

Roller Skating Museum adds band organ as working exhibit

By James Vannurden, Director & Curator, National Museum of Roller Skating

The National Museum of Roller Skating located at 4730 South Street, Lincoln, Neb., on June 24 acquired a mechanical band organ, which is a unique musical instrument of yesteryear. During the early 1900s, band organs were in common use in roller skating rinks and other venues of mass entertainment. These air-powered instruments are activated by paper rolls similar to those of a player piano and were a means of providing skating music in rinks which could be heard above the roar of old time fiber and wood skate wheels rolling across the rink's hardwood flooring. In that era, the Chicago Skate Company, then the leading manufacturer and supplier of roller skates in the United States, was an active distributor to rinks for the now defunct Wurlitzer Band Organs.

This July, Lincoln hosted the annual USA Roller Sports Indoor National Roller Skating Championships at Pershing Auditorium. The newly acquired band organ arrived in time to become an attractive addition to museum exhibits, providing an experience that few mod-

ern skaters have either seen or heard. Its gusty music provides bygone rink ambiance that will enliven inspection of the museum's rare skate artifacts, some dating back to 1812.

The museum is conceded to hold the greatest such collection in the world. It contains the first patented roller skate in history, which just happens to be an inline skate. Many skaters today believe this is a relatively new invention brought into existence by Rollerblades Company.

The Museum's new Ragtime Band Organ, Model 143dg, contains 8 automatically playing instruments: bass and snare drums, cymbal, tambourine, triangle, castanets, 27 note glockenspiel and 43 calliope pipes. This organ console was assembled in Ceres, Calif., by Ragtime West, a company owned by Ken Caulkins who has for 41 years distributed worldwide a range of automated musical instruments that include band organs, calliopes, player pianos of all sizes and types, automated guitars, banjos, accordions, marimbas, etc. The Museum's band organ was designed for commercial use and is 43" wide and 7'2" high, weighing just under 250 pounds. The cabinet's use of bi-folding doors allows volume control of its pipes



This Model 143dg Band Organ was recently added to the National Roller Skating Museum's collection.

for indoor use, similar to the way hand cranked Victrola phonograph machines controlled their sound during the same time period.

By means of grants from the USA Roller Sports Foundation and from Ragtime Automated Music, Lincoln's National Museum of Roller Skating resurrects from the past a voice of roller skating in the 1920s. To our knowledge, the last band organ music heard publicly in Lincoln was an installation at the old Capitol Beach amusement park.

Admission to the Museum is free. Doors are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. most week days. For additional information log onto our website rollerskatingmuseum.com or contact museum curator James Vannurden, phone (402) 483-7551, ext. 16.

Editor's Note: Museum Curator James Vannurden and George Pickard are also looking for a working Hammond B3 or older organ that's in working condition with a Leslie speaker(s).

Visit us at:
48th and South Streets,
Lincoln, Nebraska
Museum hours: Mon.-Fri., 9-5
Admission: FREE!
www.rollerskatingmuseum.com

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