



# Clicko: The Wild Dancing Bushman

*Neil Parsons*

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During the 1920s and '30s, Franz Taibosh—whose stage name was Clicko—performed in front of millions as one of the stars of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. Prior to his fame in the United States, Taibosh toured the world as the “Wild Dancing Bushman,” showing off his frenzied dance moves in freak shows, sideshows, and music halls from Australia to Cuba. When he died in 1940, the *New York Times* called him “the only African bushman ever exhibited in this country.” In *Clicko*, Neil Parsons unearths the untold story of Taibosh’s journey from boyhood on a small farm in South Africa to top billing as one of the travelling World’s Fair Freaks.

Through Taibosh’s tale, Parsons brings to life the bizarre golden age of entertainment as well as the role that the dubious new science of race played in it. Beginning with Taibosh’s early life, *Clicko* untangles the real story of his ancestry from the web of myths spun around him on his rise to international stardom. Parsons then chronicles the unhappy middle period of Taibosh’s career, when he suffered under the heel of a vicious manager. Left to freeze and nearly starve in an unheated apartment, Taibosh was rescued by Frank Cook, Barnum & Bailey’s lawyer. The Cooks adopted Taibosh as a member of their family of circus managers and performers, and his happy—if far from average—years with them make up the final chapter of this remarkable story.

Equal parts entertaining and disturbing, *Clicko* vividly evokes a forgotten era when vaudeville drew massive crowds and circus freaks were featured in *Billboard* and *Variety*. Parsons introduces us to colorful characters such as George Auger the giant and the original Zip the Pinhead, but above all, he gives us an unforgettable portrait of Franz Taibosh, rescued at last from the racists and the romantics and revealed here as an ordinary man with an extraordinary life.

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