

Al. G. Barnes is one of the great titles of the American circus. The roots of this show date back to the 1890's when Alpheus George Barnes Stonehouse commonly known as Al G. Barnes started an overland wagon show. The performance was composed mainly of animal acts.

In 1910 the show was upgraded from an overland show to a 10 car railroad circus, still maintaining the strong emphasis on animal acts. This show originated in the Pacific Northwest and throughout its existence almost always played west of the Mississippi. By 1917 it had grown to 30 cars and remained at about this size until 1929 when Barnes sold it to the American Circus Corporation (Mugivan, Bowers, and Ballard). During the 1929 season the Corporation continued to operate the show in essentially the Barnes format. In September 1929 the show was sold along with five other famous and active circuses to John Ringling. Just as with the Corporation, Ringling continued to operate the show in the Barnes format. Ringling, however, did gradually add more standard circus acts. In the 1938 season when the Barnes show was combined with the Ringling show the Al G. Barnes title was the longest in circus history. It was called "Al G. Barnes & Sells Floto Combined Circus with Ringling Bros. Barnum & Bailey New Features." If you want a real challenge hand letter that on one of your models!!

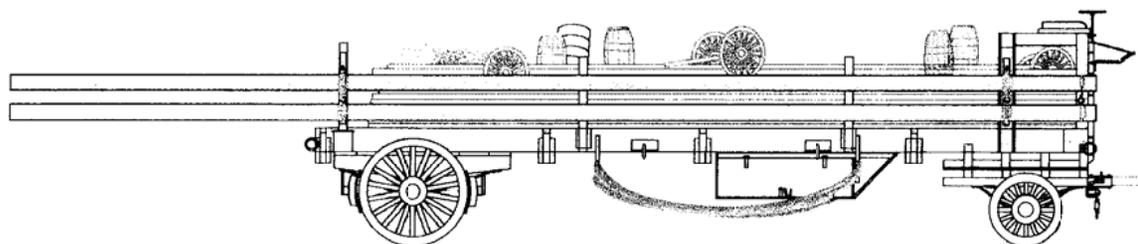
The Barnes wagons and other circus equipment was in relatively poor shape when the American Circus Corp. purchased the show. Soon after taking title, they began a program of rebuilding all of the wagons, cages, and rolling equipment. The rebuilding was done under the direction of Red Forbes, one of the best wagon builders of that time. It is this series of wagons that today are so often identified as the equipment of the Al G. Barnes Circus. Two of their readily identifying characteristics are the heavy iron braces on the sides of the wagons and the iron tired wheels (even during the 1930's when most other shows were going to rubber wheels).

It was during this period that Pole Wagon #92 came into existence. It remained a part of the show until its final days in the calamitous season of 1938. The soft sandy lots of the west coast were often were more difficult for teams and wagons to maneuver than the more infamous muddy lots of the East and South. For that reason and because of the great weight of its load, pole wagon #92 was constructed on a massive scale. This is

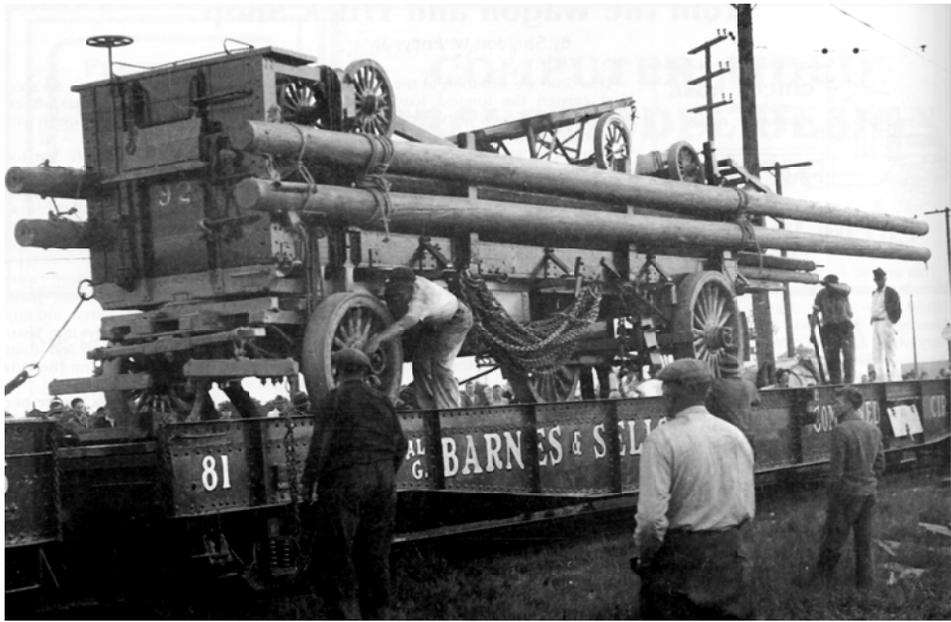
especially apparent in the huge front under gear, the very heavy cross braces under the floor, and the large, wide wheels. Both the front and rear wheel tires are 8" wide with the rear wheel having 18 (rather than the typical 16) spokes as well as an unusually large diameter of 54."

This wagon provides a very straight forward modeling project without any particularly difficulties. The only area that requires special effort is the wheels which are larger than most of the wheels readily available from the hobby dealers. A number of articles on constructing wheels have appeared in the LCW in the past and should be of considerable help. Although the wagon is not difficult to build, it is highly rewarding because the load it carries provides so many opportunities for detailing to make the finished wagon a showpiece. The load consists of four, 46 big top center poles, 30 big top red quarter poles, and 18 big top blue quarter poles. In addition this wagon would carry the poles for the marquee as well as the center poles for the menagerie and sideshow (4, 26' center poles for each top).

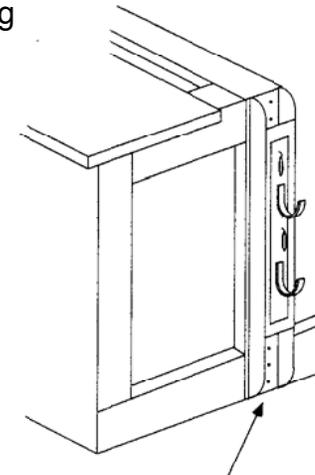
The photographs show that the wagon was also used to carry numerous other items such as barrels, pails, and carts. The two wheeled carts (or barrows), known as "gilly wagons," would have been used to move just about anything that would fit into them from one place to another around the lot. They would also have been used to ferry the performing sea lions into and out of the big top. A pair of hook shaped hangers are located on both sides of the wagon (see detail B in Plates 2 & 3). They would have been used to carry extra lead poles and lead chains. For a large wagon like this one there would probably have been two lead poles in addition to the wagon pole mounted on the wagon itself. The extra lead poles had a hook on one end and a chain with a large ring on the other end (see sketch below). The ring of the second lead pole was slipped over the hook on the wagon pole and the ring of the third lead pole was slipped over the hook of the second lead pole. This allowed for a six horse (3 pair) team. The long chains, shown in the photo, being carried by these hangers were used to extend this arrangement up to an eight or ten up team. The chains were used instead of additional lead poles. Lead chains would have also been used to attach other teams to the mud rings on the sides of the wagon to pull it out of the mud or over soft ground. The double trees of all the teams, except the wheel team, stayed with the team. The double trees had a ring



Al G. Barnes Circus Pole Wagon No. 92		
DATE: 1920/30s	SCALE: 1/2" = 1'	SCANNED & REVISED: 05/11/02
Circus Model Builders		Pg 1 of 6
Drawn By Kurt L. Seastrand, CMB 1038		DRAWING NUMBER #0391



Isometric detail sketch of wagon front showing center pole supports (Not to Scale)



Metal channel bolted to wagon frame

which was slipped over the hook on the lead poles.

The "possum belly" would have carried the rigging necessary to erect the center poles (as distinguished from the rigging required to erect the canvas itself. This would have included sledge hammers, stakes, cordage, hooks, pulleys, mud blocks (for the base of the poles), etc.

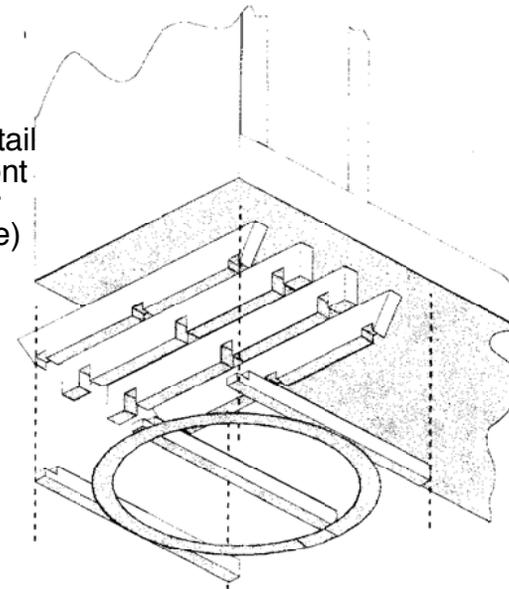
Equipped with a full load, this wagon makes a very handsome circus wagon model

Caveat Nearly all aspects of this wagon plan have been authenticated from numerous photographs. The rear under gear was not clearly shown in any of the photos so it was improvised with a configuration used on similar wagons. This is undoubtedly close to the actual rear under gear arrangement.

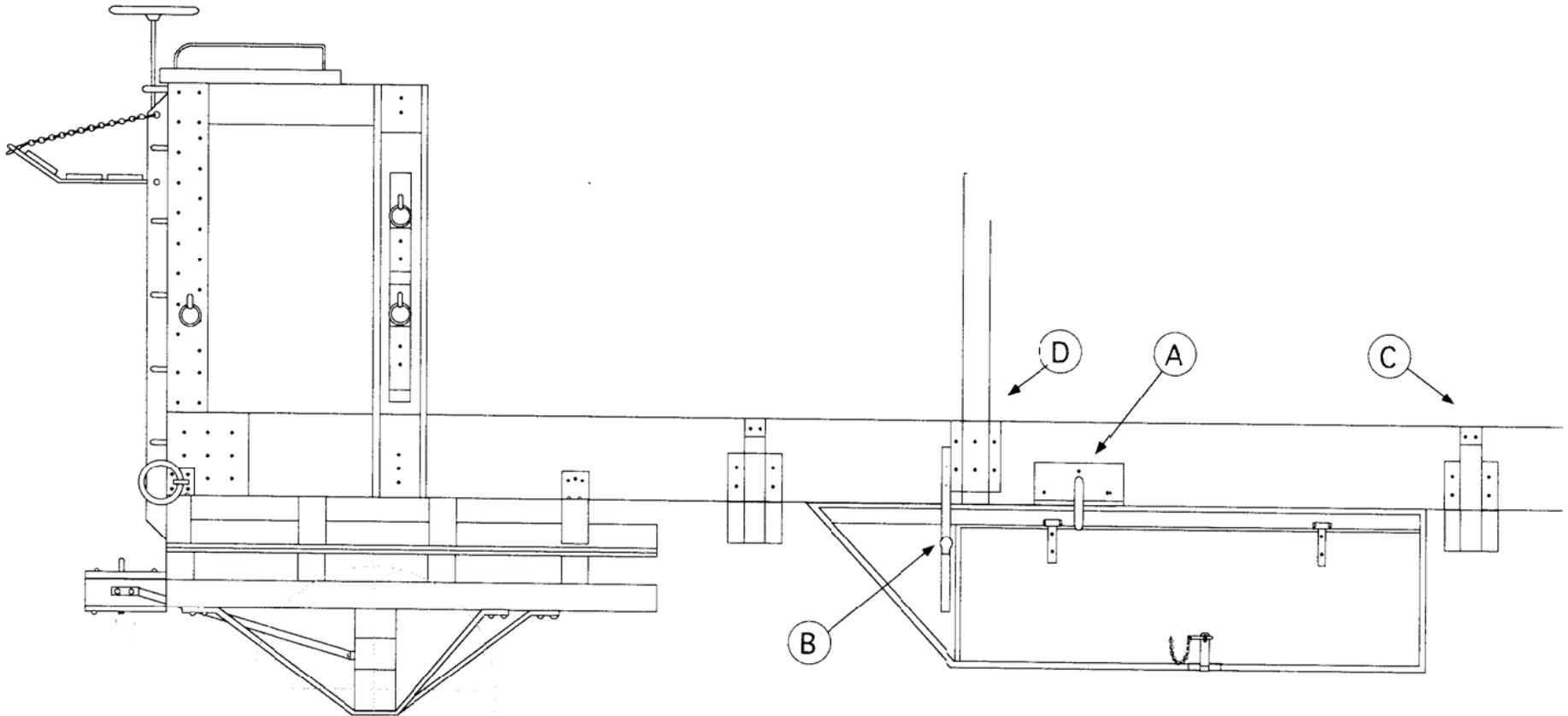
Credits Special thanks and credit goes to both Gordon M. Carver (the LCW Questions and Answer man) and Mike H Hartigan (CMB Supt. of Construction). These gentlemen both were very supportive and provided much detail and information regarding this wagon. Gordon provided one of the two photos used in this plan; the Circus World Museum the other and Mike provided the great description of the lead poles and lead chains and their use. Credit must also be given for the background information on the Al G. Barnes Circus which was found in numerous articles written by Joseph T Bradbury that have appeared in the White Tops over the years.

Additional Sources of Information Several fine articles on the Al G. Barnes Circus by Joseph T. Bradbury have been published in "White Tops" the publication of the Circus Fans of America. Two of these are "Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto Circus - Season of 1938" in two parts; Nov-Dec 1967 and Jan-Feb 1968 as well as "Al G. Barnes Circus - Season of 1936 "; Nov-Dec 1973 and Jan Feb-i 974. In addition photos of Pole Wagon # 92 can be found in: "The Circus Moves by Rail" by Parkinson and Fox, page 223; White Tops, Nov/Dec 1971; White Tops, Jan-Feb 1972; White Tops, Jan Feb 1973.

Exploded detail sketch of front undergear (Not to Scale)



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Pole Wagon No. 92**



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Wagon Length	32'	
Wagon Height	5'	
Wagon Width	6'	
Wagon Color	Red	
Undergear	Yellow	
Lettering	White	
Wheels	Front	Rear
Diameter	36"	54"
Tire Width	8"	8"
Number of Spokes	16	18

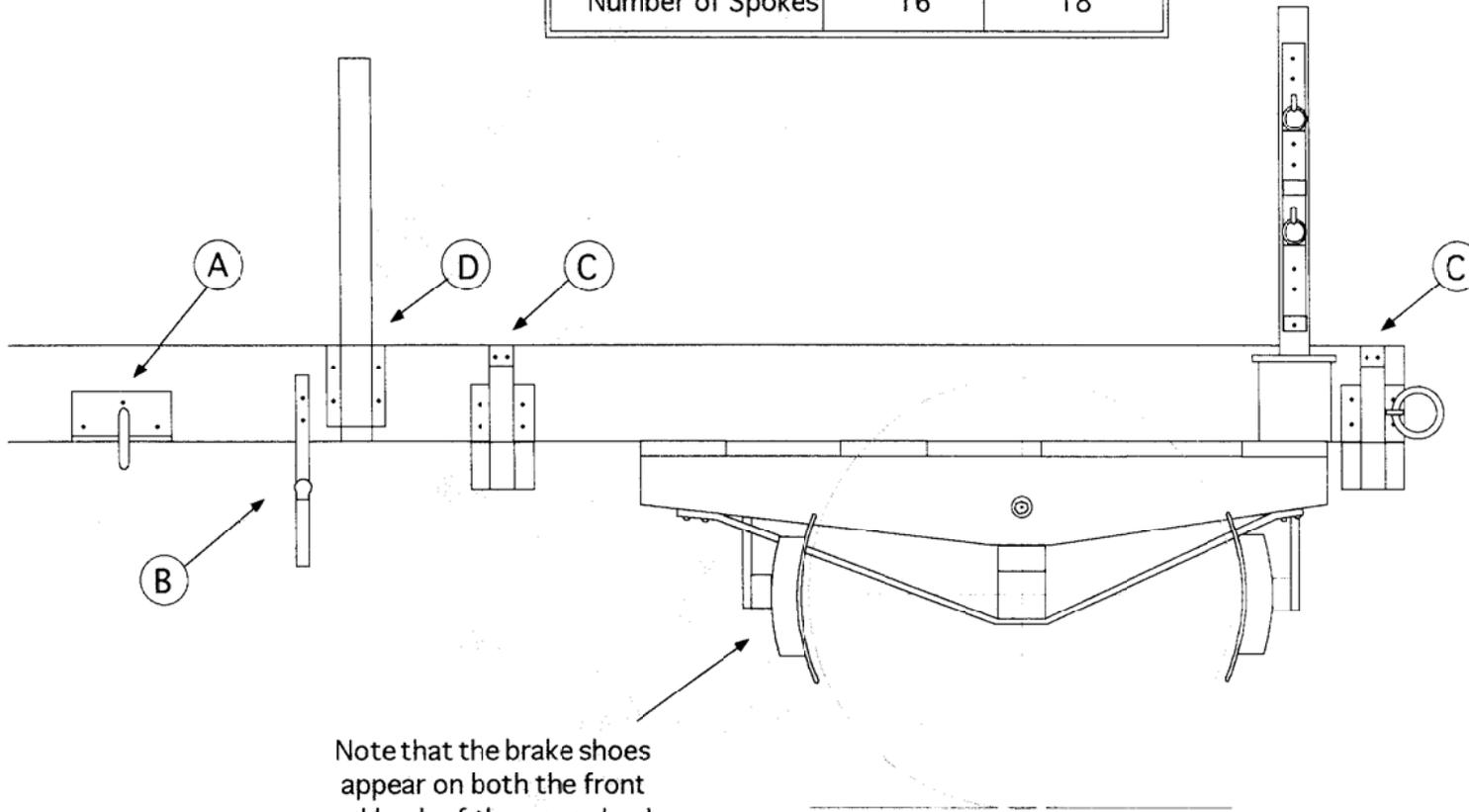
Isometric detail sketches are for clarification only (not to scale)

Detail A: A small rectangular component with a circular hole and a protrusion.

Detail B: A U-shaped component with a circular hole at the top.

Detail C: A component showing a vertical post with a circular hole and a horizontal bracket.

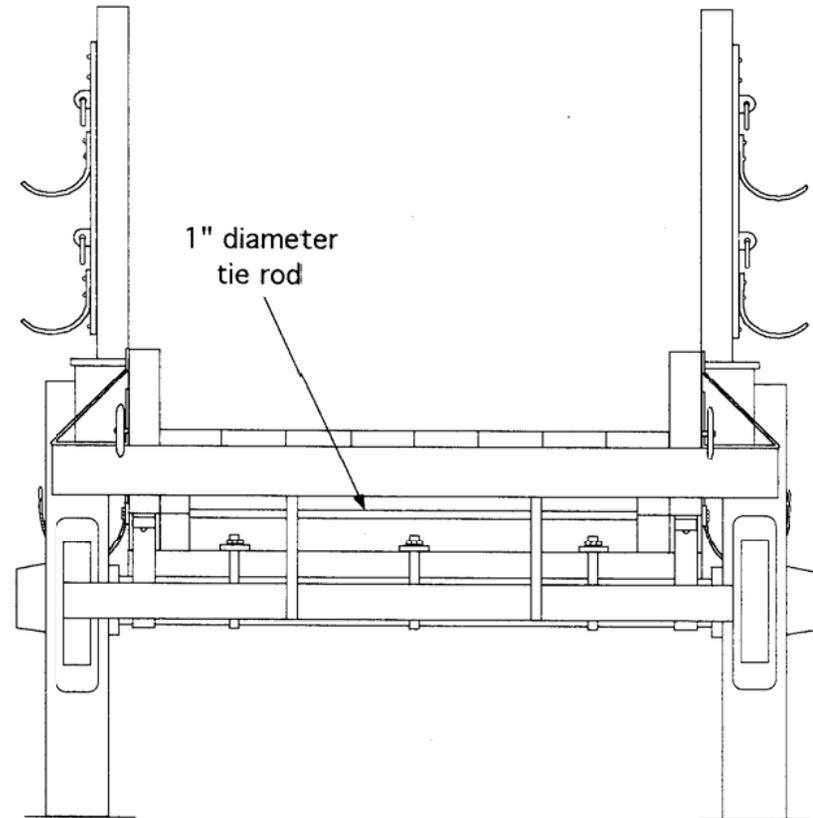
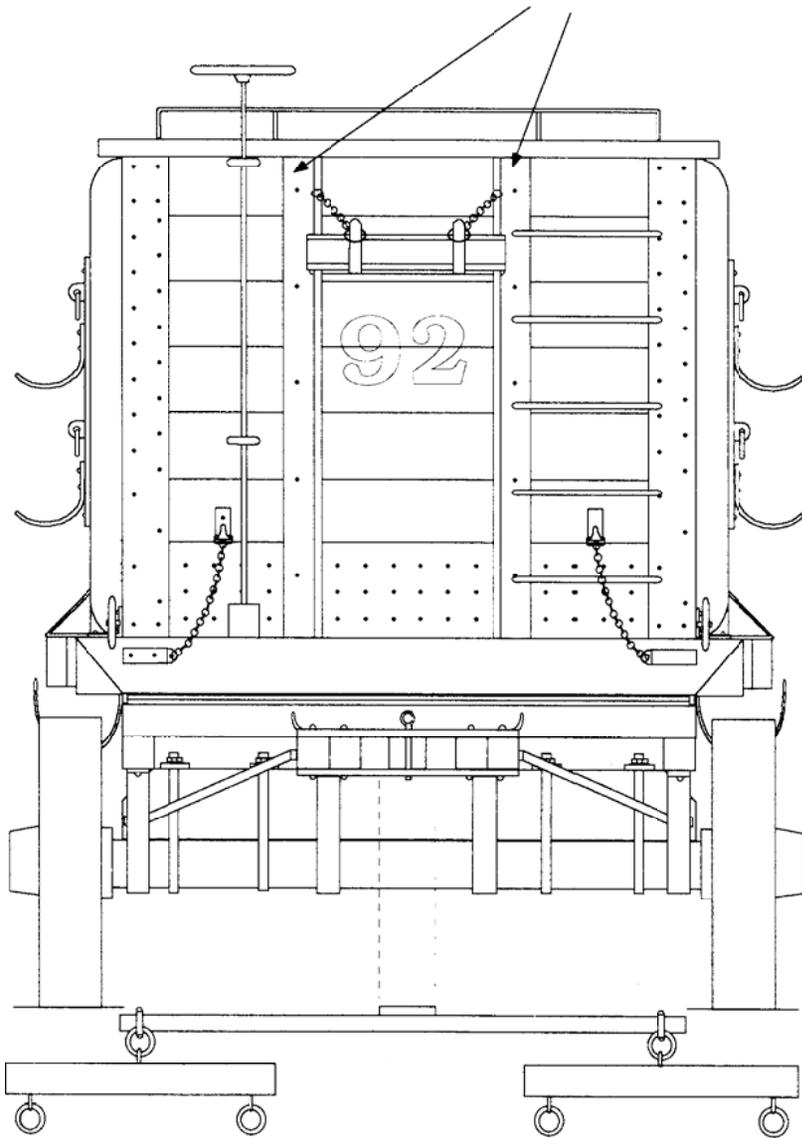
Detail D: A component showing a vertical post with a circular hole and a horizontal bracket, similar to Detail C but with different proportions.



Note that the brake shoes appear on both the front and back of the rear wheels

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Angle iron frame on
two sides supports
foot rest



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