Wurlitzer "End Numbers"
&
Roll Identification

Matthew Caulfield

If you are so lucky as to find an old band organ or nick-elodeon roll somewhere, it is quite likely that it will be missing its box and label. Many years of hard use have taken their toll on most really old rolls of this sort. The first thing to go is the leader with its label, then a few feet of the first tune, and a few more, until there is so lit-tle of the first tune left that someone cuts it away com-pletely so that the roll can start cleanly with tune 2. But then the wear and tear starts in on tune 2! The better the music is on a roll, the more of it that is likely to be lost.

Knowing about the "end numbers" on Wurlitzer rolls goes a long way to getting an old mystery-roll identi-fied. If you unroll the mystery roll all the way to its end and examine the paper just where it is taped to the roll core, you will almost always find on any Wurlitzer roll the roll number stamped, inked, or pen-ciled there. The excep-tion is if the roll has been damaged at its tail end, with the consequent loss of its "end number."
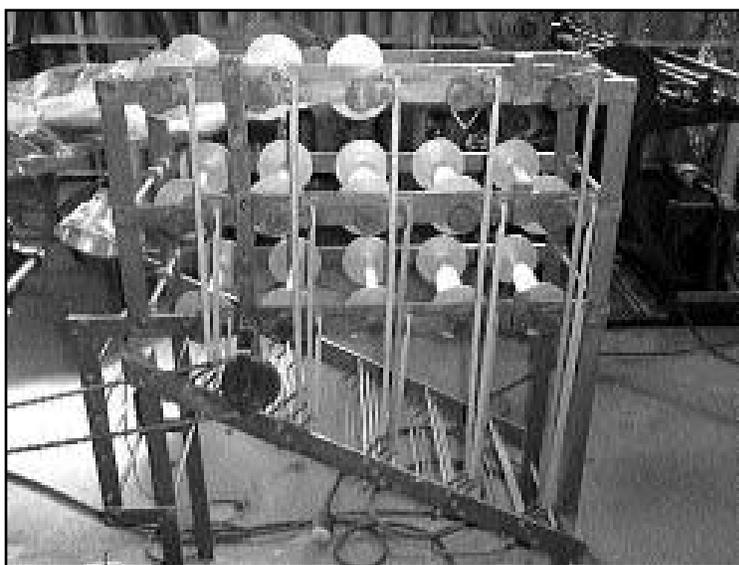

Figure 1. One of two spoolers in the Allan Herschell Carousel collection in North Tonawanda, New York.

But fortunately even the hardest-used roll is in good con-dition at its end because the end never gets exposed to damaging forces.

The one instance in which I was fooled by the "end number" was in examining an old green-paper roll owned by Steve Lanick, one of several which he bought from the late Jim Wells. I unrolled the roll, found an end number which indicated that this roll was one which nobody else owned—a unique roll find, a piece of lost history recov-ered! I took the roll home with Steve's permission, intending to have it recut and distributed. But playing the roll proved that it was one that had already been recut. How so? Well, what I failed to notice in my initial excitement was that right after tune 10 and before the rewind perforation was a splice. At some point in the past

the rewind footage of the roll must have become dam-aged, and the damaged end was cut away to be replaced by the rewind section of a different roll with a different "end number." What became of the actual roll that did belong to that unique "end number" remains a mystery to this day.

I don't know whether other roll manufacturers put a roll's number anywhere other than on the leader—it would have been a good idea if they had—but the way the Wurlitzer company produced their rolls almost required that they use "end num-bers." Wurlitzer perfora-tors are the only ones I have ever seen that have as an accessory a clever automatic spooler which winds up separately each copy of a roll as the set of copies come off the perforator. Most produc-tion perforators seem to run off the pile of copies into a bin, leaving it for later to spool up each copy from its last tune to its first.

The Wurlitzer spool-er necessarily spools a roll backwards, because it starts spooling from tune 1 as it comes off the perfora-tor to tune 10 (or whatever the number of the last tune on the roll is). The spooler uses temporary spindles rather than the actual roll cores that the rolls will later be sold on. But having the rolls individually spooled, albeit back-wards, simplifies the later handling and re-spooling in the right direction onto real roll cores, followed by leadering, labeling, and boxing.

But the Wurlitzer spooling system does require that each backwards-spooled roll be temporarily identified at its exposed end, being the tail end of the roll as it sits on the temporary spool. That is why you should expect to find an "end number" on every original Wurlitzer roll. The "end numbers" I have seen are usually written in ink or pencil (though I have seen some early ones stamped),