

Most Calliopes were actuated by steam provided by a boiler and released through the whistles by a keyboard similar to that of a piano. Air calliopes worked on a similar principle, however the whistles were actuated by the release of compressed air. An air compressor powered by a gas engine located in the front of the wagon, provided the necessary volume of air. Because the air calliope did not require the big bulky boiler found in the steam calliopes of the period they were carried in a much smaller wagon. Many shows carried two Calliopes. The traditional steam version whose singular musical blast heralded the coming of the elephants and the end of the street parade and the smaller air calliope, which was often placed in the middle of the parade. After the parade was over the steam calliope was placed at the entrance to the circus midway, where a further concert was given prior to the "Big Show." On some shows, the air calliope was placed in the entrance to the sideshow just behind the banner line. Air calliopes were often left down town to give a concert in support of the advance sale of tickets for the daily performance. In this instance, once the concert was over, they would be taken back to the rail yard. Air calliopes did not have the same nasal blast of the steam calliope. Their sound was clean and controlled.

As the forerunner of the air calliope, the steam calliope has had a long history in association with American show business. In the days, prior to mass communication provided first by radio and then by television, the calliope was used as an advertising tool. Its whistles could be heard for miles. Everybody within earshot knew that something new and exciting was about to happen and where possible would flock towards the sound. During the heyday of American river boat transportation, the steam calliope (located on the upper deck in front of the wheel house) often was used to announce the arrival of the river boat in port. The "Showboats" of the day carried them for the same reasons. The traveling American Circus incorporated the steam calliope as part of its daily ritual very early on

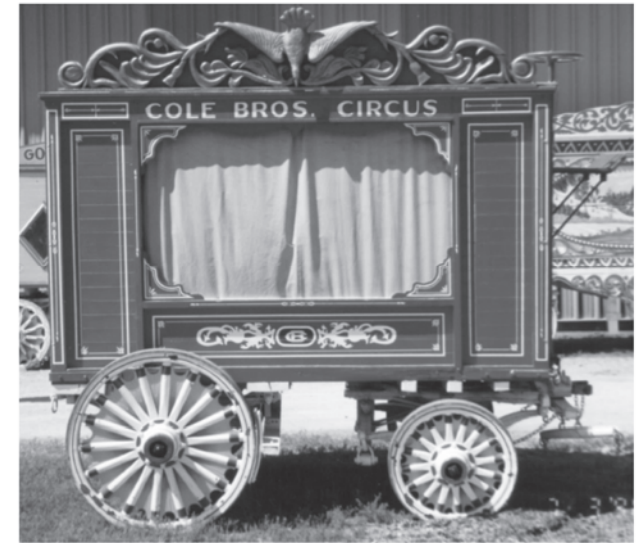
and in one fashion or another has maintained it as a part of circus tradition ever since. By the late 1920's, the steam calliope was passing along into the realm of "Folklore" as were so many other things representing the previous era. Radio advertising, and indeed a whole new way of thinking, were causing people to be attracted to events, such as the circus in different ways. Still, the raucous sound of the steam calliope could stir people's emotions in a way that the air calliope could not. In its latter years, the steam calliope belching smoke and dripping water condensation from the whistles not only announced the coming of the circus, but nostalgically for many people the end of an era. The air calliope represented practical progress. It also carved its niche in circus history, but it never gained the acceptance of the steam calliope. During the 1930's & 40's several truck shows did carry truck mounted steam calliopes but it was a trend that didn't last for long. All were replaced with the more portable air calliope as time went on.

This little jewel of a wagon started out with Ringling Bros. Circus at the beginning of this century and was last used by Cole Bros. in 1939. With the undercarriage and wheels removed it became a coal storage bin on a farm near Rochester, Ind. Later it was removed to the Circus World Museum at Baraboo and restored. For those who are building a old time rail show from ten to thirty cars in size, this cute little circus wagon will fit right in.

Notes from the Superintendent of Plans

Contrary to the data provided by Mr. Hartigan, the Circus World Museum history of this wagon is as follows:

The wagon was built for Fred Buchanan's Yankee Robinson Circus about 1915. It was used on that show through 1920, was used on the World Bros. Circus in 1923 and on the Robbins Bros. Circus from 1924 through



Cole Bros. No. 82 taken at the Circus World Museum in July 1996. [M. Dreiling Photo]

1931. These were all Buchanan owned shows. It appeared on the Cole Bros. Circus in 1935, 1937 and 1938, being on the Robbins Bros. Circus of Adkins and Terrell in 1938. Later it was stored at the Bradley farm in Rochester, Indiana. Badly weathered, it was given to the CWM by the owner in 1965. It was restored by the museum.

During its eventful history it at one time or another carried either an air calliope or a Una-Fon, a type of electronically controlled xylophone. At present time it is equipped with shaker chimes, another musical instrument typical of the circus.

Cole Bros. Air Calliope No. 82

DATE: 1920

SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

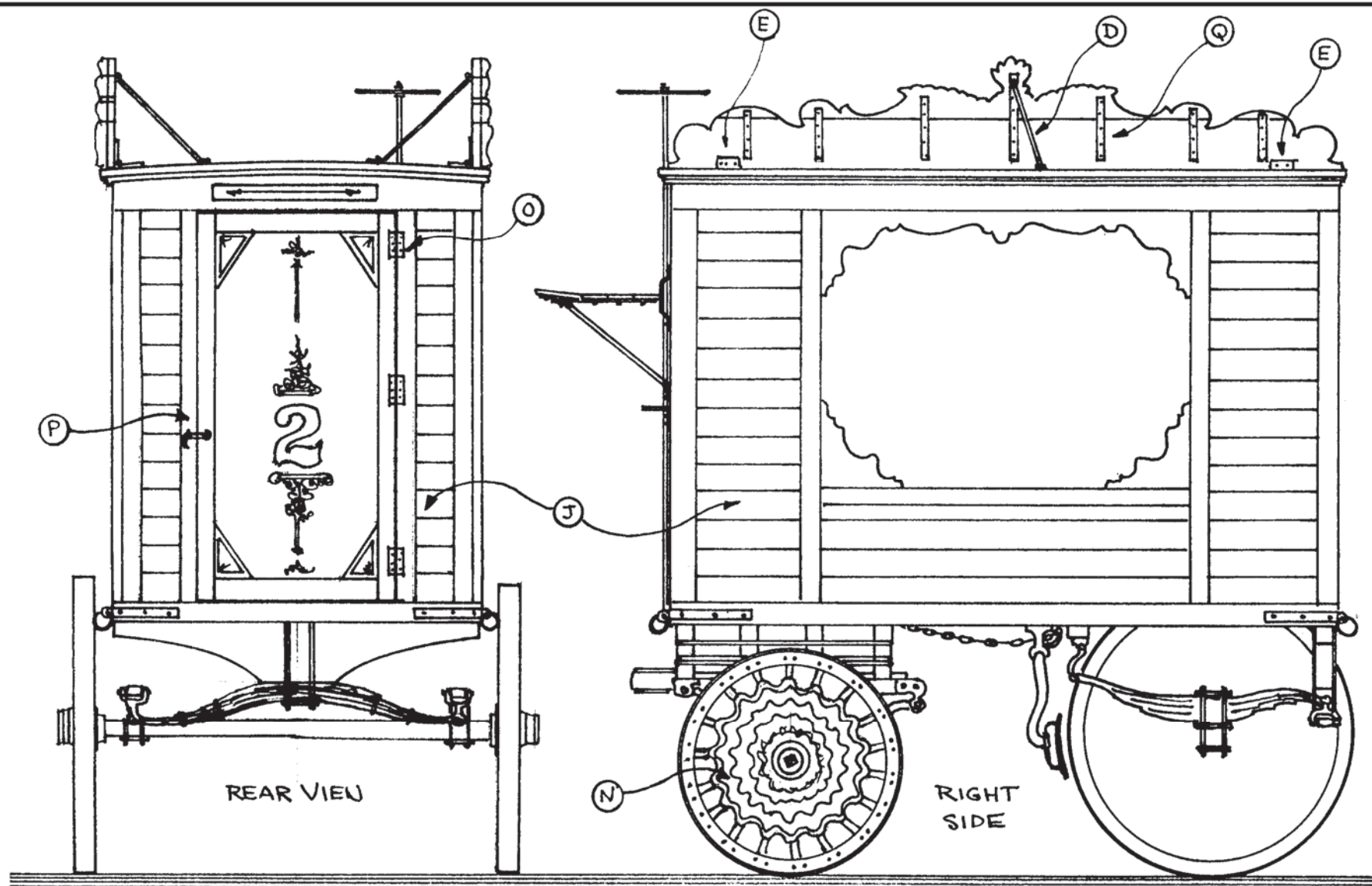
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Pg 1 of 4

Circus Model Builders

Drawn By
Mike Hartigan

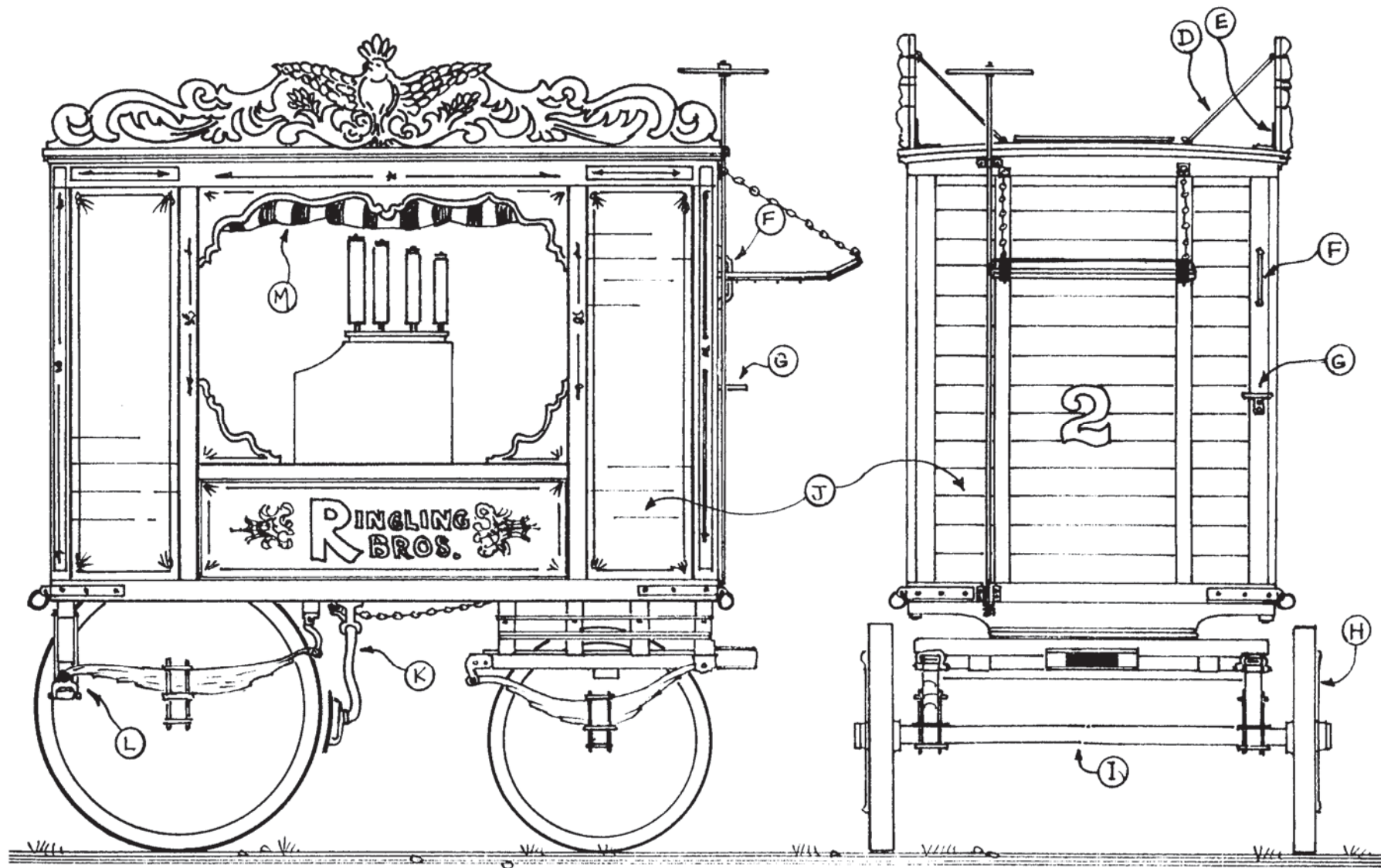
DRAWING NUMBER
#0390



- A. Air Calliope
- B. Gas motor & air compressor location
- C. Musicians keyboard
- D. Skyboard brace
- E. Skyboard hinges
- F. Grab iron
- G. Step
- H. Carved Sunburst attached to outside of wheel spokes.
- I. Tensioned iron axle
- J. 1 x 4 lumber used to construct sides

- K. Brake assembly & actuating chain (see detail drawing #1)
- L. Rear springs & cast shackles (see detail drawing #2)
- M. Striped canvas rain curtain
- N. Side view of carved Sunburst
- O. Back door hinges
- P. Door latch
- Q. Skyboard reinforcing straps (see detail drawing #3)

**Cole Bros.
Air Calliope No. 82**



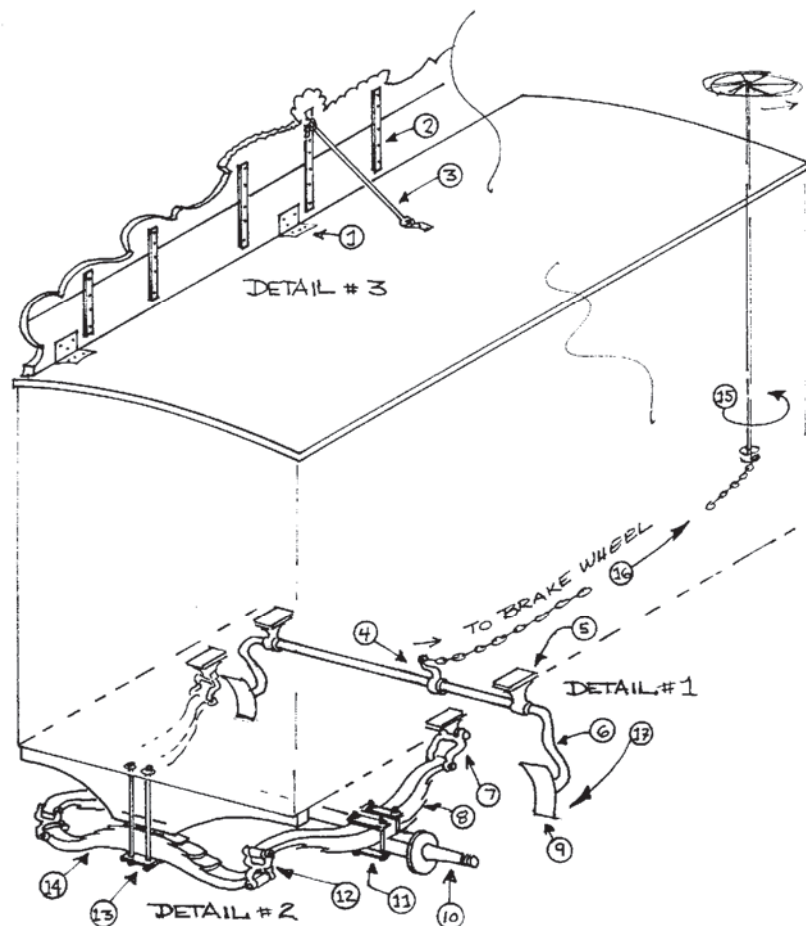
**Cole Bros.
Air Calliope No. 82**

Pg 3 of 4

SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

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Plan Legend

1. Skyboard hinges
2. Reinforcing straps
3. detachable brace to keep skyboards vertical
4. Brake rod lever (probably an iron casting)
5. Brake rod sleepers (cast Iron with bushings)
6. Hardened iron brake rod
7. Cast iron spring shackles
8. Rear axle springs
9. Iron brake shoe
10. Hardened iron rear axle (note tapered stub)
11. Rear axle & spring shackles
12. Cast iron rear cross spring shackles
13. Rear cross spring attachment shackle
14. Rear cross spring
15. Assumed direction of turn for brake wheel
16. Direction of travel of brake rod chain
17. Direction of travel of brake shoe



Front end view of Cole Bros. No. 82 taken at the Circus World Museum in July 1996. [M. Dreiling Photo]

Cole Bros. Air Calliope No. 82

Pg 4 of 4

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