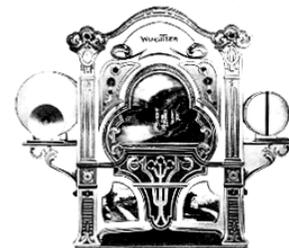




CAROUSEL ORGAN



The Official Journal of the
Carousel Organ Association of America (COAA)

Devoted to enjoying, preserving and sharing knowledge of all outdoor mechanical musical instruments, including band, fair and street organs, calliopes, and hand-cranked organs of all sizes.

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**The COAA
Logo is Coming!**
Watch for it at future
COAA rallies or on page
2 of this issue!

Editor/Publisher — Ron Bopp
Assist. Editor — Angelo Rulli

A Gaviman By Any Other Name

Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

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When you read about turn of the century fair organ operations in England, you frequently encounter the term “gaviman.” It designated the person who was responsible for operating the organ with a fair-ground attraction. The attraction could have been a mechanical ride or a show front for a bioscope, a traveling menagerie or another form of tented show. The purpose of the organ was to attract and entertain a crowd, and perhaps to mask some of the ambient noise. The gaviman made certain that the organ accomplished its duty (**Figure 1**).

One assumes that the popularity of the Gavioli organs in the island kingdom caused the term to be manufacturer specific, so staunchly affiliated was the French manufacturer's name with the activity. The person was, as the term indicated, usually a man. Our research has not uncovered the use of the term in America, though the same function was performed by dozens of largely nameless men whose names were not recorded or have been forgotten. Infrequently we have found the term “organist” in American outdoor show trade publications. It designated the person that looked after carnival carousel and show front organs.

We have not seen an exhaustive historical derivation for “gaviman,” but suspect that the term was likely used no earlier than the 1880s, when larger rides and organs were beginning to appear on British fairgrounds (**Figure 2**). Rationally, it would have been in use prior to both the importation of Marengi organs shortly after the turn of the century and the closure of the Gavioli firm less than a decade later. The name would have been generated as part of the vernacular of the fairground after the defined work role became adequately large to necessitate the assignment of a person's entire time to look after the organ.

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The President Speaks . . .

As I write this message we are one week from the first rally of 2001. The rally at Dutch Village in Holland, Michigan will be the largest rally ever held there. I am looking forward to seeing everybody and listening to some great music.

We are already booking rallies for 2002—one is in the planning stage in Pennsylvania in August. As we firm up these dates for 2002, we will post them in the calendar in the *Carousel Organ*.

The organization is growing at a steady pace, we are at record levels with our membership, and the *Carousel Organ* journal is alive and well! We get great reviews from around the world about the journal. Thanks to the editors and the members who send in the articles. Its a great service you are doing for the organ lovers of the world.

See you all at a rally this year!

Terry

From the Editor's Loft . . .

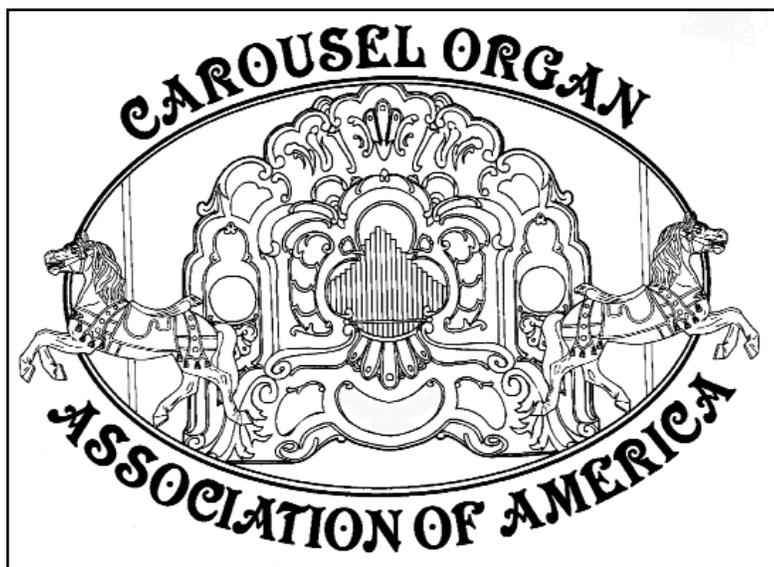
Spring has sprung and so has another great issue of the *Carousel Organ*. You will note a variety of articles in this issue including one of the most fascinating articles *A Gaviman by Any Other Name* written by Fred Dahlinger. In a sense, we all are Gavimen for our own organs. That makes us responsible for our organs and reading the *Carousel Organ* just makes that job a little easier. In addition David Wasson has written a fine article detailing some of the information used in his fine sounding organ (and information that perhaps another COAA member can use for his project).

Included with this issue are a couple of articles that should make the smaller organ owner (I mean small organs, not small organ owners—he he—ed) happy. Mike Barnhart has submitted an article about building a cart to mount your organ upon and Eve Crasse (France) has been kind enough to tell us about the beginnings of LeLudion, the French organ-building firm.

What does the future hold for readers of the *Carousel Organ*? Well, I hesitate to give you all the 'scoop' but we will finish up Dave Kerr's fine calliope-building article; read another one of Matthew Caulfield's interesting points about Wurlitzer rolls; and much, much more! Remember, if you don't renew your membership, you won't be getting any more issues containing these fine articles. And also, don't forget to submit an article—share your knowledge and experience!

Ron

COAA Logos . . .



Two logos have been chosen for the Carousel Organ Association of America. The one to the left will be the one used on T-shirts and other large apparel. The logo above will be utilized for smaller items such as hats and stationary. The artwork shown here is from preliminary drawings received from the artist just prior to publication of this issue and will be refined prior to use (and hopefully, the Bearcreek rally).

... continued from page 1 (*A Gaviman By Any Other Name*)

A gaviman would have been responsible for the assembly, operation, routine maintenance and packing of the organ. The unwritten or understood job description may have included setting up the organ for play, removal of any protective covers and wraps, and the installation of the drive belt between the pump crankshaft wheel and whatever device was used to power the instrument. Some organs had their own dedicated steam engine, supplied with steam by the boiler that powered the ride's

Musically speaking, the gaviman's input was limited to selecting the tunes to be played. That may have entailed the shifting of the cylinder in a barrel organ or the placement of books, or a book cradle, into position in a book organ. Paper roll organs generally don't require much operator attention, a fact always touted by their marketing. Roll operation would have spelled the demise of the gaviman post had the system been implemented in large quantities in Europe.

It was important that the gaviman's musical selections be chosen wisely (**Figure 3**). Experienced amusement caterers knew that different audiences required varying serenades. The right selections drew the crowd to an attraction. The wrong ones drove the people away. Whether the ride foreman or show manager directed the gaviman to play certain tunes is unknown. One suspects that after a few fairground appearances, the owner's preferences, local favorites and crowd demands were routine knowledge of the operator. New popular tunes would have been desirable, for the organs were a pre-radio means of circulating such music to the public. Standards and old favorites were sure to please many and kept the owner's investment in new music to a minimum.

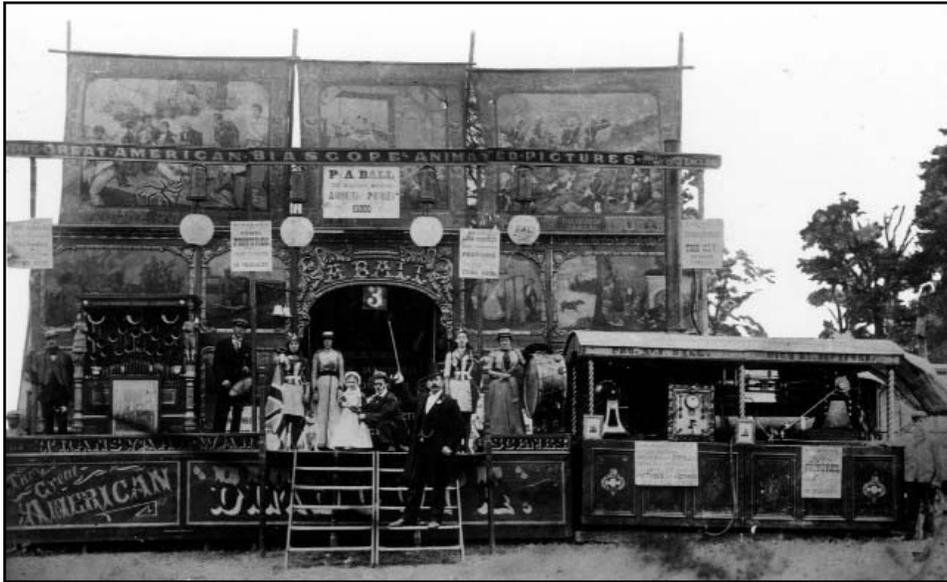


Figure 1. The gaviman is likely the fellow standing to the left of the cylinder-operated military trumpet organ on the front of Alf Ball's Great American Bioscope (sic). Note that other employees accompanied the organ with snare and bass drums, and a large cymbal. This William Keating photograph was taken in 1898.

engine. The gaviman may have connected, serviced and lubricated the organ engine. If steam or electric power was unavailable, the gaviman was probably the person who manually cranked the organ. Cleaning, wiping down and general care for the presentation of the organ would have been a daily job for the gaviman, as it would for any fairground employee whose area of responsibility was within view of the public.

It has not been unusual to assign responsibility for American show organs to the show's chief electrician. They have some relevant technical skills and also generally appreciate the heritage of such instruments, though they differ significantly from the carnival's typical sound reproduction systems. At other times the kiddie land ride manager or a ride operator may have been delegated to look after an organ. Often the

We doubt that few, if any, gavimen had the requisite skills to do proper organ tuning and regulation, but some may have learned basic techniques by observing the actions of hired craftsmen charged with doing those tasks. One must remember that the organ trade of the time was characterized, to a degree, by competition, secrecy and employment provincialism. Professional trade skills were not readily shared.

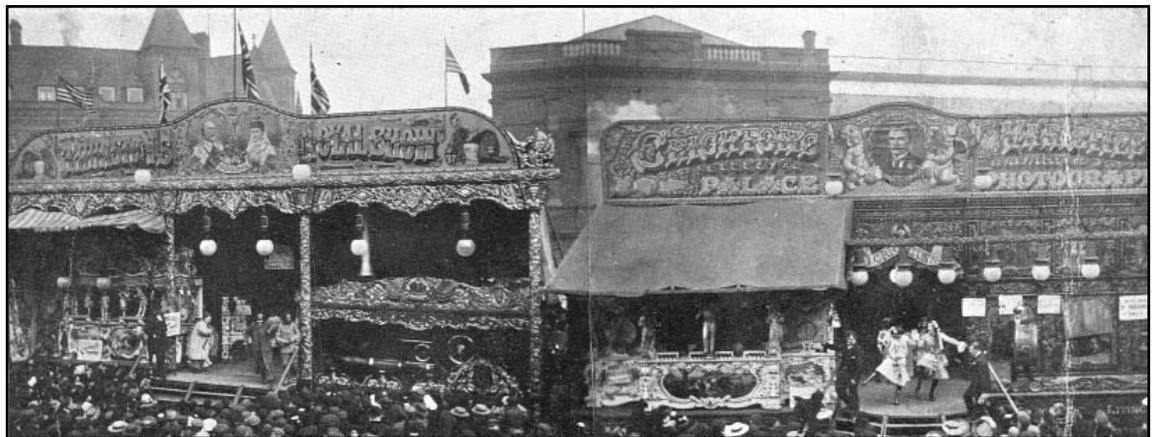


Figure 2. Huge British show fronts featured 89 key organs when this photograph was taken. Large fairs presented a competitive opportunity for showing off the best music that an organ could play, with the gaviman responsible for making the music go forth. Photograph by Nellie E. Cole, circa 1905.

organs were simply turned on and left to run continuously until the midway closed down early the next morning. The sabotaging of band organs by employees that do not appreciate their melodies was not unknown.

It was only with the American carnival band organ renaissance of the late 1950s that the gavi-man position became something known about domestically to any degree. When local reporters came to the show seeking a

story, press agents often sought out the organ man. They told great stories about the organs, the difficulty of keeping antique devices going in modern times and other familiar themes that one sees repeated. They were something of a bridge to the great carnival days of decades before, knowledge of the organs being tightly held by a few knowledgeable authorities. The peculiarities of the organs were seemingly reflected in the personalities of their caretakers. They could be obstinate, difficult and precise in their demands, but if they knew their business they were well worth the challenge that their employment represented.

“Old time” organ man A. L. “Tony” Crescio (1890-1962) was the first to gain widespread notice (Figure 5). He was hired to rebuild a long forgotten 89-key Gavioli for the Royal American Shows in 1956. Crescio maintained the big instrument on the show until health and age removed him from the post. He had a background that included Berlin origins and time working for Bacigalupo and C. W. Parker, and perhaps others, making him one of the best trained carnival organ operators to ever have such a post.¹

Erwin Heller (1917-1990), son of old time itinerant organ repair man Max Heller, found similar employment with Floyd Gooding's Million Dollar Midway, taking care of the largest stable of band organs ever owned by any American midway operator (Figure 6). The prize of the collection was the 96-key organ that Harry Beach commissioned Heinrich Voigt to assemble and that he then sold to Gooding. Heller moved on from the Gooding show and eventually landed with the James H. Drew Exposition Shows. There he looked after another large German organ that played from rolls, along with other instruments in the Drew family's personal collection. He spent his last years caring for the Stinson Organ Company instrument that was featured on Geren Rides of Valdosta, Georgia. The organ wasn't just his



Figure 3. The workers on this motor car switchback found a few spare moments to have their picture taken before the crowds arrived for the day. One of them is probably the gavi-man for the gigantic Gavioli that enthralled riders with its melodies. Author's collection.

life, the trailer housing it was also his home on wheels. Jimmy Drew wrote the following tribute of Erwin: “He is as good an organ man as there ever could be.”²

The Drew organ, later entirely restored by the combined efforts of Mike Kitner and Rosa Ragan, is now looked after by Billy Solomon (Figure 7). His position might be considered the top organ post in the American carnival business. He manages the fair-ground centerpiece

which owner James H. Drew, Jr. has lavishly outfitted in a specially equipped trailer. It set a new standard of quality for such equipment. In addition to the immaculate housing for the organ, a comfortable, climate-controlled reception space is an integral part of the state-of-the-art Drew organ trailer. Expert driver, attentive organ operator and always a public relations ambassador, Billy makes every presentation of the organ a treat for viewers and listeners.

It was the recent demise of one American carnival organ operator that sparked this article. The passing of “Frenchy” St. Germaine, long associated with the Reithoffer Shows 90-key Carl Frei organ, was noted in the “Lifelines-Final Curtain” column of the trade journal *Amusement Business*. The notice may

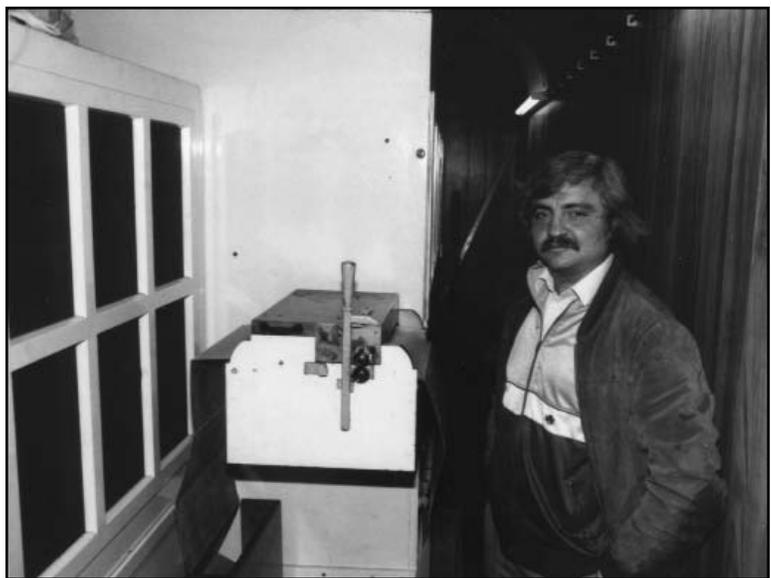


Figure 4. This genial Dutch gavi-man, whose name is unfortunately not recorded, played the entire repertoire of the Hinzen Model 38 Ruth for a group of Americans on a quiet Sunday morning in Nederweert in 1986. Author's photograph.



Figure 5. "Tony" Crescio rebuilt a big 89-key Gavioli for the Royal American Shows in 1955-1956, converting it to play Model 36 Ruth music. Few people could have managed that task in those days. Gilbert Hill photograph, circa 1956, author's collection.

have been the first for an organ operator. I met Frenchy (also spelled "Frenchie" in places) for the first time at the "Extravaganza," the extraordinary trade show for the carnival business that takes place annually on the International Showmens Foundation grounds in Gibsonton, Florida. From that February 3, 1993 interview and other printed sources we have been able to document the following about Frenchy's career and life.

Clarence "Frenchy" St. Germaine was born in Danielson, Connecticut on December 23, 1912. The origin of Frenchy's nickname was never clarified, but is thought to have been a show-originated moniker

derived in recognition of his family name. He stated that he worked on band organs at Wurlitzer's North Tonawanda, New York factory, along with Max Nowicki, Sr., father of the present day organ man, in the mid to late 1930s. His carnival career started at age 15, or in 1929, recollections varied, operating the carousel with Artdick's Greater Shows, owned by Art Lewis and Dick Gilsdorf, from 1929 to 1931.³

As with many carnival personnel, Frenchy moved between shows, always seeking a better paying and more responsible job. From 1934 through 1938 he was foreman of the Ridee-O on the O. C. Buck Shows, where he also served as mailman and agent for *The Billboard*, the weekly trade publication (Figure 8). He eventually served fourteen years with the O. C. Buck Shows, owned and operated by the son of a carousel builder. In 1939 he moved to W. J. "Billy" Giroud's New England Shows in the same capacity. His wife at that time, named Mary, was working for Mrs. Ridder with the World of Mirth Shows. Frenchy served as the merry-go-round foreman on Max Gruberg's World's Famous Shows in 1941. By 1943 he had been a ride foreman on both the World of Mirth Shows and O. C. Buck Shows and resided in Camden, New Jersey. Late that year he was mentioned as Corporal St. Germaine, indicating that World War II military service had interrupted his show career.⁴

Frenchy told me that he worked the seasons of 1945 and 1946 with the World of Mirth Shows, the big railroad outfit that



Figure 6. Erwin Heller's last organ position was managing the Stinson organ that was specially built for Geren Rides, Inc., shown here in 1989. Photo courtesy Ellijay (GA) Times Courier.

played top fairs in the eastern US and Canada. Perhaps he was familiar with the modified Model 33 Ruth organ on the show's carousel. Other tours were made with the Lawrence Carr Shows. Frenchy also said that he had a small operation of his own, Whalling Amusements (perhaps Whaling City Shows 1963-1966?) that he sold in 1974. He joined the Reithoffer Shows in 1970 and remained with them for over two decades, through the end of his carnival career. At one time he handled the show's Hurricane ride, all purchasing and operating the organ.⁵

When being a ride foreman became too arduous an assignment, Frenchy was given the exclusive task of caring for the Reithoffer show's concert band organ (**Figure 9**). It was one way that caring carnival owners provided for long term and valued employees, moving them into responsible roles and keep-



Figure 7. Billy Solomon (right), manager of the big German organ with the James H. Exposition, enjoys showing the Drew masterpiece to band organ experts. He's shown here with Dick Lokemoen. Photograph courtesy of Dick Lokemoen.

ing them active in their senior years. While he may have looked after other organs in the past as a ride foreman, it was the big Carl Frei organ that made his place in the annals of organ operators. Frenchy garnered many free bits of publicity for the Reithoffer Shows by presenting the organ to various reporters and visiting dignitaries. One widely distributed article was authored by Ron Gustafson and printed in the July 31, 1981 issue of the Dunkirk-Fredonia (New York) *Evening Observer*. Other free publicity and good will came from appearances at the Smithsonian Institution's Spring Celebration in 1981, the IISF trade shows in 1992-1993 and elsewhere. Frenchy was proud of the day when show owner Pat Reithoffer, Jr. (1920-) honored him in a ceremony as "Organ Master Extraordinaire."⁶

The first time I saw the organ that Frenchy maintained for the Reithoffer Shows, three days after our meeting, he was not there. But he had kindly called ahead in our behalf and made arrangements for the visit. The very accommodating show management had the show's Chief Electrician not only open the organ trailer, but he also erected all of its ornamentation and permitted a viewing of the works of the organ. There were four large crates of music inside, but by 1981 a duplex Wurlitzer 165 roll system had also been installed in tandem with the instrument's book playing system. It made the operation easier, but limited the musical capability of the instrument. It was also a response to the nine cardboard books that were bought in the spring of 1981 at a cost of \$3600, following a waiting period of eighteen months.

The organ had been brought to the states by the Winston Tobacco Company. Though it is typically identified as a Gavioli, the heritage of the organ is unknown. Internally it appears to have been largely assembled from older organ parts

in the Waldkirch shop of Carl Frei, Sr. (1884-1967). It may well have been one of several post-war commissions that established Frei in Waldkirch, the historic center of German fair organ manufacturing. The facade of the organ is definitely a later, post-World War II, German product and bears figures similar to those found on other German organs of the 1950s and 1960s. Design-wise it is a near twin to the facade of the 105-keyless organ built by Frei and owned by Joh. Ludwig Barth & Soehne. The figures were likely executed by Wilhelm List of Furtwangen, Germany, who supplied similar images for a new 1959 Frei organ. One source identified the post-war owner as Emil Fetscher of Karlsruhe, Germany. Reithoffer show publicity states that the organ appeared at the Munich Oktoberfest between 1947 and 1950. Carl Frei, Jr. (1912-1997) then entered the picture, perhaps as an agent for the owner. The organ was acquired by the Rudolf Robrahn family in 1968 and rebuilt for them by Frei in Waldkirch.

The organ was spotted by an agent for Winston in the early 1970s at the big annual fair in north Germany, the Bremen Freimarkt. Winston mounted the organ, still in its European style wagon, on a Fruehauf drop deck trailer to enable it to be towed to various promotional events. They christened it the "Winston Band Wagon," giving it a name that people could connect with even though it was inaccurate in the historical sense. The

cigarette manufacturer even went to the expense of cutting an LP recording of the organ's music to share with listeners.

After a few years the organ promotions had run their course and the organ was sold sometime after 1974 to Pat E. Reithoffer, Jr., the third generation owner of the Reithoffer Shows, an important American carnival.⁷ It has appeared on the show's midways ever since, now under the guidance of the fourth generation of the family. The trailer that houses it today is painted in a fine example of American carnival painting and is labeled the "Reithoffer Bandwagon."⁸ (**Figure 10**)

ported by Walter D. Nealand.

Endy Bros.

MIAMI, Fla., March 25. — Michael Roman has signed his new 36 by 50-foot cookhouse, with a seating capacity of 100. He also has purchased a new semi-

CLARENCE (FRENCHY) ST. GERMAINE, for the past five years mailman, *The Billboard* agent and Ride-O foreman with the O. G. Buck Shows, has signed in the same capacities with W. J. (Billy) Giroud's New England Motorized Shows. His wife, Mary, again has been engaged by Mrs. Ridder, of the World of Mirth Shows.

trailer and Fruehauf trailer to transport the cookhouse in addition to a small Val truck. All canvas has been purchased

Figure 8. Frenchy looked very dapper when his portrait was taken for a 1939 issue of the trade publication *Billboard*. He had nearly a decade of show experience by this time.

The organ played a 90-key scale devised by Frei, but the details of the scale are unknown as the tuning book was not with the organ when visited. Following our 1993 visit, the organ trailer was rear-ended by another semi that knocked the organ loose inside the trailer. The required repair work exceeded Frenchy's capabilities and the organ was sent off to Max Mowicki, Jr. for repairs.. It was there for five months, with Frenchy later relating how the old smashed pipes were taken out and replaced with new ones.

Though summer seasons were spent on the road, Frenchy had other off-season employment. In later years he owned a restaurant in Shelburne, Massachusetts. He also retired from a job with the transportation department of the Bedford, Massachusetts, airport. In his personal life, he enjoyed the happiness of a 54-year marriage to his wife, Charlotte. They had a daughter, Linda Drohan. Following his death on November 27, 2000, there was a Mass said at St. Stephens Catholic Church with burial in the church cemetery in Framingham, Massachusetts, the city in which he resided. With Frenchy's passing the band organ world lost one of its more colorful individuals.⁹



Figure 9. It's a sultry summer evening somewhere in the South and the Reithoffer organ's visual allure is at its peak. Frenchy found it a convenient time to pose for the unidentified photographer of this print.



Figure 10. The Reithoffer Bandwagon occupies a prominent position at many of the show's annual fair engagements. The organ continues to be housed in its original European lift-top wagon, now mounted on an American six-wheel trailer chassis. Photograph by the author, 1993.

Notes

1. More about Crescio and American carnival band organs of the 1950s can be learned from the author's remarks in the booklet accompanying the compact disk "The Royal American Shows Grand Gavioli Band Organ" issued by Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.
2. Letter to the author dated June 10, 1985. Jerry Betts' tribute to Heller is in *Carousel News & Trader*, March 1990, pages 30-31.
3. *Carnival*, VIII, 6, page 3.
4. *The Billboard*, April 1, 1939, page 44; May 10, 1941, page 32; January 16, 1943, page 32; November 27, 1943, page 39.
5. Undated clipping from *OABA News*, author's collection.
6. *Amusement Business*, March 9-15, 1992, cover.
7. A biography of Reithoffer is in *The Billboard*, June 6, 1960, page 59.
8. The show sells different recordings of the organ, but they do not always reproduce the sounds from the Carl Frei. The one owned by the author is actually a dubbing of Ken Smith's 63-keyless Ruth-style organ.
9. *Amusement Business*, December 11, 2000, page 3.

Fred Dahlinger is always interested in learning more about the history of the band organ in the United States. *Carousel Organ* readers can expect some interesting stories about famous American instruments and related topics in the future.

20-note Organs and a Wedding



On June 2, 2001, the editor and Mary Jo Bopp's son, Jason, and Amy Bohachick were united in marriage to the sounds of Mozart and traditional wedding music provided by two 20-note organs. COAA member Mike Schoepner provided the entire musical accompaniment for the wedding on 20-note Raffin and 20-note Jäger und Brommer street organs.

Many attendees expressed approval of the flawless and simplicity of the music and a future mother-of-the-bride requested information of such music for her daughter's wedding.