

How Three Penguins Came to Be in Mobile

In its heyday, the Barnum and Bailey Circus featured the greatest performers on the planet, both human and animal, including a little known acrobatic act involving a penguin family, Peter, Penny and Peyton. They came from a long line of performers, mostly in zoos and aquatic parks across the country. This family, however, was able to travel the country from coast to coast in the relative luxury of the Barnum & Bailey train. It wasn't the Orient Express, mind you, but it was equipped with water tanks, lots of dead fish, and the occasional ice cube.

Due to a scheduling miscommunication, the year before the Greatest Show on Earth literally folded its tent, the train rolled into town during Mobile's carnival season. The tent, as always, was set up in the Civic Center parking lot, causing no small amount of chaos for revelers trying to get to various balls. There was much shouting and finger pointing among the humans involved in trying to manage the situation. The penguins, however, were fascinated by all the gents showing up in costume de rigueur. "These are our people!" said Peter, the titular head of the family and clearly the most sophisticated. "We're out of work next year anyway...why don't we just stay right here." Penny and young Peyton quickly agreed, and when the train pulled out of town at the end of the circus' run, the trio slipped out of their car and into a little used room at Crystal Ice house on Canal Street.

There they spend most of the year, waddling down to Southern Fish and Oyster daily for bits of by-catch Ralph Atkins reserves just for them. But during December, when the temperatures in Mobile finally dip below 70 degrees, they come out to play. They can be seen in Cathedral Square under the pergola day and night, posing for photos with citizens and visitors. And you just might catch them during Carnival season, sneaking into a Mardi Gras ball or two and dancing generally unnoticed, right next to a guest similarly attired.