

History of the American Band Organ Association (ABOA)

Ken Smith

The American Band Organ Association was organized in 1981 by myself. I had joined the Musical Box Society International ten years before that, in 1971, but I longed for a simpler organization of people whose only interest was band organs. The main interest of the Music Box Society members was music boxes and this did not include band organs. These members regarded band organs as noisy upstarts and loud outdoor machines which drowned out their own soft speaking music boxes. Their disdain for the noisy organs grew more vocal after member Dan Slack organized the MBSI Mid-America Band Organ Rallies in 1976.

The first ABOA rally was held on Saturday, October 19, 1985, on five acres of land across the road from my home near Blacklick, Ohio. Fortunately, the weather had not turned cold, but there was an intermittent light rain that day. The turnout was excellent, with 11 large organs, and several small ones attending, plus an antique car display, a model steam traction engine, and a clown, Bob Cantine. Food was served across the road at the Smiths. My wife, Marian, and several other hard working ladies fed 60 people twice that day, at no cost to the attendees. People came from far and wide: Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Cliff Gray brought an organ from Mississippi in the back of a pick-up truck, and Bruce Miller flew in from Washington state.



Figure 1. The first Gallipolis rally held in September, 1992. A group photo of most of the attendees (not shown: Bud & B Bronson; Cliff & Robbie Gray). Photo: Ken Smith.

It would simply be a group of people with an outspoken love of the delightful machines called band organs.

In the next 14 years the American Band Organ Association conducted a total of 33 organ rallies, the last being held in 1999. These are listed in the Table 1 on page five.

I drew up a membership certificate for the new ABOA which, at that time had one member: me. I presented the idea to a few friends and created a little interest. My idea for a band organ club was to keep it as simple as possible. There would be no charter, no officers, no dues, no committees, no newsletter, etc. It would simply be a group of people with an outspoken love of the delightful machines called band organs.

The ABOA did not really get off the ground until we started having our own organ rallies. In 1985 in Fremont, Ohio, Dan Slack conducted a huge organ rally for the MBSI, with 70 organs in attendance. In those days the MBSI Mid-America rally was the only one in the entire country, and it was held once a year.

We had so much fun at that rally that it seemed a shame to enjoy it only once a year. That's when I decided to have the ABOA conduct its own rally, and set about organizing one.



Figure 2. At the ABOA rally in Jefferson, Texas in June, 1989 Jack Hewes brought his home-built 52-key organ from Seattle, WA. Photo: Mary Eberwine

Note that many locations hosted more than one rally. Gallipolis had the most with four. Holland, Angola and Findlay had three, while Oxford, Marion and Wabash each had two. It shows that good things bear repeating.

Special mention should be made of the 1989 Jefferson, Texas Rally hosted by Cliff and Robbie Gray. For some that trip was over a thousand miles each way (mine was 975), but the turnout was remarkable. One member, Jack Hewes, brought an organ from Seattle, Washington, probably 2500 miles each way (Figure 2). The Grays put on a great rally which was appreciated by all. Going to Jefferson was our way of showing our appreciation for all the thousands of miles the Grays have traveled since 1980 to attend both the MBSI and ABOA rallies, in Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

American Band Organ Association Rallies			
	Location	Host	
1.	Oct. 19, 1985	Blacklick, OH	Ken and Marian Smith
2.	May 17, 1986	Jackson, MI	Fred & Johann Dahlinger
3.	May 30 - 31, 1987	Archbold, OH	Fred & Johann Dahlinger
4.	Sept. 26, 1987	Livonia, MI	John & Nan Flint
5.	June 4, 1988	Crossroads Village, MI	Bob & Cathy Cantine
6.	Sept. 17, 1988	Ashtabula, OH	Bob & Sharon Fortune
7.	June 9 - 11, 1989	Jefferson, TX	Cliff & Robbie Gray
8.	Sept. 15 - 16, 1989	Findlay, OH	Terry & Joan Haughawout
9.	June 1 - 2, 1990	New Philadelphia, OH	Bill & Marge Waters
10.	Sept. 7 - 8, 1990	Chillicothe, OH	Neil & Debbie Smith
11.	May 31, 1991	Oxford, OH	Richard & Carol Strimple
12.	July 19 - 21, 1991	Findlay, OH	Terry & Joan Haughawout
13.	Sept. 20 - 21, 1991	Tiffin, OH	Wayne Coffman
14.	June 12 - 13, 1992	Angola, IN	Gene & Phyllis Headley
15.	July 17 - 18, 1992	Columbus, OH	Ken and Marian Smith
16.	Sept. 11 - 12, 1992	Gallipolis, OH	Neil Smith, Kim Sheets*
17.	June 11 - 12, 1993	Columbia City, IN	Mike & Linda Grant
18.	July 30 - 31, 1993	Cleveland, OH	Wally Sherman
19.	May 7 - 8, 1994	Holland, MI	Terry & Joan Haughawout
20.	June 17 - 18, 1994	Frankenmuth, MI	Albert Zehnder
21.	July 29 - 30, 1994	Wabash, IN	Frank & Hope Rider
22.	Sept. 23 - 24, 1994	Gallipolis, OH	Kim Sheets*
23.	May 13 - 14, 1995	Holland, MI	Terry & Joan Haughawout
24.	July 29 - 30, 1995	Angola, IN	Gene & Phyllis Headley
25.	Sept. 22 - 23, 1995	Gallipolis, OH	Kim Sheets*
26.	May 10 - 12, 1996	Holland, MI	Terry & Joan Haughawout
27.	Aug. 2 - 3, 1996	Wabash, IN	Frank & Hope Rider
28.	Aug. 1 - 2, 1997	Marion, OH	Don & Norma Redd
29.	June 12 - 13, 1998	Findlay, OH	Dave Vincent
30.	July 17 - 18, 1998	Angola, IN	Gene & Phyllis Headly
31.	July 17 - 19, 1999	Gallipolis, OH	Rhonda Cox*
32.	July 23 - 24, 1999	Oxford, OH	Richard & Carol Strimple
33.	Aug. 6 - 7, 1999	Marion, OH	Don & Norma Redd

*Gallia County Visitor's Bureau

Table 1. American Band Organ Association rallies and host, listed by dates.

Mention should be made of a small group of people in the ABOA known as the ABOA Concert Band (Figures 5 & 7, Table 2). This was a rather motley group of rag-tag musicians and would-be musicians whose only crime was having fun in entertaining, or trying to entertain, the long-suffering non-musician members of the ABOA.

Another mention of Cliff Gray is in order, since he bought, at his own expense, uniforms for the band: red caps, with "ABOA Concert Band" on them. I should also mention that, earlier, Cliff had membership certificates, logos (Figure 6), and an ABOA calendar printed for the club, and had

regular ABOA caps made, again at his own expense. Cliff was undoubtedly our most enthusiastic booster.



Figure 3. The ABOA, as promoted by member Ed and Carol Ditto on their Raffin street organ cart. Photo: Ken Smith.



Figure 4. Ken Smith, Mike Kitner and Randy Simons playing at the Cleveland ABOA rally on July 31, 1993. Photo: Ken Smith.



Figure 5. The ABOA rally in Columbus, OH on July 17, 1992 was entertained by the ABOA band. Musicians shown are Ron Bopp, Robbie Gray, Bob Kirshner and Mike Kitner. Photo: Nan Flint

However, all good things must come to an end. Unfortunately for the ABOA, there was a downside to the informal nature of the organization, one I had not anticipated when I started the club.

People far and wide began asking for membership, and it became my sad task to tell them that if they could not attend our organ rallies, they would get no benefit from belonging to the organization, other than the membership certificate I sent them. Without a newsletter, many lost interest in joining.

Recently, there has been much interest in a new organization, the Carousel Organ Association of American (COAA), a more formal group with a charter, officers, dues and a journal (a fine one, which you are looking at). The ABOA membership has smoothly assimilated into the COAA.

ABOA Band Members

Ron Bopp	Kim Pontius
Robbie Gray	Jackie Porter
Ben Jones	John Prtljaga
Bob Kirshner	Ken Smith
Mike Kitner	Dave Vincent
Brad McClincy	Darlene Wasson
Lexie Palmore	David Wasson
Cliff Pollock	

Table 2. A list of members of the ABOA band throughout the years.



Figure 6. The membership logo, printed on a felt-like material, was passed out to members in the early years of the ABOA organization. Photo: Ron Bopp

In 1999, after 18 years of existence, the American Band Organ Association quietly slipped into oblivion, and into history, leaving behind some great memories. Now, the COAA will provide the memories.

Figure 7. The ABOA band plays for the banquet after the organ rally in Marion, OH on August 7, 1999. Featured are John Prtljaga, Dave Vincent, Kim Pontius, Ken Smith and Ben Jones.

Photo: Mary Pollock



ABOA Membership*

1. Ken Smith	47. Robert J. Avary	93. Don Rountree
2. Don Stinson	48. Cliff Gray, III	94. Dale Gunnar
3. Richard Franceschi	49. David Niswonger	95. Darren Brown
4. Roy Haning & Neal White	50. Larry Niswonger	96. Lexie Palmore
5. Bob Gilson	51. John E. & Nan Flint	97. Ivy E. Richards
6. Jerry Betts	52. William A. & Marjorie Waters	98. Robert Molesworth
7. Dan Slack	53. Theodore Wafllart	99. William O. Winston
8. Neil Smith	54. James S. Welty	100. Jere Van Wormer
9. Bruce Miller	55. Kevin & Linda Sheehan	101. William E. Ullstrom
10. Bob Kirshner	56. David A. Rohe	102. Dan C. Brown
11. Ron & Mary Jo Bopp	57. Thomas A. Dimock	103. Harlan M. Wolff
12. John E. Tenney	58. Catherine Collison	104. Gary Scherf
13. David Stumpf	59. Reg Turlington	105. Ed Bishop
14. Mike & Linda Perry	60. George & Elizabeth Murphy	106. Richard R. Dawson
15. Terry Haughawout	61. John Pohlpete	107. Steven G. Katz - Constance K. Barsky
16. Bob Stanoszek	62. Norman & Alison Douglas	108. Carl & Sharon Curtis
17. Mike Bardin	63. Bud Bronson	109. M. Lou Marsh
18. Frank & Hope Rider	64. "B" Bronson	110. Patsy Capilungo
19. Herb Brabandt	65. David R. Young	111. Frances J. Reitz
20. Timothy Trager	66. Walter & Nancy Loucks	112. Gerald Webber
21. Jack Hewes	67. Jerry & Marilyn Buechner	113. Don Buchele
22. Ron Nelson	68. James Knudtson	114. Al & Esther Hardesty
23. Roy Norman	69. James & Alice Kershner	115. John Prtljaga
24. Ron Yost	70. Jim Grissinger	116. David Vincent
25. Walter J. Kehoe	71. Matt Caulfield	117. Mike & Sandy Schoeppner
26. Bob & Diane Yates	72. Whitey & Sandy Best	118. Fred Doolittle
27. Steve Lanick	73. Wayne Coffman	119. Frank Hall
28. Tony Marsico	74. Cliff & Mary Pollock	120. Dan Wilke
29. Richard Strimple	75. Marsh & Joyce Royster	121. Burton J. Lindhart
30. Carol Mahaney	76. Carl A. Moss	122. Randy & Linda Simon
31. Jerry Doring	77. Dr. Maurice G. & Phyllis Headley	123. James & Carol Westcott
32. John & Diana Kelly	78. Larry A. Kern	124. Joseph F. Peck
33. Mike Kitner	79. Edward L. Kraus	125. Patti Hall
34. Ron & Glynn Keisler	80. Dave Ramey	126. Art Ritchie - Dan Jones
35. Capt. John Leonard	81. Carsten Henningsen	127. Noreene M. Sweeney
36. William E. Black	82. Robert K. Conant	128. Kim A. Pontius
37. Mike Merrick	83. William Hall	129. Bob & Charlotte Scuorzo
38. Tracy M. Tolzmann	84. Donald Redd	130. Bob & Bee Hobbs
39. Tom Wurdeman	85. Walter F. Sherman	131. Paul & Pat Dyer
40. John Page	86. Art & Dee Eltzroth	132. Gary & Cynthia Craig
41. Judith Howard	87. Roy H. Higgins	133. Kim Sheets
42. Fred & Johann Dahlinger	88. Robert Fortune	134. Ed & Carol Ditto
43. Cliff Gray, 11	89. William & Mary Finch	
44. Wilfred Markey	90. Louis & Odessa Carroll	
45. David Morecraft	91. Richard Dunn	
46. Robert & Cathy Cantine	92. Tom Grace	

* in order of joining

Table 3. ABOA membership from the inception of the organization.

Ken Smith is well known for his exact replication of both a 89-keyless Gavioli and a 63-keyless Ruth organ. Both organs have appeared at ABOA and Mid-Am rallies. More information can be found about Ken in the *Meet Your Member* feature on page 31.