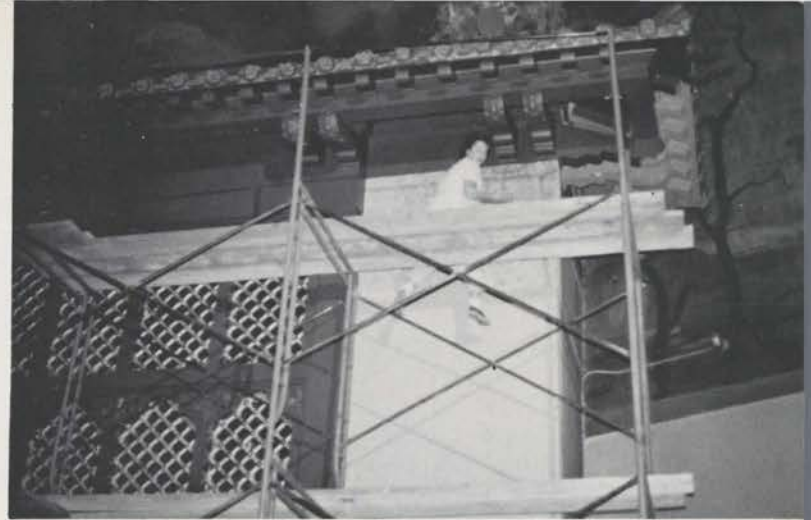
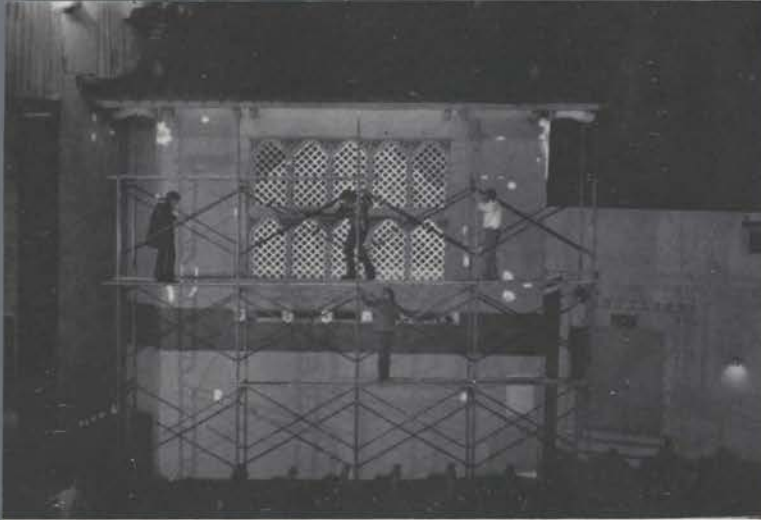


THE REDFORD THEATRE

a "sound" investment

by Don Lockwood and Don Grimshaw





(Left:) Members erect scaffolding to repair and paint the scarred walls of the auditorium, the organ had been muffled for years under heavy drapes. (Right:) Enid Martin, in a precarious position "three flights up," uses a sponge to apply the granite block wall texture to the outside of the solo chamber. "I had never been up on scaffolding before," she says. "I didn't dare look down, but I got used to it. The blisters and splinters I acquired while sliding back and forth on the plank were a "fringe benefit." (Dave Ullin Photos)

Do you ATOS conventioners remember 1974? That was the year the Motor City Chapter hosted the bash in Detroit — and as happens every year, no host showed up for the cocktail party. However, to those of you who did attend, we hope that you remember the opening event. That was the afternoon trip to the Redford Theatre, where we heard a concert by Detroit's own John Muri, and got some lessons on how to play the horns, by Vic Hyde — live — on stage. That "Redford Theatre" is the property that Motor City Chapter has agreed to purchase.

"What," you say, "a theatre organ chapter purchase a theatre?" Well, the MCTOS by-laws say that 'this corporation is dedicated to the preservation, maintenance, and playing of theatre pipe organ in a proper setting' . . . and the ATOS by-laws adds "in their home theatres where possible." By putting these things together — the membership of Motor City Chapter voted "Yes" on the proposal to buy and operate the theatre — to save the organ.

That 3/10 Barton organ has proved to be the saving force behind a determined fund raising drive to "Buy the Redford." And before we get any further, we are asking and begging everyone for donations to get us over the top, to pay off the purchase price of \$125,000 — and in case you quit reading here — we are begging *you*. Just cash in your bonds, savings, gas guzzling cars, etc. and send the money to Motor City Theatre Organ Society, P.O. Box 40716, Redford, Michigan 48240.

Although we never got around to



The Redford stage provides needed space for a variety of activities. Here, members repair a water-damaged Oboe rank. (Phil Gorden Photo)

Kenny Martin and Greg Bellamy in the Redford's fully-equipped projection booth.

(Phil Gorden Photo)



◀ A lone usher helps ready the theatre for an organ program in 1971. Three years later the Redford closed as a movie house and the Motor City Chapter took over management of the 1500-seat theatre.

(Phil Gorden Photo)

writing a THEATRE ORGAN magazine article before, we must mention that Motor City has been operating the Redford on a "handshake-lease" agreement with Community Theatres since November, 1974, (shortly after the convention) when the theatre closed. It took work, work, work, by many, many members and friends, to bring the theatre back as close as possible to its original appearance — from blueprints and photographs found in the files.

First and foremost in the work crew's mind, was to remove the heavy drapes that covered the front of the auditorium, including the chambers. While we were guests in the theatre, we rigged pulleys and ropes to open the drapes for our public shows — what joy there was in Old Redford, when we could take those drapes down. But, under those drapes, were several old paint jobs, the remains of decorative plaster work which had been broken away.

When the call went out for help, it came from all directions. The plaster work was restored with plywood and sheetmetal, and the walls were painted gray by talented members, with black and white three dimensional highlighting to resemble granite blocks. Motor City Chapter, already united for the 1974 Convention, has stayed alive and well — and working — because of the Redford Theatre.

When the offer was presented to us, purchasing the theatre had the membership somewhat divided. The main division was that the theatre



The mainstay of any theatre operation is the concession stand. The candy counter in the Redford foyer is stocked and manned by volunteers and is seldom without customers. (Lance Luce Photo)

complex has five store fronts, eight second floor offices, two parking lots, and the cares and problems related to managing the entire property.

With all our prior work and shows in mind — and two year's operation behind us — paying rent and utilities — we were just a step less than breaking even. But with a little more effort, most of us thought, we could own the Barton organ, and the property that comes with it. Honest money has been put up, and an agreement to purchase has been signed, and a percentage of the money has been assured through donations.

Motor City Chapter has really made use of its home — the Redford. It has been the scene of chapter concerts, work nights, practice time, mailing parties, board and member-

ship meetings, pot-luck dinners, and even our 10th anniversary banquet, catered on stage, featuring dancing to organ music, and a grand march — through the dressing rooms, the projection booth, the balcony, and somehow ending back on stage. It might be noted here, that the theatre is well equipped with projection equipment, spotlights, eight dressing rooms, (and the water now flows to the four stories of dressing rooms). This reconstruction of the dressing rooms is the latest triumph of our work crew.

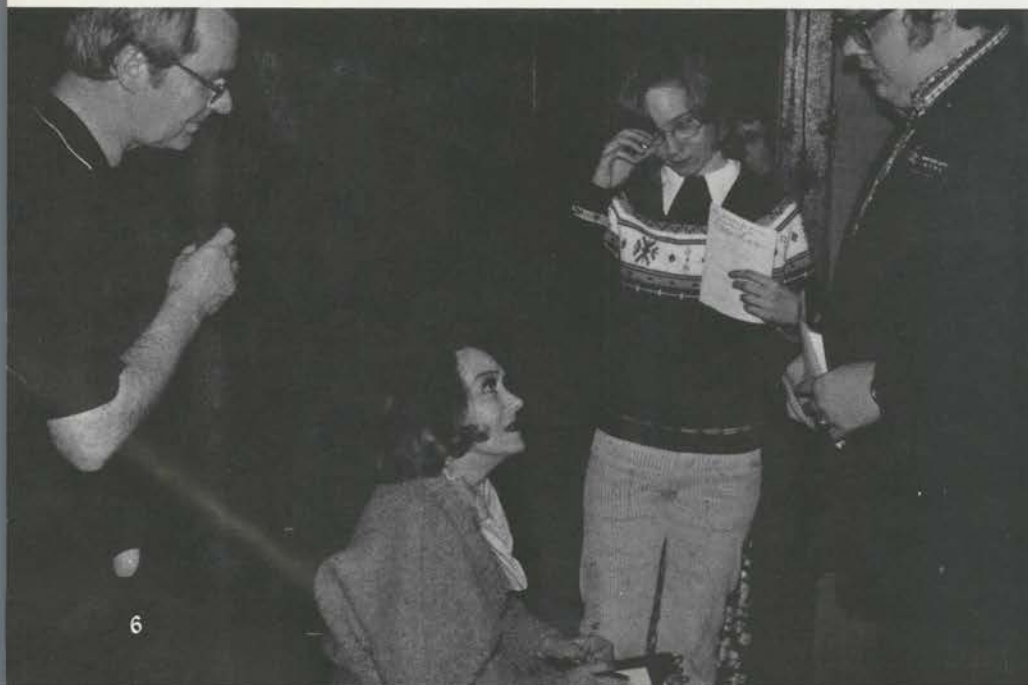
Our efforts were supported by outside rentals for such shows as Virgil Fox, Concert Ministries, the Ford Chorus, the Oakway Symphony, the International Brotherhood of Magicians, etc. A few rentals were not quite what we expected — especially when the Detroit Lawyers Guild turned out to be a Black Panther program. Nevertheless, the rent was paid, and now we enter into rentals more cautiously.

While we know a few "Save The Theatre" projects are currently in progress, we feel the "Buy The Redford" project is different. There is no wrecking ball hanging on a crane outside. The theatre is for sale, will be sold, and Motor City was the first group notified. The future of the theatre, if the chapter were not to buy it, would probably be a church or X-rated movie house, and the future of the organ, very uncertain.

Although Motor City maintains four organs which are still in their original settings, the chapter does not own an organ. Purchase of the Redford Theatre includes the Barton

Hugh Hammarstrom, Nancy Green and Greg Smith talk with Gloria Swanson on the Redford stage in 1975.

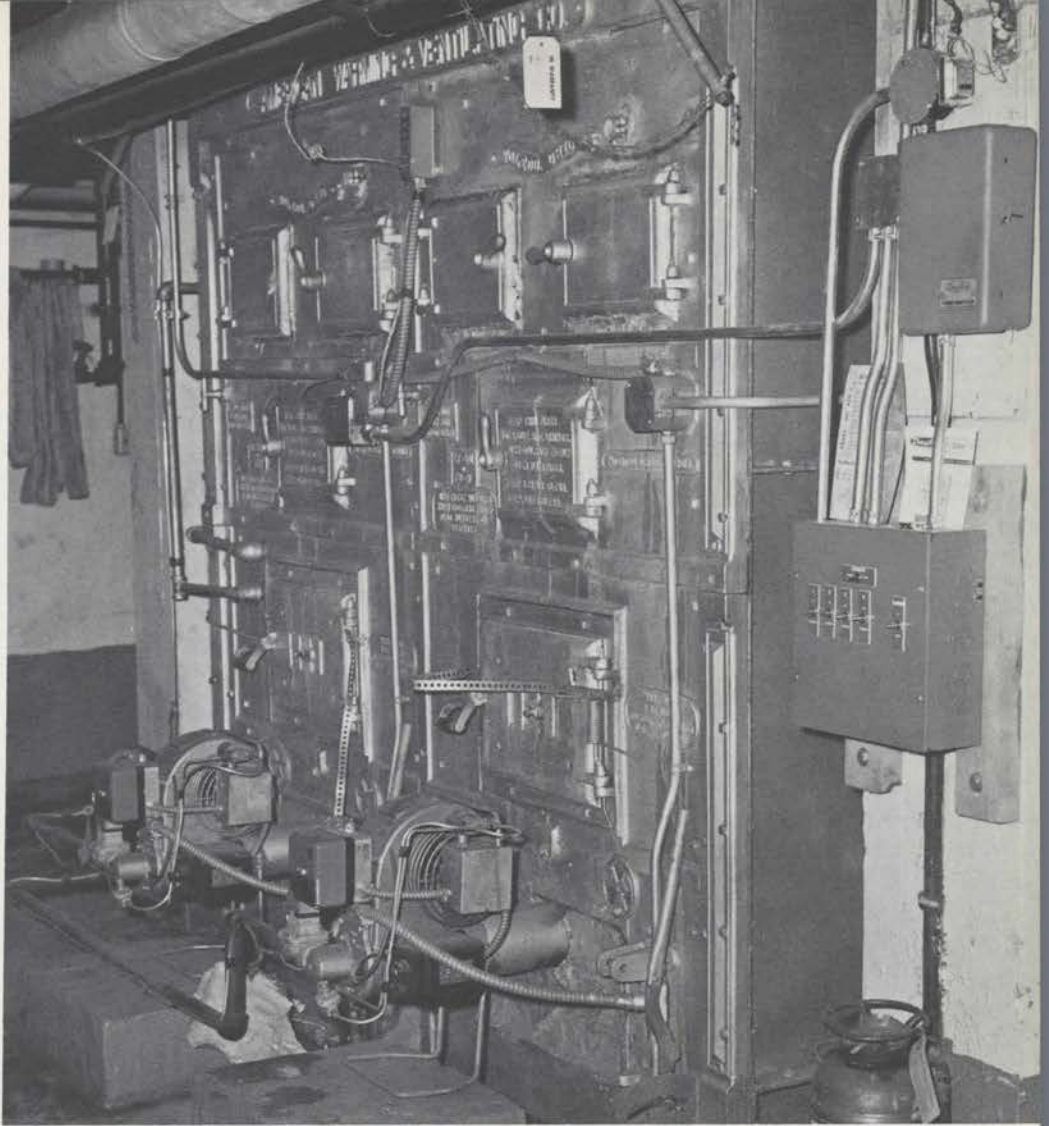
(Dave Ullin Photo)



organ, plus the continued use of the building and all the special wiring, phones, lights, and hours of work done during our rental period.

One of the first projects of our work crew, was the hoisting of the one-ton CinemaScope curved screen, with wooden frame, to the stage ceiling — as the stage had not been used for live shows since the wide screen was installed. During our banquet on stage, everyone was quite careful about sitting under that huge screen. It hasn't fallen yet, and our nimble stagehands can get it up or down in 60 seconds! It is counter-balanced on three battens with 2000 pounds of 25-pound lead weights.

After we accepted our unexpected rental of the theatre in 1974, the stage floor was completely sanded, the seats were cleaned and vacuumed, and years of gum was scraped from the floor and seats. Work was temporarily halted for our first public show — the Lee Erwin-Gloria Swanson Show, which brought about 6000 to the five performances, (two at the Royal Oak Theatre) and received extensive newspaper, radio, and television coverage. We currently have a Motor City Chorus who continue to use the theme music from the Gloria Swanson Show. A place to rehearse is another advantage of the Redford.



And you thought *your* heating bill was high! Two of the four furnaces that provide heat for the Redford Theatre, where building maintenance is as important as organ maintenance. (Phil Gorden Photo)

The first public show presented by Motor City at the Redford Theatre, in the fall of 1967, featured vintage cars and several members dressed in '20s attire. (Phil Gorden Photo)



They meet every Wednesday night, and, if you closed your eyes, you might think it was Mitch Miller, or Fred Waring.

If you look up at the Redford ceiling — which has the original clouds and a few water marks — you will now see 94 stars twinkling, thanks to brave members who crawled into the area above the ceiling with an intercom and located and relamped each "star."

The "house" phone system has now been extended from the light board to each of the eight dressing rooms, and is also connected to the booth, managers office, candy counter, and box office.

Restoration of the Barton has been in progress since 1966. Many man hours went into restoration of the chambers and the console, which in their original installation, had not been used for many years. The intricate Japanese pagodas and dragons that decorate the sides and top of the console, were restored in fiber-

glass by a member who makes and operates marionettes.

A player piano was purchased by the chapter and connected to the console after many hours of back-stage wiring, and when the piano was finally operational and moved to the pit, it was decorated to match the organ.

Other building improvements include automation of the building's archaic temperature control, adding a Genaraco high-intensity carbon arc spotlight to the projection booth, and the acquisition of old stage drapes, scenic backgrounds and light fixtures, many donated by other theatres.

In addition to the player piano in the pit, there is now a Knabe grand piano on stage, donated by the theatre owners from one of the downtown Detroit theatres — in fact it was the same theatre — the Capital, who loaned Mr. Don Miller to the Redford for opening night in 1928.

Although several multi-thousand seat movie palaces opened in Detroit in 1928, a smaller 2,000 seat Redford was the first, opening on January 27, 1928, billed as "America's most unique suburban playhouse," attending shows at the Redford was taking a trip to the Orient with a stop at Japan. The Redford might

Motor City members spent many months and used miles of wire to connect this rebuilt player piano to the organ console in 1973. It was decorated to resemble the Japanese ornamentation on the console.

(Phil Gorden Photo)



The Redford vertical bore the Kunskey name, the chain that first operated the theatre. The "New Redford" replaced an earlier store front nickelodeon.

(Manning Bros. Photo)

well have been the only theatre in the country to be patterned after a Japanese garden.

It was built by the John F. Kunskey chain and opened in the midst of Greater Redford Week — a campaign set up by the area merchants and partially financed by the Kunskey organization to usher in the new era of prosperity that the deluxe theatre would bring. (The New Redford, as it was known, replaced an earlier storefront nickelodeon located around the corner on Grand River Ave.) With approximately 2000 seats, and the finest in Kunskey-Balaban and Katz Publix stage presentation, several thousand persons per week were expected in the area.

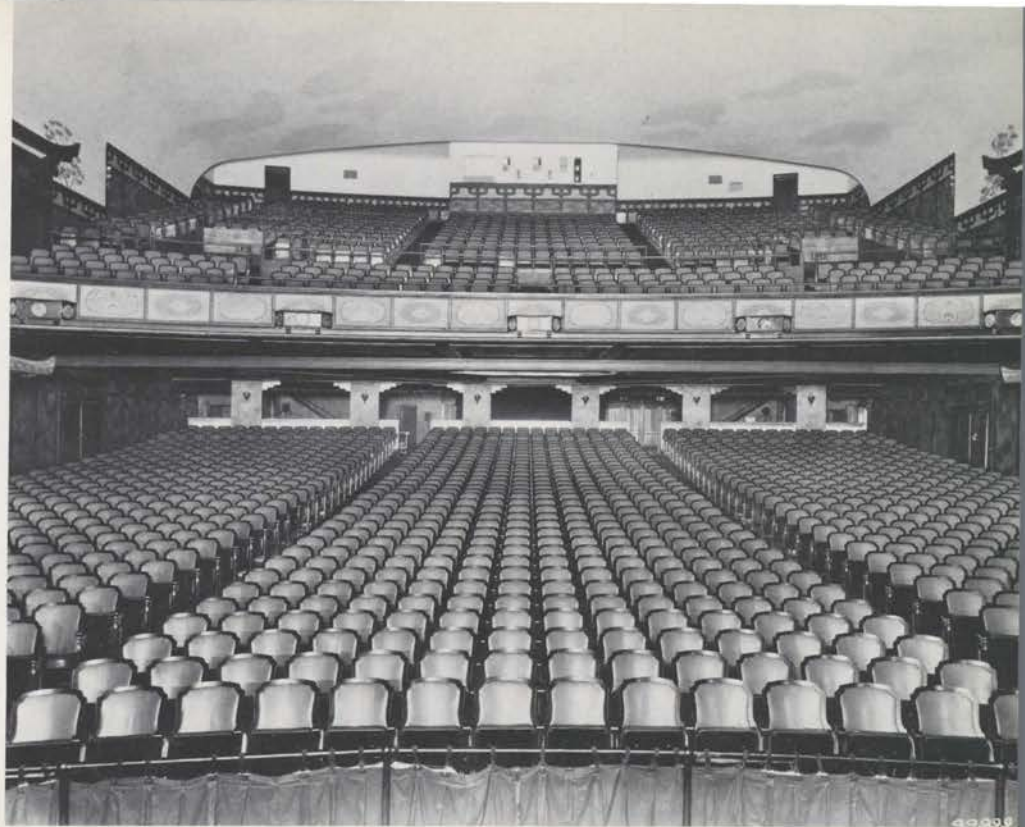


Tickets were purchased at a bronze and tile pagoda box office. The color scheme of the lobby was burnished gold with richly decorative plaster moldings. Bronze attraction boards, urns and carved chairs provided a final touch of atmosphere. Above the staircases on either side of the foyer hung huge Japanese tapestries and ornate brass light fixtures cast a golden glow across the richly carpeted floor.

Opening night audiences soon forgot the bitter cold as they entered the auditorium and found themselves in a Japanese garden with clouds floating lazily overhead and stars mysteriously blinking. Huge pagodas were situated on either side of the auditorium and on the ends of each were gardens with greenery, flowers and statuary. Japanese warriors flanked (and guarded?) the organ chambers and a mysterious mountain hovered in the background along with trees and landscape.

The evenings performance consisted of a presentation of the Barton theatre organ by Detroit's Don Miller. (Those who attended the 1967 ATOS Convention in Detroit will remember that Don Miller was the opening artist.) He accompanied a Richard Dix film, presented a newsreel and encouraged the patrons participation with one of his famous sing-alongs. The performance was presented twice that evening. Well into the middle of the second and final performance, another capacity crowd swelled outside the theatre,

The Redford as it appeared to opening night audiences in 1928. Note the Japanese detail on the grand drape and auditorium walls.



Original appearance of the auditorium when it opened. In later years, reseating created more leg room and reduced the seating capacity from about 2000 to 1500. (Manning Bros. Photo)

hoping to gain admittance.

The Redford Theatre has really always been a home for the chapter since the first public show there in the fall of 1967 when Gaylord Carter accompanied *The Mark of Zorro*. Excited by the public response for this type of entertainment, the chapter tried similar programs utilizing the pipe organs still remaining at the Punch and Judy, Royal Oak and Michigan (Ann Arbor) theatres. The audiences that attended these shows soon swelled to 20,000 each year.

Since the first public program in 1967, the chapter has presented over 50 silent film and theatre pipe organ programs to the public, of which about 30 have taken place at the Redford Theatre.

As we hope you will agree, Motor City has a golden opportunity to purchase a Golden-Voiced Barton — with a theatre attached, which we expect to become the "Performing Arts Center of Northwest Detroit," through our own programs and rentals.

Our fund-raising campaign has just begun. We started with the membership and past members, a mailing to our 5,000 friends who have supported our shows, and we are going into a 54,000-name mailing to the four local zip codes, appealing to the neighborhood to support our theatre and their community.

The concession stand in the lobby is not to be overlooked, as each night the theatre is open, we have candy, soft drinks, and popcorn to offer cared for by a loyal group of members who learned by experience. How much popcorn do we order, how much candy, what brands? This has all been worked out by our loyal staff, who learned the hard way that you do not melt butter on the heating element, you must insert a stainless container first to keep the butter from running onto the lobby floor.

Cleaning is also important, especially when we have three or four performances on a weekend and sweeping out between shows is necessary. Once again, members come to the rescue and man the brooms and trash bags. We operate with all volunteer help, and our members are working harder at the theatre than they would consider at home.

Once a month we host the Detroit Youth Film Forum for high school students, which previews a soon-to-be-released film and discussions are held after the viewing. During this, and most other outside performances, we are demonstrating our Barton organ to groups who have never before had the opportunity to hear live theatre organ music.

In addition to the mailings to raise funds, we have scheduled a full summer of fund-raising events. A giant garage sale is planned for the lobby, a five-day carnival will be held in the parking lots, and a summer series of all-time favorite films will be held every weekend during July and August, with a different nationally known artist at the organ for a pops concert.

An "orgathon" is planned for Labor Day weekend, when the organ will be played around the clock to collect pledges and possibly set a Guinness world record for theatre organ playing.

What can you do? We are so happy you asked! Donations of any amount from ATOS members and chapters are welcome. Each contribution of \$25.00 or more will be acknowledged by a lapel pin saying "I'm an angel — I helped buy the Redford," plus a ticket to a "Contributor's Concert" featuring a name artist, at the end of the fund raising drive.

Contributions of \$100.00 or more will receive a copper plaque, \$500.00 or more, a silver plaque, \$1,000 or more, a gold plaque, \$5,000 or more a specially engraved plaque and a lifetime membership in the chapter.

And for \$50,000 you will get a private concert!

Again, we repeat, please help Motor City "Buy the Redford" by sending your tax-deductible contributions to:

Motor City Theatre Organ Society
P.O. Box 40716
Redford, Michigan 48240

Chicago '77 ATOS Convention Update . . .

by Tom Tibia
with the assistance of Jim Koller

PALMER HOUSE, CHICAGO — I'm standing in the elegant lobby of this grand hotel after a brief tour by Jim Koller of the "Chicago '77" convention hospitality committee who helped show me what registrants can expect when they arrive for the big event.

Located at State and Monroe Streets, the Palmer House is just a short cab ride from Amtrak's Union Station as well as both bus depots. Those travelling lighter than I do (three steamer trunks and a tooth brush!) could easily walk from Greyhound or Trailways which are both on Randolph St., four blocks north. If you are flying into O'Hare Field, a cab ride will cost about \$10. It makes more sense, however, to take the Continental Air Transport Bus from the lower baggage claim area. Be sure to be on their South Loop bus which comes directly here to the Palmer House for only \$3.15 one way. If you are driving one of Cousin Carter's gas guzzlers you may exit Interstate 94 at Monroe St. and proceed east two miles to the hotel on State St. Hotel parking is available in the Mid-Continent Plaza building garage directly across Wabash Ave. to the east of the hotel for about \$4.00 per day (use the Monroe St. entrance). City parking is also available, three blocks east of the hotel, at the Monroe St. lot at \$4.00 per day.

The main lobby of the hotel where I am now standing is one flight up from the street level. The Palmer House is a Hilton Hotel which accepts all major credit cards including Visa-BankAmericard, Master Charge, Carte Blanche and Diners Club. Having completed your hotel check in, you can find our registration area on the mezzanine overlooking the lobby. Just ride the escalator up and turn to your right.

Hopefully you will have pre-

registered so that Charlotte Rieger and helpers will have your registration packet and badge prepared and waiting for you. Please step down to see Art Todesco who will help you select your alternative event. You have one choice from four alternatives, two on Saturday afternoon (Home Tour "A" or WGN) and two on Sunday afternoon (Home Tour "B" or Temple Sholom). Three organs are on Home Tour "A": Faye Wheeler's 3/16 Wicks from the Oral Roberts University Auditorium, Art Todesco's 2/5 Estey (with Haskell basses), one of fourteen pipe organs originally in the Oriental Theatre building, and the 3/8 Wurlitzer-Kimball hybrid which belongs to Jack Gustafson.

Corporate Vice President Alexander Field will be on hand to host those who choose WGN, home of a 3/11 Wurlitzer/Kimball. It was heard on the *Little Orphan Annie* and *Amos and Andy* radio shows, and is one of the few left in broadcasting. It is still in weekly use for religious shows and on special occasions, such as a recent Christmas TV special when it was played by Walter Strony. On Sunday, Home Tour "B" will stop at Leon Berry's "Beast in the Basement" 2/8 Wurlitzer, at Stan and Vi Lechowicz's 4/20 Barton (originally a 4/10 and probably a 4/21 by now), and at Bob Schmidt's 2/7 hybrid with Kimball pipes and Wurlitzer console. Those choosing Temple Sholom will hear a 4/32 Wurlitzer, one of that builders few liturgical attempts. (Yes, your ears are hearing correctly.) That is the sound of two Tibias, (one a Tibia Plena) speaking into the huge octagonal stone room which is the Temple's sanctuary. Please note that due to tight scheduling and limited space you must have chosen to ride the bus in order to choose either home tour.

