



## Journals of Yesteryear

### Promoter Brought Talents to Sarasota

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Source: Sarasota County History Center

His house is gone and there are no streets named for him, but during the1920s and 1930s, Samuel Gumpertz impacted Sarasota.

When he and his first wife came to Sarasota in 1919, they came as friends of John and Mable Ringling. In 1922, they built a 16-room home with six bathrooms and servants' quarters on the western end of Gulfstream Avenue. The house reflected the owners' New York social circles - interior mahogany doors from the old Astor Hotel and crystal chandeliers from Venice, Italy. The Spanish-style building had hot-water radiators to keep off the winter chill and a half-basement that reportedly never flooded.

The Gumpertzes' neighbor to the north was New York Giants manager John McGraw. He brought the team to Sarasota for spring training beginning in 1924, at the urging of Gumpertz and Ringling.

By the time Gumpertz arrived in Sarasota, he had already had nearly 40 years of experience with circuses, amusements and entertainment enterprises. A Rough Rider with the Buffalo Bill Show, a manager of Harry Houdini, the builder and manager of "Dreamland," the amusement park at Coney Island, he then managed the promotion of Brighton Beach in Brooklyn from 1912-1932. He traveled to Europe to locate new talent, and during those years his association with John Ringling grew. At times he served as a public spokesperson for Ringling; at other times they engaged in joint enterprises.

In 1926, Gumpertz joined Ringling and Owen Burns in the construction of a bathing pavilion on Lido Key. Opened six months after the completion of the Ringling Causeway, the pavilion offered bathhouses and a long pier out into the Gulf of Mexico and provided an excuse for people to drive through the Ringling Isles development on St. Armands Key. With road access to the key for tourists, Gumpertz moved a building from the mainland to the key to become the Lido Beach Hotel.

When John Ringling considered moving the winter quarters for the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus to Sarasota from Bridgeport, Connecticut, it was Samuel Gumpertz who brought the news to the community. In March 1927, he told the county fair association that if it would turn over the fair grounds to Ringling, the "Greatest Show on Earth" would come to Sarasota. In its report of the announcement, the Sarasota Herald quoted Gumpertz as having worked for two years to make this dream come true.

During the 1920s, Gumpertz and some associates in New York formed the Prudence Bond Company, which then opened offices in Sarasota and offered to finance land development projects. His association with this and large financial institutions put him in a position, in the golden years, to provide financial assistance to his friends, such as Ringling and Burns. However, in the Great Depression years, it put him in the position of foreclosing on Burns' El Vernona Hotel and taking control of the circus away from Ringling. From 1932 to 1937, Gumpertz managed the circus, leaving an increasingly ill and bitter Ringling closed out of any decisions relating to its operations. After John Ringling's death in 1936, other members of the Ringling family were able to rearrange the circus financing and reestablish family control of its management.

After Gumpertz death in 1952, the *Herald-Tribune* noted his involvement in community affairs, especially those that benefited children. He had an addition build on the Joseph Halton Hospital and equipped it for the care of indigent children. Land on Siesta Key that he donated to the Boy Scouts became "Camp Gumpertz." After the sale, the resultant income became a trust fund for the Scout's Sunny Land Council. Gumpertz also was a charter member of the Sarasota YMCA and served on the city's Park Board.

Sam Gumpertz was a many faceted person, whose activities made a lasting impression on the Sarasota of his time.

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Although a balmy December day in Sarasota may not trigger childhood holiday memories for all of us, Sarasotans have a long and proud tradition of holiday celebration. The following is a partial account of some notable events that occurred here at Christmas time.

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