

The McClaran/Santa Cruz Wurlitzer 165

Matthew Caulfield

It is always a sad occasion when one more band organ disappears from its natural place in an amusement park, either from fire or neglect or — most often — by sale into a private collection. So it was very welcome news that Hayes McClaran, longtime Fresno, California, resident, lately in Batesville, Indiana had sold his Wurlitzer 165 band organ to Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, which is celebrating its centennial this year.

Although Hayes had long been wanting to see the organ return “home” to California, it was through the efforts of Tim Trager, band organ broker, that the successful connection was made between Hayes and park owner, Charles Canfield, who worked out the details of the sale.



Figure 1. Wurlitzer 165 band organ with its California scenes, now placed in its protective band shell.



Figure 2. The carousel as seen from the edge of the revolving carousel.

That band organ is serial no. 3124, shipped on December 28, 1918, to San Francisco, where it played until 1972 at Whitney’s “Playland-at-the-Beach.” After Playland closed, the organ went with the Whitney family, then to Mike Roberts, of Lafayette, California, who sold it to Hathaway & Bowers, whence it was sold to Hayes

McClaran. The original façade painting had been stripped away long before Hayes acquired the organ. So Hayes had the façade repainted in Wurlitzer style, with scenes illustrating California history (Figure 1 & 2). The left scene has no people in it; they had all left town to join the gold rush. The middle scenes are mining camp scenes. The right scene is an Indian on a hill pondering what the miners had done to his land. The scene at the top of the organ shows the old Cliff House, which burned down in 1907.

After its sale to Santa Cruz, the organ was given a thorough “going-over” by Don Stinson, owner of the Stinson Band Organ Company, Bellefontaine, Ohio, who installed a MIDI playing system to complement the organ’s dual-

tracker roll system. Don then traveled to Santa Cruz to tweak the tuning of the organ after it had been moved into place on the Santa Cruz Loeff carousel.

This puts a Wurlitzer 165 band organ back in California, which boasted several in the days of Ross R. Davis, but for the past few months has had not a single one, with the sale last year of John Malone's 165 to the Arnold Chase collection in Connecticut. Not only that, but it puts a Wurlitzer 165 back on an operating carousel, where band organs really do belong. Coincidentally, the Santa Cruz organ first played in its new location on the very day, March 31, 2007, when thirteen years ago, in 1994, the Seabreeze Park Wurlitzer 165 (serial no. 3349, from April 11, 1921) was destroyed by fire. This left, until now, the Glen Echo 165 (serial no. 3779, from May 29, 1925) as the only one on a carousel.

The Santa Cruz Sentinel's April 2, 2007, report on the acquisition and installation of the Wurlitzer is noted in **Figure 3** (right).

Boardwalk Acquires Rare Antique Band Organ

SANTA CRUZ — Behind the scenes at the Beach Boardwalk, sound engineer Donaven Staab is getting the amusement park's newest attraction ready for a closeup. It's a 1918 Wurlitzer "165" band organ, which entertained people at San Francisco's Playland at the Beach until 1972. Fewer than a dozen are known to exist today.

During a tuning session Friday afternoon, the organ loudly played a rollicking melody, a perfect accompaniment for a ride on the landmark Loeff Carousel.

"It was designed for a dance hall with 2,000 people," Staab said. "I can't wait for everybody to hear it"

The \$250,000 antique has been outfitted with MIDI [Musical Instrument Digital Interface], which performs hundreds of songs, from the William Tell Overture to "Under the Boardwalk"

The organ was discovered just in time for this year's centennial of the amusement park, which is run by the Santa Cruz Seaside Co.

Staab, 43, who has worked at the Boardwalk for 16 years, got a tip from a friend, Dan Horenberger of *Carousel News and Trader*, that the Wurlitzer was available. The 165 model, produced in upstate New York, is larger than the Boardwalk's Wurlitzer 146.

Staab flew to Indiana with Seaside Co. president Charles Canfield to meet broker Tim Trager, an organ enthusiast. They met restorer Hayes McClaran, who lives in Batesville, outside Indianapolis, and owns a collection of mechanical music machines in a room the size of a basketball court.

"We listened to the organ and fell in love," Staab said.

Staab was impressed by the organ's intricate mechanics, a system of motors, pulleys, flywheels and bellows. The exterior is beautifully painted, with a rendering of the Cliff House above the beach in San Francisco, and scenes of 1850s goldmining in California.

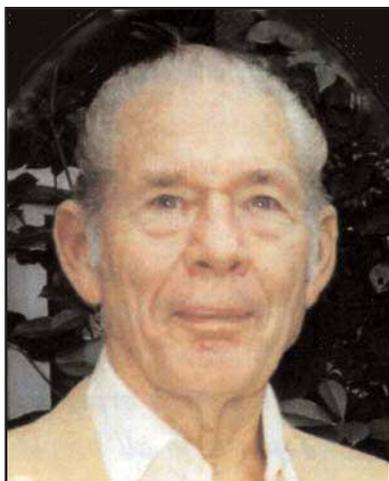
McClaran, who is in his 70s, had considered selling before but never found the right owner. He felt that sending the 2,000-pound Wurlitzer back to California made sense.

After all, the Boardwalk paid \$50,000 to acquire "Laughing Sal," another Playland icon, in 2004. She's now chuckling near Neptune's Kingdom.

Canfield, whose family has been in charge of the Boardwalk since 1952, is pleased to preserve another piece of amusement park history.

By JONDI GUMZ - *Sentinel* staff writer - April 2, 2007

Dwayne Steck



Dwayne R. Steck, 76, passed away on Tuesday, February 20, 2007 of a heart attack while assembling the Lady Bugs ride for the San Angelo Stock Show and Rodeo. Dwayne grew up helping his parents travel between their work at carnivals and state fairs. He began working with the State Fair of Texas in the late 1950s. In 1969 he moved to Dallas where he revamped an indoor children's amusement center, Penny Whistle Park, into a thriving business for birthday parties. During it's prime, Penny Whistle Park hosted 60 to 70 birthday parties a day. It had a full size carousel, a Lady Bug ride, steam train and other amusements.

In December, 2006, he was inducted into the Hall of Honor for the Showmen's League of America. For those COAA members in the Oklahoma-Texas area Dwayne was also well known for his collection of organs. He personally helped the editor with many photographs for his book on American band organs.

Dwayne is survived by his wife, Beverly as well as a daughter and two grandchildren.

Information obtained for this notice came from Joe Simmacher of *The Dallas Morning News*, February 20, 2007.