

The following article by Mr. Allaire is written around the Sparks Show of the 1920's, while the sketches by Mr. Robinson depict a show of greater size as the Ringling Show of the 1940's. We feel sure, with study and thought, this material can be used to great advantage for the show of your size and choice you may wish to build. Keep in mind no two circus menageries were alike as each show had their own ideas to outdo the other. This article then represents these ideas and does not hold to any one circus menagerie, style or size. It merely covers a circus menagerie, all of which could have been found on a circus lot of the past. Time, travel and costs have curtailed this type of menagerie on our present day traveling circuses.

For many years our closest contact with each other on our various projects in building certain models



**Ringling Bros. Barnum and Bailey Circus Menagerie 1933 Season.**  
Photo, Fred Pfening collection

## OH, THOSE MENAGERIES WHERE ARE THEY?

for our model circus has been through the Little Circus Wagon. This has produced many types of wagons, railroad cars, big top layouts, props, and figures of animals, people, performers, etc. There is one department that is not too well emphasized on our building projects, that is the ever important MENAGERIE.

Your writer admits that the finest and largest circus menagerie ever to appear with any circus was the one carried with the Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey Circus before the great menagerie fire in Cleveland.

The only circus ever to come close to this in regard to size was the menagerie with the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus when it had a six center pole menagerie top. With this great magnetic size, it was well visible that the Ringling Bros., Barnum and Bailey Circus menagerie was to boast for size and quality. You might say about 80% for size and show and about 20% for working animals to earn their keep.

So, model builders, lets go back to the 20 and 30 car shows of the 20's as a guide to build up your menagerie, and yet make each animal earn its keep. This would go from the hay

burners to the meat eaters. I am going to take the menagerie of the Sparks Circus because of the size and use it as a guide for you to go by. So cut or add to your menagerie if you are in the 20 or 30 car circus. It is not necessary for you to build the exact wagons of any one show but take your pick from various shows, but be careful, stay to the size you should carry according to the size show you want.

The Sparks show had twelve cages in their menagerie. Nine of these cages were twelve footers, three were sixteen footers. All these cages were constructed so they could be used for animals acts. The only other den not used in the menagerie was the dog wagon. Of course this was set in the backyard. I remember one season, there were six different wild animal acts plus a seal act, bird act and dogs. Also in

### Circus Menagerie

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## Circus Model Builders

Drawn By  
M. Allaire & R. Robinson

DRAWING NUMBER  
**#0191**

the menagerie lineup were the nine elephants, four camels (two were the SACRED WHITE CAMELS) and four zebras. This was the menagerie lead stock. You will note the emphasis on the two white camels. This was the lead feature of the Sparks menagerie. This does not mean you have to have the same on you show. Just put something as a come on for your menagerie. I feature an African elephant, yet for the vintage my show is built on, this would be a rarity. Remember Gargantua? This is the idea. Don't forget your small pony cages, I have three and these blend in perfectly for balance and fill-ins at the needed spots.

Do not have your line-up of cages too perfect? Have one of the dens being taken out of the menagerie on its way to the backyard for the next wild animal act via bull hitch. I have a hippo coming out of its den guided by an attendant. The sidewall is rolled to give the effect and can be viewed both in and out. I have a cage cleaner at the cage line up, a man sleeping under a cage, a one armed attendant and bull men. All this will add effect. Do not have your leadstock lined up in a military setting. If so, stagger this line as much as possible. Check some of your photos and you will see what I mean. Have a neck halter on each camel and zebra, zebu or what have you and tie them to the stake line. Chain your bulls to the pegs. Have



Some shows worked many of their animals that were exhibited in the menagerie Here are a pair of zebras used as hitch to a jungle cart hi spec. of R.B.&B.B. Photo from Allaire collection.



Open-air menagerie of the Sparks Circus 1927. Due to late arrivals on the Lot, this type of menagerie was common on the R.B.&B.B. show during the war years of 1945-1950. Note right lower corner gives good detail of wagon top with canvas, etc. stored on top. Eddie Jackson photo from Allaire collection.

neckties to the corners of your cages and don't forget, banners tied to the quarter poles advertising local merchants products. The use of an Indian Village can be very effective in a menagerie. I have one with teepee and boiling cauldron, squaws, etc. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus had one and it was very good.

Your cages want to be dressed up as much as possible. Have storm or side panels with your show titles or the names of the animal acts you are featuring. Put some of these panels in front of your wheels on the ground. Scroll the fronts and backs of the cages. I know for several years the Sparks show had a large fancy S on the front of the cages and the number on the face of the footboard. Last with the cages, let's be prepared for anything. Have a cage for spare outside the menagerie and have this cage canvassed and lettered 'DANGER - WILD ANIMALS' - KEEP AWAY.

As for your menagerie top, you can easily go overboard on this. I have seen some of these and they could easily be used as a big top for your 20 or 30 car size shows. I have a three center pole top with one set of quarter poles and for something different, it is a square end top. If you have this top too large, you will be lacking

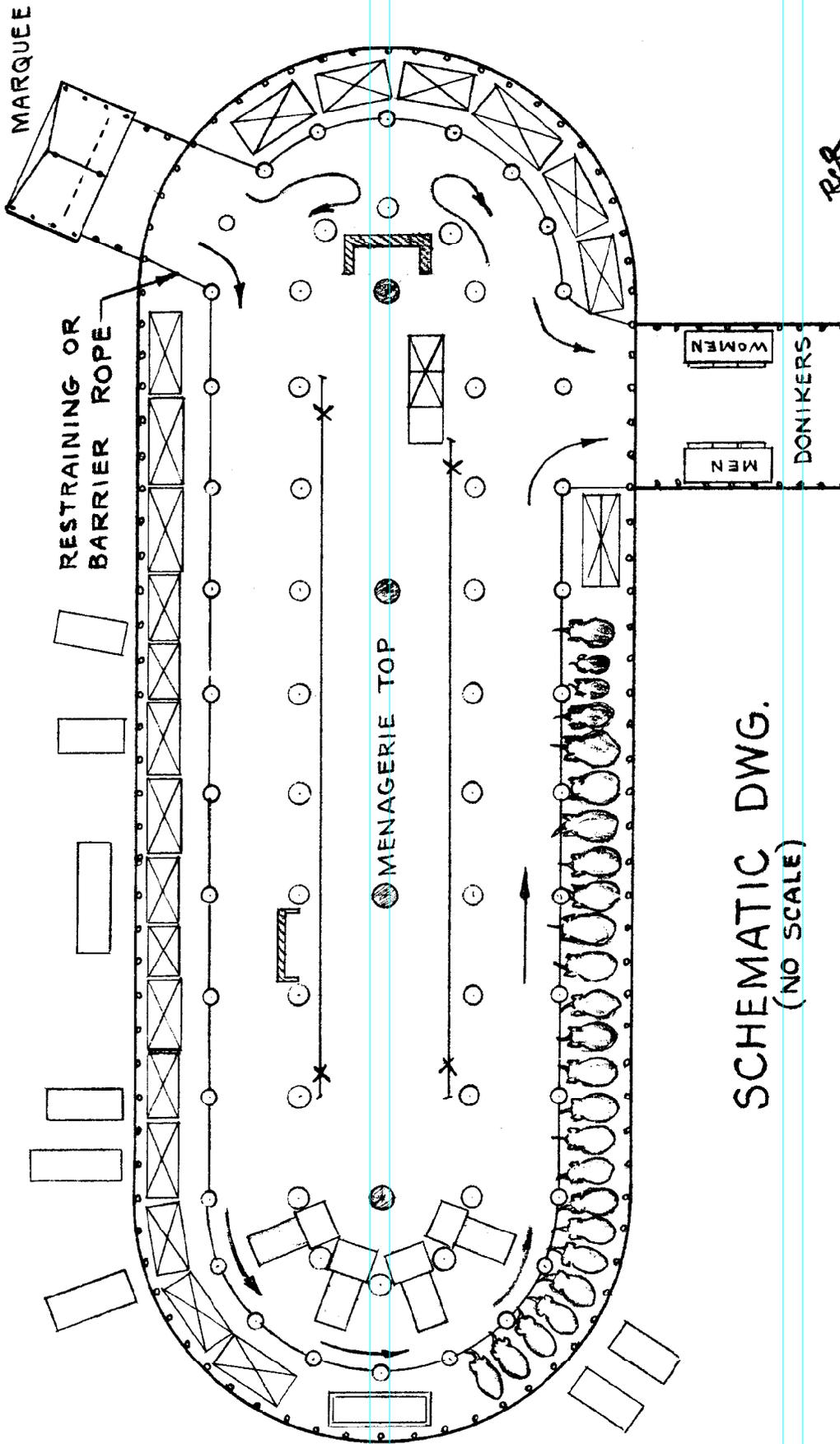
cages and leadstock.

I am one of the few fortunates to have been a student of Charlie Sparks. I have in my collection his own wagon list with the load of each wagon. There are many versions of this list but this is from the owner himself. This is the only list made up when the show never carried a truck. This is of the original show. This paragraph just about explains why this article is centered around the Sparks Circus for a guide and the writer really hopes this article has not taken too much valuable space in this issue but feels that this is a department not too talked about for your model circuses. Happy modeling.



Buchanan Robbins Bros. Circus of the 1920s even had lead stock in cages. This photo shows a zebra being exhibited in this manner. Photo from Allaire collection

## Circus Menagerie



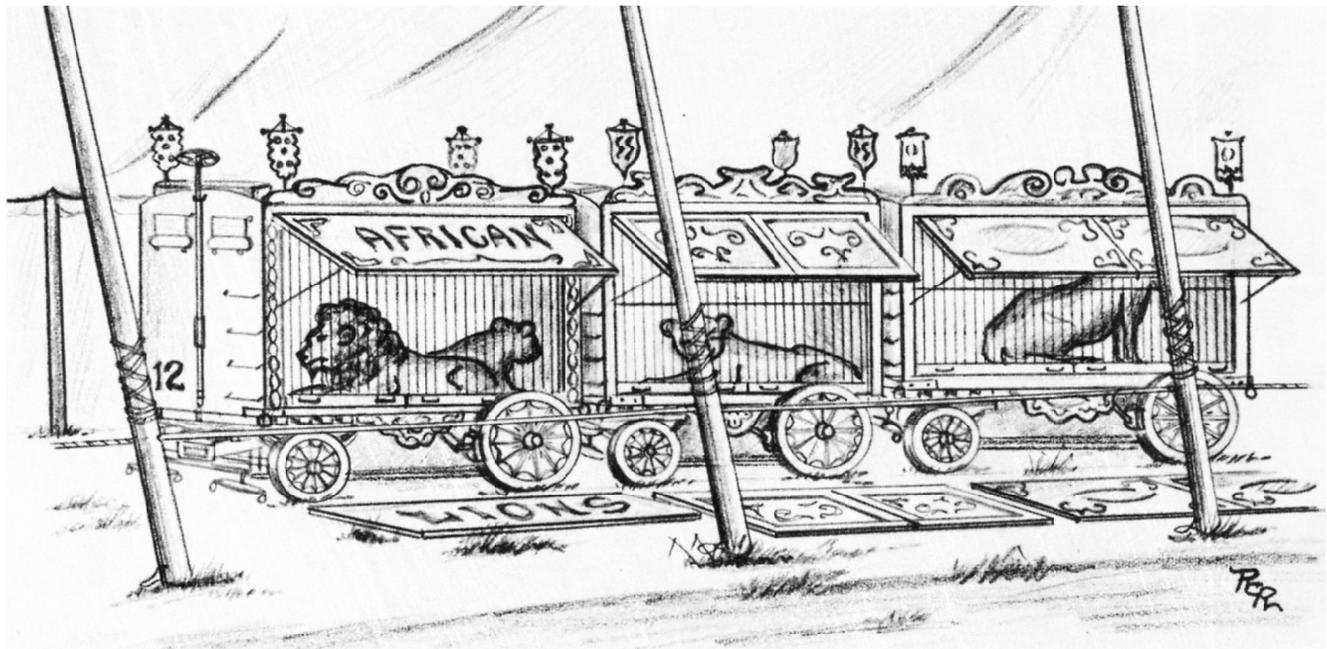
**SCHEMATIC DWG.**  
(NO SCALE)

BIG TOP AREA

**LEGEND**

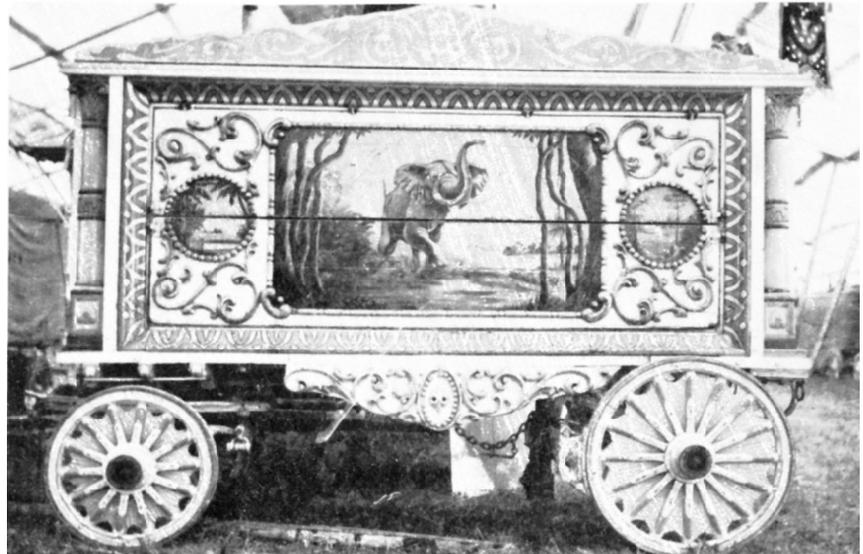
-  GORILLA CAGE
-  CAGES & DENS
-  HIPPO DEN
-  GIRAFFE WAGONS & PENS
-  OSTRICH WAGON & PEN
-  POPCORN, PEANUTS, PROGRAMS, ETC.
-  PEANUTS, ORANGEADE, LEMONADE
-  PICKET LINES - LEAD STOCK

**Circus Menagerie**



In this sketch Mr. Robinson is depicting a cage line under the menagerie top, showing the methods of decorating and handling side panels. The photo below shows a fancy carved and painted side panel on a R.B.&B.B. cage wagon during the 1939 season. Decorate your cages on the sides net open for display as well as open side panels.

With the exception of space required for the bull line and one or two special wagons, the perimeter of the menagerie top between the short quarter poles and the sidewalls was occupied by the animal cages and dens. These "wagons", with footboards lowered to conserve space, were placed end to end. The upper halves of the side panels were hinged upward, and the lower halves were removed and placed flat on the ground (see sketch) or leaned against the wagon wheels. Sometimes, when both upper and lower halves of the panels were entirely removed and left hinged in the middle, they were set on the ground in triangle fashion with the most beautifully painted or gilded portion to the foreground. Clean-out boards were left in place. Heavily carved sky boards were raised, and be-spangled pennants in brilliant colors were flown at the roof corners. Wagon tongues were removed and placed under each wagon. Animal attendants, attired in at least fairly presentable special coats and caps remained near the wagons. A barrier rope inserted through the quarter poles about two and one half feet above the ground (see schematic drawing) is here to keep the public out of danger.



While the placement of animals and cages can be done in many different ways, there are perhaps some basic ideas to keep in mind. The crowds of people must be lured to keep moving forward, rather than backtracking or milling around. After entering the top by way of the marquee, the people should be able to circle the entire menagerie before arriving at the exit to the Big Top. Because the gorilla was often a featured

attraction, its cage was spotted at the far end of the Top and a bit to itself, and space must be left for larger crowds at this point.

#### The Giraffe Pen

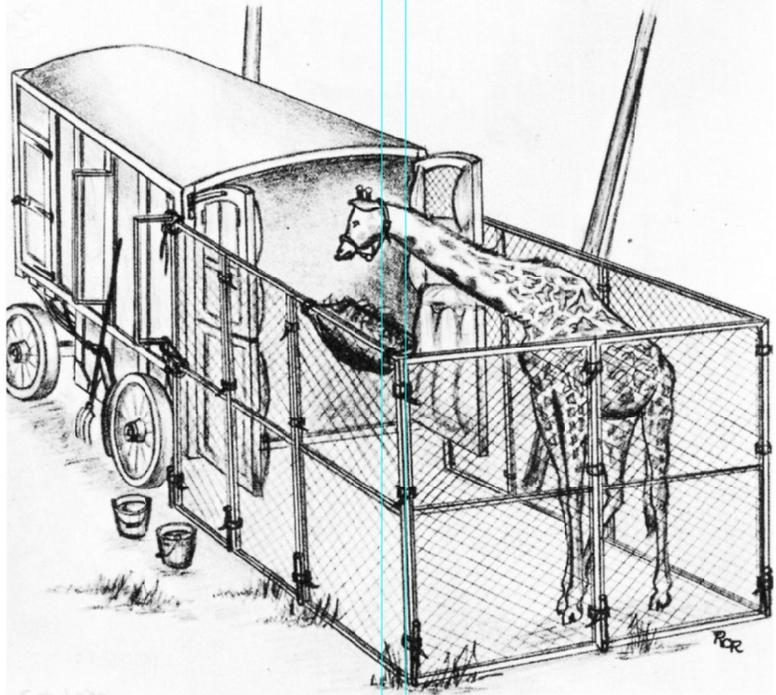
The drawing indicates a pen set-up for close quarters. As a rule, on the wagon end, a pen section was set up 90 degrees to the wagon on each side, and the rest of the pen was fastened to them, making for a larger pen. When two, three, and four giraffe

## Circus Menagerie



**'The Giraffe Pen'**

Here again we see an outdoor menagerie on the R.B.&B.B. Circus during the 1945 season. A Heist photo



Shown here by Mr. Robinson is a complete 1 giraffe pen and wagon sketch, while photo shows multiple pens. Wagons were to the right or back of photo as shown on the first photo of this article.

wagons were used, the pens were assembled, put together side by side with a dividing section assembly between. Each wagon's doors were free to open and close without hindrance.

Giraffe pens were assembled with heavy leather straps and buckles. At strategic places around the pen steel stakes were

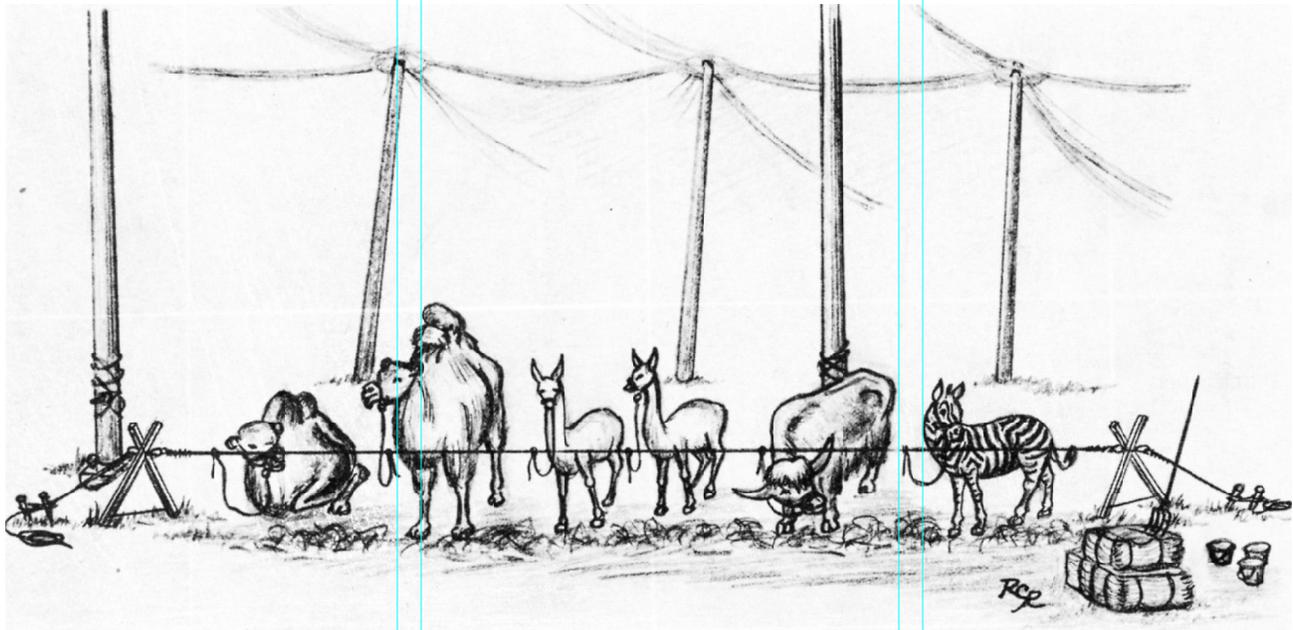
driven into the ground, and to them was lashed or buckled the pen's uprights. See drawing.

Entry to the den by a keeper or vet was through the front side-door of the wagon.

**The Lead Stock**

On each side of the center poles, a picket line is set up for

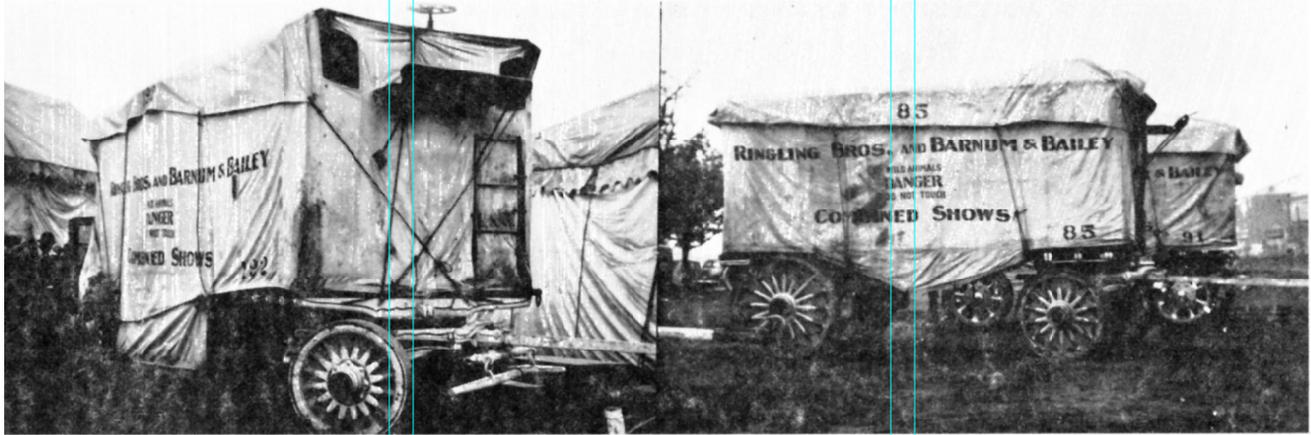
securing two rows of lead-stock animals back to back. This area is bounded by the long quarter poles. The drawing shows but one picket line; the other would be directly behind. The camels, llamas, exotic cattle, zebra, etc., are tethered together in groups as to kind on a ground covering of



This Robinson sketch shows a lead-stock picket line and the method of construction. Not\* that balls of hay, buckets for water and grain, pitch fork, etc. will add greatly to your model. Also note that the stock are all positioned differently for realism.

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While we are constructing our model menagerie we must keep in mind cover for our cage wagons, as you might want to display as a loading or railroad scene. The above Ringling wagons shown covered. Heist photos from the 1940 season.

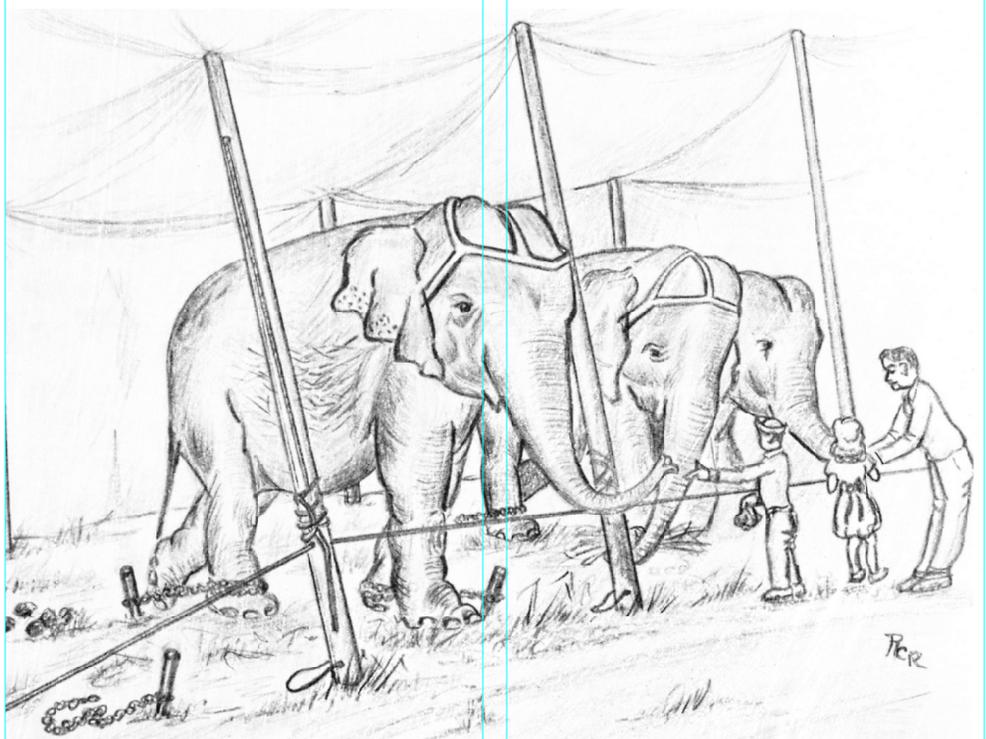
straw.

The picket line itself consists of two scissors-type jacks, with a pivot pin passing through and attached to a ring on each side. The main line or rope has a hook-rope spliced to each end. The rope-end-stays (two) each has a hook-rope spliced to one end. The spread of the scissors jack is contained by a steel rod attached near the bottom of the legs. The rod can be disconnected on one end for folding the jack.

### The Bull Line

The bulls, from two to fifty in number, were chained between the short quarter poles and the tent's sidewalls. Usually, it was the bull's left front leg and the right rear leg that was chained to stakes. See drawing. However, I have seen them chained by both legs on the same side. Sometimes the headgear is worn; sometimes not.

Holes are in the quarter poles about two and a half feet above the ground for a barrier rope to pass through. Straw is spread on the ground under the beasts, and hay is spread in front for their consumption.



In the above sketch Mr. Robinson shows the realism that can be had in your Bull Line, and the method of construction. Don't forget a few spectators and various positions of your bulls. See photo on page 1 of this article for further details.

## Circus Menagerie



In this model menagerie of the late Irwin Nelson, note the realism of the Bull line. Even the droppings have been added. Photo from the Heist collection, taken at the 25th anniversary gathering, Hershey, PA.



R.B.B.&B. combined menagerie, Newark, NJ, 1940. Photo from Heist collection. Note the similarity to Mr. Robinson's sketches on the preceding pages.

## Circus Menagerie