

American Circus Corporation's Sectional Wagons

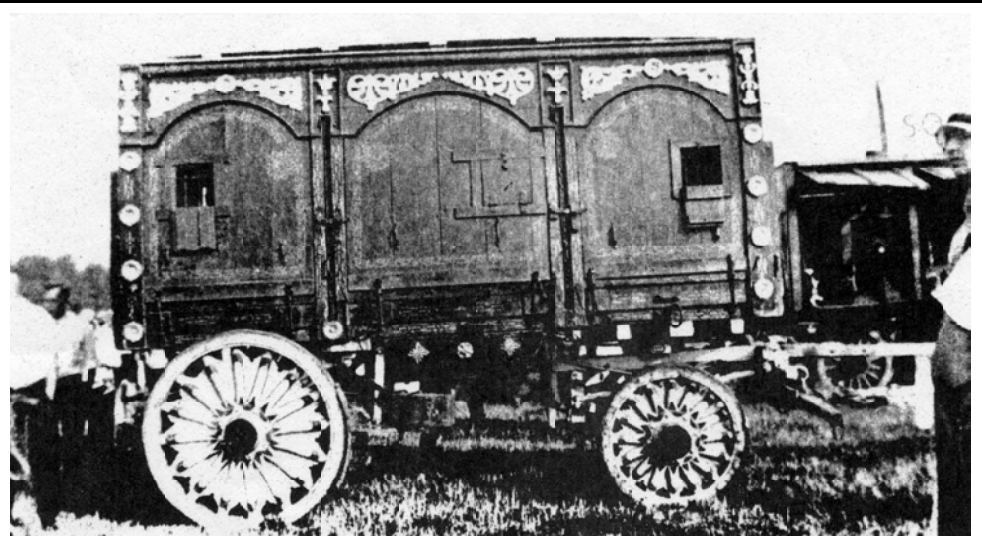
By Richard Conover, CMB 108 (Written in 1967)

Hagenbeck Wallace Cage No. 24, which has been in the Circus World Museum in Baraboo since early 1960, is one of the four or five survivors of a group of twenty-five or more that were built in the Peru quarters of the American Circus Corporation in 1922-25. This one, and two others, also in Baraboo, are fine examples of this series which are characterized by their arched openings that mark the divisions between the sections. My count of twenty-five has been evolved entirely from approximately 100 photographs. This is probably the only type of data available, unless someone has construction records.

These cages were constructed in the era when it was apparent that the traditional street parade was on its way out, so their designs were long on practicability and short on aesthetic values. The sameness in their general construction and the employment of what appears to have been machine-made carvings made for a monotonous lineup — this very monotony hinders and sometimes almost defies any attempt to differentiate between individual units by the median of photographs. This becomes particularly vexing when trying to trace the minor modifications made over the years. On an occasion or two, when it was not absolutely determinable if it was a modification or a new specimen. I took the low count. As more photographs become available, the situation should resolve itself; and then the total number will probably exceed twenty-five. Whatever the total production may have been, the cages were originally divided up between the corporations Hagenbeck-Wallace and Sells Floto units. There is at least one picture extant that shows the John Robinson title on the sky-board, but this is believed to have been in the post-1930 period when that title was appended to Hagenbeck-Wallace for one season.

Of the twenty-five now identified, one was of four sections, four were of two sections, and the remainder had three sections. Some of them, like No. 24, were built to handle wild animal acts with the steel meshed partition between the sections which slid out through the divider posts to unload a string of cages directly into the arena. Others, like No. 25 (Circus World Museum numbering; the last historical number was No. 28 on the 1938 Hagenbeck-Wallace) had narrow chutes built down one side to facilitate in the shifting. They were very practical and sturdy cages, all extra wide to provide for the maximum accommodations for the in-mates.

Nineteen hundred thirty-two was the last year for Sells Floto except for the use of the title in combination with Barnes on what was formerly Barnes equipment. This left a surplus of these cages around Peru so the Hagenbeck Wallace Circus of 1933, 1934, and 1935 was outfitted with all that was required from the best of the two shows. There was no Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1936; but in 1937 and 1938, the title and thirty cars of equipment were leased to Howard Y. Bary. The 1937 Bary show featured Terrell Jacobs' Wild Animal Act; and Cage No. 24 was one of the several that carried Jacobs' name, lettered exactly as it was restored last year by the Circus World



No. 24 on Hagenbeck-Wallace circa 1933 [William Koford photo]



No. 24 in the 2002 Milwaukee Circus parade [M. Dreiling photo]

Hagenbeck-Wallace Cage Wagon #24

American Circus Corp. Sectional Cages

DATE: 1920s/30s

SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

SCANNED & REVISED:
04/29/03

Pg 1 of 5

Circus Model Builders

Drawn By
Frank F. Sullivan, CMB 225

DRAWING NUMBER

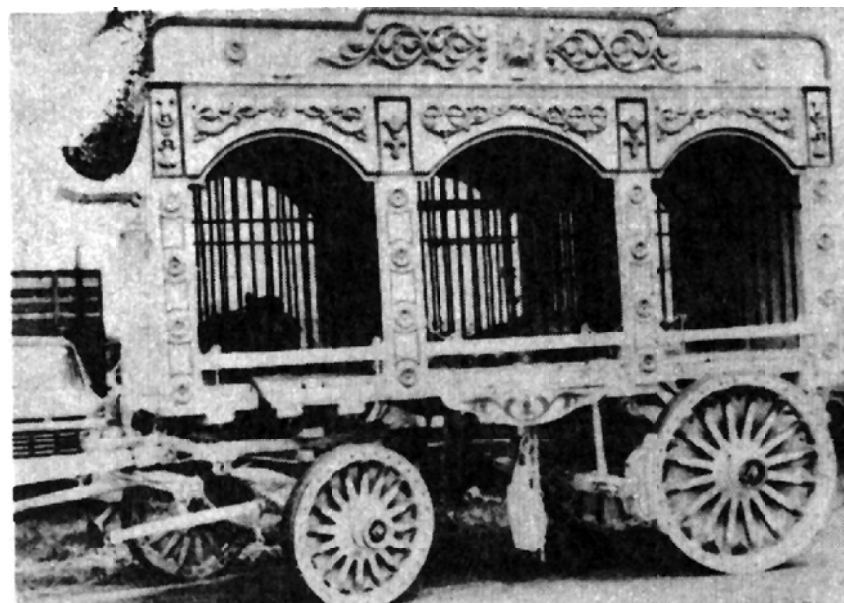
#0194

Museum. This gesture (on the behalf of the Museum to honor one of the best friends and supporters among the troupers that any club ever had, as all the old timers in the CMB will attest) was graciously arranged for by Director C. P. (Chappie) Fox at the suggestion of this author. In 1938 Jacobs transferred to the Ringling show, and there was some realignment of these cages on Bary's Hagenbeck Wallace. At least two of the 1937 cages were left in quarters, because they appear in the photos made when the wagons were burned in Peru in November 1941. Nine others of this class, including No. 24, must have been on that 1938 Hagenbeck-Wallace show train because this many different cages have shown up in photographs made in and since 1938. These photographs must be aligned with the cages that landed on the West Coast when the Bary show was stranded in Riverside, California. Soon thereafter, these cages were acquired by Louis Goebel, operator of a wild animal farm near Thousand Oaks, who, as a side line, dealt a little in second hand show property and rented props to the motion picture studios. The King Lamarr title shown on Cage No. 24 in the picture I took at Thousand Oaks in 1944 is the result of such a rental.

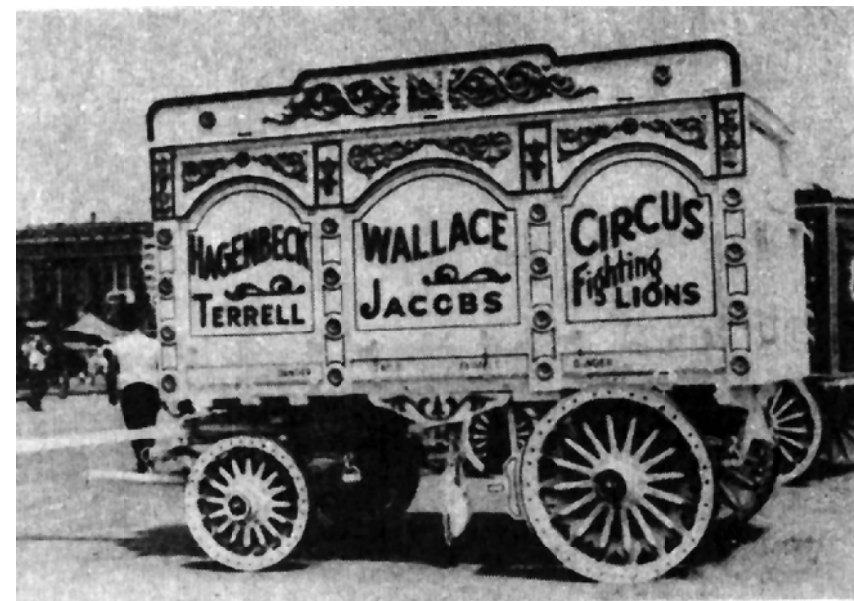
Of the nine cages which were once at Goebels, two were of the two-section length and the rest had three sections. In 1940, two of the larger ones were picked up by the Cole Brothers Circus when they were in the Los Angeles area. In 1945, another of the three-section and one with two sections toured with Arthur Brothers Circus, a West Coast organization that railed it east but did not quite make it back intact. At least, it seems to have left its large cage in Arizona, where, at last report, it still is. Three of the nine are now in Baraboo. The rest seem to have been broken up to build the wreck set for "The Greatest Show on Earth" which was released in 1952. I am prepared to set through it at least twice to check on this on the next re-release.

Besides the nine that ended up in California, five others were taken out of Peru before the 1941 wagon-burning episode. Four of these went to the Ringling show to house Jacobs' cat act in 1938 and 1939. These four were very much alike — in fact, so much alike that differentiation between them by comparing photographs is virtually impossible. None of these four were with Jacobs on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1937. The last cage to leave Peru was a two-section one that the Ringlings let the Cole show have to replace part of that show's losses when its quarters burned on 20 February 1940. This one is probably still at the Paul Kelly quarters in Peru.

By a year later, it was evident to the Ringling management that there was no foreseeable use for the circus property still in the Peru quarters. Since almost nobody can justify the economics of storing a vast quantity of taxable junk to await the day when it might turn into valuable antiques, there was little else to do but to dispose of it. But before the sentimentalist deplores the loss of our heritage of these dozen or so cages on that memorable 30 November 1941 day, a rehearsal for the real Day of Infamy which occurred a week later at Pearl Harbor, let him remember that these clumsy boxes were probably the least aesthetic and certainly the least historic of the many items that were destroyed that day.



Wagon No. 24 shown here after restoration at the Circus World Museum. The top photo shows cage open, while the bottom photo shows the cage closed with the side panels in place. CMB photos taken by Al Conover during the 1966 Milwaukee parade.



Hagenbeck-Wallace Cage Wagon #24

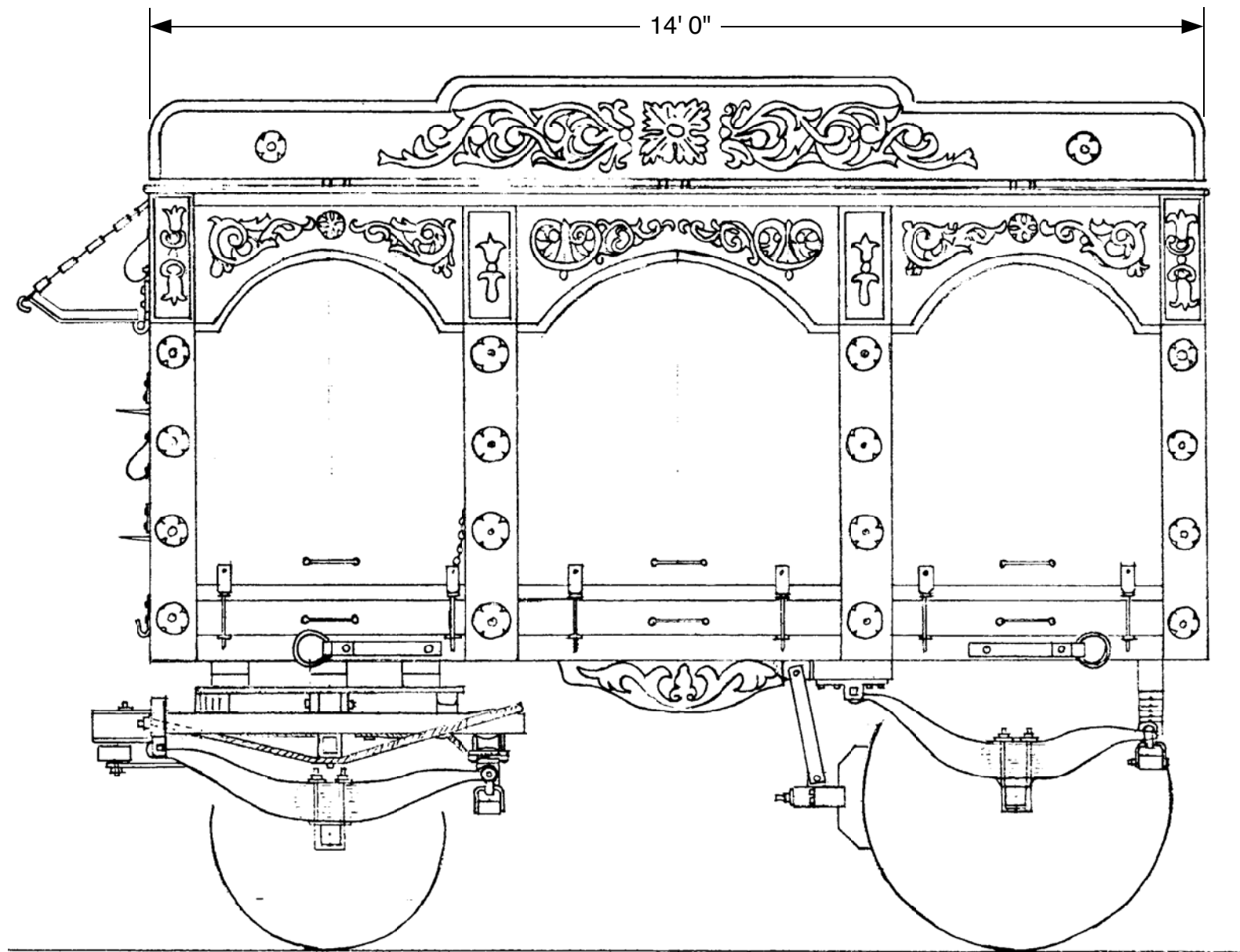
American Circus Corp. Sectional Cages

Pg 2 of 5

SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

SCANNED & REVISED:
04/29/03

DRAWING NUMBER
#0194



Side View

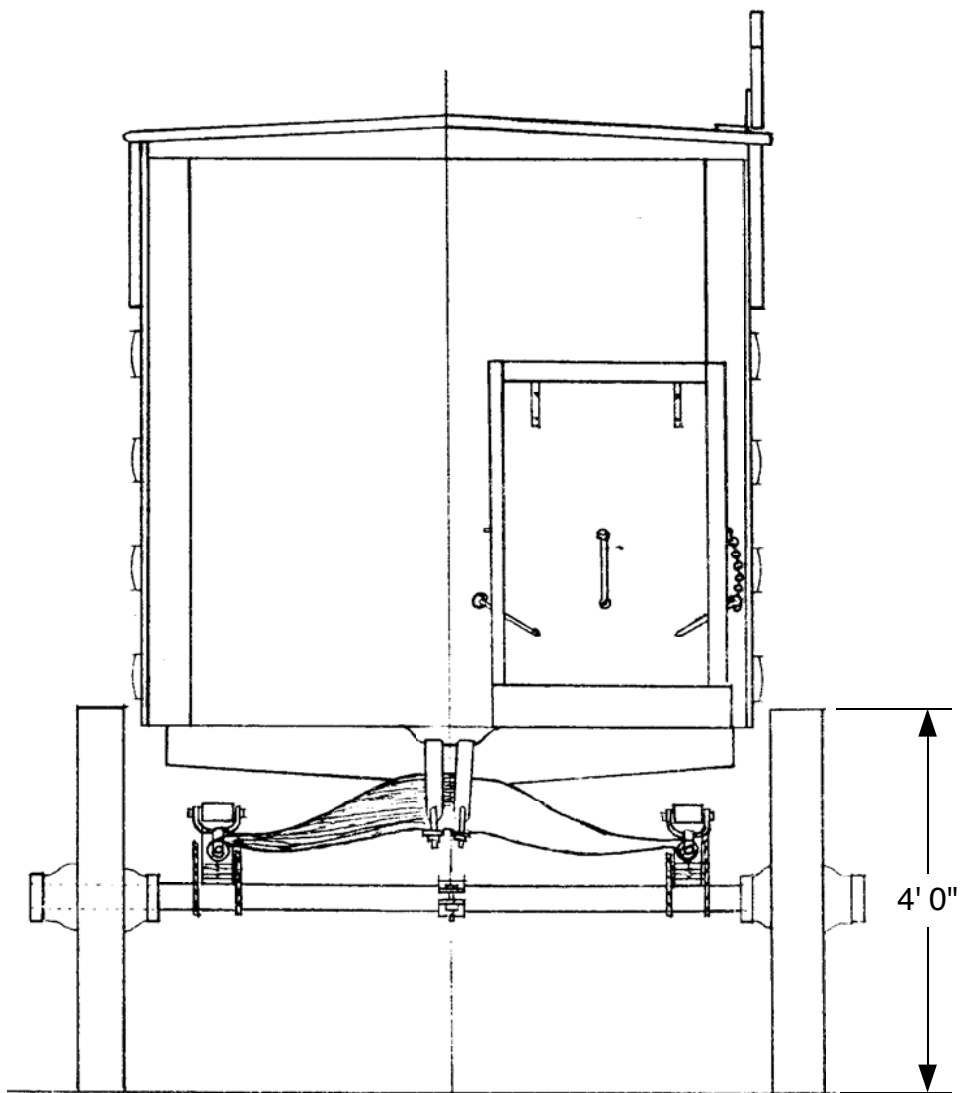
Hagenbeck-Wallace Cage Wagon #24
American Circus Corp. Sectional Cages

Pg 3 of 5

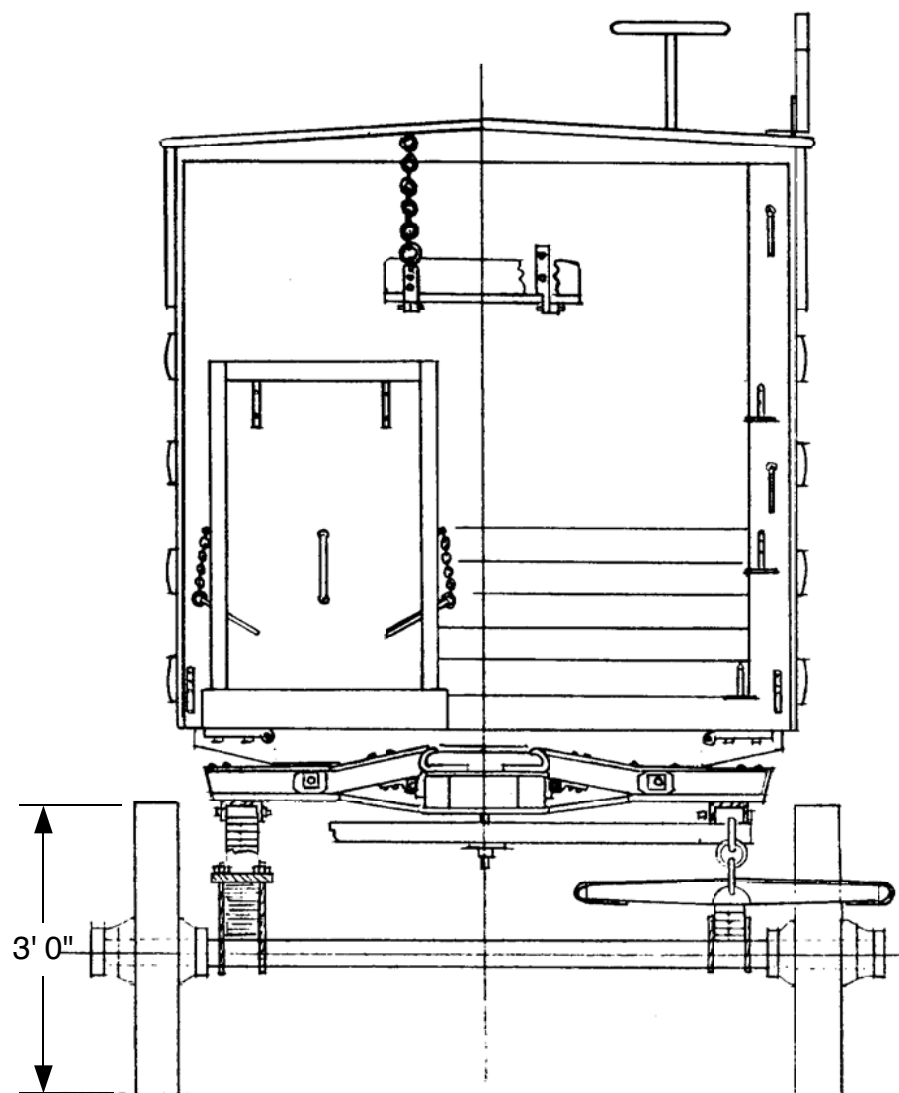
SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

SCANNED & REVISED:
04/29/03

DRAWING NUMBER
#0194

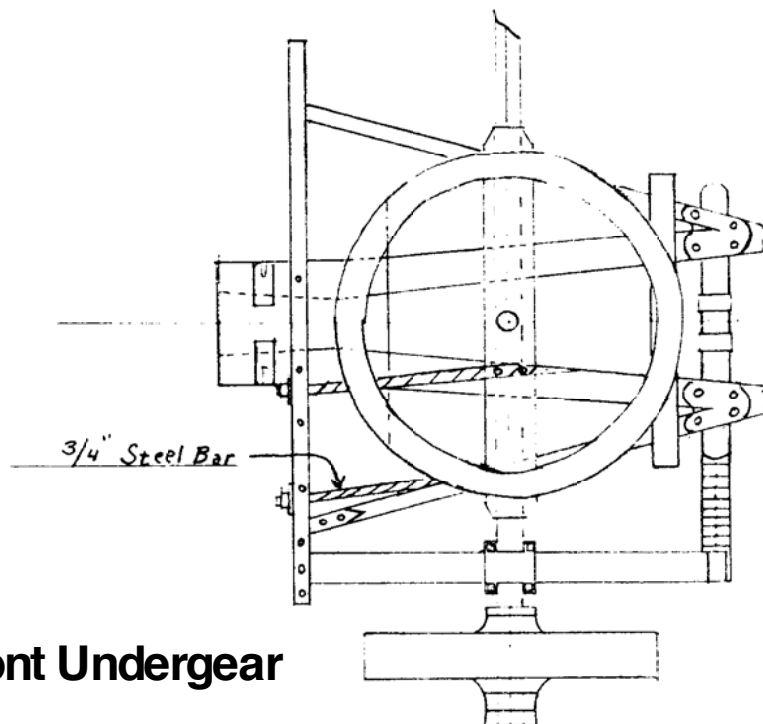


Rear View

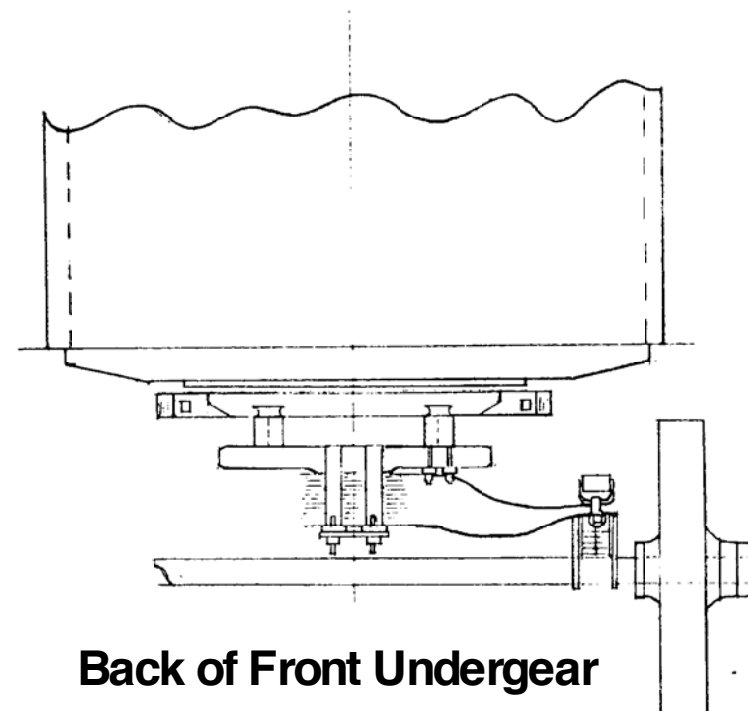


Front View

Hagenbeck-Wallace Cage Wagon #24
American Circus Corp. Sectional Cages



Front Undergear



Back of Front Undergear



Cage wagon No. 24 at the Circus World Museum in 1996.
[M. Dreiling photo]

No. 24 at Thousand Oaks,
California, circa 1943.
[Richard Conover Photo]



Hagenbeck-Wallace Cage Wagon #24
American Circus Corp. Sectional Cages

Pg 5 of 5

SCALE: 1/2" = 1'

SCANNED & REVISED:
04/29/03

DRAWING NUMBER
#0194