

Les Franconis. Lithograph, hand colored. Printed Metz: Imprimerie, Lithographie et Fabrique d'Images de Dembour et Gangel, N.130. (Before 1852) 14" x 13" on wove paper. Vertical folds, with small closed tear in center. Slight fraying lower right margin. Colors fresh and bright.



A souvenir print of the famous Parisian equestrian circus of the Franconis with eight scenes of acrobats on horseback that include riding while standing, riding supine and riding backwards. Horses are shown jumping over other horses, and clowns acting out scenes with horses. According the Hannah Winter the great performers in the Franconi troupe were not only wonderful horsemen - "veritable Centaurs-and jumpers, but also expressive mimes and elegant dancers of a kind rare in the modern circuses for they had been formed in the special schools for circus children." (P194).

The Franconis circus was founded in 1793 when Antonio Franconi became associated with Astley's Amphitheatre in Paris. He leased the theatre from Astley, renaming it the Amphithéâtre Franconi. "On the ashes of [Astley's circus] grew Franconi's Cirque Olympique first and greatest of Continental rings." (Disher, p187). Franconi subsequently transferred management in 1805, to his sons Henri and Laurent who likewise gained reputations as notable circus men. Recognized as 'the people's theatre par excellence.' Between 1807-1848 the Franconis staged 260 theatrical pieces, premiering five or six new scripts a year. Every season it premiered animal operas, animal melodramas, Easter pantomimes and others. (Wall, p147). Wall also states that the Franconi circus "marked the apex of the age of theatrical circus." Franconi's youngest son, Victor, during this period notably, established the first open-air hippodrome in Paris, where he developed acts that influenced the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circuses in America.

A print for popular consumption, **Les Franconis** is not an advertising poster for an upcoming performance but a tribute to the greatest Equestrian performing circus of France in the 19th Century. It was published as part of an occasional series called *Fabrique d'Images* devoted to historical events of France, popular legends and tales, circus and popular theatres, children's stories and popular songs, devotional prints, and also board games.

The publisher was the firm of Dembour and Gangel*. In 1835, in Metz, Adrien Dembour established himself as a printer-lithographer succeeding Hanké and Rosch. He also bought the engraved woodblocks of the Lacour house in Nancy and those of the Ardant house in Limoges. Dembour then associated, from 1840 to 1852, with Nicolas Gangel from Lunéville. The popularity of the prints spread to the point where Dembour and Gangel employed over 100 workers to print woodblock and lithographs (a medium developed by Gangel), to hand-color and then to distribute the finished prints. Dembour et Gangel published prints in Metz, and also Nancy and Epinal. The partnership was dissolved at the end of 1851, after which Gangel operated alone with his sons. When in 1860 Paulin Didion joins, the firm's name is changed to Gangel et Didion.

So successful was this publishing adventure that by 1860, 18% of the images sold in the region came from the Gangel presses in Metz. It is estimated that between 3,500 to 5,000 different image were published by the press on satirical, topical or religious themes, including reissues of older woodblocks bought from other publishers of popular prints.

Note: *Adrien-Népomucène Dembour (b. Metz 1799- D. Vittonville 1887); Charles Nicholas Gangel (b. Luneville 1798 ; D. Luneville 1879?).

Rare: another hand-colored copy is located at the Harvard Theatre Collection, as part of the Hannah Winter archive; a copy is cited in *Le Cirque, iconographie*. [Catalogue par Nicole Wild et Tristan Re´my.] Bibliothe`que nationale, 1969. #414.

Refs: Disher, M. Willson. *Clowns and Pantomimes*. London: Constable, 1925; Wall, Duncan. *The Ordinary Acrobat: A Journey Into the Wondrous World of the Circus, Past and Present*. 2013; Winter, Marian Hannah. *The Theatre of Marvels*. NY:Blom, 1964.

\$850.00