

New England with performances in Waterbury, New Haven and Bridgeport, Connecticut; Worcester and Fitchburg, Massachusetts; Manchester, New Hampshire; and Portland, Maine.

The circus would set up in Portland, Maine, for shows scheduled on June 30 and July 1. Extra help was easy to find in this city, and among the temporary workers that Ringling picked up on this visit to Maine were homeless "town clown" Roy Tuttle and fourteen-year-old runaway Robert Dale Segee. Both were later considered suspicious and investigated by police for their possible involvement in the Hartford circus fire. During one of the Portland performances, a spectator alerted an attendant to a small fire on the aerialist's rigging, and it was quickly extinguished.

Providence, Rhode Island, was host for the Big Show on the third and fourth of July 1944. Ringling had 587 employees for the July 4 show, which was short of the 800 that were required to move the show most efficiently. Manpower in Hartford was even less. Though the Providence Police Department confirmed that it received no reports of fires at the circus during the performances and Ringling's wagon-man Joe Lloyd knew of no fires, seat man Neil Todd testified that he put out about a dozen fires on the sidewall canvas that season using pails of water, including one in Providence. After putting out a fire, he'd let the sail-maker know that a repair was needed, and it would be taken care of. Todd worked under the grandstand seats at each show, where the floor beneath the seats was solid and the only place for a cigarette to be dropped down below was at the top row of seats, and he found several dropped cigarettes at every show. The bleacher seats were of different construction, consisting of planks for seats that were open to the space below, affording every seated patron an opportunity to drop a cigarette or match. Ringling prohibited its employees who worked around the public from smoking during performances, and all smoking was forbidden by order of boss canvas man Aylesworth when the big top was being erected and taken down. Historically, preventing patrons from smoking was a futile task without assistance from local authorities and was done by the circus only when requested. The "No Smoking" signs would only be displayed in cities when required by the fire officials, and Hartford made no such request in 1944 or any previous year. In fact, Hartford's fire officials made no requests of the circus.

Leaving Providence and headed for Hartford, the circus ran into unexpected rail delays and was late to its destination on July 5. Ringling was forced to cancel the Wednesday matinee show but planned to be ready for the evening show to go on as scheduled. All available hands were called