

The name Banner Line' is self descriptive, a line of banners in front of the Side Show advertising what can be seen on the inside. Today these signs are painted on panels attached to trucks and are folded down or up while the truck is enroute, as the inside of the truck is used to carry equipment belonging to the show.

The old time Banner Line, used since the circus began and up until the late 1940's were painted on panels of canvas, not artist's canvas, but tent canvas, and were strung between wooden or metal poles. Each corner of these panels were reinforced with a heavy leather or canvas triangle in which a metal lined hole was made. The rope to pull the piece to the top of the pole was attached to this portion of the banner, ran through a small pulley attached to the top of the pole, and down to the ground where it was tied around the bottom of the pole. The bottom of the banner was also fastened to the pole with a small piece of rope run through the hole and tied to the bottom of the pole. Some large banners also had a hole half way up the banner and was tied to the pole also at this point. The size and amount of these banners depended upon the size of the show, the one illustrated in this article are 10 ft. by 20 ft. and are drawn full size for fourth inch scale, HO scale would be half the size illustrated. (Drawings can be photostated to any size required.) Notice that the banners here are drawn as perfect rectangles, with straight side and bottoms and tops, but real banners, due the wear and tear and stretching encountered every day became like the ones illustrated in drawing No. 2, curved at the top and bottom and sides due to stretching the ropes eight. Try and make your banners look this way as it is the way they were.

Perhaps the hardest part of constructing a banner line, especially for beginners, is getting the paintings on the banners. I realize that not all of us are gifted with drawing ability, but once the drawing is on the canvas, the painting is rather easy, therefore I have made drawings that can be transferred to your banner line by



Typical Canvas Banner Line of the 30s is shown here on the Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto Circus during the 1938 season. This was the last appearance of these two shows together. Photo from Baxter Photo Collection.

merely tracing them onto your canvas with carbon paper. Those who are not in fourth inch scale will have to have the drawings photostated to the correct size, or change them yourself. These drawings are shown here in black and white, as it is too costly to reproduce color for the LCW, but they should be painted in colors. The banners on real circus banner lines were far from being works of art. They served their purpose by being loud and garish, they got people into the tent to see the marvels advertised on the outside. The banners I have made here represent a typical lineup, consisting of the Fat Lady, human skeleton, magician, fire eater, etc. etc. Many side shows had many more "freaks" than illustrated here. Somehow, the people on these paintings never looked real, they were from some other world. This is because they were, for the most part,

flat, without perspective, and the colors usually clashed. Backgrounds should be a red orange, pale blue, yellow or red, use your imagination for the clothing of the people, but of course their hands, face and exposed parts of their bodies should be flesh color. Don't worry too much about shadows, as very little was used, thus the lack of depth in the paintings. Each banner should have a border clear around, make this border, a darker color than the background, and also make it a different color than the background. Put different color backgrounds and borders on each banner, as they were not all the same, each one had a different background color and border color.

Material that can be used to construct these banners can be heavy cloth, the best thing I have found is "Wall Tex", a canvas like material put on walls as wall paper. Use the side that is pasted to the wall for the

Side Show "Banner Line"

DATE: 1920s/30s

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'

SCANNED & REVISED:
06/04/03

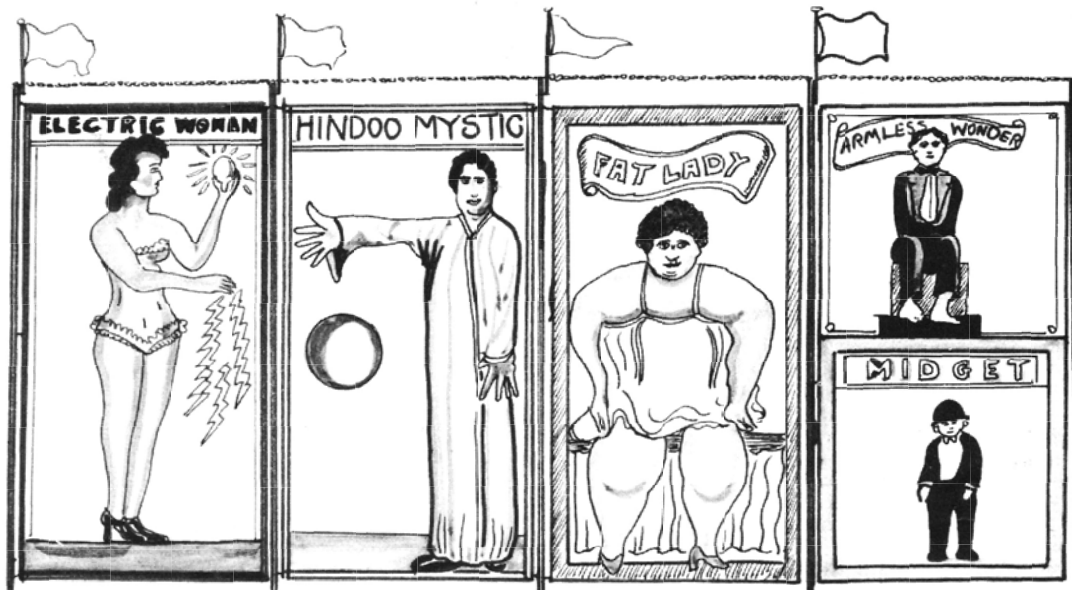
Pg 1 of 4

Circus Model Builders

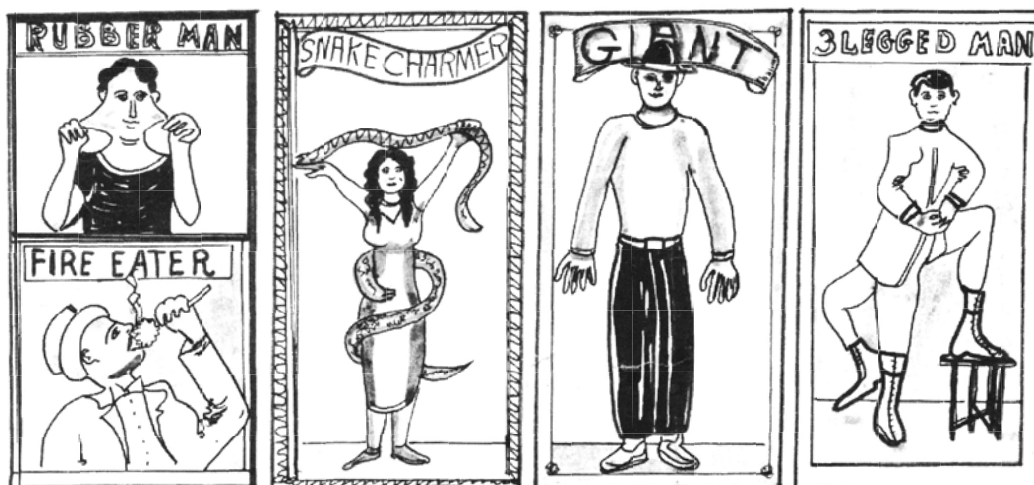
Drawn By
Paul West

DRAWING NUMBER

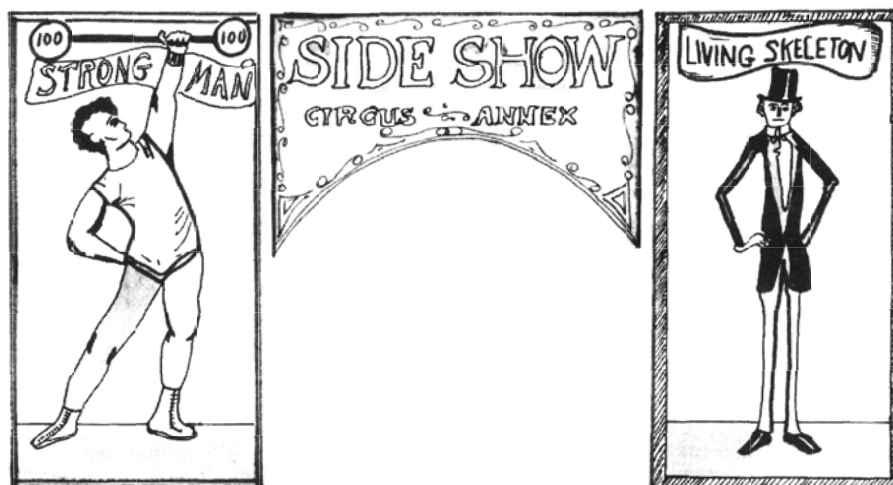
#0212



Left Side Bannerline with various styles of Banners.



Right Side Banner Line Panels



Center Section Banner Line

Side Show "Banner Line"

outside of your banner, and the other side, if it has a design on it can be painted dark grey or brown. If it is plain white, just darken it a little and use it as it is. This will be the back side of your banner. The corners can be reinforced with iron on tape. put on the back only. The hole for the rope can be made with a small grommet. The figures can be painted with artist's oil colors, which gives the best results, but takes longer to dry, 2 to 3 days. Water colors are the new plastic paints can also be used, but will not look as good as the oil paint. As I said before, these need not be work of art. I think that with a little preliminary practice on spare canvas, you can accomplish it. It is not necessary to buy a complete roll of wall-tex to make these banners, your local paint store usually has some scrap pieces laying around, or if necessary you could buy a small piece of artists canvas, which is not too expensive.

The older circuses used wooden poles for their banner lines, later metal poles were used. Paint them either red, blue or yellow. Each pole had a metal pin sticking up on the top end, and a metal chain was strung along the top, one of the links slipping down over the pin. This chain ran the whole length of the line, with the link that goes over the pin being a little larger than the rest of the links. These links that went over the pin were evenly spaced, about every ten feet or so, in order that the poles could be evenly spaced before being raised, as the chain was put on prior to the raising. These poles should not be larger than six scale inches in diameter, the smaller in diameter they are the better they look. Each pole had a flag on top, these can be the pennant or square type, and can be all the same colors or can be mixed up, as you please. Many shows used a flag of some nation other than the United States, on each pole, making it a flag of all nations collection. This requires a lot more work but it is well worth the extra effort. Be sure the flags fit the era in which you are modeling, don't use a modern flag on a 1920 show.

These poles were kept in place by the usual guy ropes, strung from the



Another view of a typical Side Show Banner Line this one on the Al G. Barnes Circus of 1934. Photo from Baxter Photo Collection.

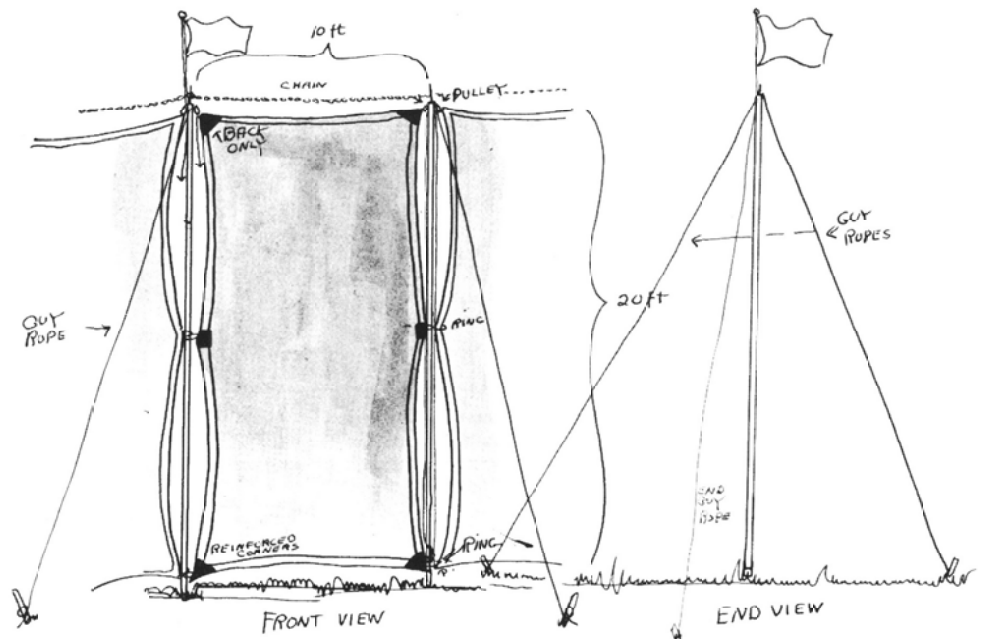


Plate No. 2 shows a Front and End View of the Banner Line, Poles. Guy Wires and Chain, as well as an example of Rigging.

top of each pole, over the pin for the chain, and down to stakes in front and rear of the line: The two ropes in front by the entrance were guyed out at an angle in order to make room at the entrance for the people to enter and leave the tent. The line at each end, along with the chain along the top keeps the poles evenly spaced

and the other lines keep them from falling over.

In order to get more people into the side show, a free show with one or two performers, was given outside. This was done on a small platform or stage in front of the entrance. This stage should not be directly under the arched canvas entrance, but out

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Hagenbeck-Wallace-Forpough-Sells Banner Line 1935. Note the difference in the Full Banners and the similarity of the center section to our Banner Line Sketch. - A Baxter Photo, token at Albony. N. Y.

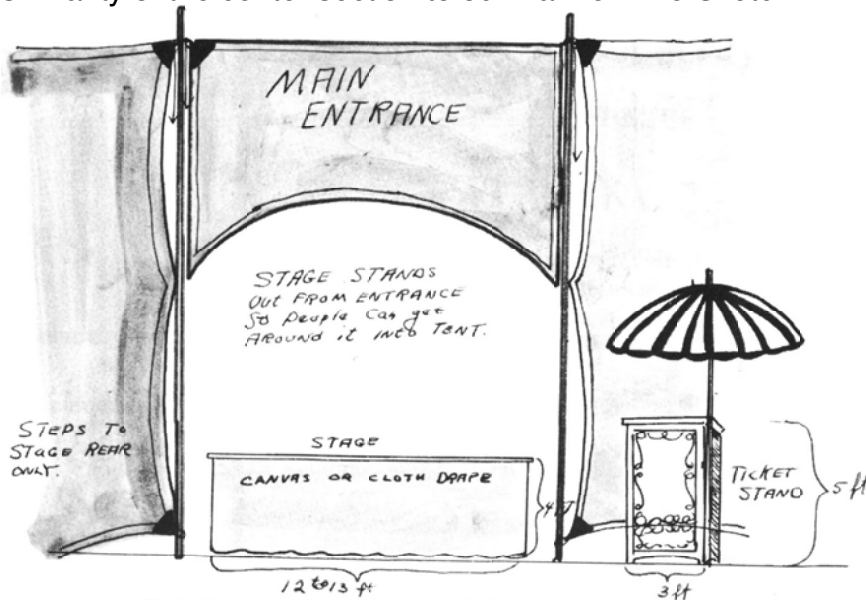


Plate No. 3 - Center Section, Bally Stand and Ticket Box

some feet in front, and should be about eight feet long, but very narrow. Steps for the performers to get to the stage should be in the rear only. It was placed on jacks and draped with a canvas skirt, either plain or striped. The usual ticket stand was also used in front to sell tickets to the side show, some shows used two, one on each side of the stage, and most of them had a gaily striped umbrella to keep the hot sun off the ticket seller. Some shows had electric lights over the banner line, but not many, as the side show was usually down and on it's way to the train before dark.

I have tried to tell everything to make a banner line, and I think that by using the drawings and photos



In this John Robinson Banner Line 1928, note the further variations and the canopy over the Bally Stand. - Baxter Photo Collection.

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