

Player Pianos and Music Machines In Virginia and Nevada City, Montana.

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The Bovey Music Machine Collection.

When Charlie Bovey began the restoration of Virginia City in 1944, the “player piano era” had not been “out of fashion” for even twenty years, and many of the instruments were only between 20 and 30 years old - curiosities but hardly “antiques” in most opinions. Almost every adult of that era had probably had the experience of pumping a home player piano. But even then, few had seen the unique commercial orchestrions with their drums and organ pipes. And though they were but 20 to 30 years old, there had been a great change in the world between the time they were new and the post World War II “present.” The time before the First World War now seemed almost as distant and innocent as a long-ago childhood. While there were automobiles then, they were yet primitive and rare enough to be somewhat of a novelty. Horses still clip-clopped along the streets of towns, and life was attuned to their slow pace. Life was simple compared to the quarter-century that followed. Then there was the harsh reality of the U.S. entry into the European War, “the last of the old wars and the first of the new.” No longer did the Atlantic keep us in safe isolation.

Though it was perhaps not the biggest change, while the men were away, Prohibition was passed, and the old time saloon, that great male institution, especially of the “Old West,” was gone forever. The drinking continued, but instead of being visible to all, it just went under cover. The new “speakeasy” had an aspect few, if any, old time saloons tolerated: women – not just those of “easy virtue,” but “good” women – girl friends and wives – could drink (and smoke) there as well as men. To an old cowboy or miner – a man of the Old West, it was shocking!

In Montana, there was the 1919 drought, with the end of the homestead boom; then the Roaring Twenties, and the Great Depression, followed by World War II. Every aspect of life was changed by this war. It made those days of “only yesterday” – a mere twenty-five years ago, seemed a century or more in the past. There was now hurry about life. The streamline modern style of everything from automobiles to architecture made the gingerbread Victorian styles that were still popular in the “teens” seem as old fashioned as a squared-off Model T Ford. From furniture to the labels on canned goods, the “modern” quickly replaced the ornate “old.” Even heavy machinery, farm tractors, tools and typewriters had their working parts, formerly proudly exposed for enjoyment and inspection, hidden under streamlined cases that would offer little air resistance should they need to be moved at the high speeds to which society was now propelling itself. Dark colors and varnished wood were replaced with light-colored paint, and pastel

plastic. Open drinking had been back on the scene for well over a decade, but gone was the saloon with its grand mahogany back bar; in its place was art deco or streamlined styles with chrome, indirect neon lights and soft colors. The radio, of course, had replaced the player piano as entertainment center in the home, and the juke box with electronic amplification blared modern music in the “bar” where, only a mere twenty-five years ago, the orchestrion had been the most unique of novelties.

Thus was Charlie Bovey’s theme for first “Old Town” in the Great Falls Fairgrounds, and then Virginia City and especially Nevada City: life in the “Old Days” – not necessarily pure 1860’s or 1870’s, but the “Old Days” - those days which had changed little from the 1870’s until about 1935; those days when fancy was in fashion; when automobiles were still something to run outside to see; when train travel was adventure and luxury; when every surface was covered with ornament. Those days when life was slower and simpler. Those days that now seemed, like Margaret Mitchell’s Old South, only yesterday, but yet now “Gone with the Wind.”

Charlie Bovey said the first music machine he acquired was a Coinola 65 note A roll piano with an oval glass front, which he loaded over a fence on April 28, 1947 from a house of ill repute at “No. 1, Main St., Mederville,” (an address which, by the 1970’s, no longer existed: by then it was over the Berkley Pit.) It was soon followed by many others, mostly, at first, from Butte. Butte greatest era paralleled that of the rise of the player piano. The Butte Piano Co., dealers for Seeberg and Mills, were said by some to be the largest outside of Chicago, and instruments bearing their dealer’s tag have been found in a vast region. Shipped to dry Montana when they were new, they still played well in the 1950’s when instruments in more humid climates had already given up.

Charlie Bovey eventually met a man who was to play a large role in the music machine collection, Ozzie Wurdeman of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Ozzie had been a dealer and repairman for the Mills Novelty Co., who manufactured the unique electric Mills Violano. He put the music machines Charlie acquired into good operating condition, and as the collection grew, he was kept busy with the daily maintenance needed.

The old Bale of Hay was a magical place, a sort of trip in time into that vanished pre-prohibition old-west. The front room was the player piano museum, where even young kids could go: a dozen orchestrions, plus various arcade machines, a long line of cast iron mutoscopes, oak cased drop pictures, and at one time, the haunting gypsy fortuneteller in her case. Behind swinging doors was the bar room, with it’s magnificent Eastlake style walnut back bar glittering with beveled mirrors and the massive carved front bar being leaned upon by an assortment of humanity. And then there was a sort of inter sanctum, a couple of dark rooms with elaborate reddish wallpaper, gold wainscoting, oversize nude paintings, and the melancholy strains of the Reproduco Pipe Organ. Dirt adhered to the sticky spilled beer at the edges of the rooms, and a stale beer smell permeated all. It could be argued that no real saloon ever had that many player pianos, but the old Bale was perhaps more like a strange pleasant dream than a “perfect” recreation. It had an almost indescribable realism that no “museum” could even approach.

One day in the 1950's, Charlie Bovey was in New York and saw an organ grinder with his monkey. He gave him a good tip, and asked if he could look inside the organ. There he noted the name of the Molinari Organ Works, 112-116 32nd St., Brooklyn, New York. He took a cab to the address and knocked on the door. A man came, and when Charlie asked if they had organs for sale, he was told they were out of business. Charlie persisted, and eventually got inside. The B.A.B. Organ Co. had succeeded Molinari some years before, and A. Antoniazzi and D. Brugnolotti, the owners, had recently been dealt a blow. New York Mayor LaGuardia had banned street musicians, including organ grinders. Along with the trend to use recorded music instead of real band organs on Merry-go-rounds, their craft of organ building was obsolete. Fortunately for Mr. Bovey and the people of Montana, Charlie came at a perfect time. He saw the "Big Gavioli," and many other organs in the B.A. B. showrooms, and toured the workshop with its odd machinery and special hand made tools. Eventually, Charlie Bovey bought nearly the entire contents of their building. The organs, tools, parts and etc. were shipped to Nevada City in 1959. The big organs went in the huge log Music Hall, formerly the recreation hall at Canyon Lodge in Yellowstone Park. The unusual tools and machinery were installed in a building down the street. Ozzie was kept busy putting the long disused organs, which also suffered from the humid weather of New York, into playing condition.

Thus the collection grew, and thousands who had never seen even a home player piano marveled at the orchestrions in the Bale of Hay Saloon, the double violin player in the Wells Fargo Coffee House, the soft music boxes in the hotels, and the ear-splitting marches of the gigantic band organs in the Nevada City Music Hall.

Twenty years and a day ago as of this writing, on the evening of Friday, the 13th of May, 1983, the Bale of Hay Saloon was badly burned in a fire caused by an electric heater plugged into an extension cord. The music machines were badly scorched, but most survived. The Bale was rebuilt, opening on July 1, 1985, but though the original log walls and false front remained, it was never the same. The burned music machines were sold in 1990. Many have now been beautifully restored in other locations. But the old Bale of Hay is as gone as the vanished era it once echoed. The sounds captured on the 1964 record are like ghosts from the past.

There were once numerous places with collections similar to the one here, but beginning in the early 1970's, automatic musical instruments were no longer considered simply curiosities; they entered the realm of the most valuable and collectable of rarities. Most of the other collections once on public display have gravitated to wealthy collectors. Here they are beautifully cared for, but, unfortunately, seldom seen by the ordinary public. Throughout the last years of Bovey Restorations, Ford Bovey was approached countless times by collectors who wished to purchase the music machines. Ford stood firm, and at last, in 1997, the collection, one of the largest remaining on public display, became the property of the People of Montana.

Nevada City Music Hall

89 Key Gavioli Band Organ (Big Gavioli)

Built by the famous firm of Gavioli et Cie, Paris, France, in c. 1900, it is not only the most impressive instrument in the Nevada City collection, but, in the words of the world-famous automatic musical instrument restoration expert Art Reblitz, "*One of America's greatest European fairground organs.*" The hand carved façade is a fabulous example of pure Art Nouveau. The huge organ was originally played by folding cardboard book music and a key frame with metal "key" levers, and later converted by the B.A. B. Organ Company of Brooklyn, New York, to "keyless" operation using the cardboard. The "keyless" frame is still with the organ, but it was converted by Ozzie Wurdeman to play B.A.B. 87 note rolls in c. 1959. Other than these changes, it is essentially original.

The legend is that during World War I, this organ was traded to the USA for a carload of flour. According to the story, the French Government asked for donations of items that could be traded or sold to U.S. buyers to purchase food to keep the French from starvation. In doing the evaluation of the Bovey assets, appraiser Tim Gordon came up with a value of \$210,000 for this organ, and it is interesting to note that he said that, for the sake of curiosity, he researched and found that the modern value of a (railroad) "carload" of flour is still about the same as that of the organ.

In the U.S.A., the "Big Gavioli" was apparently used inside (due to its excellent condition) in several places similar to "Coney Island" before eventually ending up in the shops of the Molinari Organ Works at 112-116 32nd St., Brooklyn, New York, where it stood for years with the price of \$1,100.00. In July, 1958, Charlie Bovey purchased the majority of the organs and equipment of the B.A. B. Organ Co., and had it shipped to Nevada City. After work by Ozzie Wurdeman, the "Big Gavioli," which is nearly as wide as the Music Hall, again delighted young and old alike. Of the one hundred or so of this size organs ever made, it is estimated that only a dozen or so remain in this unaltered condition worldwide. It is the premier organ of the collection.

65 key Gavioli Band Organ (Gavioli with Bells)

This smaller organ was made by Gavioli et Cie, of Paris, France, in c. 1900, and probably used an amusement park in the New York area. Like the "Big Gavioli," it was purchased from the B.A.B. Organ Co. of Brooklyn, N.Y. by Charlie Bovey in 1958. Perhaps twenty or so organs of this size remain in the world.

54 key "Unknown" (perhaps Bruder) Band Organ (Unpainted Organ) (Called "Marengi" Organ on the Record.

The beautiful hand carved façade of this organ was never painted, probably because it was waiting to be purchased and painted to the specification of the owner. The actual organ was probably made in Germany the late 1890's and is likely about 10 to 15 years older than the façade, Originally a barrel organ, it was later converted to cardboard. Obtained from the B.A.B. Organ Co., it is featured on the c. 1964 record, (as a Marengi) but has been out of order since 1972 because the special cardboard roll wore out.

43 key Band Organ (Possibly Gavioli) (“The Butterfly Organ”)

A typical small European band organ, it was made in c. 1900. Many organs of this size were made, perhaps one to two hundred still exist worldwide. Though the music contains a couple of errors resulting in off-key notes, it has a unique and pleasant sound. This was another organ obtained by Charlie Bovey from the B.A.B. Organ Co.

Wurlitzer 103 Band Organ

The smallest regular production Wurlitzer band organ, this little organ is nearly as loud as Wurlitzer’s largest model, the 180, locally called the “loudest,” next to it. The 103 made in the 1920’s and was purchased from a priest in Helena. The original shipping crate is still with the organ!

Wurlitzer 180 Band Organ

Wurlitzer’s largest production model, only five or six were ever made; two complete and this organ still exist. Originally shipped in 1929 to Spillman Engineering (manufactures of carousels,) it was returned to the factory and reshipped in 1936 to a church! They must have really wanted to wake up the congregation! Charlie Bovey got the 180 from Mr. Cargill of Excelsior Park, Lake Minnetonka, Minnesota. It has two tracker bars so it could play continuously with no delay for rewind. Only about one-third of the original organ remains, many of the missing pipes having been replaced by Ozzie Wurdeman with pipes from the Wurlitzer Organ originally in the Marlow Theatre in Helena.

Wurlitzer Theatre Organ, Style 135

Theatre organs were installed inside the walls of the most expensive and elaborate permanent movie theatres during the silent movie era of the early teens to the beginning of talkies in 1926. Talking pictures made them unnecessary, and while some theatres continued have live organists play before the show and at intermission into the 1930’s, many more theatre organs fell into disrepair. In the 1970’s some were turned into “Pizza Organs” and thus received a few more years of life, but many of these magnificent instruments were unfortunately junked.

Originally installed in the theatre in Dillon, Montana in 1914, this model features a piano with organ keyboard and pedal organ. There are three theatre organs remaining in playable condition in Montana – The Ellen in Bozeman, the Wilma in Missoula, and this one. Ozzie Wurdeman installed a Coinola spool frame so it can play the wonderful arrangements found on O Rolls.

Wurlitzer Band Organ Style 150 (the Horns.)

This style of medium sized organ was popular in the 1920’s era for Merry-go-rounds and skating rinks. Several hundred were made, and a few dozen remain today. Charlie Bovey purchased this famous organ from Ozzie Wurdeman in 1952, and it stood in the east wind of the front area of the Bale of Hay for about a quarter century, blasting away at “Red Sails in the Sunset” and “Boots and Saddles,” slightly out of tune. It thus earned the reputation as the “famous and obnoxious horn machine” of the Bale of Hay Saloon, and was somewhat symbolic of the beloved “funky” atmosphere of not only the

Bale but other aspects of Virginia City as well. It was moved to Nevada City in the mid 1970's after Bale patrons threatened to silence it, but its loyal following continued to seek it out. No visit to Virginia City is considered complete without viewing Club Foot George's clubfoot in the Thompson Hickman Museum and experiencing the musical abilities of the Horn Machine.

46 Key Gavioli Organ with Dolle Façade

This organ, made in the 1890's in Paris by the famous Gavioli et Cie, has an early version of the cardboard- played keyframe system. Mr. Fred Dolle, a Coney Island carousel operator and importer is said to have formerly been in the cake decorating business. The majority of the façade is by him, and his cake decorating experience is obvious. The beautifully carved wooden piece above was not original to the organ, but seems to go well with it. For years this organ played "Barney Goggle" and the happy face was thus named for the song.

Nelson Wiggen Coin Piano, Style 8

This Prohibition-era cabinet piano was made by Nelson-Wiggen of Chicago in the mid 1920's. During Prohibition, the large key-board style orchestrions fell from favor and small box pianos gained in popularity, possibly, it is said, because they could have a drape thrown over them in case of a raid. With a 65 note piano and alternating xylophone and bells, its makes good music. This one was obtained from Excelsior Park in Minnesota, where the Wurlitzer 180 Organ also came from. Of several hundred made, only about 15 or 20 remain.

Peerless 44 Note Piano

One of the first type of automatic pianos, the Peerless was introduced in 1902. Peerless liked the endless roll, which avoided all the problems associated with roll rewind. The "roll" is a continuous paper loop, which allowed pianos similar to this to play from morning to late at night uninterrupted in saloons and penny arcades. Most of the musical arrangements are true classic ragtime.

This particular piano was "made for A.D. Mitchell, Helena, Montana." Mr. Mitchell, who was a dealer in Mitchell automobiles. The Bovey automobile collection contained several Mitchells that once stood in his showroom where this piano presumably furnished music. The piano, strangely enough, had made its way to Savage, Minnesota, where Charlie found it years after he bought the cars.

Regina Sublima Piano and Mandolin Orchestra.

The Regina Music Box Co. of Rahway, New Jersey, liked purely mechanical things – none of that new-fangled pneumatic stuff for them. This instrument came out quite early in the automatic musical instrument era, probably about 1906. When played, it sounds like the then very popular mandolin. The vibrating "piano" action is controlled by possibly the widest roll made of the heaviest paper ever used in a music machine. It is also interesting that Regina manufactured these many of these instruments with a large spring-wound motor (usable in places without electricity) but for those few locations that had electric current, such as the mining camps of Montana, they had an electric version. When automatic pianos became more reliable in the later "oughts," these instruments,

along with such novelties as the Wurlitzer harp, declined in popularity. About 3,000 were made, and only a few dozen still exist. This particular one was used in the “Comac” Saloon in Neihart, Montana. We had another in the Bale of Hay Saloon, and though it was undamaged by the Bale fire in 1983, it was sold in 1990.

Story and Clark Player Reed Organ

Originally intended for home use, player reed organs were among the first instruments to use the new pneumatic systems and “piano rolls” beginning in the 1890’s. This organ has an especially beautiful inlaid oak case, and was an expensive addition to its original owner’s home. Ozzie Wurdeman bought it in Minneapolis and converted it to play A rolls with his own unique combination electrical-pneumatic system in the late 1950’s. True to Ozzie’s knowledge and love of Mills Violano roll mechanisms, he made the spool frame to “stop rewind” by sensing the number of turns of paper left on the roll, a system that worked better on the Mills Violano than on this organ, thus it seldom stops at the actual beginning of the first song.

Seeberg Style KT Orchestration

Seeberg quality is well known with collectors. (More on Seeberg can be found with the Bale of Hay articles.) This was one of their most popular models, made between the mid teens and the late 1920’s. The KT is among the most desirable with both collectors and listeners because of the combination of the 65 note piano, toe-tapping percussion instruments and the excellent arrangements of the “G” rolls it plays. It was probably originally shipped from Chicago to Butte in c. 1926. Thousands were made and hundreds exist, but their great music makes them far more valuable than rarities that play poorly. We have three other Seeberg K’s, and had more before the scorched Bale instruments were sold.

Wells Fargo Coffee House

Mills Violano-Virtuoso, Deluxe Model with two violins

Invented Henry Sandell, a Swedish immigrant and largely self taught electrical wizard, the electric violin appeared on the automatic musical instrument scene in a time when most of the population had not seen even an ordinary electric light bulb. The simple on-off of a piano action or organ easily lends itself to automatic operation, but Sandell chose to automate one of the most difficult instruments – the violin! Unlike automatic player pianos which operate on air (actually vacuum) and use an electric motor only to power bellows, Sandell’s violin player is completely electric, and while it is not “electronic,” it features advanced circuitry, use of changeable resistances, and other features which were very complex for their time. Sandell proved a genius in another aspect – he entered into a contract with the Mills Novelty Co. of Chicago, whose principle line of manufacture was gambling “slot” machines, to market his invention. In 1909, the Yukon Pacific Exposition, the “other Seattle World’s Fair,” included an exhibit from the U.S. Patent Office of eight great inventions of the past ten years, among them the Mills Violano. From then on, Mills thus proclaimed on a large sign inside their

Violanos, “Designated by the U.S. Government as one of the eight greatest inventions of the decade.” About 4,500 Violanos were made in total, of which about a thousand still exist. Only about 60 of the “doubles” remain. Most “American” of the automatic instruments, it is also one of the most interesting. And you will hopefully agree that it really does play well.

This Violano was made about 1926, and was originally in the Palace Bar in Great Falls, Montana, and later in the Falls Hotel, where it was purchased by Charlie Bovey in the early 1950’s. Since that time, it has furnished dinner music for the Wells Fargo Coffee House. Mrs. Bovey had it painted green to match other Coffee House furniture in the mid 1950’s; it was refinished to its rich mahogany by John Ellingsen in 1992.

Wurlitzer Automatic Harp, Style A.

Among the earliest automatic musical instruments was the unlikely self-playing harp. Like the Violano, it was perfected by an independent inventor, in this case J.W. Whitlock of Rising Sun, Indiana. The machine was promoted as soft and sophisticated, the correct music for elegant dining. Except for the electric motor, it is made almost entirely of wood. About 1,500 harps were made in the 1906-1910 era, mostly of this model. Another even more attractive model, shaped like a real harp, was designed but few were built. When player pianos were more perfected, the popularity of the soft-playing harps waned. Several dozen harps survive nationwide. This harp and the beautiful Wurlitzer DX Roll Changing Piano now in the Nevada City Music Hall were purchased from the Five Mile Inn, which still stands on South Harrison Ave. in Butte, Montana.

Fairweather Inn

Regina 27" Upright Music Box.

Purchased in 1941 in Great Falls, this non-changer music box is typical of Regina instruments. While cylinder music boxes had been made for hundreds of years in Germany and Switzerland, they were expensive and their musical selections limited by the very tedious pinning of the cylinders. Even the expensive models played only a few – six to ten - songs, and only the wealthiest could afford additional cylinders.

About 1889, a disk style music box was invented. The disks, made of flat steel, could be pressed, in one quick operation, to form pins, which played the musical comb as in the cylinder music boxes. The interchangeable disks gave huge musical selection; one could easily have any number of pieces of music and change them in a few seconds. Unlike the fragile cylinders, the disks were easy to reproduce, quite durable, and unbreakable.

Despite a huge potential market, the American-made disk music boxes did not appear on the scene until the early 1890's. The tonal quality was outstanding, and the musical selections, despite having to fit a perfectly timed single revolution, were even better. By 1900 many middle-class homes were enjoying the beautiful and calming music of a Regina. The complaint in public places that the same disk was played over and over (as in the machine in the Fairweather Inn lobby) led to development of a commercial model that one could select the piece he wanted to hear, or that would play the selections in sequence. The machinery – gears, cams, spring motors – worked silently “like clockwork”. The cases were works of art. This was all yet in a time when player pianos and other pneumatic instruments had not yet been well perfected.

For about ten years the Regina music box reigned supreme in automatic home entertainment, but then an unlikely challenge came to that market from a place barely five miles from the Rahway, New Jersey Regina factory – the Edison laboratories of Menlo Park, and later of East Orange, New Jersey. Edison had envisioned the main use of his invention of the Phonograph as an office machine, but when he was finally convinced about 1902 to introduce the phonograph and cylinders pre-recorded with music to the general public, it became all the rage. Despite the poor quality of the music on the records compared to the fabulously superior quality of the music boxes, the Edison Phonograph quickly took over.

About this time, an Eldridge R. Johnson called on the Regina factory and tried to sell them a patent invented by Emile Berliner, the disk record. He was rejected, of course. He next talked to Edison – he too declined. Mr. Johnson went home to Camden, New Jersey, also not far away, and started the Victor Talking Machine Co.

In 1902 Regina “diversified” by introducing a cumbersome and unlikely device related more to pneumatic pianos than their mechanical music boxes – a hand operated vacuum cleaner. Though their last music box was made in 1919, Regina continued to make a variety of products. Regina is one of the few former music machine makers that is still in business. Today it is well known as the manufacturer of vacuum cleaners.

The Bale of Hay Saloon

Seeberg G Orchestrion

The J. P. Seeberg Piano Co., located in Chicago was one of the largest manufactures of automatic musical instruments. They lived up to their motto of simplicity, reliability, and endurance. Seeburg instruments were extremely well made, and while other lines had overly complicated gearboxes, etc., Seeburgs were models of simplicity. They also had beautifully designed cases, and were pioneers in the use of back-lighted stained glass fronts to attract attention. The “G” was an especially attractive and well-proportioned design. Seeburg music arrangements, especially of their “G” rolls, were outstanding.

The Seeberg G was probably the best sounding instrument in the Bovey collection, and the favorite of many. The Bale of Hay “G” was from the Lime Quarry Inn, a few miles west of Anaconda, Montana. It, along with the other Bale of Hay instruments, was heavily damaged in the Friday the 13th of May, 1983 fire. Sold in 1990, its present whereabouts in unknown.

Coinola Reproduco Pipeorgan

The Coinola line of automatic instruments was made by Operators Piano Co. of Chicago. Similarly to Seeburg, Coinola instruments were noted for their high quality, simplicity, and durability. They had one feature, which was much better than Seeburg – their simple and very reliable rewind mechanism. One of the most popular Coinola instruments was the Reproduco Pipe Organ. It joined a high quality piano with three ranks of organ pipes, including bass, and featured swell shutters below the keyboard for varied-volume effects. Many found use in theatres, and were equipped with two tracker bars so that one type of mood music could be playing while another was being loaded or rewound. But the best customer for Reproducos seemed to be funeral homes.

The Bale’s Reproduco, made famous in the “back room” but later located on the “stage” in the front, came from Maud Rosenstein at the Plaza Bar in Butte, and was purchased in 1952. It played a sentimental roll including the “Roses of Picardy,” “Call me Back, Pal of Mine,” and other World War I songs.

Cremona J Orchestrion

The Marquette Piano Company of Chicago manufactured the Cremona line of instruments. Cremona was named for the town in Italy where Stradivarius violins were made. If Seeburgs were Buicks, Cremona was considered the Cadillac of orchestrions. The Model J was their answer to the fabulous Seeburg H. While the Cremona lacked the female statues of the “H,” it did feature some of the most beautiful combination stained and beveled leaded glass on any coin piano. The clear glass allowed viewing of the internal moving parts, always an extra interesting feature. And those parts included, besides a piano and mandolin, flute and violin pipes, bass and snare drums, tympani, cymbal, triangle, and xylophone.

The Bovey Cremona J was originally in Nina Clifford's "High Class House" in St. Paul, a house of ill repute. Charlie Bovey said there were so many wine bottles in the alley when they went to pick it up in 1952, they had to shovel them out of the way. The original finish, probably quartered oak, had been grained to look (somewhat) like walnut. Like the other Bale instruments, it was scorched in the fire, but because thick Plexiglas had been placed over the beautiful leaded glass as protection from rough Bale parties, it was not damaged, and the graining bubbled off as if a heat gun had been used, readying the case for refinishing. The piano was sold in 1990 along with the other Bale instruments, and certain collectors who claim to know its present location say it is beautifully restored today.

Seeburg J with Unafon Bells

The Seeburg line included many different case designs, the largest of which were the "H" (which featured carved female figures of "strength and beauty"); the "G"; and the "J". The Seeburg J had some of the most elaborate stained glass in the whole orchestration realm. It featured a stylized view of the U.S. Capitol dome against a sky of blue art glass, and there were even tiny, internally lighted stained glass windows in the front pillars. The case was in Circassian walnut. Inside were a fine piano, mandolin attachment, flute and violin pipes, xylophone, triangle and castanets. It played the very wide "H" roll.

The Seeburg J recorded on the record was from Conley Lake. It was purchased in 1957 from Frank Conley, who ran the Montana State Prison under contract for many years. The organ pipes were missing, so Ozzie Wurdeman rigged it up to play a Deagan "Unafon Bells." The Unafon bells were a loud instrument designed to be used out of doors somewhat like a calliope to attract a crowd. They could easily be mounted in the back of a Model T. Ford and run off a six-volt car battery. As used in the Bale, the Unafon bells sat on top of the piano, and when they played their "solo" parts, sparks flew out of the contacts, giving a good show both from sound and sight.