CANADIAN CARNIVAL FREAKS AND THE EXTRAORDINARY BODY, 1900–1970s

In 1973, a five-year-old girl known as Pookie was exhibited as “The Monkey Girl” at the Canadian National Exhibition. Dressed only in her diaper and on display for just one day before complaints closed the exhibit down, she would be the last of many children exhibited as “freaks” in twentieth-century Canada.

Jane Nicholas takes us on a search for answers about how and why the freak show persisted into the 1970s and offers a sophisticated analysis of its place in twentieth-century culture. These exhibits survived and thrived because of their flexible business model and government support, and remained popular by mobilizing cultural and medical ideas of the body and normalcy.

Canadian Carnival Freaks and the Extraordinary Body is the first full-length study of the freak show in Canada and is a significant contribution to our understanding of the history of Canadian popular culture, attitudes toward children, and the social construction of able-bodiedness. Based on a foundation of impressive research, the book will be of particular interest to anyone interested in the history of disability, the history of childhood, and the history of consumer culture.

JANE NICHOLAS is an associate professor in the Department of History and Department of Sexuality, Marriage, and Family Studies at the University of Waterloo.

CNE Midway 1920? City of Toronto Archives, fonds 1244, item 2015.

JANE NICHOLAS

Canadian Carnival Freaks
and the Extraordinary Body,
1900–1970s

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS
Toronto Buffalo London

© University of Toronto Press 2018
Toronto Buffalo London
utorontopress.com
Printed in Canada

ISBN 978-1-4875-0265-2 (cloth)
ISBN 978-1-4875-2208-7 (paper)

Printed on acid-free, 100% post-consumer recycled paper
with vegetable-based inks.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Nicholas, Jane, 1977–, author
Canadian carnival freaks and the extraordinary body, 1900–1970s / Jane
Nicholas.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4875-0265-2 (hardcover) ISBN 978-1-4875-2208-7 (softcover)

1. Freak shows – Canada – History – 20th century. 2. Sideshows – Canada – History – 20th century. 3. Carnivals – Canada – History – 20th century.
4. Entertainers – Canada – History – 20th century. 5. Freak shows – Social aspects – Canada – History – 20th century. 6. Sideshows – Social aspects – Canada – History – 20th century. 7. Carnivals – Social aspects – Canada – History – 20th century. 8. Entertainers – Canada – Social conditions – 20th century. I. Title.

GV1835.56.C2N53 2018

791.3'50971

C2017-906322-7

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

University of Toronto Press acknowledges the financial assistance to its publishing program of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council, an agency of the Government of Ontario.

Canada Council
for the Arts

Conseil des Arts
du Canada

ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO
an Ontario government agency
un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

Funded by the
Government
of Canada Financé par le
gouvernement
du Canada

Canada

For Karl and Sebastian

This page intentionally left blank