

Light Plants 112 and 111 in 19955. W.H.B. Jones Photo

To meet the power requirements for the huge under canvas operations, the circus carried their own equipment to produce electrical current. The Ringling electrical department, which was under the direction of Edward R. Versteeg, was a highly specialized unit that employed approximately 30 men.

The equipment of this department basically consisted of four wagons that carried electrical generators and two wagons that contained the various lights and supplies. Additional supplies and cables were also carried in several of the seat wagons.

Two other generator wagons were also carried on the show: one for the cookhouse and the other for use at the train; however, these wagons were not actually considered as being a part of the electrical department. This also applied to the small generators in the gorilla cages.

The major responsibility of the electrical department was to supply the vast amount of electrical current needed to illuminate the performance. In the early 1950's the movie "The Greatest Show on Earth" was filmed on the Ringling show. In order to properly film the movie, many innovations were made in the lighting system and, as a result, most of these technical improvements remained in use throughout the final years under canvas. This system used a series of remote controlled 5000 watt spotlights that were mounted in groups of three on the long quarter poles.

In addition, two standards were used in front of the blues at each end to fill out the dark spots on the hippodrome track. Aerial lights called "Wallenda Lights" were also used above the rings, as well as, several ground lights for proper illumination. The blue canvas of the big top also kept out the sunlight during the afternoon performance and permitted the use of such lighting effects at both shows.

I would like to thank all those who have provided information for this article and again a special thanks to Dyer Reynolds, who without his help this plan could not have been near as detailed.



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Dimensions 16" 0" Long 7' 3" Wide 6' 3" High at side

Painted Ringling Red with a green interior and a gray floor.

Wagon #111 contained two G.M. diesel generators and supplied power for the big top. The original wagon was of wood construction. In 1953 this was replaced with a new steel constructed wagon which was exactly the same as the former wooden one. The original number, 111 was retained on this new wagon.

The generators in this wagon were connected with the generators in wagon #112 so that three units were used to supply the required amount of current for the performance. The fourth unit was kept running and could be switched in at a moments notice if trouble should develop. The fuel for these generators was stored in tanks built into the supporting frames for the generators. The front portion of this wagon contained a parts cabinet which completely filled this area.

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Dimensions 16' 0" Long 7' 3" Wide 6' 3" High at side

Painted Ringling Red with a green interior and gray floor.

Wagon #112 contained two G.M. diesel generators and supplied power for the big top. It was of metal construction and was built in the early 1940's. This was the show's main power wagon, as the panels in the front portion controlled all of the

current going to the circuits inside the big top. This panel matched the monitoring panel located in wagon #105. In this way the generators in both wagons #111 and #112, which were linked together, could be controlled from either location.

The actual control of the circuits inside the big top was done from three different switch boards located in the back rows of the seating. These were later moved down between the rings next to the center poles.

After the show closed in 1956, this wagon was sold to Cypress Gardens where it was used for several years to provide current for lighting their water ski shows.

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#112 Generators Rear View





Original No. 111, wooden wagon at Winter quarters in 1952, Dyer Reynolds Photo



View of steel version of No. 111. Caldwell Collection



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No. 112 with No. 111 in background in 1952. Dyer Reynolds Photo

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The remote board in Generator Wagon No. 112.



Remote control board used in the Big Top to control the spotlights,

Electrical Plug-in Detail

Ed Versteeg at the remote control board in Generator Wagon No. 112.

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Rear Deta

General Motors Diesel Generator

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DRAWING NUMBER #0252

Chandelier Wagon #114 and Power Control Wagon #105 on a 1952 Lot. Dyer Reynolds Photo

In the 1950's, wagon #114 was referred to as the chandelier wagon because it carried all of the large spotlights used in the big top. No. 105 was the electrical department headquarters, so to speak, as well as the communication center for the show. It was the office of Chief Electrician Edward R. Versteeg, as well as the general repair shop of the department. It contained benches and motors so that such repairs could be performed.

The ground lights and "Wallenda lights" were carried in this wagon on a special rack located in the rear. A special parts cabinet was on the opposite side next to the control desk. It also had a heater located near the front, with a duct that ran back under the desk.

The wagon contained a two-way radio for communication with several jeeps that were used around the lot and with the trainmaster at the runs. Since the majority of the equipment was along the sides of this wagon, the virtually empty aisle way was loaded with boxes of novelties and souvenirs that were sold by the concession department.

No. 114 had special racks on the inside walls to support 33 large spotlights. It also carried all of the various test boxes for checking these lights. In the center, more novelties were loaded similar to 105. In the 30's and 40's, 114 had a companion wagon #113, which was very similar, except the top rack did not run the entire length of the roof.

Ed Versteeg at his desk in No. 105. Dyer Reynolds Photo

No. 105 on a 1950s lot. Dyer Reynolds Photo

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Pg 7 of 14	SCALE: 1/4" = 1'	SCANNED & REVISED: 08/08/02	DRAWING NUMBER #0252

Spotlights and power cables waiting to be moved into the Big Top. Note the power cables. Photo taken 1952 by Dyer Reynolds.

The spots on one of the long quarter poles in the main tent. Markers on the long quarters were about 10 feet down from the horn and were three inch stripe. Poles were 41 foot long.

One of 33 5K spotlights used around the ring. They were hung from the long quarter poles plus two standards at each end, located on stakes in front of the blues to fill out the dark spots on the wider hippodrome track.

Dyer Reynolds holding a 5,000 watt bulb for the spotlight on the test rack at the rear of No. 114. Note the concession supplies on the racks in the background, set up near the wagons for dispensing to the various vendors. This method worked out well because the loading space was available and these wagons were still on the lot after the performance, while the other concession wagons had already left for the train.

Spotlight and remote control test box for the lamps. The light is located on the test rack on the rear door of No. 114.

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Generator No. 109 in the mid 1940s, believed to be 1943 or 1945. - Koford Photo

This Reynolds photo shows a three-quarter view of the left side and rear of the wagon. Obviously a point of interest to the gentlemen at the left, are the generators. That is Ed Versteeg, chief electrician, in the hat. The others are unidentified. To the left of the wagon can be seen the rear of the Bannerline.

Set up just off the midway, behind the bannerline wagons [note at left of picture] and next to the side show tent, wagon No. 109 provides power on a 1954 lot. Note the donniker tent just to the rear of the wagon. [Reynolds Photo]. Wagon 109 was of metal construction and was built in the early 1940's. It was originally numbered 180 and was used to supply power to the Big Top. Later it was moved to the Midway and the number was changed to 109. This occurred sometime prior to 1946.

The wagon carried two Cummins Diesel generators and supplied power to the midway and sideshow. It had a large tank located in the front portion to supply fuel for the generators and various other supplies were carried in this wagon as well. However, the cables and wiring were carried in sideshow bannerline wagon #116.

After the show went off the road in 1956, this wagon was junked at Goodmans Junkyard in Sarasota. Several years ago, many of these discarded wagons were sent to Houston Texas where a proposed circus theme park was planned. But it never materialized. I believe wagon 109 was one of those sent to Houston.

Wagon #110 was of wood construction and had been on the show for a number of years. In the late 30's and early 40's this wagon carried number 126.

The unit contained one single General Motors diesel generator which supplied power for the backyard and the dressing rooms of the late 40's and 1950's which were located in the rear of the mechanical seat wagons. It was built in the late 1930's.

Several other wagons were also number 110, both before and after this wagon was in use. The last season this particular wagon was used was 1950. The last number 110 carried on the show in 1956 was an old cage wagon that had been replaced after the 1947 season and later remodeled to carry a generator.

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 Pg 12 of 14
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 DRAWING NUMBER #0252

No. 110 on a lot in 1946. Note cables laying under the wagon. Koford Photo

In winter quarters in 1952, note the position of the single generator. Also note the interior roof construction. Dyre Reynolds Photo

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Pg 14 of 14 SCALE: 1/4" = 1' SCANNED & REVISED: 08/08/02

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