

## *A Pioneer Hooghuis and A "Major League" Mortier*

**Fred Dahlinger, Jr.**

Copyright 2001  
Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

This is the story of several interesting band organs. It is also an example of what can transpire when a historian patiently pursues information for fifteen years and seeks answers for questions. The researcher goes about the task of gathering facts, observations and evidence that will ultimately be brought together to create a better understanding of history. Sometimes the search takes paths and turns that were not anticipated. At other times, a multitude of "facts" are available that remain disconnected until such time as a crucial bit of information serves to connect seemingly disparate parts into a unified whole. Theories that were once thought to be possible are discarded when they no longer fit new discoveries. All of the above happened with this story. The final chapter has not yet been written, so this account is something of a work in progress and additions are welcome.

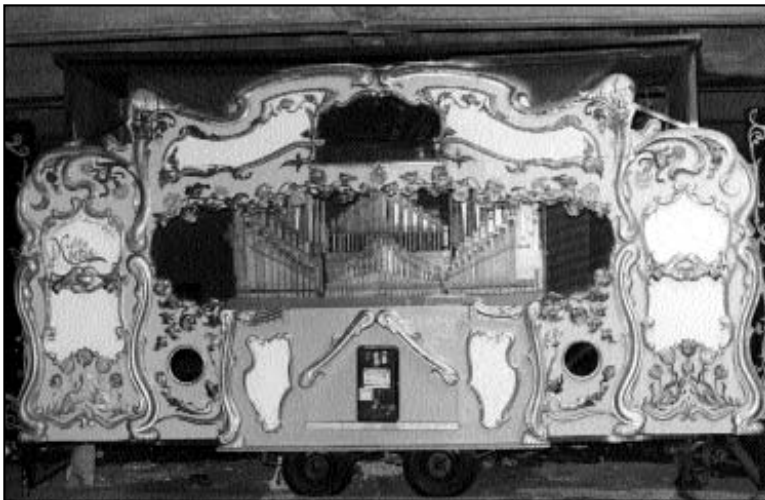


Figure 1. The heritage of a Hooghuis organ was hardly discernable when visitors gazed upon this presentation at Underground Atlanta in the 1970s. (All photos from the author's collection unless stated)

Our search for band organ history commenced with a visit to the late Dan Slack's collection in the early 1980s and the examination of photographs that he had collected. Among them was a print showing an organ identified as a 101-key Mortier. It was once featured in the Underground Atlanta attraction in the Georgia city of the same name (**Figure 1**). It looked very unusual for a Mortier, with art nouveau styled carved ornamentation in lieu of the usual "classic" or art deco styled details that one typically associates with that marque. There were also gaps on the front that were surely once filled by other decorative elements. Perhaps the most drastic alteration was the presence of a coin box on the facade, to collect coins for playing the organ from site visitors.

Another trip to Dan's Fremont, Ohio playground led to the discovery of a second photograph showing a gentleman identi-

fied as Lee Edwards standing in front of the organ. It revealed a much more complete arrangement of the facade (**Figure 2**). This was the first time that the entire front was seen, yet there were still unanswered questions. Was the covered opening in the upper part of the facade where the belly pipes had once been located? What had happened to those cello pipes that were in the side chests? Knowing that any number of organs have been altered for a variety of reasons, it appeared that there was much more to learn about this organ.



Figure 2. Some idea as to the imposing facade that once graced the organ was evident in this photograph, showing Lee Edwards displaying one of the 101-key books for the Mortier.

Dan traveled across the country, both for business reasons and to seek out new instruments. One trip, in search of a Gavioli, took him to the Kensett, Iowa home of Tom Fretty, the well-known dealer and collector. Knowing of my interest in organ history, Dan usually photographed anything that looked interesting or unusual. In addition to the Gavioli, he photographed a Mortier that Tom had for sale (**Figure 3**). Though by this time the facade had suffered further alteration and the organ was playing 165 Wurlitzer rolls, it was still recognizable as the Atlanta organ. An inquiry to Tom yielded only a serial number, 971, that mandated further investigation. The Mortier chassis was later dated by knowledgeable authorities as before 1925. The date originated from the organ's lack of jazz-flutes,



Figure 3. The present configuration of the organ was attained in the late 1970s, and is shown as such in this early-1980s view taken at Tom Fretty's place.

which I was told were introduced in the mid-1920s. The original ownership and subsequent history of Mortier 971 was unknown to even the specialists that document Mortier organs.

activity caused it to erupt in (into? music. The postcard said that the organ came from the Musical Museum & Arcade at Underground Atlanta So there it was, the Mortier with the unusual facade, the only band organ, to the writer's knowledge, to ever be a fixture and part of a national sports franchise. Why, it was a "major league organ." It was a story that definitely needed to be told, some day.

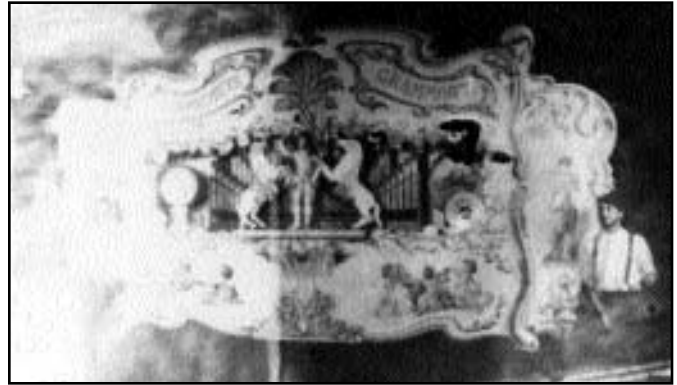


Figure 5. Recognition of the original organ as a Hooghuys was facilitated by the discovery of this diminutive copy print, which could have been taken in either Europe or the U.S.

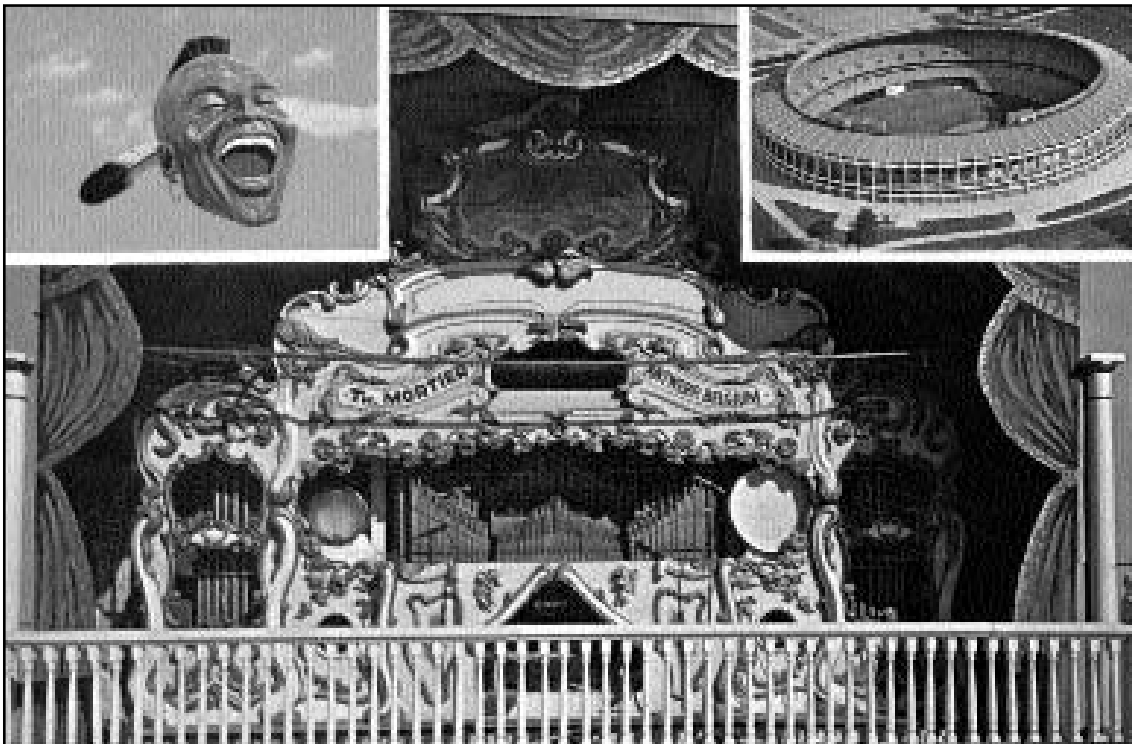


Figure 4. It would have been a rare ballpark spectator that knew what type of boom box was located behind the right field fence. What did Hank Aaron think of the musical serenades?

The final puzzle piece gained from the Slack collection was in the form of a postcard (Figure 4). It showed the organ positioned behind the right outfield fence of the Atlanta Braves baseball stadium, "backing up Hank Aaron" as the card caption put it. I imagined that a home run or other significant game

The piece of the puzzle that served as the key to unlock the mystery turned up in the form of a small copy print, partially overexposed, yet showing the organ in such a way that the features were generally discernable and unmistakable (Figure 5). Painted upon the facade was "L. Hooghuys, Grammont." It revealed the probable origin of the front, but the pipework that could be seen was certainly unlike that in the Mortier organ behind the surviving facade. It looked like an entirely different organ, perhaps an original Hooghuys instrument. They were not known to have been imported to the United States until after the hobby interest in organs commenced in the 1960s. If Mortier had not simply placed one of his own organs behind the facade, perhaps he extensively rebuilt the Hooghuys, substantially altering it from a fairground instrument to one suited for dance hall usage.

In 1986 the writer had the pleasure to journey to Europe and meet some of the great personalities of the European band organ world. It is impossible to replicate that trip today because most of those visited are now deceased, including Heinrich Voigt; Carl Frei, Jr.; Gijs Perlee; and others. For this story, the important man was Romain Charles Hooghuyts (1901-1989). Here was the chance to ask the grandson of the maker about the organ. He pronounced his name “oo-guys,” or at least that is what I heard. He could speak English well, but my explanation for why I wanted to record his pronunciation of his family name for history escaped him. In the matter of the name he was self-effacing; but when it came to the organs bearing the family name, there he was quite proud.



Figure 6. R. Charles struck a rather stiff pose in front of a great sounding organ, his “Crescendo,” in 1986. Photo: Neil Smith

Through the courtesies of Gus Mathot and his delightful wife, Lillian, R. Charles met us at the Het Boudewijnpark indoor complex in Brugges, Belgium where he had three Hooghuyts organs for us to see and hear. The fact that there was a youthful fashion show scheduled at almost the same time as our visit did not matter to him at all. He had friends that had come all the way from America to see his family's heritage. A delightful time was spent watching him play the organs, a beret on his head, the cigar that was clenched in his teeth occasionally bobbing up and down in time with the music. He focused intently and very seriously on the key frame, literally by force of personality defying that there be anything less than perfect operation.

That is the way it was; perfect. First was the 80-key fair organ (Figure 6), LH552 “Crescendo,” followed by the LH 518 72-key “Senior.”<sup>1</sup> Each was played several times to demonstrate the capability of the instrument or a special arrangement. The arrival of the guests for the fashion show, the placement of temporary walls on the stage in front of the LH605, the 97/100-key “Condor” and other actions all meant that the recital would come to an end after a just few tunes on that great dance organ.



Figure 7. Cus Mathot is listening closely to a fine point being made by R. Charles Hooghuyts. Dan Slack, on the left, and the author, on the right, awaited their turn to ask about organ matters. Photo: Neil Smith

The playing yielded to the sharing of a few glasses of good Belgian beer and the exchanging of stories and perspectives on life (Figure 7). R. Charles wanted to talk American politics, but obviously we wanted to talk organs. Dan learned much about the history of his 58-key Hooghuyts organ, CH 670, and asked about others that he desired.<sup>2</sup> When my turn came, I showed R. Charles the diminutive photograph of the Hooghuyts organ. Yes, he recognized it from decades before! Unfortunately, all that he could recall was that it was exported to the United States, between the two world wars he thought, to the area of Boston, Massachusetts. That was all he could remember, but he told me to write to him for more information. The return to America and other activities placed the inquiry on the back burner and the exchange never took place.

Our European visit continued with an afternoon audience with Gus, who revealed to us a large archive of Hooghuyts factory photographs. There, resplendent in factory freshness and completeness, was an organ that, for all practical purposes, was a twin to the “American” Hooghuyts (Figure 8). The only major difference between the two organs, beyond paint schemes and some facade details, was in the figures on the shelf. The factory view organ had a central female equestrienne presenting the two circus liberty horses or ponies, one standing up on either side of her. The “American” Hooghuyts had a male equestrian in her stead. Instrument-wise, the visible pipework brought to mind another Hooghuyts organ that we had seen recently, the “Crescendo.” Gus happened to have an extra print of the factory view that he kindly shared with me.<sup>3</sup>

It was sad day when we learned in 1989 that R. Charles Hooghuyts had died as the result of injuries he received in an automobile mishap. He was on a bicycle when we approached the organ hall in 1986; our van had passed him as we motored to the place where we were to meet. He was quite amazing, even at age 85. I composed a letter of condolence to his youngest son, Marc Hooghuyts, which resulted in the initiation of a correspondence of mutual benefit concerning Hooghuyts organs. From Marc I learned that he had succeeded in buying

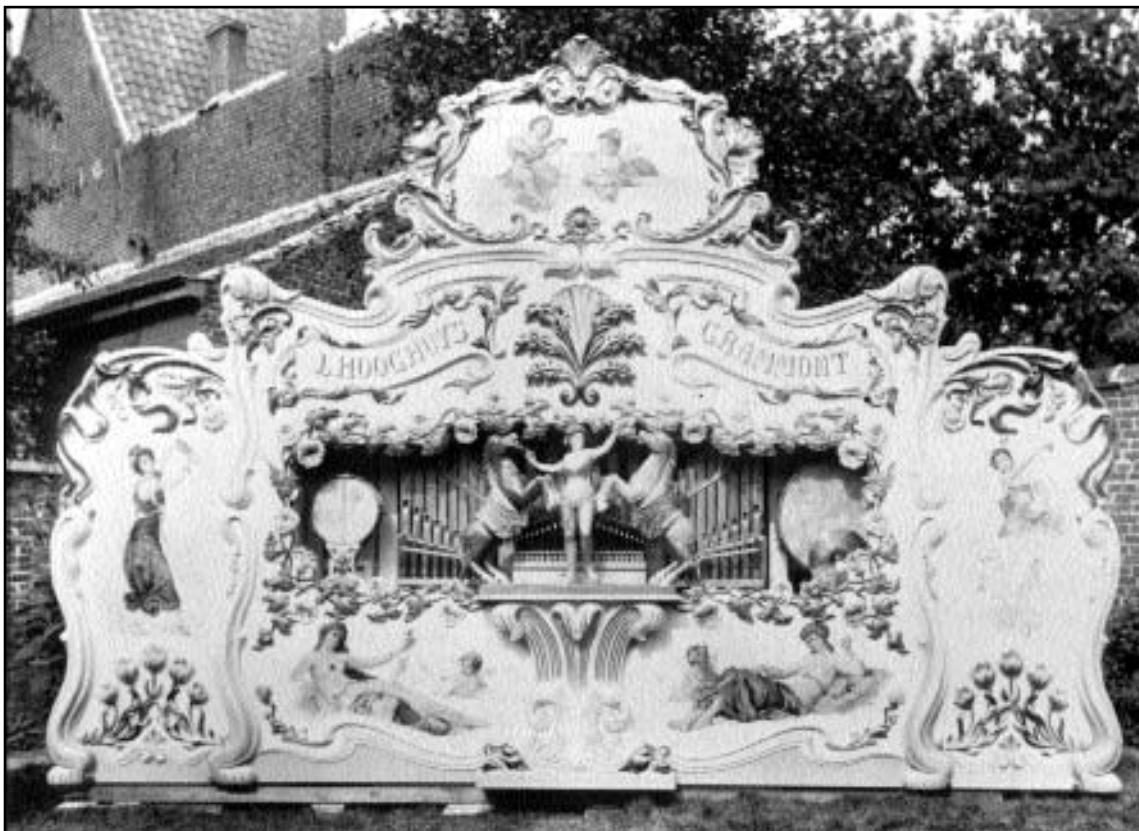


Figure 8. A twin to the “American” Hooghuy's was this fine machine, shown after completion at the Louis Hooghuy's shop circa 1908. Photo: Gus Mathot

the “Crescendo,” which he re-christened “Albatros.” In one of the exchanges I naturally asked about the “American” Hooghuy's. Marc replied with a photocopy of the original scale stick for the organ. It revealed the 73-key layout of the organ that had been assigned serial number LH555. It was similar to the original organ that had become the “Crescendo” that R. Charles had played for us in 1986. It also had an inscription that read “Nr 555 is de 73 toets van Kerschietter in Amerika USA.” Unfortunately, Marc knew nothing further of the name Kerschietter. Too bad that we had not known of the name earlier and asked R. Charles about it.

Surprisingly, about the same time these discoveries were taking place the three original facade figures from the “American” Hooghuy's organ “surfaced.” (Figure 9). They were once owned by Walt Bellm, who reportedly sold them at auction in September 1986. Vince Marcone, a Daytona Beach, Florida collector, paid between \$4500 and \$5250 for them, winning out over another bidder, possibly



Figure 9. Three finely carved figures originally adorned the facade of the “American” Hooghuy's. One suspects that they were inspired by a favorite act at the circus.

from Rochester, New York. He later offered them at private sale for \$5600 and they were sold, perhaps this time to the Rochester area. They were offered for sale again in December 1989, for \$15,000, by carousel figure dealers Ken and Barb Weaver of Spring City, Pennsylvania. The assembly was described as “Circus Carving,” and in “old paint,” which appears to have been accurate in a sense. A consignment sale of which they were part took place on October 20, 1990, at the New England Carousel Museum. On February 3, 1993 they sold again at auction in Tampa, Florida, for about \$7425, including the 10% buyers premium. They have remained in the same private hands since that transaction. Though uncertain of the vintage, the paint that they bear is old, perhaps original. They may be all that survives from this pioneer “American” Hooghuy's.<sup>4</sup>

Tom Fretty subsequently sold the 101-key Mortier and it disappeared from notice until Bill Nunn of Hamel, Minnesota brought it to a rally. I had the pleasure to meet Bill in 1999 and gave him some

insight on the heritage of his organ facade, at least as far as I understood it at the time. Interested to learn more, I subsequently shared with him some of the documents that I had gathered. It spurred him to learn more. When I saw Bill again on August 26, 2000, not only did he show me the Hooghuys facade and the Mortier that backed it (**Figure 10**), he also revealed that he had bought an original Hooghuys organ. He told me that he also thought that he knew the location of the original organ from behind his Hooghuys facade. Finally, I thought, all of the missing pieces were, literally, falling into place. The publication of a history of the Hooghuys family and commentary on some of their band organs in *Carousel Organ* issue number 6 suggested that the time had arrived to tell the story of these interesting Hooghuys organs. What follows is the history of these instruments, as best as we have been able to discover and arrange it. Learning about the history of the organs continued literally until the day came to submit this paper for publication.



Figure 10. This is the back of Mortier 971, showing the Wurlitzer roll frame and valve stack. The open arrangement makes explaining the operation of the organ to a novice quite easy.

Louis Francois Hooghuys (1856-1924) constructed the “American” Hooghuys organ in his Grammont, Belgium factory. His story, and that of his other organ building relations, has been told previously by others. We need note here only that he commenced work in the field of mechanical organs in 1880 and continued at it without interruption through 1914, when World War I started. There was a hiatus until sometime about 1918 when work was resumed. After his death, two incomplete organs were acquired and finished by his son Charles Francois Hooghuys (1878-1951). The output of the firm included hand organs, military style trumpet organs, fair organs and dance organs. His organs were very highly regarded, with western Belgium particularly fond of the instruments.<sup>5</sup>

Two listings of Louis Hooghuys work numbers exist, a combined one for organ repair and new organ work and another for cylinder arranging commissions.<sup>6</sup> In the period covered by the organ entries, January 18, 1895 to October 24, 1907, there are 254 organ listings. Only 52 entries, twenty percent, in a period spanning nearly twelve years, were for new and rebuild work on Hooghuys-built organs. All other entries documented

work on other makes of organs. Though he was a very competent builder in his own right, exposure to these many different organs undoubtedly enhanced his knowledge of other makers methods, voicing styles and technical details. They may have influenced the design of organs of his own construction.

In the ledger entries there are just 23 new Hooghuys organs noted between 1895 and 1907, an average of about two per year. The limited output, as compared to other factories, partially explains why they were never exported to overseas buyers. Continental showmen, eager to own a prized Hooghuys organ, could readily consume all of the output from the shop. The earliest Hooghuys book organ listed, in June 1900, was a rebuild of a cylinder organ. The first entirely new book organ, having 53-keys, was constructed in 1901. With one exception in 1902, beginning that year all subsequent new organs were book-operated. The book organs listed had from 53 to 92 keys. We know that Hooghuys book organs with as many as 97 or 98 keys were manufactured later. Unfortunately, it is not known how early

Hooghuys implemented the concept of automatic registers to control various ranks of pipes, or how early the famous fast keyframe action was developed. Its invention may have been a means to both circumvent the patent coverage granted to other manufacturers and to enable musical arrangements to be played on Hooghuys organs that were not possible on other organs.

Louis Hooghuys also did a thriving business in the repair, rebuilding and alteration of organs made by other manufacturers, including the marking of cylinders. The cylinder organs continued to be serviced for years after their format fell from favor. In some cases they were converted to book operation. The Hooghuys cylinder organs listed in the ledger entries ranged from 57 to 115 keys in size. Many were likely of the military band disposition with brass pipe resonators, as opposed to the orchestral type fair organs and dance organs with wooden pipework that gained popularity after the turn of the century.

Rebuilds were given their own factory number sequence, from 294 to 528. One must clearly differentiate new organ serial numbers from factory ledger repair numbers to avoid confusing the two series. It's been done in this paper by appending the “LH” prefix on serial numbers.

*The limited output, as compared to other factories, partially explains why they were never exported to overseas buyers.*

From the factory ledger number system, it can be determined that the new organs made between 1895 and 1907 were probably the 51st to 74th constructed by the firm. Number 66 was inexplicably skipped. The numbers 51 to 74 are in chronological sequence and stand out from the repair work entries. Hooghuys did not apply serial numbers for new organs consecutively. The 51st new organ listed was assigned serial number LH275 while the 74th was given LH547.

In some cases the jump in serial numbers was as little as two, such as from LH275 to LH277. At other times the gap was one hundred and fifty-four numbers, as from LH346 to LH500. Such non-sequential numbering makes dating other segments of the Hooghuys output a somewhat uncertain prospect. Knowing the above data, the Crescendo/Albatros, serial number LH552, must have been made in late 1907 or the first half of 1908. With a gap of only five numbers to the last newly built organ in the ledger, it was likely one of, if not the very next new instrument manufactured. LH555, just three higher, followed almost immediately, if not simultaneously.



Figure 11. A third 72-key organ with a facade like that on LH555 was its predecessor, H552. This is how the “Crescendo” looked in its original arrangement.

Photo: Marc Hooghuys and Bjorn Isebaert

Connecting LH552 and LH555 together were their facades.<sup>7</sup> Both had essentially the same front design, including three central carved figures on the shelf. They were in the form of a male equestrian flanked by standing horses. Even the paintings that adorned their flat spaces were essentially identical (Figure 11). They also shared a particular carving detail, a closed loop swirl near the top edge of the wings, which differentiates them from the other two later examples of the same design, the factory photo organ and the facade on Mortier 971. Their front design was an extension and next generation of the configuration that had decorated at least two previous Hooghuys organs, LH530 and LH547. The former is a 57-key machine presently owned by Boz Oram in England while the latter is a 92-key organ in France. Both were fabricated immediately prior to the first 72/73 key organs (Figure 12).

In his best years, Louis Hooghuys appears to have made two organs in the early part of the year and two in the latter part. These two, LH552 and LH555, would have been the first of the 72/73-key scale fair organs fabricated by the firm, likely in early 1908. R. Charles Hooghuys told the writer that LH552 was built in 1910, a reasonably close approximation to the actual date. He also stated that it was built by his father, Charles Francois Hooghuys (1878-1951), which is not totally accurate in one sense. His father may have actually built it, but the work would have been conducted in his grandfather's workshop and bore his name. Another surviving Hooghuys organ, “De Witte

Merel,” LH585 has been identified as a 1912 machine, which appears to be about right. LH 595 and LH605 have both been dated as 1910 by other writers, but we suspect they are likely closer to 1913. There is a workman's personal note about World War I inscribed inside LH620 that includes the date August 18, 1914, fixing a point in time for its manufacture. LH625 and what became LH670 were started before the First World War but were not completed until after the conflict, providing a line of demarcation between 1914 and when production recommenced afterwards. The serial numbers of surviving Hooghuys organs suggest that the firm later staggered serial numbers by fives, beginning at 580 or 585, jumping from 585 to 590, and so on, to the final number of 670. It is so highly unusual that only Hooghuys organs ending with a “5” exist after serial number 585 that this is the only conclusion that can be reached.

The scale of the “American” Hooghuys organ, according to the copy of the original scale stick supplied by Marc Hooghuys, included: eight bass notes (F, G, A, A#, B, C, D and E, 58-65); eleven accompaniment notes (G, A, A#, B, C, C#, D, D#, E, F, F#, 47-57); nineteen baritone notes (C to F#, chromatic, 28-46); and twenty-two melody notes (G to D chromatic, E, F, 5-26). There were registers for what is thought to be a triangle or perhaps loudness (Timbre, 27), Violin (72), oboe (Hautbois, 71), Flageolet (70), large harmonic flute (Grosse flute hamonique, 69), Saxophones (68), baritone (Baryton, 67), and trombones (Bombardon, 4). Other keys were for bass drum (Grosse caisse, 66), two for the snare drum (Tambour, 1 and 3), a cancel key (Cliche, 73) and a special action to lower all keyframe keys, another unique Hooghuys feature (ferme, 2).

Despite fifteen years of researching in both public and private collections, and having asked literally dozens of knowledgeable people, the writer has yet to discover any “on site” photographs or documentation that confirm a pre-World War II Boston-area ownership of the “American” Hooghuys. Inquiries about Boston organs, including those gathered by the pioneering Revere Beach organ aficionado Louis Bopp, proved fruitless. At best we know only what R. Charles stated, that it came to the States between the two world conflicts and to the Boston area. Significantly, it would have been the only Hooghuys band organ ever exported to the United States for use by an outdoor



Figure 12. The arrangement of the 72/73-key Hooghuys facades was derived from previous organs made by the firm. Here is LH547, a slightly larger 92-key organ

Photo: Marc Hooghuys and Bjorn Isebaert

showman. The relatively wide and tall facade may have proved unsuited for placement within the center circle of certain carousel platforms. Perhaps parts of the facade were deleted so that it could be placed within a ride, to keep it away from the hands and fin-

gers of the inquisitive. This could explain the vintage photograph of it sans top pieces. But, there is just no available, confirming evidence of an “American” Hooghuy before, or after, the war available at this time.

The identity of the showman that commissioned the organ is unknown. It is possible that Kerschietter was the name of the person for whom it was constructed, but confirmation is lacking. He could also be the last owner before the organ went to America. Most Hooghuy owners developed long-term bonds with their organs, with ownership marked by decades and not simply years. This may have resulted from the custom-made, personal approach that Louis Hooghuy applied to show organ manufacture. His methods were akin to other commercial enterprises where the product was custom tailored to the precise wants and desires of the buyer, and satisfied under the direct supervision of the builder.

A recent e-mail to a friend Dutch elicited a response that we initially thought could explain some of the mystery surrounding the American Hooghuy, but, alas, it does not make the connection completely. The late Leonard Grymonprez penned a two-part article about his organ-owning great-grandfather. Henri De Keerschietter (?-1919, yes, a slightly different spelling) entered the organ business in the early 1900s, after he moved from West Flanders to Ghent with his twelve year-old daughter, Celina. He owned and operated a small bar in the city and kept cattle on the side. Prospering, he relocated to larger quarters and rented out rooms. Someone gave him an organ at this time, in poor condition. An alcoholic organ repairman named “Jantje Cornand” arrived looking for a room and stayed, repairing what has been identified as a very early Marenghi (or perhaps a Gavioli) organ for De Keerschietter. Shortly thereafter he had the opportunity to acquire three more organs at a very good price, eventually selling just one of them for more than he had paid for the three. This laid the foundation for his organ business, which totaled 32 machines at the time of his passing. Meanwhile, his daughter Celina married Henri Grymonprez (?-1911). They had a son, Oscar (1904- ), who played in his grandfather's organ warehouse as a child and is alive as this is written. He later had a son, Leonard (1932-1988). Together they did a good export business, supplying many organs and orchestrions to American collectors in the 1960s and 1970s.

In 1914 Celina Grymonprez married one Gustaaf van Halter, who had returned to Europe from Chicago. They inherited and carried on De Keerschietter's organ business, also inheriting a large sum of money. Oscar and his stepfather did not get along and Oscar left the family trade and went to work for Theofiel Mortier. Then for a short period of time he worked for Pierre Verbeeck, who went bankrupt, which caused Oscar to go into business for himself. He also worked in the family busi-

ness. By 1960 he and his son Leonard sold over 160 organs, the makes enumerated by Leonard in his story including Hooghuy. All of this raises an interesting possibility. Could Oscar Grymonprez have possibly arranged for the sale and shipment of one of his grandfather's Hooghuy organs to an American buyer? At this time, we cannot confirm that De Keerschietter was the owner of the “American Hooghuy.” Though the Grymonprez family later sold many organs to American collectors, nothing is known of their pre-World War II export business. The connection remains possible, but the necessary corroborating facts and photographs have yet to be discovered. The possibility that the Grymonprez family may have been involved with the organ was given another step backwards when Oscar recently advised that neither his grandfather nor his father ever owned a Hooghuy.<sup>8</sup> Hopefully the Kerschietter name and its relationship to the “American” Hooghuy will be resolved some day.

There is another Hooghuy organ, or more correctly, a Hooghuy facade, that can first be documented in American collector ownership in the late 1960s. It is the facade of the “major league” Mortier that initially sparked this inquiry. The facade is a “quadruplet” to the LH552 “Crescendo/Albatros,” the LH555 “American” Hooghuy and the factory photo organ with the equestrienne figure. Differences in the carvings on the facades of the four organs indicate that there were at least four examples of this 72/73-key organ design, testimony to its popularity among showmen.

Dorothy Hagwood, widow of the late Leslie E. Hagwood (1937-1996), an attorney of Meridian, Mississippi, advised the writer that Hagwood personally imported the organ from Belgium. An unidentified contemporary clipping supplied by Mrs. Hagwood stated that he found it in a leaky warehouse in Antwerp (Anvers), Belgium and transported it to America. He named it “Queen Maudine” in honor of his first wife. To gain adequate knowledge of how to rebuild his mechanical musical instruments, Hagwood essentially apprenticed himself to Atlanta collector and rebuilder Hugh Starr for about a year at no salary. To support himself, Hagwood worked as a manager and projectionist at various area theaters, including the imposing Atlanta Fox, calling upon the experiences that he had as a youth working in a local Meridian theater.

At the time of Hagwood's ownership the organ was clearly described as a 101-key Mortier. The observation is significant. Unless Hagwood himself made a change, which is doubtful, it is clear that someone in Europe had taken a Hooghuy facade and consolidated it with a 101-key Mortier dance organ. Openings were cut into the side wings of the Hooghuy facade, but the work was done in a stylish manner by a skilled craftsman. Delicate vine and flower carvings were made and applied to surround the new openings, matching the original decorative

*Most Hooghuy owners developed long-term bonds with their organs, with ownership marked by decades and not simply years. This may have resulted from the custom-made, personal approach that Louis Hooghuy applied to show organ manufacture.*

treatment of the facade. When the medical bills for his first wife's illness proved an unbearable burden, Hagwood was forced to sell the organ. He sold it to Lee Edwards, owner of the Musical Museum at Underground Atlanta. Their facility presented a variety of mechanical music forms to visitors to the trendy new attraction. Some of the displayed items were the property of Hugh Starr.

Underground Atlanta was and still is located in the old business district of Atlanta, nearby to the site of the old Union Station (1871-1930). The underground designation came about as the result of a street change in which ten blocks of commercial streets were elevated one floor, leaving the original first floor entrances "underground." Atlanta's Civic Design Commission decided to revitalize the derelict delivery area with a treatment that created something of the flavor of a Victorian era French Quarter or Gas Light Square. It opened on April 8, 1969 and peaked in 1972 with 70 businesses and 3.5 million visitors. Recession and crime caused a rapid decline. A takeover by the Metropolitan Area Rapid Transit Authority could not stem the downfall, with the final enterprise closing in February 1982. A revised, expanded and reportedly more sophisticated Underground Atlanta was opened by the Rouse Company in about 1989, but as of late it has also had its share of challenges.

By the spring of 1971 Edwards submitted an idea to Atlanta Braves management to place the Mortier in Atlanta Stadium, which had opened in 1965. The Braves management was reportedly inspired to embrace the offer by the antics of the Montreal ball club's organist, who excited spectators with his wild acts. Braves public relations man Bob Hope thought that they could do even better with the big organ. They planned a new, musical atmosphere for Braves stadium. There was a vision of automatic figures, twirling pom-poms and flashing strobe lights to add to the spectacle. It was thought that the organ would emit a "road runner" like "beep-beep" sound when the Braves ace base runner, Ralph Garr, would steal a base. They even spoke of a "name the organ" contest to enthruse fans over the new addition, with the repertoire being augmented to include *Home of the Brave*, *The Hammer* and *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, with *Happy days are Here Again* sounded whenever someone hit a home run. Edwards, characterized as a long term Braves fan, expressed concern about "those long Aaron blasts" and expected that a screen would have to be erected to protect the organ.<sup>9</sup> The organ was mounted on a trailer and promoted as the "Mighty Mortier," according to a postcard issued in 1973. Edwards' father played the organ when it was displayed at the ball-



Figure 13. The Mortier and its Hooghuys facade travel in style in this first class trailer. A Wurlitzer 125 or other show artifacts usually accompany the organ on its trips.

"Hammer-in" Hank Aaron's opinion of the Belgian music that came forth, but reportedly batters tried to aim fly balls at the organ during batting practice.

Exactly how long the organ remained a feature at the ballpark no one seems to recall, but it presumably remained a few seasons before the novelty wore thin. The owners returned the organ to Underground Atlanta, where it was one of the most popular features. They also did spot and extended dates with it, one of the latter being recorded at Atlanta's suburban Springdale Plaza shopping facility. The Mortier was probably the most popular attraction at the Musical Museum until it closed in late 1976. Exactly when and how the organ left Atlanta no one can recall, the closure and dispersal of assets being obscured at this time.

Constant playing of the organ while at Underground Atlanta took its toll on the cardboard books that came with the organ. Replacement books were available from Europe but they were not cheap. At some time during the Edwards ownership the Mortier organ was modified to play Wurlitzer 165 rolls, a concession to finances and the type of day to day operation experienced at Underground Atlanta. Fortunately, the key frame remained with it through subsequent ownership changes, but the books were worn out and disposed of when the organ was still in Atlanta. During this time other components were removed and lost. The top panels were removed from the Hooghuys facade in Atlanta and their whereabouts are now unknown. The facade was further altered through the deletion of carved ornamentation.

By 1981 the Mortier organ with its altered Hooghuys facade was in the possession of Tom Fretty, who retained Floyd Taylor (?-1981) of Kansas City, Kansas to rebuild it. The side wings of the facade and the Mortier side chests were no longer with the organ. Probably they were discarded in Atlanta, as the pipework was no longer needed for the 165-scale roll operation.<sup>10</sup> Tom Fretty still had possession of the organ in 1988. He subsequently sold it to Bob Blase, an eastern collector. Following Blase's passing, the organ was sold to Bill Nunn by one of the owner's relatives in the Minnesota area. Bill acquired the large trailer that once hauled Jim Wells' Wurlitzer 180 band organ and placed the Mortier/Hooghuys in it, and now takes it

to rallies and other events (Figure 13). He has since acquired a complete and original Hooghuys 71-key dance organ, LH620. Interestingly, it took the personal intervention of R. Charles Hooghuys to re-unite that instrument with its original facade, after the chassis was exported to the U. S.

Sometime in the 1970s, Lee Edwards sold a large organ to Charles Walker, Atlanta's resident carousel doyenne and



preservation advocate. Recent communication with Walker indicated that the serial number 525 is on the organ, which is about 92-key size. Because of the identified serial number, it cannot be the “American” Hooghuys, LH555. Its existence confuses the story because it was in the hands of Edwards, who also happened to own a Mortier with a Hooghuys facade with a European provenance. It is believed that Edwards acquired this organ from Ron Stuckey, owner of Stone Mountain Antiques. Walker describes the organ as having been thoroughly wet at one time, with pipes delaminated into many pieces. The main case has side chests and there is evidence to suggest the one time presence of a xylophone and possibly an accordion. Overall the organ is in poor condition and needing a thorough restoration. No books are with the organ and the pump and chests have yet to be opened for internal documentation. Perhaps some of the mystery will be resolved when that information is available.

Marc Hooghuys and Bjorn Isebaert have indicated that the Walker organ is a Hooghuys by their inclusion of it on their listing of extant Hooghuys organs. It is stated that a number 525 Hooghuys organ of 92-keys appeared in the records of R. Charles Hooghuys, adding merit to the listing. Our only difficulty with the identification is that a Hooghuys serial number LH525 should have appeared in the works ledger. One does not, leaving the situation without an explanation. This may be a 92-key Hooghuys organ that was once owned and restored by Oscar Grymonprez.

What started out as a simple inquiry about a single organ branched out into a trans-Atlantic study that discovered four very similar Hooghuys organs of circa 1908 vintage, a fifth organ of possible Hooghuys provenance and a circa 1925 Mortier organ. When we set out on the investigation it was thought that the facade on Mortier 971 would turn out to be that of the “American Hooghuys” LH555 and that the Walker instrument would be the long lost chassis. It does not appear that this is possible. Our hope is that the missing elements of LH555 do survive somewhere and may eventually be brought back together to make a complete example of a very fine Hooghuys organ. The same success in reunification is desired for the owner of LH552, Marc Hooghuys, caretaker of the proud heritage of Hooghuys organs.

The author is grateful to the following people who contributed their knowledge to making this account a better story: Lee Edwards, Tom Fretty, Dorothy Hagwood, Marc Hooghuys, Bjorn Isebaert, Hanneke Kelly, Tom Meijer, Bill Nunn, Richard J. Reynolds III, Dr. Hans van Oost and Charles Walker.

## Notes

1. The writer adopted Marc Hooghuys’ “LH” prefix to designate manufacture of the organ by Louis Hooghuys and not another member of the family.
2. Though Dan’s organ was and has always been called a 57-key Hooghuys in the U. S., indeed, the original scale stick shows 58 keys, one extra key for castanets.
3. This view, and a number of additional Hooghuys factory photos, with subsequent notage, have recently been printed in the Kring van Draaiorgelvrieden’s journal, *Het Pierement*, volumes XLIV-XLV.
4. *Carousel News & Trader*, December 1989, page 34; January 1991, page 27, photo in lower left corner; April 1993, page 56.
5. For further information on the Hooghuys family and their organs, see “Louis Francois Hooghuys” in Stephane Godfroid, *Muziek Instrumentenbouw te Geraardsbergen van de 15 de eeuw tot heden* (Geraardsbergen, 1986), pages 68-109; Bjorn Isebaert and Marc Hooghuys, *Hooghuys--The History of the Family and of the Company*, *Carousel Organ*, No. 6, pages 1, 3-12; D. G. Karlsohn, *Enkele beschouwingen over het vroegere orgelbedrijf Hooghuys*, *Het Pierement*, VI, 1 (April 1959), pages 3-5; Ted Bowman, *Repairing a Flemish Dance Organ*, *Music Box*, V, 5, (Summer 1972), pages 233-239; *Hooghuys, Geslacht van orgelmakers in het Brugse*, *Het Pierement*, XXII, 3 (Fall 1975), pages 43-45; *Hooghuys*, *Het Pierement*, XXIII, 1 (Spring 1976), page 2; *Louis Hooghuys* *Music Box*, VIII, 1 (Spring 1977), pages 12-13; and A. M. Broeke, *57-toets Hooghuys Orgels*, *Het Pierement*, XXVII, 1 (Januari 1980), pages 4-8.
6. Both listings are transcribed and printed in Godfroid. The ledger(s) are now thought to be in the possession of one of R. Charles Hooghuys’ sons.
7. The original facade for LH552 survives in the hands of showman Jean-Baptiste Rorive, who at one time used it with a carousel.
8. See Oscar Grymonprez, *De geschiedenis van mijn overgrootvader Henri De Heerschieter . . .* (sic) *Het Pierement*, VII, 2 (July 1960) pages 11-15 and VII, 3 (Oktober 1960, pages 5-7. The writer is indebted to Dr. Hans van Oost for this citation. Bjorn Isebaert kindly spoke with Oscar Grymonprez twice on behalf of this article.
9. Ron Hudspeth, *Braves Sign Swinger*, 80, *The Atlanta Journal*, March 11, 1971, page 2-D.
10. Andrea Stewart, *This man combines history and music*, *The Kansan*, October 1, 1981, rpt., *MBSI News Bulletin* Number 45 (March 1982), pages 13-14. Taylor claimed ownership of the organ in the article, a statement recently disputed by Tom Fretty.

Fred Dahlinger, a frequent contributor to the *Carousel Organ*, has recently finished his third book (about circus show trains of various types). He continues to do original research on many aspects of American band organ history.

## Don’t Forget — 2001-2002 Membership Dues

Please submit your dues now for the upcoming year and receive the *Carousel Organ* without interruption. How? Follow the instructions found on the bottom of page 15. Thanks!