

Bernie's Berni: The Revere Beach Whip Gavioli

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The search for history takes you down many paths. The course is often an adventure hallmarked by unexpected surprises and learning things you never knew. More than once I've learned that the route can be a circle, bringing you back where you started and providing additional meaning for things already at hand. The advancement of knowledge typically provokes increased appreciation for artifacts of history, especially if they have not been accorded a second look because of inadequate or incomplete preliminary appraisals.

The manner in which this story developed is akin to finding what's at the center of an onion. It started with the exterior wrapper, in the form of a surviving artifact, and layer by layer led to the core, the origin of the artifact. The peeling away proceeded in a Forrest Gump-like series of accidental discoveries, as opposed to planned or guided study. The intriguing history of this band organ eventually came together via several unrelated episodes.

This journey started slightly over two decades ago, in the spring of 1986. The late Dan Slack, a real sleuth when it came to finding mechanical music instruments, told me about an interesting collection of music machines and other devices owned by a nice fellow named Bernie Zipkin. He owned a place called Mahopac Farm Playhouse and Museum in Baldwin Place, New York.¹ Through the years, Bernie and his wife Florence (married 55 years as of 2007) amassed a huge and diverse aggregation of "neat stuff" on their Westchester County property. The rental of some of these novelties for film and stage use around New York City provided a portion of their income. From my perspective, their most interesting pieces were a bonafide Molinari street piano and a very original and perhaps unique Foucher-Gasparini military-style cylinder organ.



Figure 1. It was this central arch panel from a large organ façade that initiated a two-decade long search for the history and heritage of this and associated fragments. Dan Slack photograph.

Dan told me to check out an organ façade at the Zipkin property. He'd taken a photo of the center arch, which originally rose over the central pipe opening, and shared it with me. The style suggested a French or Belgian arrangement. It certainly looked interesting. **Figure 1.** The remainder of the front was there, but photographs weren't possible because the pieces were hemmed in by

other properties. When I arrived, Bernie was pre-occupied with other activities and he accorded me the run of his barn and adjacent buildings, yielding a sort of treasure hunt experience. I readily found the arch in the photograph, hanging in the same place where Dan observed it. The background was a light bluish-green. It had attractive Art Nouveau scrollwork, especially below the arch. The pierced carving was a type that the late Ken Smith termed "whale bone," because there was no backing behind the open spaces. Metallic leaf had been applied to the elegantly executed handwork. There were raised title panels to either side of a central ornament at the top. They bore the painted legends "Berni Organ Company" and "216 West 20 Street/New York." I knew from prior research that it was an artifact from the time when Louis Berni and his brother operated their own mechanical music instrument buying and selling business in the New York City borough of Manhattan in the 1910s. They'd imported a broad array of fine European organs during those years, the existence and stories of most of them forgotten and unknown today. Little did I then realize how long it would take to unravel the story of this one.



Figure 2. The finest element in the remaining façade fragments are the scenic paintings, particularly this grouping of six cavorting cupids in their natural state below the counter. Author's photograph

The belly assembly and two side wings were located in another part of Bernie's barn. **Figures 2 & 3.** All of the items were in good shape, the enclosed structure having protected them from the elements. What amazed me was that the original scenic paintings on the lower panels were still intact. For nearly a century, the six cavorting cupids had escaped any attempt to cover their innocent natural state. Two additional painted figures, a trumpeter and a fairy-like Tinker Bell image adorning the lower side panels on the wings, had similarly survived the decades. It was an indication that the owners of the piece had appreciated the playful artwork and saw little reason to over-paint it with something less artistic or valuable.

The next features that drew my attention were the panels that fit into the upper areas of the side wings. Unlike most percussion



Figure 3. The most unusual feature of the Art Nouveau façade was the pair of decorated panels that concealed the drums and their actions. Here is one of them. Author's photograph.

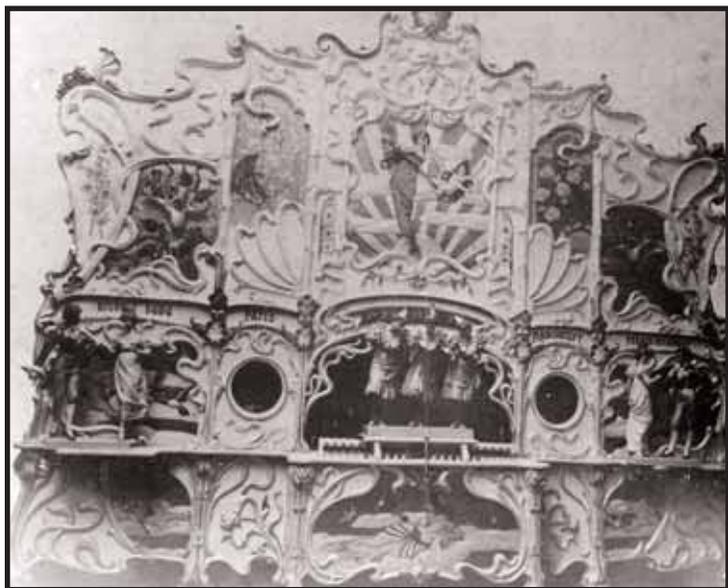


Fig. 4 Gavioli provided large and elaborate Art Nouveau facades that could fill the entire stage area of a dance hall. The central portion of this elegant 57-key machine is now on a Hooghuys organ. Author's collection.

instruments, which were exposed, the drums and their actions on this organ were placed behind flat panels perforated only by a limited, circular opening for the direct exposure of the heads. The shrouds were painted Art Nouveau style, the turn of the century motif that was so heartily embraced by the French. It was an unusual drum presentation design and I was hard-pressed to remember whether I'd ever seen any similar arrangement elsewhere. Later searching revealed that the concept had been utilized in several fronts pictured in the flamboyant circa 1906 Gavioli & Cie. catalog. Another Gavioli with an Art Nouveau façade also came to my attention. Mike Kitner owned a 60-key Louis Hooghuys dance organ, LH625, and the front for it originated with a 57-key Gavioli with the same sort of side wings. **Figure 4.**

The belly assembly and the wings were also decorated with finely crafted scrollwork finished in metallic leaf. The entablature level panels were painted in additional Art Nouveau designs featuring floral patterns. Overall, I was impressed by the elegant façade, having seen few of the same size and detail in the U. S.

The decorative scheme embodied some Art Nouveau patterns that had been suggested decades earlier by the work of William Morris (1834-1896) and others that could be seen in works by Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939) and additional graphic artists and painters who gave life to the style. As one authority defined it, "Characterized by ornamental, sinuous lines, Art Nouveau was a highly original style based on the natural forms of flora and fauna. The unique work and fine craftsmanship of individual artists were the hallmarks of this style, which provided a transition between the overwrought abundance of Victorian 'historicism' and the sleek functionality of Modernism."²

The question being pondered in my mind was who made this façade? There was no indication anywhere on the artifact, not even a telltale layer of earlier paint below the Berni Organ Company legend. Marengi wasn't a likely candidate as his larger facades were usually provided with carvings having heavy relief, not sinewy scrollwork. Gavioli was a real possibility, as the firm had supplied Art Nouveau facades with some of their organs. The name Limonaire kept coming to mind. I knew less about the Parisian brothers' products, but was aware that by 1904 they had forsaken all other decorative styles for Art Nouveau. Perhaps it was theirs?

A tape measure is always a handy item to possess on intelligence-gathering field trips and the venture to Mahopac Farm was no exception. The façade components indicated that the case of the long gone instrument was somewhere between 104 and 108 inches in width. The counter on the belly stood 38 inches above the floor. The side wings were 44 inches across and rose nine feet high. As best I could figure, the arch started at a point about 80 inches above the floor and rose another 46 inches higher. Analyzing the numbers yielded a conclusion that the organ case was about 80 inches high by 106 inches wide, with the façade totaling about ten and a half feet high by sixteen feet across. This had been a big organ, not huge, but certainly very large by American standards. The arrangement didn't suggest the older style 87-key French machines, more likely something in the post-1902 89-key size. I learned later that the case of an 87-key Gavioli in the Sanfilippo collection had a height and width that both measured 84.5 inches, whereas 89-key No. 4 scale Gavioli no. 9018, a circa 1903 instrument, measured 77 inches tall by 105 inches across. The "tale of the tape" was providing some answers. I concluded the on-site documentation and went on my way, satisfied to have had the privilege to document the façade.

A planned stop in the New York City area somewhat later included a visitation with legendary carousel doyenne Fred Fried. He and his wife Mary had an apartment on the upper west side that was a virtual dreamland for the historian and collector. Fred had realized the cultural value of handmade things and popular amusement artifacts long before others ever made a move to preserve many forms of folk and commercial art. A delightful and engaging time was spent with the Frieds. Despite a brutally chilling springtime climate, Fred insisted on driving me to Coney Island, to visit the lone holdout, the B & B Carousell, and to note other remaining landmarks on the real estate of the greatly changed amusement zone. The knuckle-gripping drive, made so by Fred's constant gesticulating to landmarks along the streets, took us past neighborhoods that had once been the homes to various amusement figures, like M. C. Illions and Charles Carmel. Once back in Manhattan, the opportunity was advanced to examine some of the rare archival materials housed in the apartment.

Fred assembled his "music collection" from different sources, one of which was George Messig, an old-time music machine man in Gravesend, west of Coney Island. A gruff sort of fellow on the outside, the good-hearted Messig grew to respect the equally "tough," loveable and Brooklyn-born Fred so much that he appointed him as the executor of his will. Among the treasures that were yielded by Messig's shop when it was closed and liquidated were a number of extraordinarily rare views of Gavioli & Co.'s New York warehouse and others of the interior of the Berni Organ Company. It was in sheer amazement when one print was brought before my gaze, the first one known to me that documented Louis Berni in an actual photograph. He looked very dapper standing before a large organ, which was positioned at an oblique angle.

Figure 5.

Having absorbed Berni's image, I focused on the organ. The side case closest to the camera immediately grabbed my attention and yielded an important fact. It had painted Art Nouveau panels placed before the drums. I wracked my mind trying to remember the details of the façade I'd seen at Zipkin's place. It was in the days before digital cameras and instantly retrievable photos. After returning home and developing the Zipkin films, I was able to con-

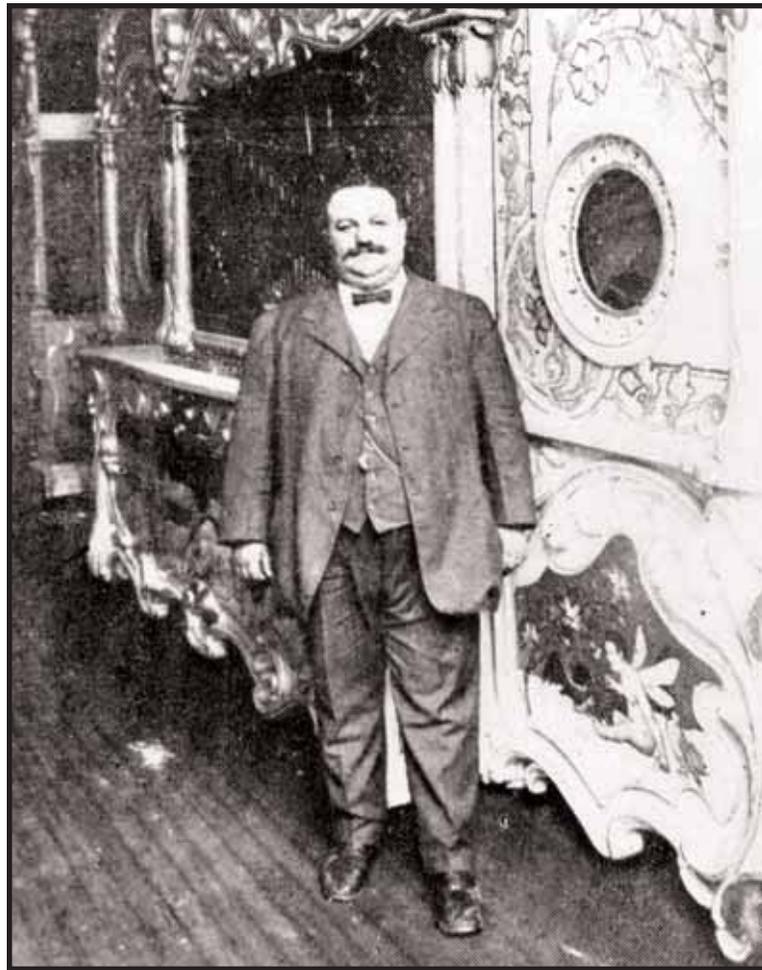


Figure 5. Taken inside the Berni Organ Company wareroom in New York, the organ behind Louis Berni was one that he personally selected for duty at Revere Beach, Massachusetts. Author's collection.

firm that the organ beside which Louis Berni had been photographed featured the façade that was now at Mahopac Farm. Scaling the distance from the counter to the bottom of the scrollwork on the arch set the bottom elevation of the latter at about 76 inches, slightly lower than my previous estimate.

The organ was big. The characteristic rows of different pipework typically found in a Parisian-built organ were faintly visible. I could see the turned "acorns" on top of a group of pan flutes on the far side, with the rank peaked in the center. A row of brass clarinets was situated in the front of the chest. An ascending row of saxophones were set to either side of the center, the tuning slides in the tops of the pipes revealing their presence. The polished surfaces of brass trombone resonators reflected the light in the far background. On the counter was a "one-piece" glockenspiel, the spherical beater heads

clearly visible. It certainly had the appearance of 89-key organs, especially of several No. 4 scale Gaviolis. Unfortunately, the photograph had been taken at such an angle that the upper façade was totally concealed. The creator of the artwork remained a mystery.

Exactly how the organ came to be photographed inside the Berni warehouse wasn't a total mystery, but details were lacking. Berni's agents scoured Europe, buying organs and exporting them to America for re-sale to outdoor showmen. His craftsmen fitted them up, touching up marred surfaces and otherwise making them sound good. Seldom was the past history of the instrument made known. Each was just another music machine, one of dozens that provided a musical atmosphere for one of Europe's famed outdoor attractions. It has only been in recent times, after much study, that the provenance of some of these interesting imported organs has been determined. The anonymous origin of this one would eventually be revealed, too.

Many early book organs were quickly discarded by early 20th century European showmen as they bought replacements, acquiring a new one every year or two. It kept their attraction current and they remained in step with the competition. Newly-fabricated replacement organs were readily available from Parisian factories, so showmen simply traded in or sold their current one to recyclers, including Berni and his field agents. French showmen, in particular, seem to have been the source of many organs that were export-



Figure 6. The new Whip ride attracted a long line of riders when it was first installed at Revere Beach about 1915. The swing of the Whip car brought many a beau and his girl into close quarters. Image courtesy Lynden Lyman.

ed elsewhere. It may have been their close proximity to the instrument factories, within their homeland, which facilitated the rapid turnover by providing replacements at low transportation cost and no tariff. For those playing the big Parisian “gingerbread fair” on the Place de la Nation, or others on the periphery of the city, the celebrated organ factories were just a short haul away.

In stark contrast to the British, who seemingly save everything, the French immediately rid themselves of all but the newest. The character trait could explain why so few older organs remain in contemporary France, despite it once being one of the two top centers of their manufacture. A goodly number were exported to Great Britain in the 1910s and 1920s and perhaps an even larger quantity was shipped by Berni’s agents to the United States between the late-1890s and 1918. With only Wurlitzer and the North Tonawanda Musical Instrument Works making attempts to compete for symphonic-style organ sales in North America, Berni pretty much had the market to himself. Nearly-new, second-hand French-built machines were readily sold to well-heeled buyers in the United States that wanted to treat their customers to higher quality music.

My research into the history of outdoor amusements has encompassed circuses, carnivals, amusement parks, carousels and other related forms of recreation. Friends knew of my personal interest in organs and calliopes, which conveniently connected into every form of popular entertainment. They’ve generously shared their findings with me as they made their own acquisitions and discoveries. One day in 2003 I learned that a friend, Lynden Lyman, had acquired a number of thrill ride catalogs, one of them being for the famous Whip that had been invented, patented and manufactured by William F. Mangels. While most people are aware that band organs were commonly found on carousels, they’re not familiar with organ installations on roller coasters, circle swings and a host of other riding devices. I knew from time spent in Fred Fried’s archives that Mangels and other showmen had placed organs with some Whip installations, so I asked Lynden to check his catalog for organ views.

A few days later an envelope arrived and enclosed were some copies from his Whip catalog. A pair of images taken at Revere Beach, Massachusetts, the one-time outdoor summer playground for the greater Boston area, caught my eye. The caption below

them stated that Louis Berni and some of his business partners purchased a Mangels Whip and placed it in a high traffic location along the Boulevard, at Shirley Avenue. The “Boulevard” was the principal thoroughfare of the entertainment zone. As with all of his amusement interests, this Berni enterprise was first class. The “Band Organ King” knew how to invest money to attract a crowd of paying customers. His ride was larger than the standard design, which had twelve cars; his had fourteen or sixteen vehicles. A nicely detailed wooden fence and colonnade surrounded the ride. At the south edge of the property was a simple wall, providing a human-scale visual barrier for the huge installation that rose prominently next door. It was the L. A. Thompson Scenic Railway Company’s Dragon Gorge roller coaster (erected 1911, closed 1923, replaced by Lightning roller coaster 1927) and the Scenic Temple (formerly the Casino). Constructed as part of the barrier wall was a protective alcove housing a large band organ. Close examination revealed a stunning surprise. It was the same one as in the Berni Organ Company interior view, the one with the façade at Zipkin’s place. **Figures 6 & 7.** Clearly seen in the image was the same decorative scheme that remained on the surviving components as well as in the Berni factory photo. No carved figures were present, but a glockenspiel was mounted on the counter. Often such devices were divided into two or four sections and spaced between figure bases, but this one was a single continuous assembly. Though the images are not extremely clear, one can discern the outwardly ascending ranks of pipes that typify a large French organ of the 89 No. 4 scale.

With the discovery of the Whip photos, there was an indication as to where it had once served in the U. S. Revere Beach had been a thriving amusement zone, with nearly all independent operators located directly on the street. The only exception had been the years 1906 to 1911, when the enclosed Wonderland Park had been in operation. The splendid era of Revere Beach’s zenith as an amusement zone came to an end in the 1970s. A few organs, notably the pair of electrically-connected instruments from Louis Bopp’s Hippodrome carousel and a Model 33 Ruth, had survived long enough to be preserved. It now appeared that a fraction of another, in this case the façade, was safe.

Knowledge of Whips, Revere Beach and Berni suggested a time frame of 1915 to 1916 for the organ images. Mangels

installed the first Whip at Luna Park, Coney Island, in 1914, so Berni's Revere Beach operation had been among the earliest, another indication of his market savvy. The date strongly suggested that the organ had been brought to the United States by Berni between when he started the Berni Organ Company, about 1911, and before war started in Europe, in 1914, but from where, and who had owned it? Berni's Whip probably remained at Revere Beach after he liquidated the majority of his amusement holdings in America and returned to Europe about 1918.

One Whip at Revere Beach in 1924 was operated with a Ferris wheel on an open lot next to The Pit, the big indoor fun house. John J. Hurley was the second Whip owner in Revere Beach at the time. His ride was positioned beside another Hurley-owned operation, the intimidating Giant Racer coaster. As one of the most prominent New England ride contractors, Hurley reportedly possessed a dozen carousels, roller coasters and other attractions at Revere Beach and elsewhere. When he went to sell a 12-car Whip in 1935, it also included an organ, but no size or description was provided. The combination of a Whip and organ music went to the core of Hurley's amusement philosophy and was shared by other amusement veterans. He stated "You take a lovin' young couple and jiggle 'em well and you've got something that'll please 'em and they'll keep coming." A reporter noted, "Hurley's stern following of his policy—the machine organ playing plenty of old-time songs and the young couple getting 'well-joggled'—has made him a millionaire." A review of the rides at the beach in 1941 revealed that two Whips remained present, operated individually by Mike Zaccaria and Willie O'Brien.³ Whether there was a continuing thread between any of these operators and the Berni-operated Whip organ cannot be clarified at this time.

One suspects that the Berni organ façade was eventually preserved because of the fine paintings adorning it. Sometimes the decorative fronts were converted to ticket booths and service area backdrops. It was a situation of readily moveable art work being preserved and a large and heavy, non-functional box of wooden construction being discarded. The instrument, which had likely been silent for many years, was probably destroyed. It was not uncommon for a large European organ, or even a façade, to be burned in the early 1960s, before the preservation movement gained recognition and gathered momentum. As the Revere Beach amusement zone was cleared and re-developed, the accumulated artifacts and icons from its days as an amusement resort were sold

and scattered, likely marking the time frame when the front was sold elsewhere, to parties unknown. How many hands it may have passed through before reaching Mahopac Farm is unknown. Bernie Zipkin could not recall with certainty where he'd bought the organ façade. His best guess was that it might have been at a Long Island auction many years before.

By this time it was pretty clear that the façade at Zipkin's place had originated with a large French organ, probably a Gavioli, or perhaps a Limonaire. It was presumably on an 89-key No. 4 scale machine, with a one-piece glockenspiel. The Berni Organ Company had likely imported it, sometime shortly before, or soon after war commenced in Europe. It had served on an early and premier Whip ride owned in part by Louis Berni in Revere Beach, and went into preservation several decades later. The question of who built it, when, and for whom, remained to be answered. A few more years passed before those answers would come forth, again by sheer coincidence.

While recently surfing the web for other data, an interesting real photo postcard of French origin came to my attention. It depicted a large, portable roller coaster termed "Les Montagnes Suisses," or "The Swiss Mountains." Straight-line switchback rides, of the type widely built by LaMarcus A. Thompson in the 1880s, as well as figure-8 type roller coasters were known in France as "Les Montagnes Russes," or "The Russian Mountains." The geographic association dated back to 1804, when an inclined slope thrill ride with wheeled cars was first erected in Paris and given the same name. The later British-originated switchback rides, with their undulating circular tracks, were known as "Les Montagnes Russes Circulaire" or "The Circular Russian Mountains." The portable coaster's owner simply added his own, identifying twist to the identification of his possibly unique attraction by associating it with another country that was actually much more mountainous than Russia.

The original postcard image was taken during the big street fair held from mid-June to early July in the northwestern Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine. The ride had the extraordinarily large footprint of two or three circular switchback rides gathered together, meaning that it was a fairly expensive proposition. Then, as now, every square foot of ground space cost extra and had to be financially productive. The ride experience would have been unique on the French fair circuit. I've not yet found another similar device in my searches, testimony to the fact that it was relative-



Fig. 7 Housed in a protective alcove, the big organ filled the entire area of the Whip and the surrounding neighborhood with delightful melodies. Image courtesy Lynden Lyman.

ly rare. There were some out and back type switchbacks at the street fairs, and a few full-fledged roller coaster-type devices were erected at French amusement parks and world's fair midways. In general, they are found with much less frequency on the European continent than in North America. Most portable units were in Germany, Switzerland and Holland, but little has been written about them.

The overall arrangement of Les Montagnes Suisses suggests a relatively new installation, perhaps one assembled for the first time at Neuilly-sur-Seine. The entrance to it was proclaimed by a series of large, finely painted Art Nouveau panels done in a very artistic manner. An elevated canvas tent protected the loading platform area. No organ was readily apparent in the view, but tucked behind the inclined "first hill" was something that looked like an organ façade. The only problem was that it was very big, with dimensions completely larger than the typical organ front. I was aware that Gavioli had built a number of smaller organs, 57 and 65-key with gigantic façades. They apparently went into modest dance halls. The smaller instrument was adequate to fill the terpsichorean space with melodies, while the extended façade gave the proprietor bragging rights that the music machine filled an entire wall. If it was indeed an organ hiding under the coaster ride canvas, it was a big one, as defined by the size of the opening for the pipework.

There were several really big organs placed beside permanent roller coasters in Europe in the early 20th century. The Model 39 Ruth furnished to a Swiss buyer in the 1920s had at one time provided melodies to a touring coaster. Perhaps I'd found a new organ image, not reproduced anywhere else, or would learn that the proprietor of the ride had a painted backdrop to simulate the Swiss mountains for his riders. I felt that the postcard purchase was an investment risk worth taking. Communication with the seller was awkward as we shared no common language, but an agreeable deal was struck.

The quick arrival of the card yielded great news. **Figure 8.** Those uncertain squiggles in the background were indeed an organ façade, and a big one. The instrument had the conventional central area and two side wings on both sides, but it impressively stretched out much wider and taller. There was another pair of outer side wings, broader than the inner ones, and on top was a huge panel spanning the entire length of the device. It was extravagantly decorated. Somewhat surprisingly, there did not appear to be any



Fig. 8 The original, monumental size of the organ was first revealed in this image, which disclosed the details of an organ first discovered over two decades earlier. Author's collection.

mechanical figures positioned on the front. Usually a band leader, bell ringers or dancers were placed on the counter of such machines.

It was clear that the owner of this riding device had decided to provide grand music and a visual treat for the enjoyment of his ridership. No other competing French showman, not Ch. Maury with his big standing top switchback, not Louis Lesot and his

carousel with a fine Marengi or another violin-baritone scale Marengi within a carousel featuring pigs, all of them down the street at the same Neuilly fair, made a finer organ presentation.⁴ Riders had an opportunity to enjoy the Swiss mountains organ music while loading and then had the privilege to see the utilitarian back of the device when the coaster train made its loop around the enclosure.

I began to analyze the image, hoping that I'd discovered the rarity of rarities, another Parisian-built organ of 100 or more keys. The postcard was cancelled in May 1907. Knowing that the photograph had been taken before then and that a printing process was undertaken to make it available to a mass merchandising effort, the circumstances suggested that the instrument was already in existence at about the same time that the first 110-key organs had been shipped to England, in May 1906. The likely time frame of creation was no earlier than circa 1902, when the first 89s started to appear, and before the 1906 fair at Neuilly-sur-Seine.

The possibility that it was an unknown giant started to dim and then evaporated entirely. Like the youthful Lex Murphy realizing she could control the security system in Jurassic Park because she knew Unix, I suddenly realized that I knew this organ because of past experience, too. It was the Berni-Revere Beach-Zipkin machine in its full, original format. Wow. There may have been some suspicion that the façade at Revere Beach had been truncated, but I never imagined that it had originally been this big. It was immense.

Using dimensions I'd taken from the components at Zipkin's place and applying them to the postcard yielded the estimate that the façade had stretched nearly 26 feet across. The tent concealed the uppermost portion of the front, but an educated guess placed it at sixteen to eighteen feet tall, if not more, with a high center circular feature. Those dimensions nominated it into a rarified group of large organs with correspondingly large façades. It was essentially a bioscope front design without the customary doorways to either side. **Figure 9.**

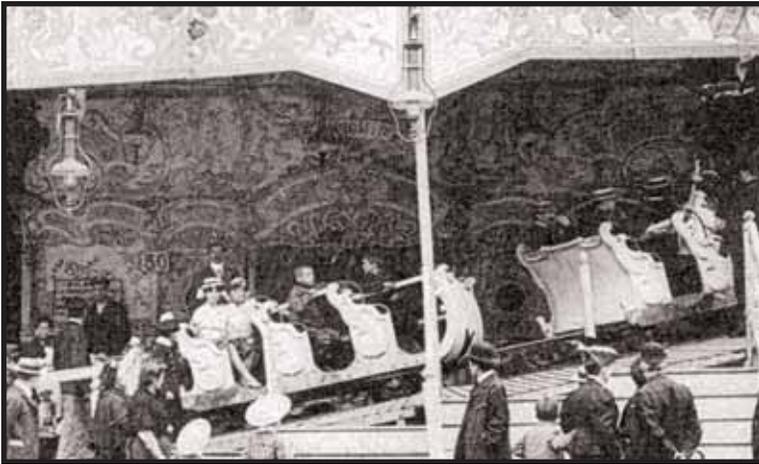


Fig. 9 The big 89-key Gavioli was a feature of a large, portable roller coaster that played the fairs around the French capital, like the one at Neuilly sur Seine about 1906.
Author's collection

All of the observations suggested that it was likely a unique machine, special-ordered by the proprietor. There were no 89-key machines in the 1906 Gavioli catalog with those dimensions; only a mammoth 110-key design outdid it in size. Based on the prices quoted in the Gavioli publication, the big instrument likely cost the owner about FF18,000 to FF20,000, then the equivalent of US\$3,474 to US\$3,860. The real value was somewhat understated because of the highly competitive nature of the French organ business at the time. Adding the 45% tariff that was applied to imported European organs upped the price to \$5,037 to \$5,597, rendering it as costly as the top of the line 122-key deKleist Mammoth. It was a lot of money for something that simply provided a musical atmosphere and required an entire wagon, or two, to house and transport it.

The search for history takes you down many paths. The course is often an adventure hallmarked by unexpected surprises and learning things you never knew. More than once I've learned that the route can be a circle, bringing you back where you started and providing additional meaning for things already at hand. The advancement of knowledge typically provokes increased appreciation for artifacts of history, especially if they have not been accorded a second look because of inadequate or incomplete preliminary appraisals.

The broader, outer side wings visible in the new postcard image were fitted with painted panels similar to those that were placed in front of the drums. The elegant floral design was carried

over, from the inner panels to those outside. The entablature was a continuation of the same style as the drum wings, but with an added furl, like in a flag, an artistic touch of interest. Additional pierced scrollwork was installed under the entablature in two places.

The entire upper panel, for handling and erection purposes, was split horizontally about four to five feet above the top of the case. The broad expanse was filled with an abundance of scroll carvings and figures in bas relief. In general, it reminds one of the upper panels outfitted to the bioscope facades of Charles Farrell's Silver Coliseum (later applied to Sidney White's Coliseum in 1909) and George T. Tuby's Coliseum. They both date to 1905 and further suggest the era of manufacture of the subject instrument.⁵ One can barely discern near the center the lower ends of a carved arc that surely reached upward and defined a circular area that likely had a prominent carving or scenic painting presented therein. Spanning the opening at the base of the arc was a cartouche bearing the attraction owner's name. The entire line cannot be discerned, but one can make out ___ om & Cie.

I thought about the Zipkin façade through the intervening years, wondering what had become of it. In this instance, it ultimately seemed that it would disappear forever, sold to parties unknown. Such things were typically overpainted, or the parts dismantled and used for other purposes. A few have turned up as café back bars, while others were used for wall decorations and ticket booths. All collectors, even those that supremely enjoy and prize their toys, come to face a day when they must declare the future of their holdings, whether by plan or default. For the Zipkins, that "day" spanned three days, October 17 to 19, 1997, when the bulk of their extensive collections, more than 1400 lots, were sold at public auction. The organ façade was listed as lot 351, "Rare complete carved and painted Organ Front[,] Berni Organ Co., Brooklyn, NY, four pieces, approx 107" l[ong] \$4,000-6,000." The Berni organ sales room had actually been in Manhattan, but that didn't make any difference to the bidders. Intelligence received after the sale indicated that the façade had brought \$7500, reportedly purchased by an interior decorator.⁶

Some time later, while laboring over a paper about Foucher-Gasparini, Phil Jamison, who'd purchased the dandy Gasparini cylinder organ at the Zipkin sale, told me that the façade transaction was never completed and that it was still in Baldwin Place. It had been 21 years since I visited the Mahopac Farm and made the acquaintance of Bernie Zipkin. He was still listed in the phone book and it was his friendly voice that I first heard when the phone was answered on April 19, 2007. Through a series of communications, the big façade became the possession of Bill and Diane Nunn of Hamel, Minnesota on June 5. The Nunns operate a horse farm outside the Twin Cities and have a strong interest in carousel horses and band organs. They also have a small kiddieland erected on their property, complete with a miniature amusement park-style train. Starting just ten years ago, in April 1998, the Nunns have subsequently assembled one of the most representative and eclectic band organ collections in the United States.⁷ **Figure 10.**

Bill and Diane have already planned to re-create the entire façade and to locate or commission the construction of a suitable Gavioli-style organ to bring it to life. It will eventually become the centerpiece of their collection, housed in a new building addition

purposefully designed to showcase the grand Belle Epoque piece. Initial contact with European experts has so far failed to reveal the existence of other photographs of the Berni façade. Hopefully, in time, perhaps spurred by this article, images of the 89-key front will be found that will facilitate re-construction of the missing components. It will then join ranks with the huge 87-key Black Forest Gavioli façade that was re-constructed for the Milhous collection and 110-key Gavioli facade restoration that has been commissioned by Jasper Sanfilippo for the instrument that he recently acquired.

The publication date of this article had been planned to follow the receipt and examination of the façade in the Nunn collection. Unfortunately, the shipment was somewhat delayed, postponing the dismantling, excavation, examination and conservation processes that would unlock the earliest history of the façade. This delay prevented the inclusion of further analysis of the artifact within the text. It is our hope and plan to provide an update in the next issue that will provide a clear indication of the maker of the façade, the shop number, the approximate year of construction and other relevant information that can be gleaned from it.

The subsequent chapter in the story will be written with the complete conservation and restoration of the existing façade, followed by the reconstruction of the missing portions in a historically correct manner. The final chapter will be the securing and the placement of a suitable instrument behind it to bring the huge and elegant Art Nouveau masterpiece back to life. Given the excellence of the restorations that Bill and Diane and their team of arti-

sans have already achieved, we can anticipate another eye-popping treat at the Nunn collection in the future. Perhaps for the first time since those pleasurable days at the Neuilly sur Seine fair, a truly gigantic organ representing the cutting edge Art Nouveau designs of one of the leading Parisian firms will again thrill people with its visual delights.

Dan Slack had been right all along. It was a big organ façade. It just took us a while to figure out how large it had been at one time, as well as to determine the engaging story embodied within it. Thank you, Bernie, and thank you, Mr. Berni.

Notes

1. See Jan T. Macauley, "History Is in Harvest at Mahopac Farm," *New York Times*, March 12, 1978.
2. Susan A. Sternau, *Art Nouveau, Spirit of the Belle Epoque*, (1996), page 5.
3. *Billboard*, June 28, 1924, page 72; September 4, 1926, page 62.
4. Other postcards in the same series by photographer "E. L. D." confirm the presence of these competitors.
5. Kevin Scrivens and Stephen Smith, *The Travelling Cinematograph Show*, (1999), pages 96 and 160. The Farrell to White connection was first revealed by Philip Upchurch in *Key Frame*, 2002, 2, pages 11-13.
6. The Mahopac Museum Auction, *The Life-Long Collection of Bernard and Florence Zipkin*, New World Trading, Inc., October 17-19, 1997, and prices realized, copy in author's collection.
7. See Bill Nunn, "The Nunn Organ Collection," *COAA Carousel Organ*, 32, pages 4-11.

The author is grateful to Peter McCauley, whose multiple works documenting the history and heritage of the Revere Beach amusement zone proved very useful in preparing this article. Fred would be pleased to hear from anyone having further information, photographs or artifacts relating to the band organs and carousels that were once featured in that seaside location.

Heads Up For 2008!

Rally the organs for the third Knoebels Amusement Resort COAA Rally Elysburg, PA June 28-29, 2008

The Knoebels family has welcomed COAA for the third time to their summer playground in the mountains of central eastern Pennsylvania. This beautiful, family-oriented amusement park has become a favorite rallying spot for the members who were lucky enough to experience the rallies in 2004 and 2006. 110 members from 16 states attended last year bringing 16 large organs and 26 grind organs delighting guests throughout the shaded groves. Park visitors, staff, and the Knoebels family look forward to the next COAA rally. June 28-29, 2008 has been specially selected to accommodate those participating in the 2008 Bumbling Bruder Tour to Europe. You will have time after your return from the overwhelming sounds of all those fantastic European organs to rest your feet and re-pack your suitcase to join us in Elysburg at one of the finest traditional amusement parks in North America.

Detailed rally information will follow in future issues of *Carousel Organ*.

Ted Guillaum and Tim Wagner will be co-hosting the rally this time. Ted will be the contact person and can be reached at organgrinderted@bellsouth.net or (615) 226-5098. Please direct all inquiries to Ted. Come and see for yourself why the members are raving about rallying at Knoebels!