

The appearance of the replica of the Ringling Bros. Giraffe Wagon in the Parade in Milwaukee sent me scurrying to my files. At the very bottom of the old tape reinforced shirt box rested this Laxman drawing of "RINGLING'S FANTASTIC GIRAFFE WAGON 1895". This drawing was prepared for the LCW back in 1953 when the LCW was mimeographed. As much less was known about the wagon in 1953 than today, Laxman did an amazing job of putting it on paper. Compared to a photograph in the Pfening Archives, the Laxman version seems rather massive and ponderous, although in proportion height to width, the photo and the drawings are close. I would guess, then, this heaviness is due to the corner trim on the wagon plan which scaled out to 1/16th" which scales out to 3 inches. The trim in the photos is more delicate and I think I shall use 1/32" stripwood for trim. The wheels seem too heavy in the drawings. The article in the BANDWAGON stresses the giraffe wagon as being very light and the wheels shown in the Pfening photo appear to be very light mud show wheels. But wheels are expendable. A similar Forepaugh giraffe wagon had a light sunburst wheel. In the parade in Milwaukee, the Ringling Replicas had sunburst wheels, so you can see, you just takes your choice.

The Pfening Archives photo shows a vertical strip dividing the front side panel. This is no big deal. I merely mention it because a similar Forepaugh wagon had a picture of a giraffe painted in this panel to indicate the purpose of the wagon if it was paraded with the sideboards in place. You might want to do the same.

The rear doors are the biggest difference. The article has a photo from the Museum which rather indicates the doors are full length with three panels. The lower panel is half the length of the doors and there are two smaller on the upper halves. The top one, and this is a view of the inside of the doors, had bars. This would indicate the upper panel opened outward for ventilation and the bars were to prevent the beast from trying to poke his head out. The horizontal door (hinged on the bottom) is actually a tailgate. It has to be dropped down to provide a ramp for the removal of the giraffe. Only when it is down can the vertical doors be opened. The giraffe, in leaving the den, has his head down and it has left the confines of the wagon some seven or eight feet before his feet do. Were the vertical doors capable of being opened before the tailgate was down, the giraffe, not seeing it, could trip over the lower door and break his legs not to mention his neck. So, the handler had to do it right the first time!

The giraffe is a delicate animal and very valuable. Not too many, even today, are maintained by circuses. They are extremely fragile, and the wagons on which they used to ride were padded, usually with the heavy walls pads like the furniture vans have, and especially on any sharp corners and around the opening in the roof. This particular padding was merely a fabric tube, filled with padding and nailed on the inside frame of the opening.

The three body bolsters on the wagon which are part of the 5th wheel assembly are rather far forward. This is not an error. In photos of the Ringling and the Forepaugh wagons, a portion of the front wheels do, in fact, extend ahead of the front of the body.

The canopy is self explanatory. However, at least this year, the replica was paraded without it. The Pfening Archive photo of the Ringling wagon shows the wagon ready to parade with the giraffe erect, and the canopy open looking like two opposing convertibles with their tops down. The photo of the giraffe wagon of the Cooper and Bailey show, shows the canopy only partially open. The two photos of the Forepaugh wagon do not show any canopy, so it was either removable or retractable.

This would be an ideal way to show off that giraffe of yours. You could display it in a pen outside the den in a sidewalled menagerie, or within the wagon on an indoor menagerie, or if no menagerie, as a unit of your parade.



Ringling Bros. Circus giraffe wagon in 1894. Note the folding canvas hood on the roof.

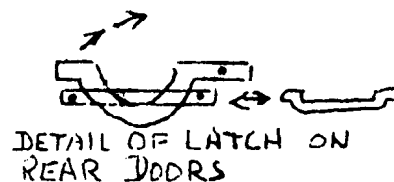
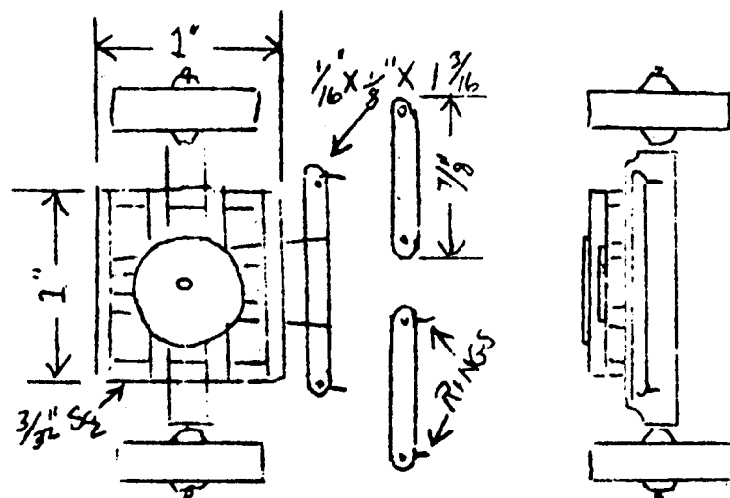
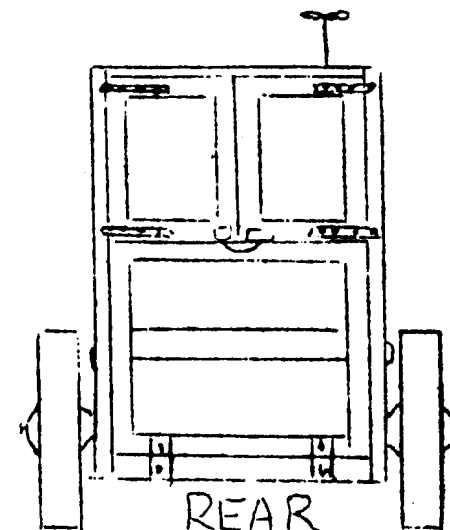
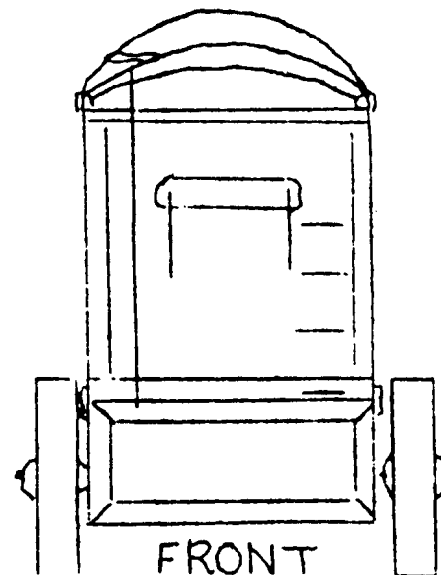
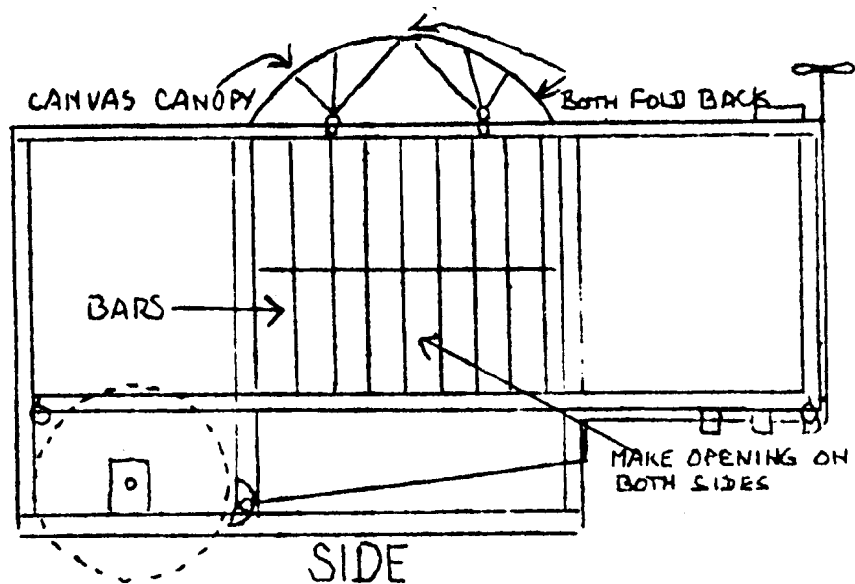
[Circus World Museum photo]

Ringling Bros. Giraffe Wagon No. 71

DATE: 1895	SCALE: 1/4" = 1'	SCANNED & REVISED: 03/12/03	Pg 1 of 2
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Circus Model Builders

Drawn By Haske "Pappy" Harr & Nick Laxman	DRAWING NUMBER #0324
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Notes:

Canopy is made of metal strips covered in cloth.
 Rear door swing open or out and bottom folds down to make a ramp.
 Photo of this wagon is also on page 134 of "Circus Parade"

**Ringling Bros.
 Giraffe Wagon No. 71**

Pg 2 of 2

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