

The 1923 RBB&B Circus Band using one of the stages. Note that the side curtains are not being used on this stage and some of the sleepers are seen. Note size of band.

This plan will deal with the center stages used sometimes in place of rings in the 6 pole Big Top. Also with the end stages used between the center pole and unreserved seats on each end.

The rough sketches were made by Marion Lewis with the help of Jimmy Whalen so credit for preserving this data must go to him along with credit for the photographs of the wagons used to haul these stages. Photos of the stages themselves must be credited to the Circus World Museum at Baraboo, Wis.

In the process of erection, the wooden blocks were first placed into position on the ground and the "I" beams placed on top of these. As the ground would probably not be level the "I" beams were leveled on the blocks by placing wooden blocking under the beams and on top of the blocks. After being leveled by sight, the sleepers were placed in position on top of the "I" beams and then the stage flooring on top of these.

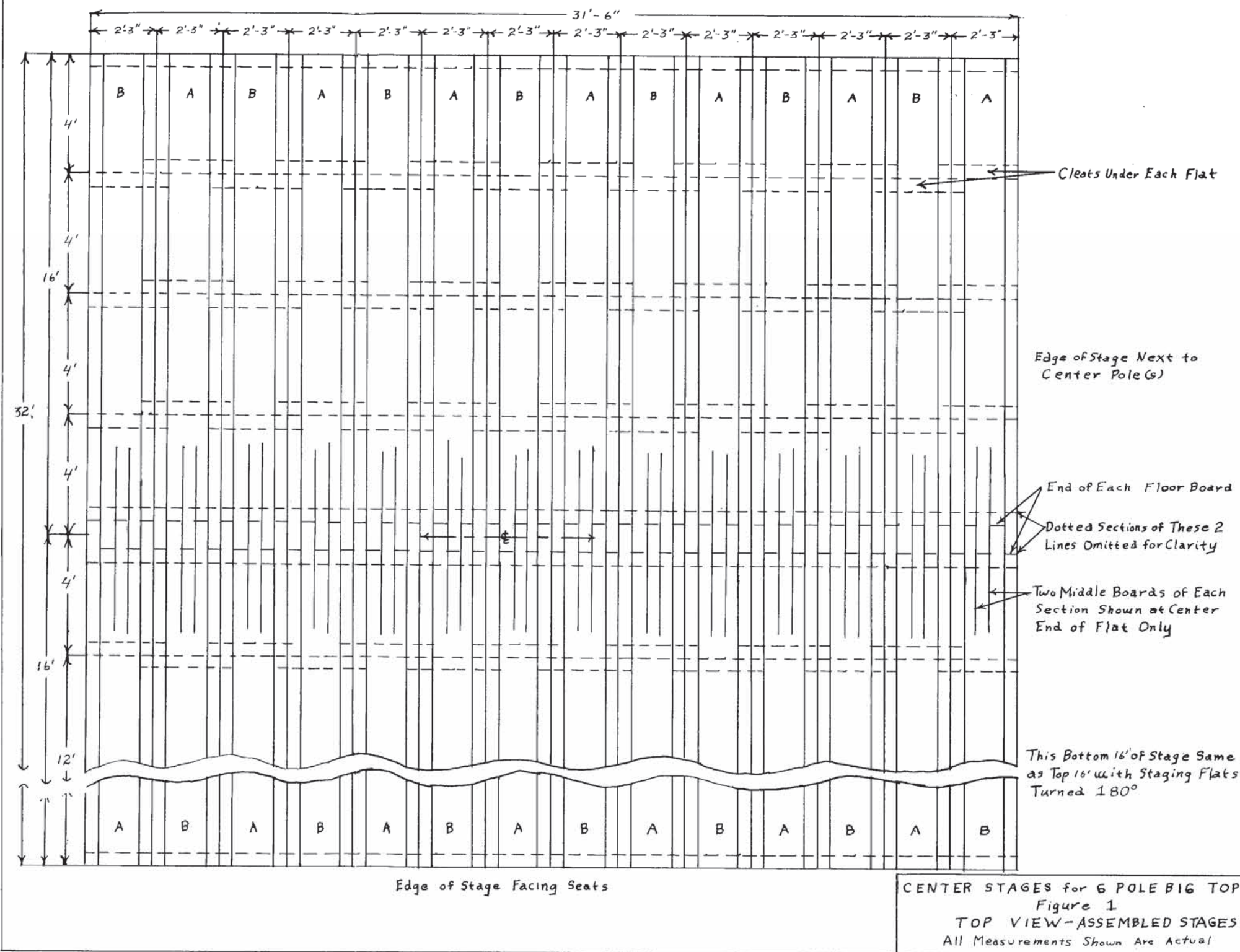
When erecting the stages, the wagon carrying each stage was pulled into the big top beside the stage and parallel to the way the flooring was laid. The flooring was always placed upon the wagon in the order used on the stage so that as each piece came off it could be placed into its proper position without any sorting. Thus the first piece to come off was an edge piece without cleats on one side. This was slid over to the farther side and lined up. Then the other A and B sections were taken off alternately, slide over and spotted leaving the last piece to come off the other side piece of the stage. Next the wagon was pulled ahead and the same process was repeated with the other half of the stage until fully erected.

One wagon carried one complete center stage making two wagons necessary for a 6 pole big top. Where the end stages were carried is not known by the writer of this article.

The drawings are self explanatory and detailed description is unnecessary in writing with just a few notes here. The only reasons Marion Lewis and I could come up with for the wooden beams fastened permanently inside the channel irons, were to give resilience or a little "give" to the flooring. The coefficient of friction between two pieces of wood is greater than between a piece of wood and a piece of metal and the staging was less apt to slide out of place, as with heavy weight on the stage the edges of the channel iron would tend to cut into the stage flooring. The wooden block placed upon the ground were drilled and bolted on each corner to prevent splitting during rough handling.

The "I" beams and the sleepers were all cut into two pieces on the center stages, on account of length, as full length would be 32 feet. This would also make them fit, and again this comes out to 9/16" in width.

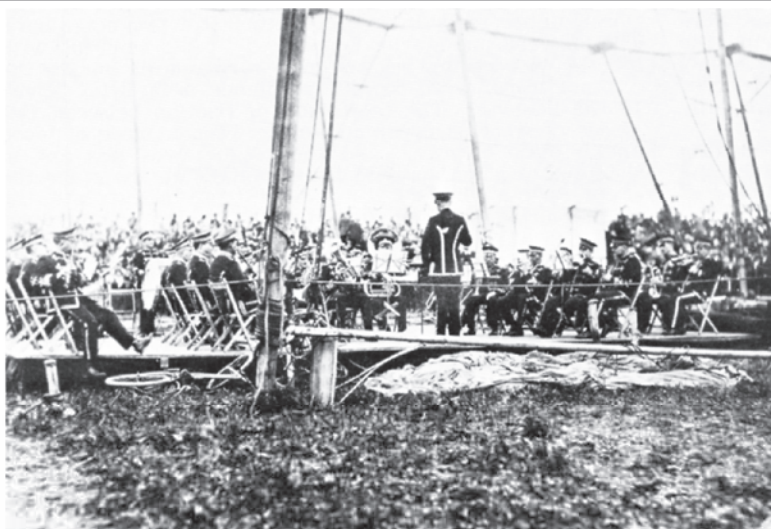
This leaves one more item before progressing to the wagons. That is the curtain around the outside of each stage. Inquiries at the Circus World Museum and through the question and answer department of the LCW did



not give the answer on how they were hung on the stage although everyone ruled out the use of thumb tacks. Again, Marion Lewis was kind enough to supply the answer. As shown in the drawing as detail G of figure 2, bent nails were sewed at regular intervals along the top of the side curtain. These were placed in holes drilled into the top of the side pieces of each stage and also along the ends. The nails were just hung in these holes making a quick easy way to finish them off.

The photos of the wagons as previously noted, are from the Marion Lewis collection. They show the wagons on steel tired wheels and also later as Ringling changed over to rubber tires. This means that these stages were used sometime after 1938 as well as previously. Wagon numbers used were 54, as can be seen in the photos, and also No. 53 for the other stage. As can be seen the stage flooring was loaded so one-half was on one side of the wagon and the other half on the other. The "I" beams, sleeper, and wood blocks were loaded

RBBB			
Big Top Stages			
DATE: 1920-40s	SCALE: 1/4" = 1'	SCANNED & REVISED: 02/11/03	Pg 1 of 3
Circus Model Builders			
Drawn By Raymond Heim			DRAWING NUMBER #0225



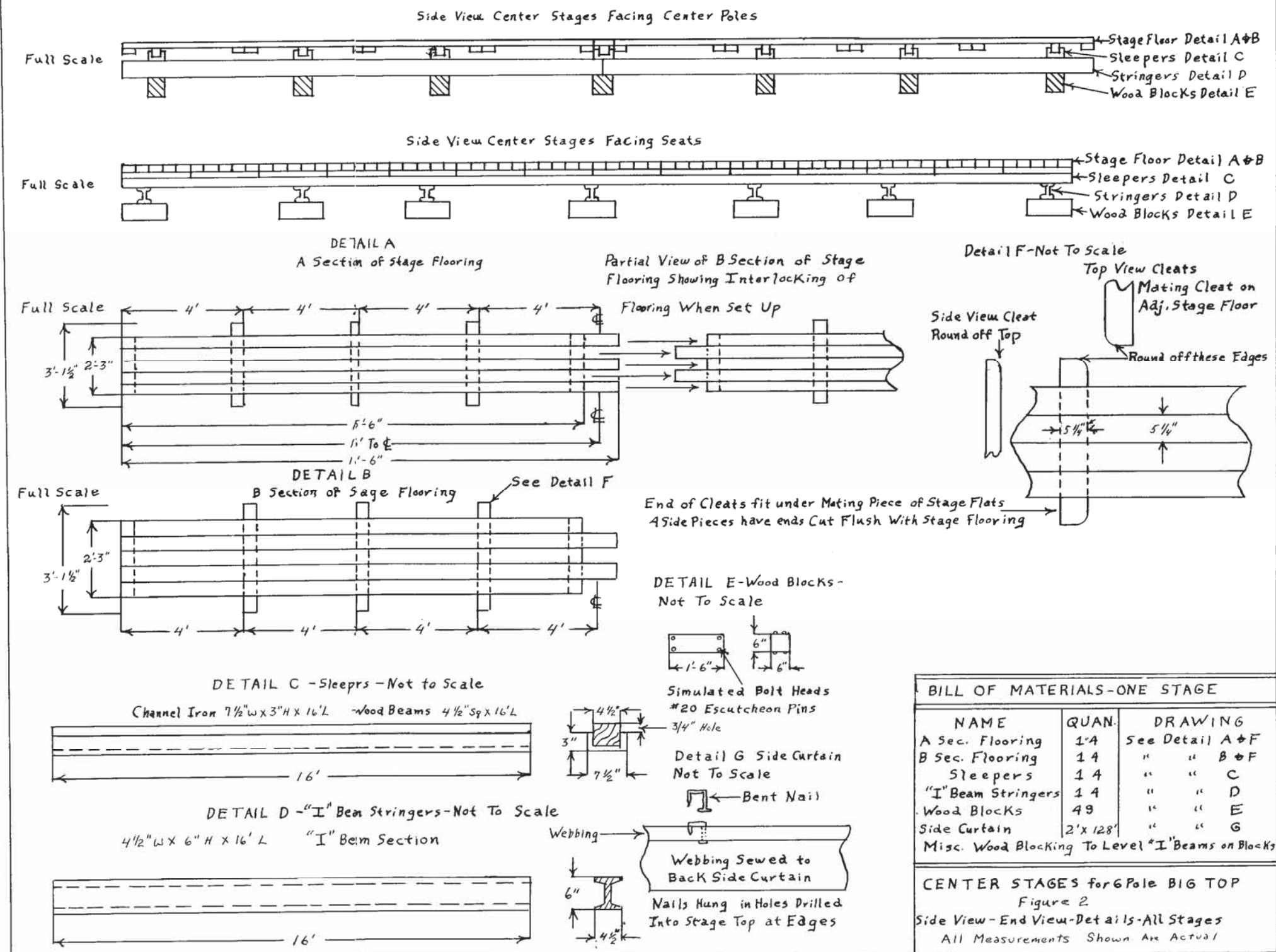
The 1923 RBB&B Stage showing the overall stage with act in progress. The side curtains are in place around edge of stage. Leveling blocks are also shown in place under the stage. In the background an act is in progress in one of the Rings.



In this 1924 RBB&B photo we not only see the stage in use, but it is support-ing a square area and lion act.

in between. The wood blocks went on top, as they were used first and loaded last; the sleepers in the middle and the "I" beams on the bottom. In the possum belly of each wagon was the burlap bags full of small wood blocks for leveling the "I" beams and the curtain which hung around the edges. As can be seen, these wagons resembled seat stringer wagons in construction with stake sides and stake ends. Only a front for drivers seat and footboard made up the body of the wagon. The stakes were chained together after loading. The reason for that circular chain arrangement shown at the rear of both photos of loaded wagons is unknown unless some other props were placed in there. Could some one come up with the answer as to where the end stages were carried? Also, the reason for the circular chain arrangement shown on the two loaded wagons? The photos from the Circus World Museum collection show about the best detail of the stages in use that could be obtained, but are in reality very sketchy. The first one is of Ringling in 1923 showing the side curtain in place with a tumbling act going on. No. 2 is also Ringling of 1923 with the band playing the pre-show concert and without the side curtain. Here one of the sleepers can be plainly seen and also some props to be used during the show. Note the size of the band.

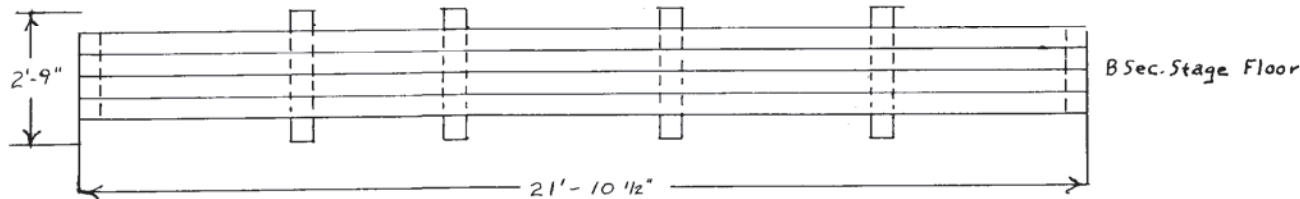
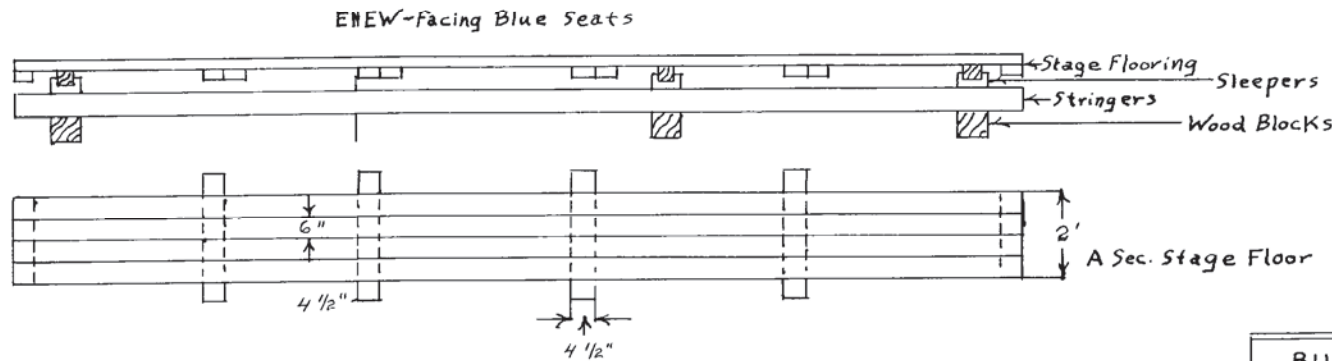
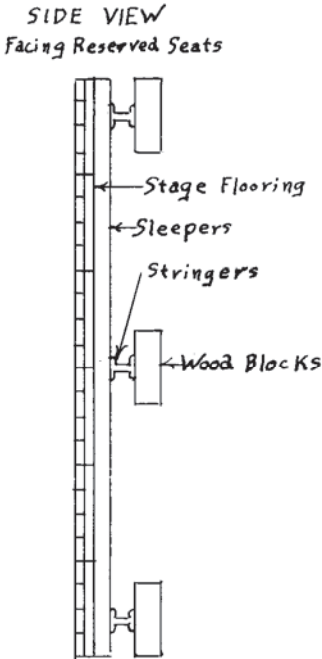
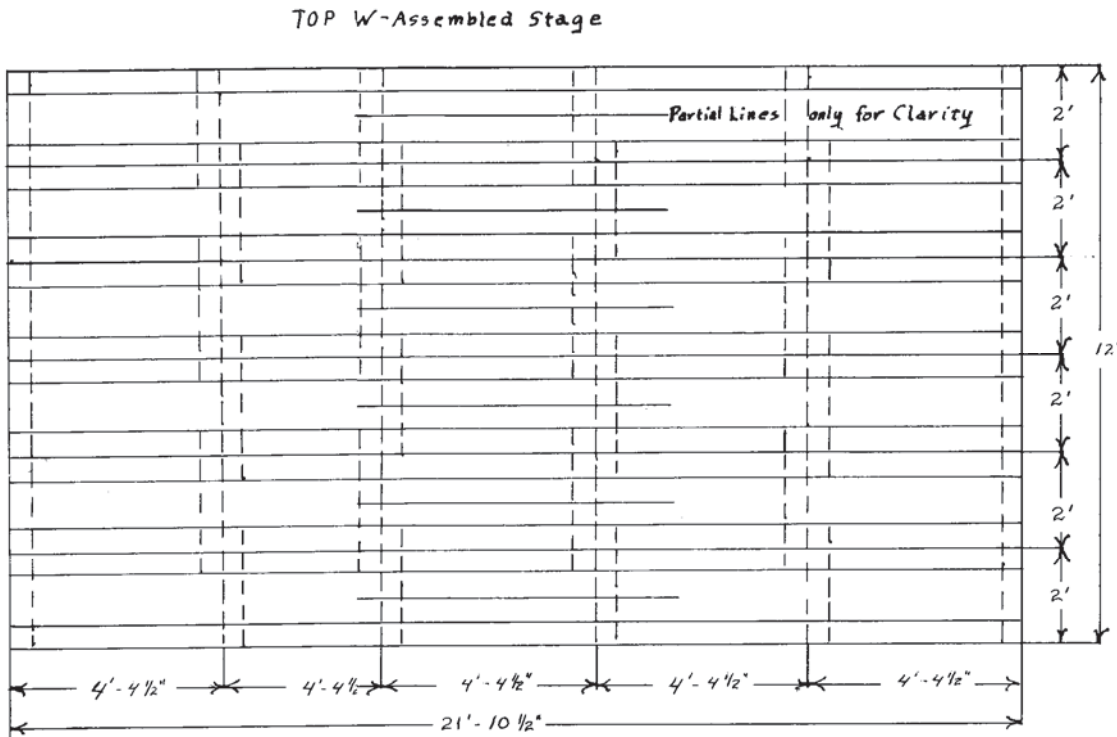
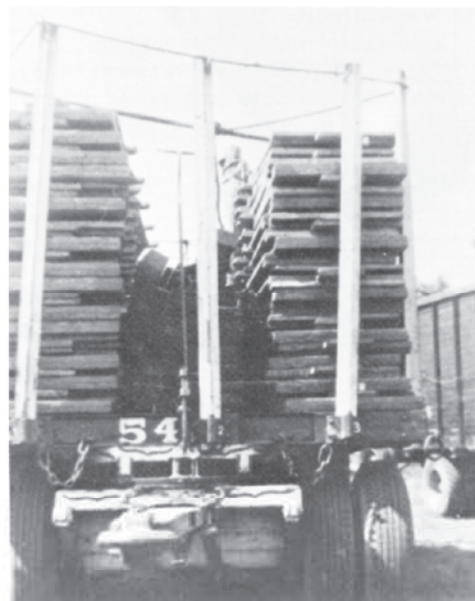
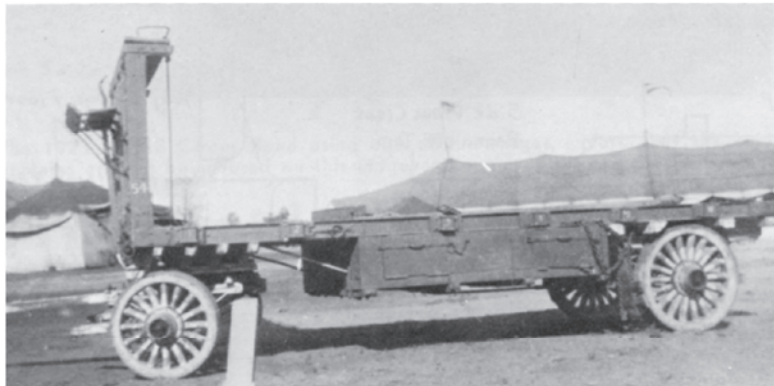
No. 3 photo shows a stage with Chubby Gilfoyle's lion act in process from Ringling in 1924. This photo included here mostly to show what I call an odd ball. This is a square arena which is just the size of the stage.



My own recollections of these stages are of the horse statue acts on the middle stages and a Chinese risley act on one end stage. Some other good photos on the sub-ject can be found on pages 132 and 133 of "A Ticket to the Circus" and pages 184 and 185 of "Pictorial History of the American Circus".



Above and below – Stage wagons showing the old wooden wheels and the rubber tired wagons.



BILL OF MATERIALS-One Stage				
NAME	QUAN	LENGTH	DETAIL	FIGURE
A Sec. Flooring	3	21'-10 1/2"	A & F	3 & 2
B Sec. Flooring	3	21'-10 1/2"	B & F	3 & 2
Sleepers	4	12'	C	2
Stringers	3	21'-10 1/2"	D	2
Wood Blocks	12	1'-6"	E	2
Side Curtain	1	2' X 68'	G	2
Misc. Wood Blocking to Level "I" Beams on Blocks				

BIG TOP END STAGES
Figure 3
Top View Assembled-Side Views-Flooring Details
All Measurements Shown Are Actual