

Famous Floridians: John Ringling

John Ringling is perhaps most remembered as a circus showman and promoter. But he is also remembered as the man who brought art and culture to Sarasota, Florida in the early 1900s.

He was the best known of the five Ringling brothers. Together, the brothers started the most successful circus in the world in 1884. In 1907, the brothers bought Barnum and Bailey Circus in London.

Ringling's circus travel often took him to Europe to look for new acts. There, he developed a taste for culture and art. He collected over six hundred Baroque masterpieces of art within five years. His collection of Peter Paul Rubens was thought to be the finest in the world. It included four so-called tapestry cartoons, giant paintings up to fourteen by nineteen feet in size.

Ringling and his wife started spending winters in Sarasota in 1909. He brought art and culture with him. He did it in such grand, circus style that he set the pace for the artistic and cultural development that came after him.

In 1924, Ringling started construction on an Italian renaissance home. It was designed to resemble the Venetian Gothic palaces that the Ringlings had admired on their extensive Italian travels. The home was named Cà d'Zan (Venetian for "House of John").

Ringling had a part in developing the area of Sarasota. He owned and planned the Ringling Isles subdivision that included St. Armands Key, Bird Key, Coon Key, Wolf Key, and 2,000 acres on Longboat Key. With a business associate, he built the Ringling Causeway and bridge to St. Armand Key. A year later he donated it to the city. Ringling was listed as one of the richest men in the world in 1925.

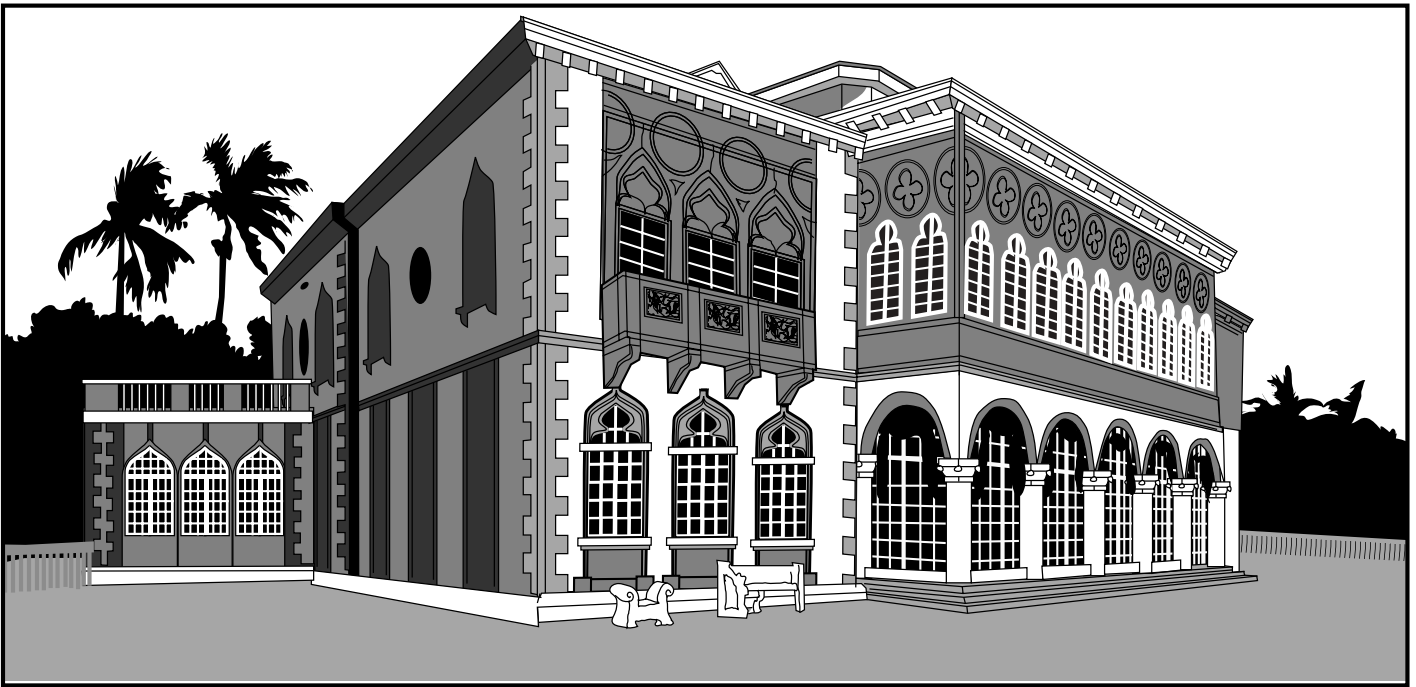
In 1927, John Ringling moved the winter quarters of Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus to Sarasota. The area became home to many great stars of circus fame.

The stock market crash of 1929 almost wiped Ringling out but



he still had wealth in the form of his art. With his personality, developed by years of circus promotions, he was a master in pushing art projects.

On his death at age 70, Ringling left his home, his museum, and its art collection to the state of Florida. Today, thousands of people visit the Ringlings' historic home. The thirty-room mansion provides a glimpse of the good life in the 'Roaring 20s.'



John Ringling's home in Sarasota, Florida.

Art is displayed and studied at The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. It is an internationally recognized museum of Western European and American art. Visitors can see the historic Asolo theater from Venice. And they can wander over 60 acres of landscaped grounds and statues.

The Museum of the Circus has been added. Anyone who has ever dreamed of running away to join "The Greatest Show On Earth" can relive those dreams at the circus museum. It's an experience for young and old alike.

The circus was the source of Ringling's early financial success. It was the vehicle that allowed him to indulge in his great love of art. Ultimately, the people of Florida received the benefits.