



Dick Leis steadies himself on the forklift after delivering components to the ground floor. (DB photo)



The organ is turned on for its final concert in Ohio, by Roy Haning.

(All photos by the author)

The Bowers Organ Project

by Dorothy Bromage

It was a familiar story. The theatre was to be torn down, and the manager called someone he knew to see if the person would be interested in removing the organ. So it happened, in 1965, that Dave Bowers, then residing in Dayton, Ohio, removed a Wurlitzer Style 210. When he went to the theatre, he was shown the console, but when he asked about pipes, the manager indicated that he had never seen any. A search led to the pipe chamber in an area on the left side, reached by catwalk, where the contents were in mint condition. For the sum of \$4000, Dave got the console and the contents of the chambers. The deal included the brass plaque from the front of the theatre, but when Dave went to get it, the plaque had vanished. The RKO Keith Theatre had been the home of the organ since April 28, 1922. Dave and friends Neil White and Roy Haning removed the organ.

The 2/9 Wurlitzer remained in storage until Roy and Neil constructed a special building in Troy, Ohio, to house and display their automatic musical instruments and to provide a space designed specifically for organ chambers and console. Chosen as installer was Dave Junchen, and the result was an instrument with a rich, exciting sound.

Another change was to occur for the RKO Keith organ. In 1986, Roy and Neil decided to sell the large residence/business in Troy. Dave Bowers, now living in New Hampshire, purchased the organ from them. Enter Pine Tree Chapter. Dave, in a letter to me on another matter, mentioned the possibility that the organ might be donated to the chapter if other options did not prove to be viable.

At our next chapter meeting, the major topic of discussion was whether we

could accept the organ as a gift if it were to become available, including the conditions: as is, where is. Transport of the organ was workable, as was storage here in Maine. Arrangements for volunteers to dismantle the organ and load it on a truck were underway. Discussion of estimated costs and a list of potential homes for the organ resulted in the chapter membership voting a \$50 per member assessment. Acquisition of the organ came even closer to being a possibility.

Then there was a week of suspense when the matter could have gone either way. Finally, the offer was made firm, the acceptance was put in writing, and the Bowers Organ Project was underway.

Pipe trays were purchased from Dr. Dwight Leighton, who had installed the organ maintained by Pine Tree Chapter in Old Orchard Beach. I borrowed a pickup truck from my son and met Bill McCullough and his two children, Marcie and Colin, at Dwight's home to haul the 18 pipe trays out of his barn. Off went the trays by Consolidated Freightways to Troy. My plane reservations were made, and the rental of the truck in Ohio was finalized. Most important, willing workers were found in Dayton, Mike and Liz Barnhart, friends I had met through AMICA (Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association) and who are also ATOS members.

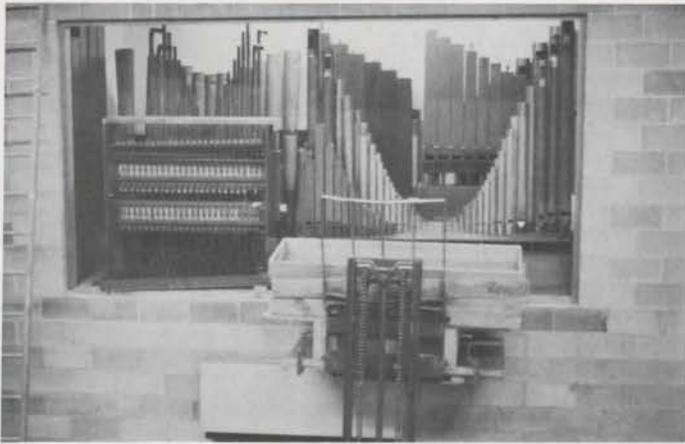
After work on Friday, May 29, I flew from Portland, Maine, to Dayton, Ohio, where I was met by Lawrence and Margaret Frazer, also AMICA members, who live near the airport. I stayed overnight with the Barnharts. What a home! They have a truly fine collection of auto-

matic musical instruments and a Wurlitzer pipe organ, from the prison in Jackson, Michigan, which Mike is in the process of installing.

On Saturday morning the weather in Troy was more like July, I was told. At nine o'clock, the temperature was 80 degrees and the humidity was high. Mike, Liz, and their son, Doug, were joined by friends Dick Leis and Lawrence Frazer. These people and myself, with the assistance of Roy Haning and Neil White, constituted the crew which took on the monumental job of removing the organ in two days.

Those who have moved an organ realize what took place that weekend. Although the organ was quite clean (for an organ), there was dust added to sweat, and fatigue built up quickly because of the humidity and the necessity of operating at both the ground level and the level of the chambers (one flight up). Our spirits were lifted by Neil as he occasionally turned on one large Belgian orchestration or another. He and Roy also provided uplifting experiences of another sort with the forklift which was used several times by crew members who preferred it to the stairs. This was a busy vehicle as the parts of the organ were separated, lifted over a four-foot wall and placed on the lift platform to be lowered to the floor near the 12' doorway where the Ryder truck awaited its precious cargo.

As the swell shades began to feel the action of cordless screwdrivers, I dashed over to the console, Roy turned it on, and I played a ballad before my mini-mini-concert was brought to a halt by pipes being pulled out of chests. But — a playing organ! Not every chapter is so fortunate!



With swell shades removed and pipe trays raised to chamber wall height, the pipes are about to start their big move.



Lawrence Frazer and Mike Barnhart find that riding the forklift beats climbing stairs.

Packing the truck began on Sunday morning with Mike in charge. Two of the toughest tasks involved the blower and the relay. Fortunately, the Ryder agency had substituted a 24-foot truck for the 22-foot one I had reserved. The console and bench went in last with much measuring and some adjusting of the contents of the truck. At ten o'clock that night, the Ohio portion of the project was complete.

I drove to a point just east of Columbus before bedding down for the night. A second night in Newburgh, Pennsylvania, and then the 1004-mile trip was

completed on Tuesday night. It was uneventful, which is the way such trips should be. Crossing Pennsylvania on Route 80, I saw some of the most beautiful countryside I'd ever seen.

The magnificent gift from Dave and Christine Bowers is now in its temporary home — my garage. Unloading in Maine was done by a work party headed by chapter technician Jim Martin along with Bill Pennock, Bill McCullough, Colin McCullough, Dick Perham and Maurice Pope. The job was completed in the hours between 9:00 and 5:00, with a break for lunch which was prepared by Margaret Green, my mom. As the organ was un-

loaded, all remarked at the absence of any signs of damage — a real credit to the Ohio crew, especially Mike Barnhart.

Exciting days are ahead for Pine Tree Chapter. The five-member search committee is checking out each prospective site for installation of our Wurlitzer. There was no time to launch a fund-raising drive, and chapter members can take real pride in funding the entire project — they did this without using the money in our treasury which is currently dedicated to the chapter's 3/13 Wurlitzer in the Loranger School in Old Orchard Beach and its ongoing maintenance and refurbishment.



The Ohio crew: Roy Haning, Mike Barnhart, Liz Barnhart, Doug Barnhart, Lawrence Frazer, Neil White and Dorothy Bromage. Not shown: Dick Leis.



The crew in Maine: Jim Martin, Bill McCullough, Colin McCullough, Bill Pennock and Dick Perham. Not shown: Maurice Pope and Dorothy Bromage.



Soldering connections being separated here by Doug Barnhart and Lawrence Frazer.



Dorothy Bromage tapes down pipes.