

# THE WURLITZER COMPANY

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NORTH TONAWANDA, NEW YORK

OFFICE OF  
FARNY R. WURLITZER  
CHAIRMAN  
OF THE BOARD

February 26, 1962.

Mr. Art Reblitz

My dear Art:

Your letter of February 19th was forwarded to me and I am sorry I can't help you by sending you catalogs or pictures of the many types of instruments that we built over the years but I can give you a short account of the business that we did back in the 1890's and up to about 1918.

The first automatic musical instrument that our Company sold was the Regina music box. It was equipped with a coin attachment and some of the larger models had 10 or 12 tunes. These were on steel sheets with perforations in them, only one tune to a sheet. They were circular and varied in diameter depending upon the model Regina that was playing it. We were the largest distributors of Regina music boxes in the United States and began handling the line when that Company began doing business which I think was in 1894. Music boxes had, of course, been made for a good many years by the Swiss and also some German firms, that was played by a round cylinder with pins in it. There are still some of these old Swiss music boxes in existence.

The first automatic piano that we built was called the Tonophone and that was played by a wooden cylinder with pins in it similar to the metal rolls in the Swiss music boxes. Each cylinder had ten tunes on it and you could shift from one to the other by adjusting the handle at the side. This was operated by a coin attachment and we did quite a large business in these.

Shortly after 1900, however, we brought out the first instruments with a paper roll. I failed to mention that the Tonophone was manufactured by the DeKleist Musical Instrument Manufacturing Company at North Tonawanda which we later acquired in 1908. We had the sole sale of all of the products made by the DeKleist firm with the exception

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of their Merry-go-round organs.

We built many types of instruments with the paper roll, the first one was the Pianino which played only 44 notes. Later on we had models that played 65 and also some that played the 88 notes. Many were built with drums and percussion instruments and, of course, pipes imitating the violin tone and the flute tone. In addition to those instruments that we built ourselves, we imported a good many Orchestrians from Germany. I worked for a short time in the factory in Frankfurt-on-the-Main, Germany where these instruments were made, that was back in 1902 and '03. I also spent some time in the Swiss Music Box factory, Switzerland.

The Orchestrians that we imported from Europe varied in retail price from about \$1500. to as high as \$8500. We stopped importing entirely when the war broke out in 1914 and the coin operated music business gradually declined and especially so when Prohibition came into effect.

In the early days of the Nickelodeons as they were called, we built instruments that could be played with a roll to accompany the motion pictures. These instruments had pipes and percussion instruments, especially the larger ones having a piano in the center with a double roll so that one roll could be playing while the other was rewinding and the cabinets on each side containing the pipes and percussion instruments. In 1910 we purchased the assets of the Hope Jones Organ Company from the Receiver and then began building the pipe organs but it took some years before these were really accepted and the early ones were used in regular theatres as the motion picture theatres had not been developed in the early days, they came along after 1912. This business was quite important but when talking pictures came into general use, the sale of organs to theatres gradually declined although we still did quite a volume with our organs going to England, South Africa and other parts of the world. There are very few of them in use in theatres today. Radio City Music Hall which has the largest organ that we built for a theatre is in use and is played regularly at their performances.

Today we are building electronic organs and selling a great many of these for homes.

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I hope the information I have given you will be of interest to you.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jerry M. Woodruff". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name "FRW'AM".

FRW'AM