



WEBFOOTER EXTRA

JUNE 2015

CELEBRATING THE RED WHITE AND BLUE



WEBFOOTERS POST CARD CLUB

PO Box 17240
Portland OR 97217-0240



www.thewebfooters.com



- ◆ The Story of Major Mite – See page 3.



NORTHWEST COLLECTIBLES
PRESENTS

The Largest Antique Paper Shows in the Northwest

**The Greater Portland
Postcard Stamp and Antique Paper Show
June 20-21, 2015**

**Lloyd Center Double Tree Hotel Annex
1000 NE Multnomah Street
Portland, Oregon**

Old Postcards, Photographs, Stereo View Cards, Books, Stamps, Valentines,
Matchbooks, Magazines, Prints,
Maps, Trade Cards, Posters & Much, Much More!

ADMISSION: \$1

Show Hours:

Saturday: 10 AM – 6 PM
Sunday: 10 AM – 4 PM

Upcoming Shows in Portland, Oregon:

October 3-4, 2015 and February 27 – 28, 2016

For Information:

Terry Weis
601 NW 72nd Circle
Vancouver, WA 98665-8462
503-679-4755



www.portlandpapershows.com

FREE APPRAISALS
FREE ADMISSION WITH THIS AD
(paid advertisement)

THE STORY OF MAJOR MITE



Major Mite at age 22

Clarence Chesterfield Howerton (February 9, 1913 – November 18, 1975), also known as *Major Mite*, was an American circus performer who starred in the sideshow for over 25 years, 20 of which were with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Major Mite was 2 ft 4 in tall (sources vary regarding his height) and he performed with several groups from the early 1920's through the late 1940's. The Major was billed as "the smallest man in the world." His small physique was often contrasted alongside larger circus sideshow acts, such as the juvenile obese and the excessively tall.

Regarded as a highly successful sideshow novelty and celebrity, Howerton visited the White House and represented recruitment efforts of the United States Marine Corps. He was featured in multiple films, including a role as a Munchkin in 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*. He retired in 1949.



Major Mite at age 18

Clarence Chesterfield Howerton was born on February 9, 1913, in Salem, Oregon, to Frank and Helen Howerton. He had five brothers, all of whom grew to 6 feet tall. However, Howerton grew to a height of only 2 ft 4 in. An expert said that he might have a "deranged ductless gland." Howerton's mother was just over 4 feet tall, which led some to wonder if his small stature was inherited.

At age six, Howerton was living in McCleary, Washington, with his parents and five brothers, Albert, Ernest, Forrest, LeRoy, and Charles. His father was employed at the time as a factory mechanic. Howerton never attended school, likely due to his physical size and associated emotional consequences.

In January 1926, Frank Howerton shot himself, having been in poor health previously. His mother subsequently remarried to Robert Crawford. At the time of the 1930 United States Census, Howerton was living with Crawford and his mother in Manhattan. According to the Census listing, Crawford was a "showman" while Howerton and his mother were identified as performers.

Howerton's career began at a young age, when his father entered him into a local vaudeville show. In 1923, at the age of ten, Howerton joined the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, where he starred as a major attraction. The circus was the largest of the kind, with 800 performers and over 1000 animals. Although he was only ten years old, the circus sought to exaggerate his diminutive size by claiming that he was 18 years old. He was billed as "the smallest man in the world," exhibited and known to the public under the name, "Major Mite". Others who used the "Major Mite" moniker had included an American comedian who died in 1900, and a 19th-century circus performer, William E. Jackson, who died in 1901, at 24, 2 ft 9 in tall and weighing 26 pounds. Accompanied by his mother, Howerton spent 20 years with Ringling Bros. and also worked with the Cole Brothers Circus, the Coney Island Dreamland Side Show, and the World Circus Sideshow.

In December 1922, Howerton received national press coverage when he visited President Warren G. Harding at the White House and billed as "the world's smallest man." One newspaper noted at the time: "The smallest midget and the smallest Shriner in the world, known as Major Mite, caused more excitement when he called at the White House recently than many a notable has done."



Major Mite hammed it up at the White House in 1922.

In 1927, Howerton drew the attention of *The New York Times* when he led a "strange cavalcade" through the streets of Manhattan to the Hospital for Crippled and Ruptured Children. Howerton led the parade in the original coach that had previously been used by General Tom Thumb. The coach was drawn by two Shetland ponies, and Howerton was accompanied by "Tiny Doll", described as "the Major's sweetheart" and other circus performers. He also drew the attention of the *Chicago Tribune* when he visited Chicago in 1928.



"Tiny Doll" was referred to as "the Major's sweetheart." (Photo courtesy Steve Kenney)

Tiny Doll was in real life Elly Annie Schneider (July 23, 1914 – September 6, 2004). She was an actress and a member of The Dancing Dolls who played one of the Munchkin villagers in *The Wizard of Oz* 1939. Born in Stolpen, Germany, she moved to the United States in 1925 to join her 3 dwarf siblings. She was 39 inches tall and weighed 46 pounds.

The four Doll siblings—Harry, Gracie, Daisy, and Tiny—were among the dwarfs who welcomed Dorothy to Munchkinland in a 10-minute scene in *The Wizard of Oz*. They also appeared in *Sailors, Beware*, a 1927 Laurel and Hardy short, and the cult classic *Freaks* in 1932, and performed with the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus and the Christiana Brothers Circus.

In 1928, Howerton was paired with an extraordinarily large circus sideshow performer known as "Tom Ton" and billed as the "Human Atom" and "Big Baby Elephant." Howerton is said to have performed with numerous human oddities, also working with Ruth Pontico, a woman weighing 700 pounds, in his career.



Major Mite was billed as the Smallest Man in the World at the 1934 World's Fair in Chicago.
(Photo courtesy of Steve Kenney)

In advertising and film, Howerton found success beyond the sideshow. During the 1930s, he was used as a mascot for the recruitment side of the United States Marine Corps. His biggest role in acting was with 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*, in which he played the part of a trumpet-playing Munchkin, Herald #3, who announced the arrival of the mayor. He was one of the smallest Munchkins in Oz. Howerton also appeared in several shorts of the comedy program *Our Gang*, including the 1932 short, "Free Eats".

By 1940, Major Mite was living with his mother in Manhattan. His occupation was described as an "exhibitionist" in a circus, but a 1941 document states that he registered with "Clackamas County Local Board No. 2", located in Estacada, Oregon; his registration prompted the Board to state "We believe we have the smallest registrant in the United States". In the announcement of his registration, his weight and height are given, vastly contrasting to other sources: a height of 3 ft 6 in, and a weight of 52 pounds. His last performance was for Cole Bros., in 1948.

Howerton was often seen with other human oddities, for example, in 1924, he was photographed with Martin Feig, a four-year-old boy who weighed 104 pounds. Feig reportedly said to Howerton, "Aw, you're nothing but a germ-weight midget." One newspaper referred to Howerton, who was in reality only 13 years old at the time, as "the Beau Brummel of the side shows", noting that the Doll sisters (two female small persons working with Ringling Brothers) declared him "a regular sheik."

In contrast to his public persona, Howerton reportedly enjoyed cigars and beer, "often yelled obscenities," and was known to "run the length of a bar, kicking anything in his way", sometimes whilst dressed in children's clothes. While working with Ringling Brothers, Howerton befriended Jack Earle who was 7 ft 7 ½ in tall, but at the time was advertised as being 8 ft 7 in. The two were often photographed together in promotional materials for Ringling Brothers, with it being said that "it is penny-ante poker which has made pals of Jack and the Major."

Reports of Howerton's size range vastly, the upper boundary for both height and weight is given by the United States Selective Service System, who report a height of 3 ft 6 in, and a weight of 52 pounds. A height of 2 ft 4 in is given in several more modern sources, including Ripley's Believe It or Not! Howerton himself claimed that was his height at 22, and that his weight was 20 pounds. The *Chicago Tribune* gave his height as 2 ft 0 in, and his weight as 20 pounds. At 18, it was reported that he weighed 13 pounds.

Howerton retired from the entertainment industry in 1948, at the age of 35. By 1970 he had moved back to Oregon and was living with a niece in the town of Dayton.

On November 18, 1975, at the age of 62, Howerton died of pneumonia in a hospital in McMinnville, Oregon. He was buried in Mountainview Cemetery in nearby Oregon City. Aside from one brother, he outlived all of his immediate family.

36th Annual

ANTIQUE PAPER SHOW

WEBFOOTERS TURN 50

U.S. NAVY

APRIL 16-17, 2016
PORTLAND, OREGON

KLIEVER ARMORY
10000 NE 33RD DRIVE

THE AKRON

www.thewebfooters.com

OVER PORTLAND

Free Admission Free Parking

BRUBAKER
AERIAL
SURVEY