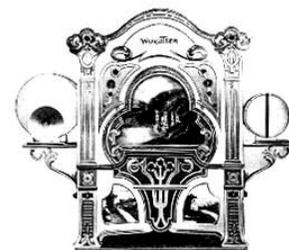




# CAROUSEL ORGAN



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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## Mechanical Organs of the American Traveling Circus, Menagerie and Wild West\*

**Fred Dahlinger, Jr.**

Though they are largely unknown in our era of electronically-reproduced and computer-generated music, mechanical organs once commonly provided an acoustic musical accompaniment to many outdoor amusement enterprises. The general public and music historians typically associate the hand-cranked organ with itinerant street musicians; the pipe organ with churches and theaters; the orchestrion with palatial homes; and the band organ with the carousel. A review of the historical record reveals that each of these four types of instruments could be heard at traveling shows. Visitors to the menagerie, the circus and the Wild West exhibition were all exposed to a variety of mechanically-produced sounds during the heyday of these instruments.

Mechanical organs were employed in two principal ways: In the most basic application they provided a musical atmosphere for the show grounds or inside the tents. In their most elaborate form they were housed in large, ornamented parade wagons that provided musical interludes in the daily street processions staged by traveling shows. After the parade, the wagon-mounted organs were parked on the show lot or inside the menagerie or another tent where their melodies continued to add to the sensory experience of visiting a field show.

A traveling menagerie, or collection of wild animals that toured the countryside housed in portable cages, was the first itinerant show enterprise in America to be accompanied by a mechanical organ. The advertisements for the Museum of Living Animals of 1814 noted that it would feature "good music on the organ." An 1818 traveling menagerie had an organ with figures that moved on it. The style suggests the work of Ignaz Bruder (1780-1845), who is generally considered the founder of the Black Forest show organ industry. The Grand Caravan of Living Animals, an 1821 collection of beasts, called attention to their "music on a good Beloudy organ."

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... Continued from page 1 (*Mechanical Organs of the American Traveling Circus, Menagerie and Wild West*)

Two hand organs, along with a bass drum and an Italian cymbal to accompany it, passed from one menagerie owner, John Miller, to two others, Thaddeus and Gerard Crane, in 1821.

English instruments were the types typically used by early American showmen. Most of them were imported on speculation by merchant sea captains and music supply houses. The French and German organ building industries did not yet flourish and offer readily available exports until the middle of the nineteenth century. For the time being, the principal source of many American imports, England, remained the primary supplier of early traveling showmen's instruments.

Joseph Beloudy, the maker of the instrument with the 1821 menagerie mentioned previously, is a documented English manufacturer of hand organs. They are so named because they were placed into action by turning a hand crank protruding from the case containing the mechanism.

Fortunately, a very rare Beloudy organ still exists in England and provides some insight into the size and simplicity of the instruments that entertained Americans in the first decade of the nineteenth century (Fig. 1). The traveling organs were not tall, upright units of the parlor type one would find in homes of the wealthy, but short, compact devices which were easily carried by a single person and stowed within a restricted space. These small instruments had two or three stops, or types of pipes, numbering 60 or so in total. The small cases caused the pipework to be extremely short, yielding quite high-pitched pipes for the most part. We would probably describe them as shrill or squeaky, or perhaps tinny, in our contemporary terminology. When they went out of tune or played improperly they could be abominable, as many mid-nineteenth century commentators on street hand organs later attested.

The early organs did not include percussion devices. In several cases the menagerie owner hired not only the hand organist but also had someone "double in brass" by beating upon a drum or playing a set of cymbals to accompany the organ. At other times one or more people playing a violin or clarinet may have accompanied the organ. Before condemning this musical ensemble, one must remember that the rural populations in particular were starved for music. Access to secular sheet music was limited and musical instruments and those who could play them were relatively uncommon. If one could hear a favorite melody from the homeland, a classical selection or the latest popular composition on a menagerie hand organ, there was little to complain about because there was no alternative. "Good music" could be interpreted to mean the only music.

When the organist was identified, he was usually a youth or black. In 1826 one Daniel Benedict had responsibility for the mechanical and musical organ of the Doolittle menagerie. He was a youthful white man. Black men performed the duty with the 1870 C. T. Ames Menagerie and the Sun Bros. Circus of about 1914. The black man's association with the organ-cranking position became so entrenched that the North Tonawanda, New York carousel manufacturers at the turn of the century (1900-1901) fitted mechanical black figures to the barrel organs on their track mounted machines. They endlessly cranked away their useful life in this menial position.

The mass appeal of the menagerie waned by the 1840s and the animal collections became an adjunct of the expanded circus activities. Other types of traveling enterprises, including itinerant museums and sideshows, similarly came to be annexed to the circus. The circus scene was dominated by the big top, a one hundred or so foot diameter tent that housed a 42-foot diameter ring, in which the performance was staged, and seating for the patrons. The show moved on a daily basis commencing in 1825, when the tent

to house the show first came into use. It traveled overland, by horse, wagon and carriage, and moved to a new community every day except the observed Sabbath. Making its presence known was accomplished by advance advertising and the making of unusual sounds and presentations in the city on the day of exhibition.



Figure 1. This rare organ was made by Beloudy of England. It is thought to be of the type used by the early American traveling menageries. Courtesy Michael Bennett-Levy.



Figure 2. The Davis Bros. Circus sideshow annex of 1911 featured a small hand organ to attract a crowd. It is shown here on the bally platform in front of the bannerline. Courtesy Circus World Museum

The circus had an enduring appeal and an ability to draw a diverse crowd under nearly all circumstances and in virtually every locale. In time, the distant sounds emanating from the hand organ in the menagerie, museum or sideshow came to be regarded as one of the symbols of the arrival and presence of the circus in smaller communities. As a reporter for the 1872 Jackson, Michigan, *Daily Citizen* wrote, "The voice of the melodious hand organ was heard thro (sic) the land mighty early this morning. Circus Day." The J. E. Warner & Co. circus had arrived that morning to entertain the Jacksonians (Fig. 2).

In addition to the hand organs of the circus, it was not uncommon for itinerant organ grinders that set out on the road from major cities in the spring to follow circuses and become part of the din of Circus Day. They were among the camp followers that relied upon the circus to draw a crowd from which they could extract their "coppers." The frequency of organ grinders seems to have reached something of a zenith of awareness in the mid-1850s, when the trade became pronounced across America as the result of immigration from particular Italian provinces. In 1854 there were singing girls with an organ and tambourine in the vicinity of the Franconi Hippodrome. Some stout, sunburned German girls cranked out discordant renditions of "Old Hundred," "Jim Crow," "Old Dan Tucker" and similar pieces in 1855 near the Van Amburgh & Co. Menagerie. The general impression of these music providers may be reflected in one reporter's account of a visit to a giant's tent in 1864, where "The music was a horrid hand organ which grated harshly on the ear, and our citizens were glad to have it cease."

Enterprising showmen determined other means by which an idle hand organ might be returned to service. Applications which have been identified include elephant acts, clown and performer gags and general performance accompaniment. Prior to the development of the military drills, which characterized elephant acts for many years, simple physical maneuvers and skits were performed by pachyderms in the ring. The first impresario to present an elephant cranking an organ has not been established, but in 1855 there was a unique example of a horse cranking a hand organ in the ring. This

was done by the trained horses Prince and Napoleon on Signor Chiarini's Italian Circus, combined with Raymond & Co.'s Menagerie. Sands, Nathans & Co.'s two elephant act of 1858 featured Albert cranking an organ while Victoria "waltzed" to its melodies. Similar pachydermatic operation of hand organs has been identified with the Cooper & Bailey circus in 1876, the Howes Great London show of the late 1870s, W. W. Cole in 1886 and the Lockhart elephants with the Ringling brothers at the turn of the century (Fig. 3). The elephant organ and dancing skit was so common by the early 1880s that noted zoologist William T. Hornaday (1854-1937) included it in his list of elephant acts when he surveyed the circus use of pachyderms in 1883.



Figure 4. The Kassino act of little people featured a typical street-type hand organ mounted on a small goat cart. The organ was half as big as the men who cranked it. Courtesy *The Billboard*.

The most ambitious attempt at elephantine music was the Adam Forepaugh "Musical Band of Elephants," schooled in the "Mysteries and Intricacies of Instrumentation" by Adam Forepaugh, Jr. (1859-1919), son of the great showman and an animal trainer of some repute. This grouping discoursed what might be called "heavy" music from a hand organ, accordion, bass drum, cymbal, xylophone and bells, all under the direction of one of their peers who held a baton in her trunk. "Popular operas, patriotic, sentimental and comic airs" were described as the product of this group of animal prodigies, with one writer indicating that airs from the operas "The Beggar Student," and "Iolanthe" could be heard. The Forepaugh elephant band concept was later restaged on the John Robinson Circus of 1903.

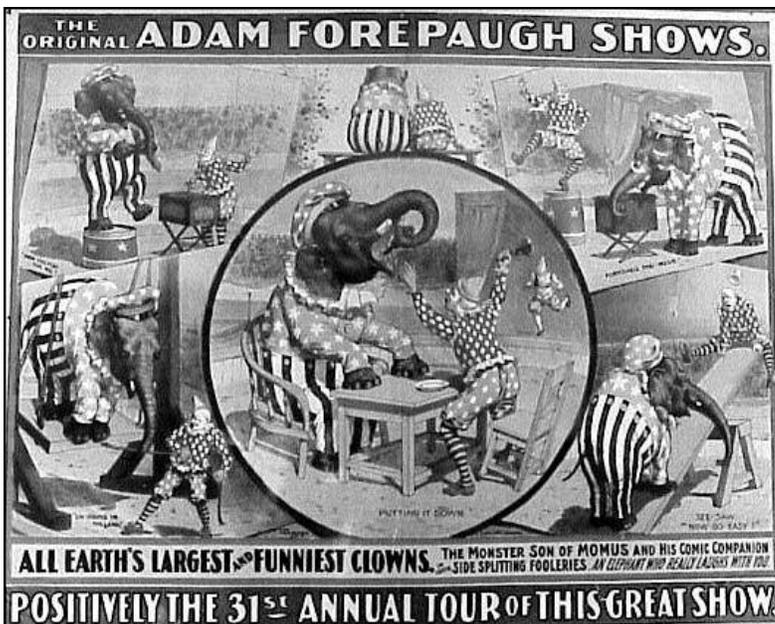


Figure 3. Elephant-crank hand organs were part of elephant acts as early as the 1850s. Here is such an act illustrated in an 1894 Adam Forepaugh circus poster. Courtesy Circus World Museum.

A few clown gags employed organs as either ethnic or incidental music sources. The Kassino Midgets, a group of little people who were hired by both Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows and the Sells-Floto Circus in the 1920s, had a hand organ mounted on a small cart pulled by a goat for one of their gags (Fig. 4). Three clowns, Del LeClair, Al Darrow and Perky Perkins staged a gag in which LeClair cranked a hand organ and Perkins donned a monkey suit and metal cup. Darrow played a cop who roused the two as they begged for money. It was a takeoff on the oft-repeated street scene of the Italian with his hand organ and monkey. Ethnic caricatures were a staple of the stage and ring at the turn of the century and the common Italian association with street instruments provided fodder for several comedy artists. One example, the Deltorelli & Co. act on the 1910 Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows, did skits titled "The Streets of Italy" and "Caruso and his Professor," working a cart mounted street piano into their work.

While on the subject of street pianos, it should be noted that they were not as commonly found at circuses as mechanical organs. The earliest mechanical piano to be discovered was a “Self-Acting Piano” located in the 1874 museum of Adam Forepaugh’s circus. It was reportedly an attraction at the 1873 Vienna World Exhibition and had a repertoire of fifty tunes, being no doubt some type of cylinder-operated piano. The other known examples are the fine crank piano in the 1891 Walter L. Main circus side show, a Pomero-made instrument with a mandolin attachment on the Charles Alderfer show in the late 1910s, an unattributed crank piano with the Atterbury horse opera in 1921 and another on the motorized Bardon & Doss outfit in the 1920s. A coin piano, popularly called a nickelodeon and characterized as the type found in bordellos, was with Dave Gillespie’s 1914 touring troupe.

Neither the hand organ nor the crank piano is properly called a hurdy gurdy. The hurdy gurdy is actually a hand-cranked violin, examples of which were reportedly operated by a German named Sanders on the 1826 Quick & Mead show and by another party on the 1827 Washington Circus. A precursor to one man band novelties was with the Nixon & Kemp Circus in 1857, described as a man with several bells on his head and playing a French violin in his hands which played by a crank—no doubt cranking away on a true hurdy gurdy.

From the inception of the American circus in 1793 until the relatively recent advent of reliable sound reproduction technology, it was circus practice to hire musicians to accompany live ring performances. Circus musicians, or “windjammers” as they are called in the business, could adapt and pace their live, scripted music to accompany the performers’ efforts in the ring. On occasion mechanical instruments were utilized to replace or augment bands. About 1885, “Old” John Robinson recalled that when he first entered the business in 1842 that the band consisted of a hand organ, a clarinet and a bass drum. In 1859, when the band walked off Gil Eldred’s show a crank organ substituted for them at the next performance. A similar circumstance took place on the M. L. Clark & Son circus about 1910, when the band went on a bender and was replaced by the show’s organ wagon. In 1894 Frank Irvin’s 25-cent wagon show claimed their seven-piece band was strengthened by a large orchestrion of an unknown nature. In the case of the later menageries, where ring activity accompanied the zoological offerings, hand organs typically sufficed to accompany the pony riding monkeys and such. In 1877 the *New York Clipper* reported that Van Amburgh & Co. Menagerie proprietor Hyatt Frost (1827-1895) had dispensed with the “old favorite,” the hand organ, in favor of a six piece band. Undoubtedly the sophistication of the menagerie audience had advanced to the point that simple organ melodies were no longer adequate even for rural populations.

The earliest of the wagon-mounted show organs were actually pipe organs with self-playing attachments. They were constructed by a famous New York builder of church organs, Henry Erben (1800-1884). Well known circus innovators Gilbert Spalding (1812-1880) and Charles J. Rogers (1817-1895)

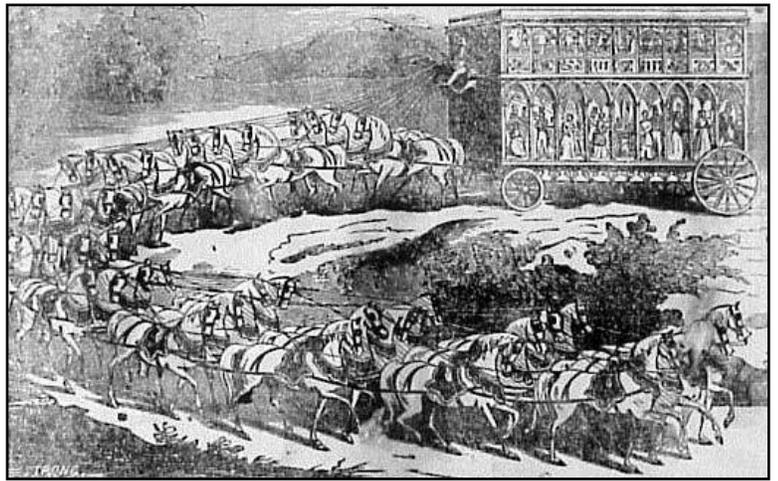


Figure 5. The Spalding & Rogers Apollonicon of 1849 was the first large wagon containing an organ to travel with an American overland circus. Courtesy Howard Tibbals Collection.

caused the first such contrivance to be built as a special attraction for their North American Circus in 1849. To carry the heavy burden over America’s rudimentary roads, New York omnibus and horse car manufacturer John Stephenson (1809-1893) built a vehicle that was called the Apollonicon, after the Greek muse Apollo (Fig. 5). After experiencing difficulties during a few years’ use, it is believed that the Erben organ was removed and placed on the duo’s Floating Palace, a full theater mounted on a barge, with the Apollonicon subsequently utilized as an enclosed bandwagon. For those familiar with pipe organs, one can imagine the problems attendant to lugging a several-thousand pound instrument overland, subject to the vagaries of weather and less than expert maintenance and tuning.

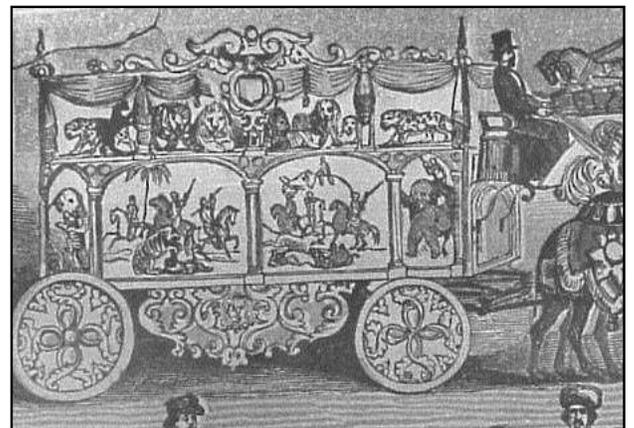


Figure 6. In 1850 the G. C. Quick menagerie featured the Automatodeon, concealing the organ inside with painted scenes and draped material. Courtesy Circus World Museum.

The owners of G. C. Quick and Co.’s Menagerie of 1850 desired to duplicate the Spalding and Rogers achievement and arranged for Erben, and no doubt Stephenson, to clone a near copy that they called the Automatodeon (Fig. 6). One must remember that neither of these devices contained a prime mover

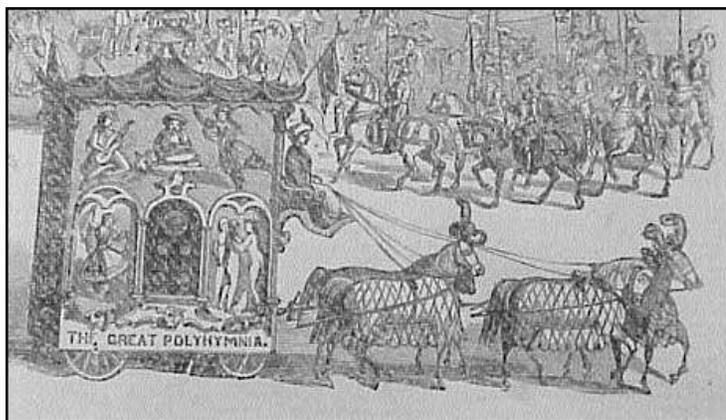


Figure 7. The Polyhymnia was an organ that served with the Yankee Robinson circus in the late 1860s. Note the decorative use of bells and exotic decorations to enhance the vehicle. Author's collection.

or device to power the wind source. An individual, or perhaps two, was pressed into service to pump the lever which filled the chests with wind from the feeders, pump or bellows, as they might commonly be called. Following the Erben instruments came the Apolonican (sic) of the 1858 E. Ganoung & Co. Consolidated Circus and Menagerie and the Polyhymnia of the 1866 Yankee Robinson show (Fig. 7). Both were short-lived attempts at hauling a large musical device across the country roads. None of these musical extravaganzas lasted more than a couple seasons in overland operation, further progress in the organ wagon line being inhibited until the adoption of rail travel by circuses in the 1870s.

As Peter Sells (1845-1904) recalled it, expansion came like an avalanche upon the circus business in the 1870s. The implementation of rail operations by circuses brought an immediate increase in their audiences and a boost to both their popularity and profit possibilities. Flush with success and cash, boosters and visionaries like P. T. Barnum sought out special acts, exhibits and features with which to dazzle their patrons. Among the first things Barnum acquired was an organ wagon, which the show called the Harmonicon. Such grand titles, at first taken from the names of the Greek Muses, were directly from the circus bill writer's voluminous vocabulary of alliterative language. Perhaps W. C. Coup (1836-1895), who featured at least three organs on his circus, had the grand-

est of all, The Salpingasian Chariot of Mnemosyne (Fig. 8). In this case the instrument lived up to the billing, being a 20 foot long monstrosity which not only housed a large organ but also had a Victorian-like false facade which elevated upwards from inside the wagon to about fifteen feet for parade purposes. Other circus organ wagons included Adam Forepaugh's Car of the Muses, W. W. Cole's Arionicon, John H. Murray's Apollonicon and the four Steam Musical Orpheades of the early 1880s John Robinson show.

Though little direct testimony has been discovered, considerable circumstantial evidence supports the conclusion that many of the virtuoso circus organs of the 1870s and 1880s were the handwork or responsibility of Wesley Jukes, a glassblower and ingenious mechanic who constructed and repaired automata, unusual display mechanisms and mechanical organs as early as 1871 for P. T. Barnum's Traveling World's Fair. Born in Pittsburgh, Jukes' career spanned over forty years, ending with an engagement in Chicago where he may have maintained the remnants of the W. C. Coup Rolling Palaces electric organ. Jukes' work associated

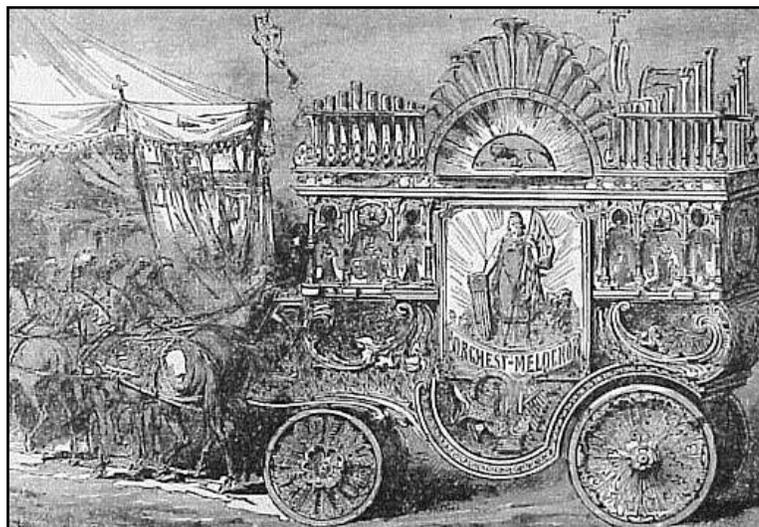
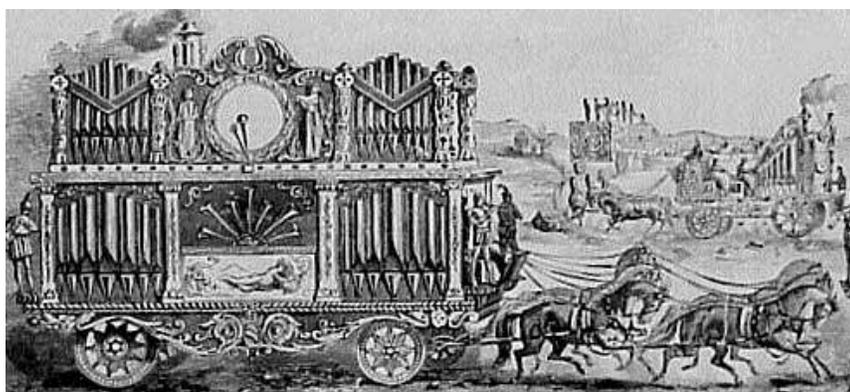


Figure 9. Wesley Jukes probably built the organ that resided in this 1882 Nathans & Co. parade wagon. Courtesy Circus World Museum.

him with the 1882 Nathans & Co. New Consolidated Railroad Shows, where he cared for an organ wagons called the Great Golden Chariot of Beethoven and the Musical Car of Orpheus,



*Perhaps  
the greatest of all  
circus organ wagons . . .  
Salpingasian Chariot of  
Mnemosyne*

Figure 8. Perhaps the greatest of all circus organ wagons was W. C. Coup's Salpingasian Chariot of Mnemosyne, shown in this 1882 engraving. Courtesy Circus World Museum.

the latter said to be powered by a new electric engine (Fig. 9). There was also the Jukes Automatic Museum and two cars of automata, the Mechanical Car of Yorick with groups of automatic clowns and the Chariot of Kaiser Wilhelm, with mechanical birds flying and singing and automatic speaking figures. Perhaps among the most interesting of Jukes' mechanical contrivances were the automaton bands, which mimicked the movements and sounds of an entire human band (Fig. 10). On top of one Coup tableau wagon he installed such an ensemble that was called Brannigan's Band.



Figure 10. Another of Jukes' creations was the automaton band. Here is one that adorned the roof of a W. C. Coup circus tableau wagon about 1882. Howard Tibbals Collection.

The wagons that conveyed and housed the mechanical organs originated in a number of ways. As already indicated, John Stephenson probably constructed both the 1849 Apollonicon and the 1850 Automatodeon. E. M. Miller of Quincy, Illinois, is credited with the construction of the Polyhymnia in 1866. Barnum's famous Orchestmelochor wagon started life as a bandwagon in 1868 and was substantially altered in 1879 to contain an organ. It is possible that one or more of the Coup organ wagons may have been built new by E. J. Quimby of Newark, New Jersey. Another of the organ wagons was built new in 1881 for the Burr Robbins Circus by Hodge & Buchholz of Janesville, Wisconsin (Fig. 11).

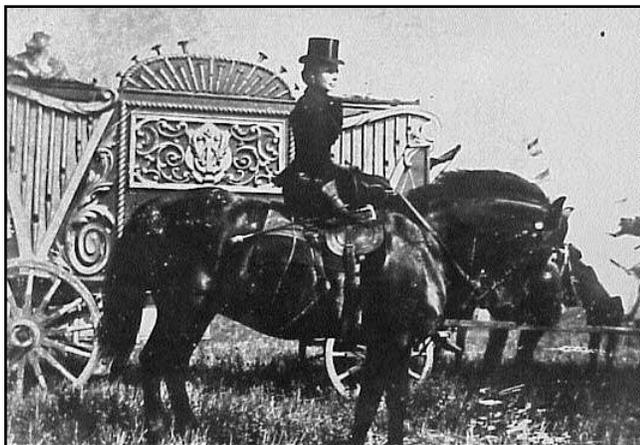


Figure 11. The lady rider is Mrs. Al (Louise) Ringling, but it's the Ringling Bros. circa 1894 organ in the background that is of interest here. Author's collection.



Figure 12. The military organ of the Mighty Haag Circus was placed inside of a small chariot and then displayed in the menagerie tent. Hopefully the lion nearby was a music enthusiast. Author's collection.

After the Orchestmelochor was altered to a tableau in the mid-1890s, the Barnum & Bailey show's twenty-some year old bell wagon was converted into an organ conveyance. The M. L. Clark show pressed a small chariot built by the Thompson Bros. of New Orleans into service to carry a new organ. The Mighty Haag circus similarly mounted a small military style organ in a small carved chariot and used it in both the daily parade and to enliven the menagerie tent (Fig. 12). The large Pawnee Bill Wild West organ wagon of 1904 is thought to have been built

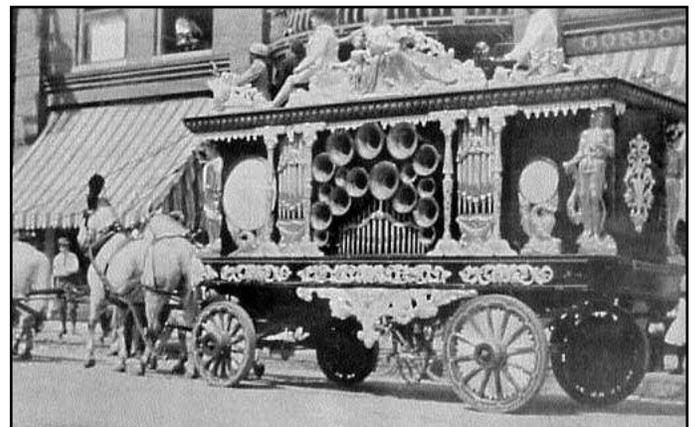


Figure 13. The 1904 Pawnee Bill Wild West organ wagon had large fake pipework on both sides of the wagon. A large military band organ must have been concealed inside the wagon. Courtesy Albert Conover collection.

by a Philadelphia wagon construction firm, likely Fulton & Walker, with carved ornamentation supplied by the Dentzel carousel firm, which may also have supplied the organ works (Fig. 13). Several of the wagons were fitted with drop bottoms, providing additional space to accommodate the height of the organs. At least two vehicles were fitted with telescoping devices that permitted a decorative pipe facade to be elevated during parade, artificially increasing the impressiveness of the device. The pipework fitted in these elevated pieces are thought to have been non-functional for the most part, but some percussion instruments, such as drums, might have been operable.

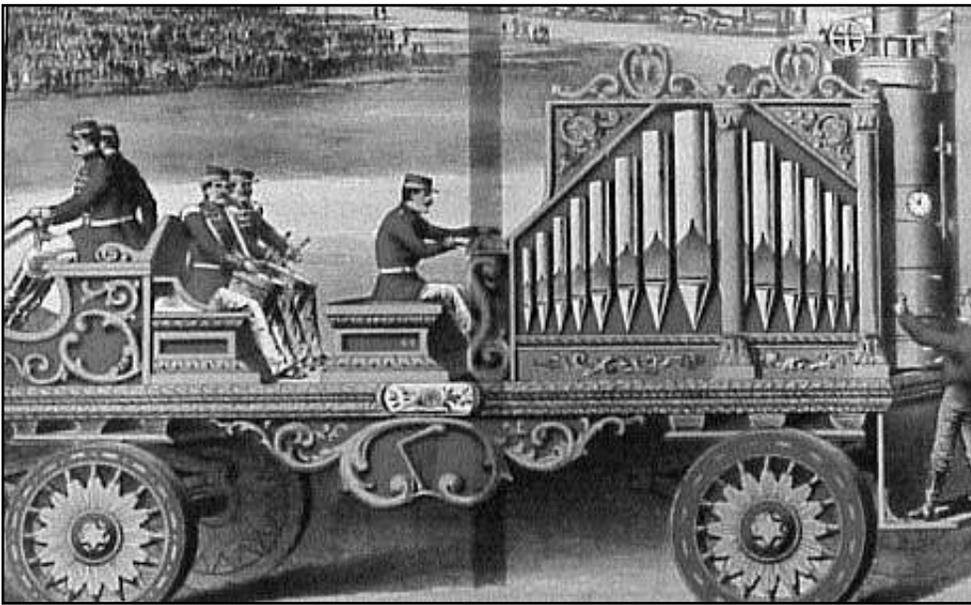


Figure 14. This circa 1876 poster may depict the Harmonicon of the P. T. Barnum circus. The drummers and keyboard artist may have been automaton figures, but the boiler fireman was likely a real person. Courtesy Howard Tibbals collection.

The typical motive power for most of the wagon-mounted organs of the 1870s was a little, perhaps one to two horsepower, reciprocating steam engine which was fed with steam from a small, vertical, fire tube boiler, all of which was housed within the decorative wagon. Contemporary knowledge of the steam calliope, coupled with clouds of smoke issuing forth from the boiler stack, often resulted in these organ units being referred to by the misnomer "steam organ" (Fig. 14). Most reporters must have thought that steam issued through the pipes and caused them to speak, as in a calliope, but such was not the case. Playing on high wind pressure (perhaps eight to ten inches of water column, which is only a one-quarter to one-third pound per square inch), these organs would have been quiet in comparison to their steam calliope cousins, which played on upwards of forty pounds per square inch pressure.

Though circuses had owned and presented steam boilers with calliopes since the late 1850s, fire inside a wood wagon resulted in trouble. On the very first day P. T. Barnum's Orchestmelochor appeared in parade, fire somehow came to exist outside the confines of the boiler firebox, resulting in the destruction of the organ. Thereafter, the Barnum show's organ was hand cranked, surely a tiring task as anyone who has hand cranked a large organ for any period of time can attest. Another example of boiler misadventure is a bit more humorous. In his memoirs, Al G. Fields (1848-1921) related that Ohio circus man G. G. Grady (1831?-1895) tried to outfit his circa 1860s show with a "calliope" by concealing a hand organ and operator inside a closed wagon. To create the impression of steam, straw was burned inside some type of enclosed box, with the smoke to issue forth from the top of the wagon. Grady's knowledge of combustion was less than satisfactory. The fumes and smoke released from the fire nearly asphyxiated the organ grinder before the wagon was broken open to rescue the luckless operator. Unfortunately for Grady, the ruse was exposed in

the middle of the street, to the amusement of local citizens.

Electricity served to power several portable organs. Electric power of one type or another had been available on circus grounds as early as 1879, when the first show-owned electric arc lights were introduced. Thereafter, electric power would have provided testimony to the progressive management of the show that utilized it. The electric motor of the 1882 Nathans & Co. machine has already been noted. It was pre-dated by an electric-powered organ that was reported to be part of the museum annex with J. W. Couch's circus out of Chicago. The large military band organ, which graced the Pawnee Bill Wild West operation, was referred to as an "Electric Organ" in show advertising. The Barnum &

Bailey show reportedly had an electric organ in 1904, the 1906 Mighty Haag Circus claimed that they, too, had an electric organ and in 1907 the Cole Bros. Circus talked about their electric orchestration in parade. In actual practice, an electric motor may have directly driven the organ crankshaft, but it would have been driven in turn by a small generator no doubt turned by an internal combustion engine or other primary power source.

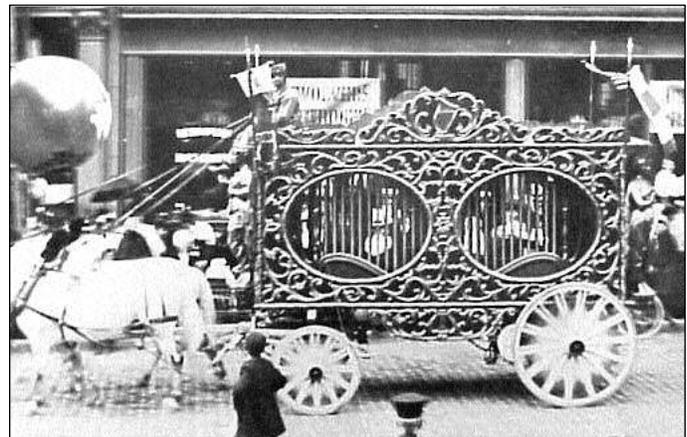


Figure 15. A wagon that formerly hauled a chime of bells was converted into an organ wagon for the 1903 Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth. Circus World Museum collection.

The Barnum & Bailey organ wagon of 1903 was fitted with a French-built gasoline engine, the operation of which initially stumped several so-called Bridgeport experts before someone was able to master it and explain the operation to head usher Charles Bernard, who was responsible for its operation (Fig. 15). From photographs, it is known that the organ was placed in the front half of the wagon and the engine in the rear, each wagon side having two large oval holes for ventilation and to permit the music to reach the parade observers.

One or two references have been found which describe organs being driven by the turning of the wagon's wheels as it rolled through the streets. The drawbacks to this type of propulsion are obvious when one begins to think of the inconsistent music tempo and the lack of power when the wagon was stopped, the operation of the instrument coming to a wheezing end at inopportune moments. Transient pitches from unstable wind, dropping registers and other operational problems would have been harsh on sensitive ears.

No detailed description of any of the early organ wagon interiors has been found. Given their 1870s to 1880s vintage, which pre-dated both perforated cardboard book and paper-roll technology, it is safe to assume that their musical programs were contained on interchangeable wooden cylinders, or barrels, into which metal pins and bridges were fitted according to the organ scale and musical score. A few cylinders would have provided limited tune selection capability, there being six to ten tunes per cylinder at most. It is probable that the organs were cased and not free standing within the wagon interiors, that is to say that the wind supply, chests and pipework were all enclosed within a protective wooden case with access openings for maintenance and to allow the sounds to issue forth. An uncased instrument would have provided perhaps greater space for pipework but would also have rendered the mechanism susceptible to damage from the elements and personnel occupying the wagon. None of the instruments would have been huge by church or later amusement park organ standards, but the appropriate selection of speaking voices would have rendered both loud and pleasing music. A Barnum organ offered for sale in 1877 was described as "a large size trumpet organ, equal to a full brass band." The description suggests either a large brass horn orchestration, which featured attractive sprays of bright trumpets, or an early form of military band organ. A similar "imitation of a brass band" statement was applied to the next Barnum organ, the

Orchestmelochor of 1879. It is suspected that loudly voiced trumpets, with brass resonators, clarinets and flutes would have been found in most of these wagon organs.

Perhaps the last 1870's organ wagon to survive largely intact, the Barnum Orchestmelochor, was finally dismantled by the winter of 1894 and converted into a regular tableau, the ornate top and instrument being sold at auction on December 11, 1894 (Fig. 16). After passing through the hands of a number of showmen, the original parts that remained were decimated in a Disney Studios wagon reconstruction program in the mid-1950s. The artifact that exists at the Circus World Museum today contains but a few carvings that might date to its days as an organ conveyance. The largest Coup organ wagon was dismantled and made into two wagons by the mid-1890s. Three of the carved muses which originally decorated the elevated skyboards survived the destruction of the wagons and today survive in private collections. Two corner statues from the Barnum & Bailey bell wagon that carried an organ in 1903 and 1904 are preserved at the Circus World Museum. These are the only surviving remnants of a once prominent tradition of circus organ wagons.



Figure 17. Here is a small hand organ that bears the name of Taylor. Larger organs built by Taylor are unknown today. Courtesy Henry Ford Museum collection.

Whether made in the Paris, Berlin or Waldkirch organ shops and bearing his stencil, or constructed in his own New York shop on Chatham Square, organs bearing the nameplate of Henry S. Taylor (?-1895) were the type most frequently offered for sale in showmen's advertisements and auctions of the nineteenth century. Called simply "Taylor organs," they were frequently referred to as "sideshow organs," the name defining their typical place of purpose and perhaps a general level of musical capability (Fig. 17). A large imported sideshow organ of the 1870s was described as having flute and piccolo attachments, a tremolo and four stops, in addition to two cylinders with perhaps sixteen songs between them. The case of it was also iron bound to protect it from the rigors of daily handling. When the Bunnell brothers liquidated part of the equipment that comprised their side show operation on the Barnum show in the early 1870s, one of the two organs they offered to sell was large and nearly new and was priced at \$600.

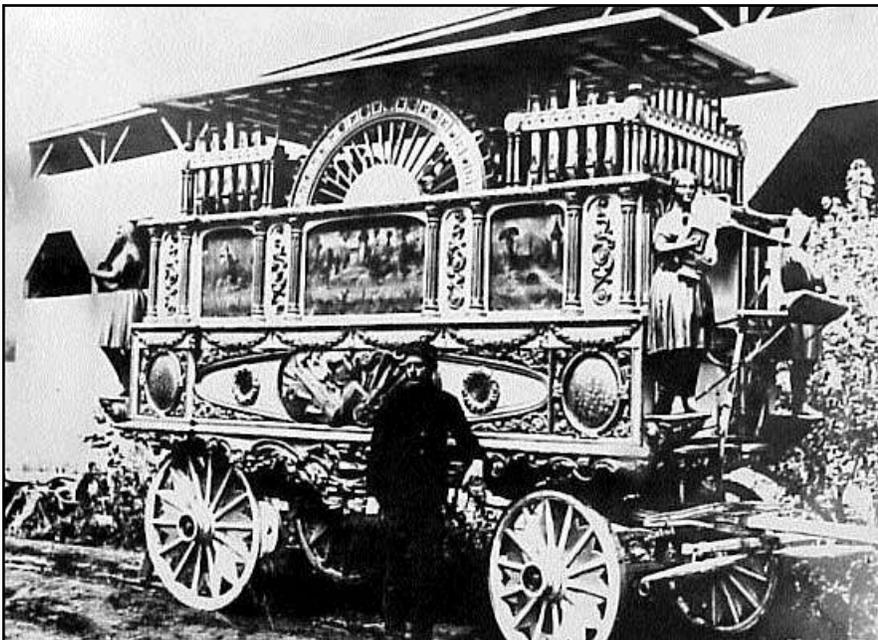


Figure 16. The most famous circus organ wagon was the 1879 P. T. Barnum show's Orchestmelochor. It's shown here in 1891, with its top pipework and roof in a semi-elevated position. Author's collection.

Beyond the great organ wagons and hand organs furnishing incidental music in tents, showmen had other mechanical music features created for their patron's enjoyment. Forepaugh's 1874 museum included an automatic trumpeter and a mechanical organist who cranked a hand organ while smoking his pipe. One envisions an early savoyard-type device when reading the description. One of the Barnum show organs was decorated with mechanical figures that played with the music. It was positioned inside one of his museum tents in 1878. Among the other musical novelties that could be seen in Barnum's tents were a Gideon's band, a monkey band and a mechanical cornetist, which brought a lowly three-dollar bid when it sold at a surplus auction in 1880.

In addition to the orchestrion like organs, a number of circuses procured instruments that can properly be called band organs. The American term "band organ" originated in the mid-1890s. Presumably the addition of percussion devices, such as drums, cymbals, bells and chimes, caused the change from "hand" organ because the instrumentation now replicated the sound of an entire band. A second adjective, "military," was frequently applied at the same time because the pipework and percussion produced the sound of the popular military bands of the period, including brass trombones, trumpets, flutes and piccolos. While the metallic resonator organs were louder than their wood pipe counterparts, they more easily went out of tune with atmospheric changes and also attracted more interest from winged insects, which viewed the polished brass as so many points of attractive light. Quantities of bugs often clogged the pipe throats or pipe reeds after finding escape from the alluring shiny resonators to be impossible.

Though most resources identify the German immigrant Eugene deKleist (1867-1913) as the first American band organ builder, the "first" American builder of larger showmen's organs was Henry Taylor. Only a few of Taylor's smaller hand organs survive today, but as early as the 1880s he was constructing medium size barrel organs with at least 60 keys. Until the arrival of deKleist in the early 1890s, the only other American supplier of organs that may have consistently solicited showmen's orders was the Molinari family of Brooklyn, New York. Their business seems to have focused more on the street organ trade than larger organs, but they advertised for show work in one late 1880s showmen's guide.

American circuses featured a variety of different band organ makes, there being no rationale applicable to the various acquisitions. A deKleist band organ served with the Al Bowdish circus. The Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows owned a 68-key cylinder-operated Frati organ, made in Berlin, and later had it converted to play continuous book music by Christopher Eifler. Perhaps the same, or another, Frati organ must have been with the Ringling-owned 1910 Forepaugh-Sells show, as they made a repair payment to Frati agent August Pollman at the beginning of the season. The Sun Bros. Circus had a medium size 58-key Wilhelm Bruder Sons organ from Waldkirch, the center of the German show organ industry, with their small railroad show. When the Barnum & Bailey show was in Europe in 1902 they had some dealings with the famous Berni brothers, buying a French brass horn organ, probably a Gavioli, from them.

Hoosier showman Ed Barlow added a North Tonawanda Musical Instrument Works military-style organ to his show in 1908. The M. L. Clark circus had a Gavioli trumpet organ mounted in a small open parade chariot and a similar conveyance carried the deKleist military trumpet instrument of the Mighty Haag show. Sig Sautelle's various circuses had organs in 1898 and 1902, and in 1912 a Gavioli military band organ with chimes, a popular attachment which added brightness and enhanced carrying power. Andrew Downie's Walter L. Main operation had a cylinder-operated deKleist military organ that was repaired by Wurlitzer in the 1910s. All of these organs were used on the circus show grounds, the Ringling unit also going in parade after its acquisition in the early 1890s. Pawnee Bill's Wild West band organ, owned by the Mighty Haag circus after 1908, was the last frequently seen and heard circus-type organ wagon, surviving until about 1914.

There is some information available concerning the cost of a complete organ wagon setup which helps to explain why only the better capitalized shows fielded large organ wagons. Two Chicago individuals offered a former Barnum organ apparatus for sale in 1877 and claimed that it had originally cost \$5,000. The small tableau-like organ wagon which was built for Burr Robbins in 1881 was entered on the builder's books at \$700, which did not include the organ or its power source. When Pawnee Bill tried to peddle his 1904 organ outfit a few years later he recalled that it had cost \$3800. Mechanical organs of the size and type which would fit an organ wagon application listed from \$500 to \$1500 in a Molinari catalog from the turn of the century, a time when elaborate circus tableau wagons were being constructed for between \$1500 and \$2000. W. C. Coup noted that bandwagons and tableaus cost \$1500 to \$3000 two to three decades earlier. Escalating the costs to include an elevating apparatus for a decorative top, a steam boiler and a steam engine or other portable power source, one can see that the cost of a first class organ wagon could easily have approached three to five thousand dollars. This was double to triple the cost of the louder and more traditional steam calliope, which ranged in price from \$1500 to \$2500 new, and from \$400 to \$600 at resale. The only circus organ for which a purchase price has been found is the French organ and gasoline engine which were acquired by Barnum & Bailey for 1903. A ledger entry lists the cost at the equivalent of \$1543, near the top end of the range stated above. Bargains could be obtained. When two steam organs associated with Jukes were offered at two different auctions in 1882, they brought bargain winning bids of \$500 and \$700, perhaps 10 to 25% of their original construction price. Pawnee Bill's went at private sale for \$1200 in late 1908, less than one-third of the original price only four years previous.

Perhaps the largest circus band organ was a mammoth 82-key North Tonawanda Musical Instrument Works mechanism which is believed to have traveled with the Barnum & Bailey Greatest Show on Earth. Probably carried in the years 1917-1918, it is known to us only by an entry in a 1919 inventory when it was considered surplus. It was mounted on a Mack truck chassis and was among the earliest motor trucks owned by a railroad circus. Circumstances suggest that it was very similar to a contemporary Ward Baking Company advertising unit

which was contained in a decorative body constructed by the Rech-Marbaker Company of Philadelphia, the principals of which included former circus wagon manufacturers Jacob Rech (1828?-1904) and Fulton & Walker, who did circus work as early as the 1870s. The North Tonawanda catalog price for this 82-key roll operated organ was \$2200 to \$2800. A heavy duty motor truck cost between \$1500 and \$3,000, with the decorative body perhaps running another \$500. This may have been the most expensive circus organ ever at between \$4,500 and \$7,000.

Wurlitzer is the best known of the American band organ builders, but perhaps only two of their products were used on an American circus lot. They were the two instruments which accompanied the C. W. Parker Carry-Us-All style merry-go-rounds on the Yankee Robinson and Sells-Floto circuses in 1915 and possibly subsequent years. These were small military band organs, about the size of a common Wurlitzer 125. Very likely they were second hand instruments which were selected from Parker's usual stock of instruments.

One of the last band organs carried by a railroad tent circus was the unidentified device which toured with the 1917 or 1918 Sells-Floto Circus. Described by its unidentified manufacturer as "the biggest ever put on four wheels," the late Bill Woodcock saw it in the show's parade and remembered that it endlessly ground out the then popular song "For Me and My Gal" in the menagerie tent. No tent show carried another mechanical organ until Circus Flora featured a Pell hand organ, made in England, at dates in 1986 and 1987, something of a return to the earliest menagerie practice (ed—played by *Carousel Organ's* Assistant Editor, Angelo Rulli). Nick Weber's Royal Lichtenstein Circus of 1991, a school show operation, carried a new Stinson-made Caliola, a device with a calliope-like name but which in fact is an organ with wood pipes, and sometimes, drums and a cymbal. Both of these organs played perforated roll or cardboard music, respectively, readily available from various sources, and catered to nostalgic tastes, as did the small hand organ owned by the Russell Bros. Family Fun Circus in 1995. The famous Royal American Shows 89-key Gavioli band organ served as entry entertainment to Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's 1995 Clown College graduation ceremony in Baraboo, Wisconsin. A few years ago a major indoor circus and a large new wave circus both requested the Circus World Museum staff to explore several options to outfit them with a significant traveling organ. The Big Apple Circus eventually acquired a special British-made organ of 44 keys. Alan Pell created the organ based upon the design of Bob Yorburg of Mamaroneck, New York.



Figure 18. The Ringling Bros. organ wagon of 1903 was manually played. It may have been the heaviest organ wagon to ever travel with an American circus. Courtesy Albert Conover collection.

Playable by either a midi-disk system or a plug-in keyboard, the organ is featured as an integral part of Big Apple's stellar ring performance.

Hopefully in the near future an American circus will again carry a melodious and imposing mechanical organ, equal to that which can be seen with high quality European circuses. The Swiss national circus, Knie, once carried an impressive art nouveau-fronted Limonaire organ of at least 66 keys. Today, Circus Roncalli features an enormous 96-key Ruth/Voigt organ on their midway, surprising listeners with its smile-making melodies as it sits amongst the other showground memorabilia which owner Bernhard Paul has collected, restored and preserved.

The story of American circus mechanical organs will close with a non-mechanical example, if only to clear the air as to the nature of this well-known instrument. In addition to their mechanical organ, steam and air calliopes, unafons and the Classic Cathedral Chimes from Moscow's Famed Kremlin Tower (actually a bell wagon made entirely within Wisconsin), the famous Ringling brothers also placed a conventional straight pipe organ in a wagon in 1903 and used it both in their daily street parade and in the cathedral scene of their big top spectacle "Joan of Arc" (Fig. 18). This manually played organ was built by George Kilgen of St. Louis. It had four 61-key manuals, only one of which was functional, a 27-note pedal and 581 speaking pipes. The instrument was housed in a truly bulky wagon built by the Bode Wagon Company of Cincinnati that cost \$1425. Despite the brothers interest in it and several efforts to keep it serviceable, some inherent constructional difficulties caused its deletion from the show after only a few years use. Ed Cross, the organist, played such staples as Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," Sousa marches and patriotic pieces like "My Country Tis of Thee."

Fred Dahlinger, Jr. has been interested in band organs ever since he first experienced the 89-key Gavioli of the Royal American Shows about 1962. He currently serves as the Director of Collections and Research at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin and is the author of two books and over 50 articles on circus topics. One of his Museum projects was to manage the restoration of the RAS Gavioli, bringing it back to its full musical potential.