

Harrison Jumbo

Belleville, IL 1898-1937



The Harrison and Company was founded in 1848 by John Cox and Cyrus Roberts in the blossoming town of Belleville, Illinois. They rented a small shop and began building vibrating threshing machines. Around 1855, the company was bought out and in 1874, the name was changed to the Harrison Machine Works.

In 1872, additional space was purchased for the company to begin production on their steam-traction engines. By April 1874, the first engine was completed. This was not only a first for the company but also the first engine ever produced in Belleville, Illinois.

In 1898, the Harrison Machine Works produced a new steam-traction engine. Wanting a standout, recognizable name for his new steam traction engine, Mr. Harrison approached the famous P.T. Barnum of the Barnum & Bailey Circus about using the name of his world-

famous elephant, Jumbo, for their new steam engine.

Back in 1882, P.T. Barnum had purchased the legendary "Jumbo the Elephant," said to be the largest in the world, from the London Zoo. P.T. was quite the showman, and he figured having the largest elephant in the world would attract crowds to his circus. That is how the African word jumbo, meaning deity, came to be a part of the English language. However, because of the size of the elephant, the word jumbo came to have a new meaning in the English language. Unlike its African counterpart which meant deity, jumbo in English today's terms, super-sized.

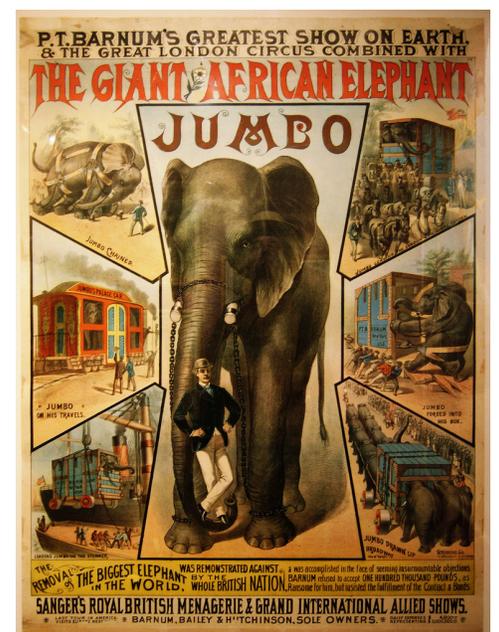
Mr. Barnum granted Mr. Harrison permission to use the name and his elephant's likeness for his new steam traction engine and the Harrison Jumbo Steam Engine was born.

The Jumbo was different than many other steam-traction engines of the time. It used a higher drive wheel and was about a foot bigger in diameter than most. It also had a very large fire box, which came in handy for getting large wood or coal fires going and burning hot. The Jumbo had a two-speed gear arrangement, slow and slower, that allowed the operator to drop the intermediate gear away from the crank shaft gear, which came in handy when the drive belt got in the gears.

It is estimated only 842 Harrison Jumbo Steam Engines were produced between

1898 and 1937. The Harrison Machine Co. lived and died with their steam engines and it never attempted to convert production into gasoline tractors.

At its height, Harrison employed over 200 workers in a six-acre factory. Customers ranged from local farmers to the international trade. Because the company never moved into the gasoline tractor market, its market share slipped away and, in 1926, company employees moved into smaller quarters until finally closing in 1950 after more than 100 years in business.



Jumbo and his keeper Matthew Scott
(Circus poster, ca. 1882)

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