

Fred and Freda



Harry Fliederer of the eponymous Family Circus liked to say that he could spot good talent a mile away. And the prodigiously gifted men and women who worked for him were living proof of his claim. There's an exception to any rule, though, and in the case of Harry's surefire ability to pick a winner, that exception was Fred and Freda Fremmel, two of the ghastliest little crumbsnatchers ever to set foot on a stage. At first blush, they seemed sweet enough – aspartame readily oozed from their pores if you touched them – but they could turn mean and malevolent at the drop of a rat. And Fred typically traveled with a whole pocketful of rats that he delighted in dropping onto unsuspecting dupes. Harry discovered the pair at an amateur talent contest where they played Mr. and Mrs. Genghis Khan in pantomime. On the surface, the routine was ribald with plenty of slapstick, but Harry now admits that he probably should have paid more attention to the use of a strappado in the finale, which hinted at the undercurrent of sadism that would later define the young Fremmels. In their publicity photo, Fred looks like he just swallowed a canary, which indeed he had. And not for the first time! Freda is cradling her cat o' nine tails, with which she'd just whipped Fred – for not sharing the canary. As much as Harry disliked having the pair on staff, the Circus Performers Guild staunchly defended their right to be abhorrent. Until, that is, they tried to set fire to Yamgirl. Even the CPG frowned on *that*. Within an hour, the Fremmels were gone, banished from the big top. However to this day, Harry claims that, late at night, he can sometimes still hear echoes of Fred's sinister chortle – *hah haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah*.