

February 1, 2007

Hi,

Yesterday we drove down to Sarasota and visited the Ringling Estate. We toured the John and Mable Ringling mansion, visited the circus museum, the art museum, and another building that houses a miniature reconstruction of a circus. The miniature was created by one man over a period of about 30 years, and it was huge - covering a space about as big as a football field. It was extremely detailed. It really made me realize how big the Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus was in the early part of the century. Once the railroads were built, the circus traveled by rail, with dozens of cars. The miniature included all the train cars, showed them being unloaded, showed all the tents and all the people - circus people and the people coming to see the circus.

The whole complex has been restored in just the last few years. It had been getting pretty run down until about 10 years ago. The state has taken it over. It got run down because the Ringlings lost a lot of money in the stock market crash of 1929, then there was sickness. Bankruptcy proceedings dragged on for many years, then when the state got it, they didn't have the will or money to fix it up. Finally, control was given to Florida State University and they got things under control.

It was warm and sunny yesterday. Today it is warm, but very windy.

Steve