



Frank Buck Collection, 1935-1950

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Date Completed:	[October 21, 2010]

Frank Buck Collection, 1935-1950
0.2 cubic ft.

Frank Buck (1884-1950) was a notorious big game hunter and explorer who collected wild animals from around the world. Throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s, he brought many of these animals to America to exhibit. Buck was also a successful actor, director, writer and producer of jungle adventure movies. He authored several books, his most popular being *Bring 'Em Back Alive*, a bestseller in 1930. However, he was most proud of his elementary school reader, *On Jungle Trails*, which described how he captured wild animals. Buck created successful wild animal exhibits for Chicago's 1933-1934 Century of Progress Exposition and the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair. He also toured as the star attraction with Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus in 1938.

For Chicago's Century of Progress Exposition, Buck created a reproduction of the camp he and his native assistants lived in while collecting animals in Asia. Complete with wild animals, he called it "Frank Buck's Jungle Camp." It was one of the fair's most popular exhibits, attracting over two million people. After the fair closed, Buck moved the camp to a compound on the eastern end of Massapequa, by the border of Amityville, Long Island.

Frank Buck's Jungle Camp (sometimes referred to as "Jungle Land" or "Long Island Zoo") sat on forty acres along the newly built Sunrise Highway. Opening its doors in 1934, it contained a menagerie of animals Buck had collected on his hunting expeditions. A two-story Tudor style building close to the road housed reptiles and thousands of birds. The rest of the animals—including among which were elephants, tigers, lions, kangaroos, and bears—were housed in several plain concrete buildings. Located in the center of the grounds, "Monkey Mountain" was one of the zoo's most popular attractions. The large simulated mountain, which was surrounded by a moat, was occupied by several hundred monkeys at any given time. For a twenty-five cent admissions fee, guests could view the animals, promotional movie posters, and large photographs of Buck's travels. In addition, souvenirs and refreshments could be purchased at the camp. Buck's business partner and manager, T.A. Loveland, ran the zoo while Buck was busy traveling, writing, filming movies and giving lectures.

Just before noon on August 21, 1935, 150 of the 570 monkeys housed on "Monkey Mountain" escaped. While engaging in his usual routine of cleaning the mountain, maintenance man Charles Selner absentmindedly left a wooden plank across the moat. The monkeys seized the opportunity for escape, and then fled the camp. They scattered throughout Massapequa and its surrounding towns, where some caused a Long Island Rail Road train to stop, while others caused some near accidents and at least one fender bender. Around twilight, approximately thirty of the monkeys peacefully and willingly returned to the zoo. Thirty-nine more were captured the next day, and by the end of August, all but four of the monkeys were accounted for. (Regrettably, four of the escaped creatures died from electrocution.) In the days after the monkeys' escape, business was booming at the zoo, with hundreds of curious customers hoping to see the arrival of Frank Buck.

Unfortunately, several employees, including Buck himself, were injured on the zoo premises. Two employees were bitten by snakes, one of which had his chest crushed by a 26-foot python, which led to traumatic pneumonia. Another employee was clawed by a lion and had his shoulder gashed open. Frank Buck was bitten by a python and also was seriously injured after being trampled by a horse. All injuries were treated at Reed's General Hospital in Amityville.

Frank Buck's Jungle Camp closed sometime in the late 1940s. In the early 1950s, the property's new owners replaced the camp with a petting zoo and drive-in movie theater. Buck's business partner, T.A. Loveland, attributed several factors to the closing of the zoo: Sunrise Highway had become a secondary road; food rationing during World War II made it difficult to get certain foods for the animals; and gas rationing (also due to the war) meant that people weren't willing to drive the distance to see the camp.

A large flagpole that once stood on Monkey Mountain was moved in 1955 to the home of the mayor of Massapequa at the time, Herman Strully. On March 13, 2010, a storm knocked the historic flagpole down. The current homeowners decided that they would replace the pole with a bronze plaque to honor the rich piece of Massapequa's history that is "Frank Buck's Jungle Camp."

The collection contains thirty 8" x 10" black and white photographs (stamped on the back "Photo by Drennan") that span from 1935-c.1939. While the majority of the photos were taken at the jungle camp in Massapequa, a small number were taken at a Long Island Rail Road station (most likely at Amityville) and on the road from the train station to the camp. Notable camp photos include one of Frank Buck operating on the ingrown toenail of an Indian elephant, as well as one of him with radio personality John B. Gambling and a rhesus monkey, after the monkeys had escaped from Monkey Mountain in 1935. Also taken at the camp are two photos of U.S. Senator Robert F. Wagner with his son, then-assemblyman and future mayor of New York City Robert F. Wagner, Jr., riding in a basket on an elephant named "Trixie." Other photos depict elephants—with their feet wrapped in burlap sacks to protect them from the snow—being unloaded from a railroad car or being walked from the railroad station to the camp. (Note: many of the animals pictured in these photos were brought to the U.S. to be part of Buck's jungle exhibition at the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair.)

Collection also contains ephemera, including souvenir and explorers club pins and *Topps* Frank Buck "Bring 'Em Back Alive" trading cards (incomplete set) produced in 1950.

SUBJECTS

Names:

Buck, Frank, 1884-1950.
Gambling, John B.
Wagner, Robert F. (Robert Ferdinand), 1877-1953.
Wagner, Robert F. (Robert Ferdinand), 1910-1991.
Frank Buck's Jungle Camp.
Jungle Land
Long Island Zoo
New York World's Fair (1939-1940).

Subjects:

Animal collecting.
Animals.
Exhibitions.
Zoos--New York--Massapequa.

Places:

Amityville (N.Y.)--History.
Long Island--History.
Massapequa (N.Y.)--History.

Form and Genre Terms:

Ephemera.
Photographs.

The Frank Buck Collection is arranged in two series:

- I. Ephemera – souvenir and explorers club pins, and *Topps* Frank Buck “Bring ‘Em Back Alive” trading cards (incomplete set)
- II. Frank Buck's Jungle Camp Photographs – thirty 8” x 10” black and white photographs taken from 1935-c.1939. Includes photos taken at Frank Buck's Jungle Camp in Massapequa, N.Y., as well as photos taken at a Long Island Railroad Station (most likely Amityville) and on the road from the train station to the camp. Arranged alphabetically.

Frank Buck Collection, 1938-1950

Box and Folder Listing

Series I: Ephemera

Box 1

<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Title/Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	Souvenir and explorers club pins and a "Jungle Camp" matchbook	c.1940s
2	Trading cards (Topps), "Bring 'Em Back Alive" (incomplete set)	1950

Series II: Frank Buck's Jungle Camp Photographs

Box 1

<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Title/Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
3	Cottonmouth water moccasin poised to strike. (Note: While attempting to remove this snake from a glass cage in the reptile house, handler Cole Smith was bitten on the finger by the venomous reptile.)	1938
4	Exterior front view of building at the camp, people walking in parking lot.	c.1939
5	Exterior view of building at the camp, people walking by.	c.1939
6	Four elephants standing in snow in either Amityville or Massapequa.	c.1939
7	Frank Buck and an elephant handler standing with a group of elephants in a building at the camp.	c.1939
8	Frank Buck and cages full of rhesus monkeys.	c.1939
9	Frank Buck holding a baby monkey in one hand and a large egg in the other.	c.1939
10	Frank Buck holding a newborn donkey. Also pictured is the newborn's mother. (3 copies)	c.1939
11	Frank Buck operating on 41-year-old elephant Yazzo, who had developed an ingrown toenail.	c.1939
12	Frank Buck standing next to "Tiger Trap."	c.1939
13	Frank Buck standing with a group of elephants in a building at the camp.	c.1939

Series II: Frank Buck's Jungle Camp Photographs

Box 1

<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Title/Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
14	Frank Buck with radio personality John B. Gambling and a rhesus monkey. Buck is holding a \$5 bill and a reward flyer concerning monkeys that escaped from the camp on Aug. 21, 1935.	1935
15	Frank Buck with radio personality John B. Gambling and a rhesus monkey. Buck is holding a \$5 bill and a reward flyer concerning monkeys that escaped from the camp on Aug. 21, 1935	1935
16	Handler guiding elephant out of railroad car, most likely at the Amityville train station.	c.1939
17	Handler guiding elephant out of railroad car, most likely at the Amityville train station.	c.1939
18	Handlers guiding two elephants down ramp, most likely at the Amityville train station.	c.1939
19	Handlers walking three elephants on road in either Amityville or Massapequa.	c.1939
20	Handlers walking three elephants on snow-covered road in Amityville or Massapequa.	c.1939
21	Monkeys going across plank to Monkey Mountain.	c.1939
22	Six owls in a cage. (Note: owls were captured at the old Vanderbilt mansion and brought to the camp.)	c.1939
23	Tiger in cage, holding cub in its mouth.	c.1939
24	U.S. Senator Robert F. Wagner with his son, Assemblyman Robert F. Wagner, Jr., riding in a basket on elephant named "Trixie."	c.1939
25	U.S. Senator Robert F. Wagner with his son, Assemblyman Robert F. Wagner, Jr., riding in a basket on elephant named "Trixie."	c.1939
26	U.S. Senator Robert F. Wagner, his son, Assemblyman Robert F. Wagner, Jr., and others posing with stuffed orangutan.	c.1939

Series II: Frank Buck's Jungle Camp Photographs

Box 1

<u>Folder #</u>	<u>Title/Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
27	Unidentified man and woman, both wearing turbans, riding in a basket on top of an elephant bearing a "Town of Oyster Bay" banner. Handlers are walking alongside and behind the elephant.	c.1939
28	Visitors looking at animals in cages.	c.1939
29	Visitors riding in basket atop elephant near Monkey Mountain as Frank Buck and other visitors look on.	c.1939
30	Visitors watching monkeys going across plank to Monkey Mountain.	c.1939
31	Visitors watching the monkeys on Monkey Mountain as Frank Buck looks on.	c.1939
32	Visitors watching the monkeys on Monkey Mountain.	c.1939