

Meet your COAA Member

The featured COAA members this month are Roberta and Cliff Gray, Jefferson, Texas. Seen at every rally, their mechanical music experience dates back a long time. Cliff attended Baylor University where he played football and received his degree in geology and geophysics. As a child he was fascinated by the circuses that played in Terrell, Texas, where he was born. He would watch the circus unload while he played in his father's lumber yard. He even remembers listening to a big Wurlitzer 157 band organ at the Texas State Fair.



Cliff and Roberta Gray enjoying one of their two organs they bring to rallies. This one is a Wurlitzer Style 150 Military Band Organ

Cliff and Robbie met while he was working in Venezuela and they married there in 1959. When they returned to the States, Cliff worked in Washington, D.C. One day, in 1962, Robbie came home from an auction hauling a player piano in much need of repair and said: "Make it play, you can fix anything." And, he did. She continued to bring musical things home, and he continued to make them play. Cliff met Jim Wells, and they became good swapping

friends.

His first band organ was a North Tonawanda, which he later swapped back (with some booty) for a Wurlitzer 146A. Soon the house was filled with all types of mechanical musical instruments. At this point in time, Cliff, Jim Wells, and Bruce Miller, along with others, started the National Capital chapter of MBSI, holding the organization meeting in Robbie's antique shop, where Cliff's machines were stored.

All this was about 1976, just before Cliff's job was transferred to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. In the early 1980s the Grays became active in AMICA and hosted the Board of Director's meeting, with band organs lining the front of their home (outside Picayune, Mississippi). During this time they attended their first band organ rally, in Roscoe Village (Coshocton, Ohio). This started a whole, new and wonderful life.

Since retiring and moving back to Texas — the little Piney Woods town of Jefferson — Cliff and Robbie have



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Each issue we will feature one of the COAA members who have provided familiar faces, organs and music for the many organ rallies of the past. This way, new and not-so-new COAA members can learn what others have contributed to the field of outdoor mechanical music.

Do you have a suggestion for someone you would like to see featured in this section? If so, contact the editor.



Noteworthy for collectors of mechanical music was the "Early Holiday 1999" edition of Hammacher Schlemmer, an upscale mail order catalog business which advertises that they "offer the best, the only and the unexpected for 151 years."

While the COAA does not promote one manufacturer over the other it is of interest to see that one of the manufacturers of contemporary organs, Heinz Jäger and Wolfgang Brommer of Waldkirch, Germany has been represented in a publicly-viewed catalog. Perhaps other companies such as Hofbauer, Pell or Raffin will also be seen in the future in these types of advertising catalogs.