

## In Memory of . . .

### Hal O'Rourke 1944-2010

The passing of Hal O'Rourke on March 10, 2010 was not only a great surprise to his many organ grinder friends who learned the news of his death but it also created a void in the entire fabric of the hobby we all love so much (and will not be easily filled). In recent decades Hal was recognized and respected as a principal figure in the development and growth of the popularity of the hand-cranked organ throughout the United States, and was known and respected among organ grinders throughout Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom as a leader within American musical circles. He is survived by Susan his wife of 42 years.

Hal was a career United States Air Force officer retiring with the rank of Major. He served overseas both in Korea and Germany where he was stationed just outside Frankfurt. It was here where Hal began his passion for mechanical musical instruments. Upon his retirement he and his wife, Susan, remained in Germany and became close friends with organ builder Kurt Niemuth and his wife, Christa. The Niemuths intro-

duced them to the organ grinder fraternity in Germany and the four of them attended numerous rallies together throughout Germany and Switzerland. It was also during this period of time Hal and Susan acquired their Raffin 31/84 street organ.

Another memory Hal never got tired of relating was his participation with the Berlin Organ Grinder's Club (INTERNATIONALE DREHORGEL-FREUNDE BERLIN E.V.). In 1990 the club paraded west to east along "Unter den Linden" from Brandenburg Gate to

Alexander Platz, celebrating the opening of the Berlin Wall. Hal's recitation of the emotions of the participants with tears in their eyes and running down their cheeks was an experience in itself.

Upon his return with Susan to the United States he created special commercial relationships with the Raffin organization allowing him to represent them in the United States. Hal also established commercial relations with Ian Alderman and Melvyn Wright, music arrangers and roll perforators in the United Kingdom

As a service to his American customers Hal, over time, developed provisions for currency exchange, insurance coverage and door-to-door shipping facilitation to the United States from Germany and the United Kingdom. These efforts, in effect, created a seamless transaction for his American purchasers in place of what would normally be a complex if not tortuous process.

These were all in the very nature of a very kind and generous person. All that dealt with Hal have their own remembrances and stories of his friendly and sage advice, such as, "don't get the organ without a cart—it weighs 95 pounds."

Hal our friend, we already miss you.

Tom Griffith



Hal pushing a Niemuth 45er in the 2002 Berlin International Festival parade.