

An Organ Grinder in Auburn, New York 120 Years Ago

Bob Conant



The organ grinder of Auburn, NY.

Photo, courtesy: William Hecht, Union Springs, NY.

The photo shows an organ grinder on the corner of State and Genesee Streets in Auburn, NY, sometime in the 1880s (time identified Joseph O’Hearn, Auburn, NY.). There are several interesting points about this photograph. First, the organ grinder is seated which was a bit unusual, possibly indicating that this was his “regular” corner and that he didn’t move around much. Generally, they tended to move from place to place on a regular route, or when they were chased away. We can see at least one shoe and no crutches suggesting that he was not legless or crippled. Organ grinders in big cities tended to do fairly well financially and this fellow isn’t dressed too poorly but maybe it was not as lucrative in a smaller city like Auburn.

We can’t tell much about the organ as it is covered but it is about the size of a Molinari of about 20 or 21 notes. Whether the cover is to reduce the sound somewhat, or whether the case is rather old and decrepit we can only make guesses. Perhaps the dog scratches it up jumping up and down on it.

One final point about the photograph to note is that his companion is a dog. We usually think of an organ grinder having a monkey or even a parrot but, in truth, the dog was by far the most common animal to accompany the typical grinder.

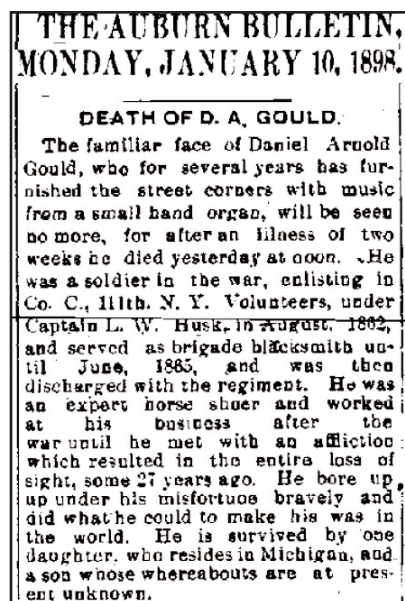
Joseph also provided me with another newspaper article, an obituary for an organ grinder in Auburn.

- Great Dorset Steam Fair*, Dorset England, Hardman, Jack; #1, p 7.
- Grinding for Success—Looking like a Professional*, Davidson, Gordie #34, p 26.
- Henk Veeningen's Draaiorgels (A Collection of Street Organs in Holland)*, Veeningen, Henk; #19, p 13.
- Hey, Where's The Monkey?*, Rulli, Angelo; #13, p 14.
- History of the American Band Organ Association (ABOA)*, Smith, Ken; #10, p 4.
- How Did I Get Involved?*, Smith, David; #9, p 24.
- I Ran Away With The Circus*, Rulli, Angelo; #22, p 26.
- Ignaz Blasius Bruder (1806-2006) and 200 years of Building Mechanical Organs*, Brommer, Wolfgang and Peter E. Scherle; #30, p 4.
- Internationales Drehorgelfest*; Griffith, Tom; #17, p 24.
- Joseph Raffin Celebrates 40th Anniversary*, Griffith, Tom; #5, p 20.
- Ken Smith*, Brabandt, Herb; #23, p 28.
- Ken Smith*, Smith, Neil; #23, p 26.
- Ken Smith*, Wasson, Wasson, David; #23, p 25.
- Le "Mecanophone"*, Bopp, Ron; #27, p 7.
- Luigi's "Rescued"*, O'Rourke, Hal; #6, p 21.
- Longevity of Music Media*, Bogatko, George; #17, p 10
- Lost, A Good Durable Monkey*, Bopp, Ron; #11, p 23.
- Marion Roehl Recordings*, Roehl, Harvey; #4, p 20.
- Mediocre Restoration and Regulation*, Reblitz, Art; #1, p 9.
- Memories of George Cushing and the Thursford Collection*, Brabandt, Herb; #18, p 22.
- Mike Kitner 1944-2000*, Black, Bill; #9, p 18.
- Miniature Model Organs*, Mackey, George; #21, p 9.
- Music Arranging and the Computer*, Meijer, Tom; #6, p 22.
- Music Box Organs*, Rulli, Angelo, #31, p 30.
- Nederlands Boekorgel Centrum or N.B.B.*, Schmuck, Ron; #31, p 4.
- Organ Figures*, Seagrave, Shane; #33, p 15.
- Organ Rally Enameled Pins*, Bopp, Ron; #22, p 4.
- Orgelfest '99, Waldkirch*, Germany, Bopp Ron; #1, p 8.
- Patience is a Virtue—Anxiety Isn't*, Schultz, Ralph; #10, p 20.
- Piano Melodico—A Family of Mechanical Musical Instruments*, Greinacher, Dr.C.F.C.; #14, p 14.
- Ralph Tussing*, Caulfield, Matthew; #32, p 12.
- Reflections on Harvey Roehl*, Conant, Bob, #5, p 18.
- Remembering Jack Hewes*, Miller, Bruce; #29, p 36.
- Ringling and Ringling: Showmen's Bells, Chimes and Related Instruments— Part I*, Dahlinger, Fred, Jr.; #20, p 4.
- Ringling and Ringling: Showmen's Bells, Chimes and Related Instruments— Part II*, Dahlinger, Fred, Jr.; #21, p 10.
- Ringling and Ringling: Showmen's Bells, Chimes and Related Instruments— Part III*, Dahlinger, Fred, Jr.; #22, p 17.
- Rise, Blossom and Decline of the Gavioli Gavioli Company — Part 2*, van Oost, Hans; #32, p 29.
- "Singing" by Robert Louis Stevenson— A Chance to Illustrate the Organ Grinder*, Rulli, Angelo; #36, p 20.
- The 2008 Bumbling Bruder Tour*, Bopp, Ron; #37, p 18.
- The "Auto-Organ,"* Bopp, Ron; #12, p 26.
- The Creation of Big Horn*, Simon, Brad; #12, p 24.
- The Ear and Hearing Protection*, Liljenkrants, Johan; #3, p 8.
- The First COAA Organ Rally, Trolleyville (Olmsted Falls, OH)*, Bopp, Ron; #37, p 7.
- The Grand Dad of all Automated Street and Fairground Organs*, Schmuck, Ron; #20, p 25.
- The Greatest Show on Earth—The Great Dorset Steam Fair*, Brabandt, Herb; #20, p 22.
- The Happiest Music on Earth*, Bopp, Ron; #11, p 11.
- "The Harlem Phoenix", The 2004 UK Mechanical Organ Owners Society Tour*, Clark, Michael; #24, p 12.
- The HERSHEY PARK Carrousel and Its Band Organ*, Black, Bill; #10, p 21.
- The Haughawout Book-Punching Machine*, Haughawout, Terry; #23, p 4.
- The Johnson Organ Company*, Johnson Lance; #22, p 12.
- The Magic World of Showman's Models*, Atkinson, Clarry; #3, p 14.
- The Nunn Organ Collection*, Nunn, Bill; #32, p 4.
- The Sale of Big Horn*, McNabb, Gareth Lee; #30, p 28.
- The Stinson Band Organ Co., Inc., Bellefontaine, Ohio*, Bopp, Ron; #33, p 4.
- The Story of Captain John Leonard's Fascination with Military Band Organs*, Leonard, Captain John; #4, p 16.
- The Tradition in Waldkirch and a Review of the 200 Year Orgelfest*, Brommer Wolfgang, #2, p 17.
- The Very First Time*, McAuley, Tom; #3, p 13.
- The World's Smallest Mechanical Organ*, Bopp, Ron; #36, p 4.
- Third Bumbling Bruder Tour (Organ Tour of Europe)*, Bopp, Ron; #13, p 19.
- Twelfth International Drehorgelfest*, Griffith Tom; #13, p 17.

COAA, other rally reports, and recording and book reviews may be found in individual Carousel Organ journals.

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At first glance it would appear that Daniel Gould could be the organ grinder in the photograph. However, Mr. O'Hearn does not think that Mr. Gould was organ grinding at the time of the photograph and therefore it must be two separate persons.



I think it is surprising that a small town like Auburn, NY, would actually have two organ grinders within a short period of time but the analysis suggests that this could be the case.

Bob Conant is a retired gavaman and organ grinder living in Bradenton, FL, with his wife, Cherri.