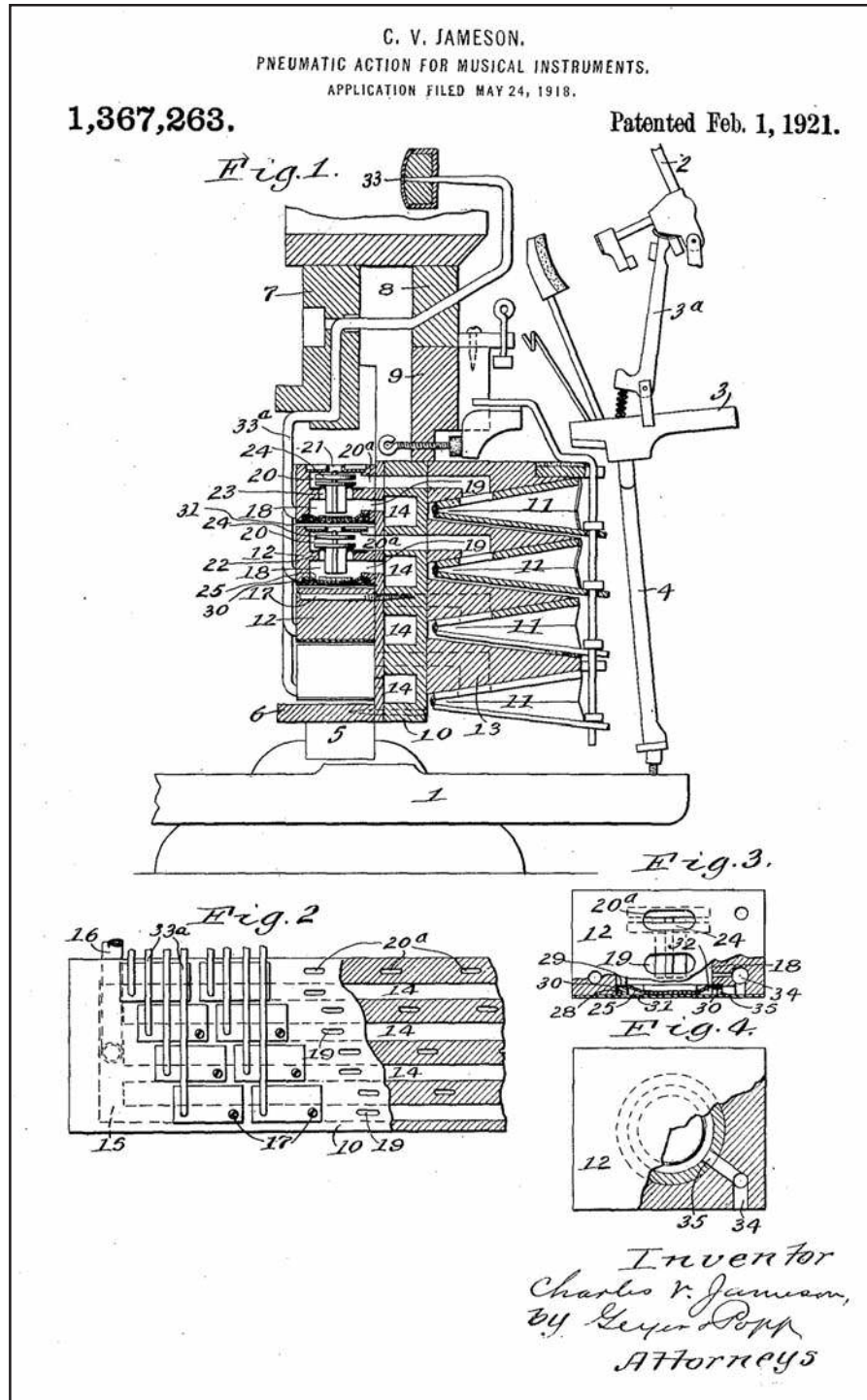


# The Jameson Chest

Matthew Caulfield

Notations in the famous but hard-to-view Wurlitzer Shipping Dock records mention here and there a “Jameson Chest” or an organ being retrofitted with a “Jamison Chest” or a cryptic “James” note. It seems clear that these misspelled notations had to do with a design change that Wurlitzer made at some early point in its band organ manufacture.

Early band organs had a vacuum chest with internal valves. If anything went wrong with a valve (a hole in the pouch, a clogged bleed, or a poppet that needed replacement) the whole vacuum chest needed to be removed from the organ and either the metal cap for the bad valve had to be removed or the underside of the vacuum chest in the area of the bad valve had to be peeled back to access the pouch. Either way it was a fairly large disassembly, requiring all the tubes to the tracker bar being removed.



The Jameson Chest patent photos (granted February 1, 1921). Figure 2 shows the unit blocks ganged up in four rows on a pneumatic chest. Wurlitzer customarily used three rows. Figures 3-4 show the design of the unit block, which was the design used by Wurlitzer until it switched to using the 4-in-1 pot metal valve, invented by Stephen Battner in 1921 (U.S. Patent #1578182, assigned to the Rudolph Wurlitzer Company).

The Jameson/Jamison/Jameson Chest was the design improvement that introduced the unit block concept to Wurlitzer band organs. To fix a bad valve in an organ with a unit-block-equipped vacuum chest, all one need do is to unscrew the bad valve block, which is held onto the face of the vacuum chest by two #6 wood screws that are two inches long, disconnect its tube to the tracker bar, and put a new block in its place.

But who was Jameson and when was the block introduced? Patent no. 1367263 answers these questions. The inventor of the unit block was Charles V. Jameson, of Chicago, who also patented other player piano parts, automotive devices, and a scalp treatment apparatus. His application for the unit block patent was filed May 24, 1918, and the patent was granted Feb. 1, 1921. Apparently Wurlitzer liked the design and adopted it, supposedly under license.

Matthew Caulfield is a Wurlitzer band organ historian and the maintainer of the Seabreeze Verbeeck/Wurlitzer 165 band organ. He wishes to thank Doug Herschberger and Tim Trager for the Jameson patent, and Dana Johnson for the Battner patent.