people in question wanted to be called “prodigies,” “performers,” or as Frederick Drimmer described them, “*Very Special People*.” They were all human and therefore all had human emotions. This presentation will explore their stories in that light.

Researchers point out that 90% of these special people married normal individuals, had normal families and enjoyed happy marriages. Yet, many of them were exploited, some being mistreated, abused or even enslaved. Most chose the circus life because they could have a lucrative career when there were few other employment possibilities available to them.

Since the nearby town of Somers, NY has been officially designated “The Cradle of the American Circus,” this presentation will also examine the role this town has played in circus history.



Jon Fiorella

Jon Fiorella was a science teacher for 43 years at both the high school and college levels and won five national awards related to his teaching along the way. Science was his vocation and history his avocation. In both fields he has conducted extensive research, which he has generously shared through his many public programs and speaking engagements. In the past year he has given presentations in New York, New Jersey and Florida on a variety of topics related to both science and history.

This FREE program will be held at the Putnam Valley Free Library
30 Oscawana Lake Road ♦ Putnam Valley, NY 10579 at 10:00 am