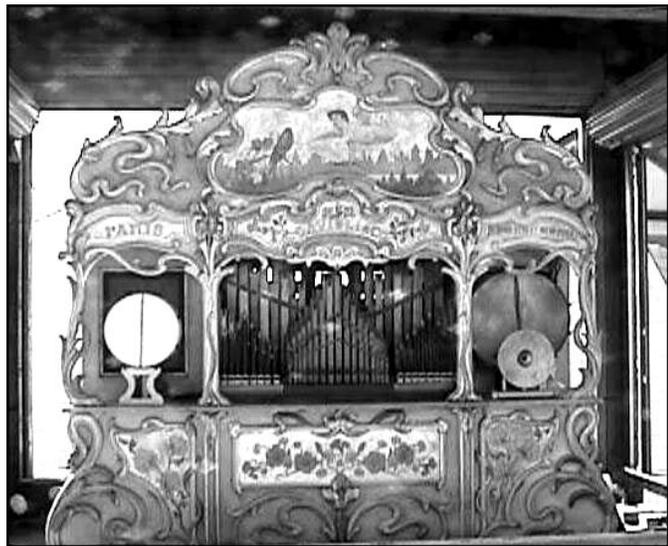


The Colosseum Gavioli

By
Ron Bopp



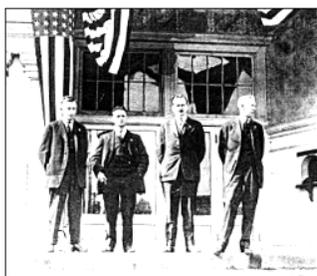
The Neilson 57 key Gavioli fairground organ, awaiting restoration.

every skating rink owner knew at the time, skaters come back for more with good music and a brand new 57 key Gavioli provided just that. The Gavioli façade stands over nine feet tall and also as wide (9'2" x 9'6") whereas the case itself is 32" deep.

Apparently built in 1906, this organ played the Gavioli system until October 22, 1922 when it was converted by the Artizan Factories, Inc., to play the Artizan D roll (a keyless, pressurized roll system). Note: the Artizan Factories, Inc. opened its doors in 1922 so this would have been a very early piece of work for this American band organ factory that was facing the odds competing against the across-the-town industry giant, The Rudolph Wurlitzer Company.

Both the Colosseum and the Gavioli closed up in December, 1931. James Elliott passed away on October 12, 1931. The organ was moved to a small garage where it remained until July, 1962 when purchased by Harold Knieriem of Perkasie, PA. Less than a month later the organ was playing again and was displayed at a local antique and sports car shows. In October, 1990, Don Neilson (now the third owner) obtained the organ from Mrs. Knieriem.

The organ is on schedule for full restoration. If one can judge by a similar 57 key Gavioli Fair Organ owned by Harvey and Marian Roehl, the Colosseum Gavioli will also be a real "winner."



Harry Elliott (far left) and his son, Jim Elliott (far right) stand ready for action in front the main entrance of the Colosseum on Broadway and Carton Ave., South Bethlehem,

*Photos and information courtesy of Don Neilson.

The recent journey by Mary Jo and myself to Eastern Pennsylvania to attend the annual meeting of the Musical Box Society International gave us the chance to visit the home and collection of Don and Mary Lou Neilson of Norristown, PA. Don is a recent addition to the collecting brotherhood of mechanical musical instruments, and while specializing in American coin-operated pianos, he has acquired a few band organs as well. A most interesting organ in this vast collection is a 57 key Gavioli fairground organ. The organ is mounted in a large trailer with roll-top doors on all four sides. It seems to be in very good condition and currently is equipped to play with the Artizan D pressurized roll system. A capsular history of this organ follows.

In the late 1900th century James Elliott was born in France and eight years later emigrated to America. Being an enterprising person, James (who was already into automobile displays and poultry shows) planned on building a skating rink. In 1908 the Colosseum Skating Rink of South Bethlehem, PA, was completed (built in the interest of Roller Skating, Roller Polo, Basket Ball and Sports in General) and the doors opened for business. As



A March 7, 1908, Colosseum newsletter (which claimed that it was published once in a while; 'Third Spasm') noted "the accompanying picture is that of James L. Elliott, the man who originated the idea of building a Rink in South Bethlehem. . . ."

Mr. Harold Knieriem (right) poses in July 1962, with his newly purchased Gavioli organ.*

