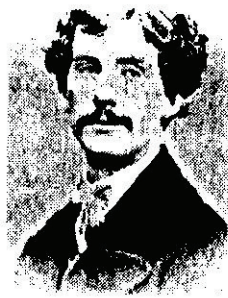


A photo of Ben, probably taken in the 1870s, by B. C. Daily, a photographer in Peru.



**Benjamin E. Wallace**  
**October 14, 1847 . . . April 7, 1921**

Moved here from Pennsylvania sometime between 1861 and 1864, settling with his family in Washington Township, just outside of Peru, Indiana, where his parents Ephraim and Rebecca became the custodians at the Miami County Infirmary [poor farm]. After his father's death Ben became the means of support for his family working for a neighbor, Frank Bearss. Within a few years he acquired the land near the poor farm, the ornamental corner post with the name "Wallace" can still be seen.

Ben enlisted February 28, 1865, in the 13<sup>th</sup> Regiment Infantry-Reorganized with the enlisted men of Company "K" just before General Lee surrendered, and was discharged September 5<sup>th</sup> of the same year. With the county bonds he received from his enlistment Ben Wallace began to build his fortune, beginning with a small livery stable and several acres of land. One track of approximately 32 acres became the first winter-quarters that would house his circus animals. By 1881 it was reported that he had the largest livery in the state of Indiana, and had become the stop for traveling entertainment groups that passed through the Peru area.

In September of 1882 he purchased the harness and wardrobe of the Cout's Circus, and began collecting exotic animals and keeping them in the old chair factory on West Second St. and at the winter-quarters. The chair factory was destroyed in 1884 by fire and the animals stored there were killed. However Ben acquired new animals and opened his first show in Peru, April 26<sup>th</sup> of the same year.

Expanding his show every year he soon needed more space and purchased the home and farm of Gabriel Godfroy, of the Miami Indians, in 1892. The winter-quarters were then relocated to the east bank of the Mississinewa River 2 ½ miles east of Peru, where he housed the big cats, elephants and horses. He also built a large paint shop, a ring barn, and several storage areas; which were destroyed by fire in 1918. Rebuilding after the fire he added all the farms along State Road 124 from the Wayne Street Bridge to the location of the new quarters.

In 1907 he purchased the Carl Hagenbeck circus and equipment, renaming it the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus.

When the circus went out on the road, large amounts of silver and currency were accumulated; it was reported to have been shipped back to Peru in boxes and barrels labeled as nails so that it would not be stolen. Because the banks were reluctant to handle these large amounts Ben organized another bank to handle his shipments; it was named the Wabash Valley Trust Company and was located on the corner of Main and Broadway in Peru. After the organization was complete the bank purchased the property changing the name to the Wabash Valley Bank and Trust Company. The third floor of the building was used as a workshop for making circus costumes.

Ben's business adventures also led him into a deal with the Singer Dry Goods Company; giving him a local source for large amounts of materials used in making circus costumes. The success of this business remained in tact until the store closed its doors in 1978; today it houses the Miami County Museum, which now has on display many circus items from the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus.

During the flood of 1913 the Mississinewa River rose so quickly and unexpectedly that there was little the men at the winter-quarters could do. The elephants were turned loose in hopes that they could save themselves, but 8 of them died along with 21 lions and tigers and 8 of the horses used in performing horses. The last performance in Peru was April 26<sup>th</sup> of that year, and in May Ben Wallace sold his circus.

Ben Wallace entered the Mayo Clinic at Rochester, Minnesota for a hernia operation and although the surgery was a success he died unexpectedly on April 7, 1921.

Four years after the death of his first wife, Dora Blue, in 1870, Ben married Florence E. Fuller she passed away just four years after her husband on February 8, 1942 and was laid to rest beside him. Both Ben and Florence were buried in the family lot here at Mt. Hope Cemetery in Peru, located in section A lot 23 spaces 9 & 10