

Organ Rally Enameled Pins

Ron Bopp

It would be uncommon today to attend an organ rally without noticing the prevalence of one or more enameled, decorative pins attached to the organ grinder, owner, or even the attending audience. How did this start? The production of the enameled organ rally pin had its beginning in the United States in 1983 when Dan Slack of Fremont, Ohio, introduced a pin for rally attendees at the 8th annual Mid-America Chapter (Musical Box Society International) organ rally. The rally was held in Dan's back yard (literally and figuratively) where the attendees had chance to play at a pre-rally at Dan and Marilyn's home and then, just a few miles away, at the Fremont fairgrounds. Dan had been a pioneer in instigating the organ rally concept in America in 1976 after attending organ and traction engine shows in England.

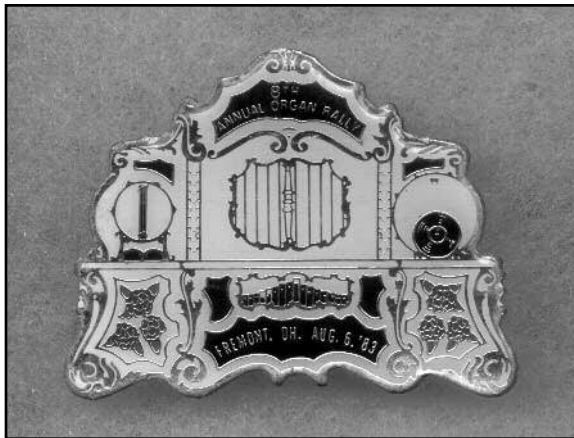


Figure 1. The first organ rally pin depicting a Wurlitzer Style 153 band organ from the Dan Slack collection.

The rally in 1983 was gigantic in proportion to previous rallies and Dan felt that some method of rewarding organ-bringing attendees was in order. Again, after noting what had been done in England and Europe, he came up with the idea of producing a commemorative pin of the rally. Those bringing an organ to the rally were rewarded with a complimentary pin as a keepsake. This practice had been started earlier with posters but again, the 1983 rally gave Dan chance to produce a poster like none previously. This practice has also bloomed and many rallies today continue to promote four-color posters, but this is not the subject of this article and will be covered later.

The first pin made and given to organ owners (and also available by purchase for others) was a replica of Dan's Wurlitzer Style 153 carousel organ (**Figure 1**). Measuring 1 3/4" x 1 1/4" the glossy, colored enameled pin instantly became a hit. Featuring a clothes clasp on the reverse side the pin could be worn by anyone, thus promoting the rally for all to see.

The subsequent Mid-America Chapter organ rallies have continued to feature brightly colored, enameled pins for the organ owners and continue to this time. Many of these can be seen in **Figure 2**. The largest pin measures 2 1/2" wide by 1 7/8" where as the smallest is but 1" wide. Usually the featured organ of the rally organizer was the pin organ but this was not the only case. For example in 1985, Dan again hosted the rally and used Ken Smith's 89-key Gavioli for the pin. In 1986, Frank Rider (Wabash, IN) hosted the Mid-America Chapter's rally and used

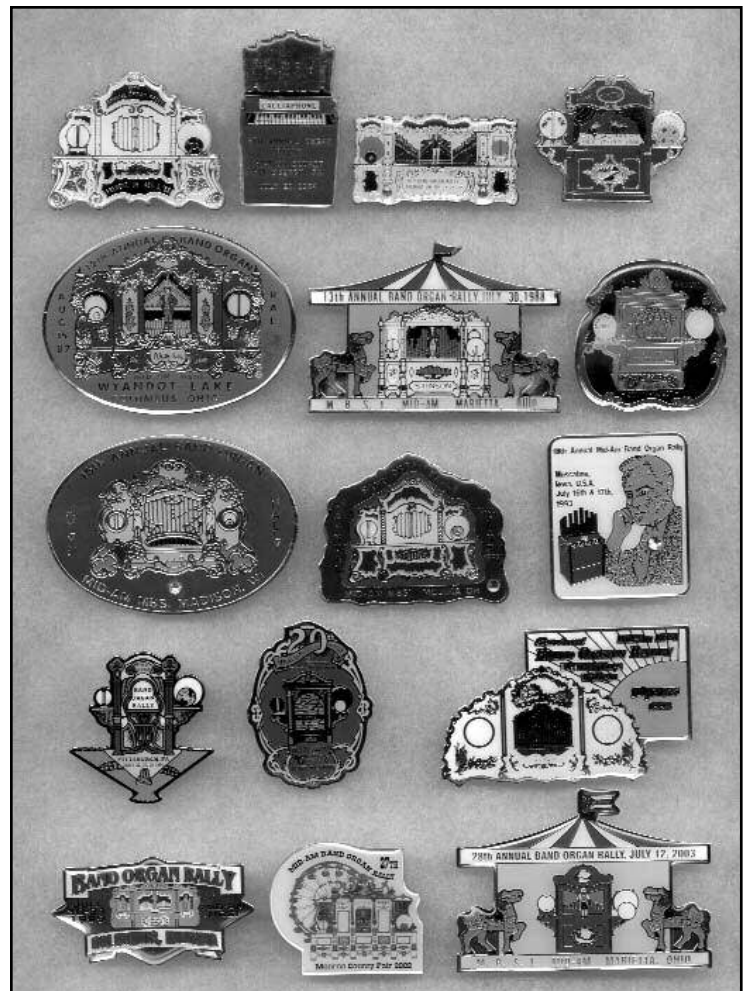


Figure 2. Organ rally enameled pins produced by the various Mid-America Chapter (MBSI) rallies. While not a complete display this gives an idea of the variety of pins produced over a 30 year span.

his Wurlitzer Caliola with drums as the pin organ. Other organs featured have been Wurlitzer Styles 125, 146A, 157 and 165. In addition there have been an Artizan A, more calliopes and various Stinson models.

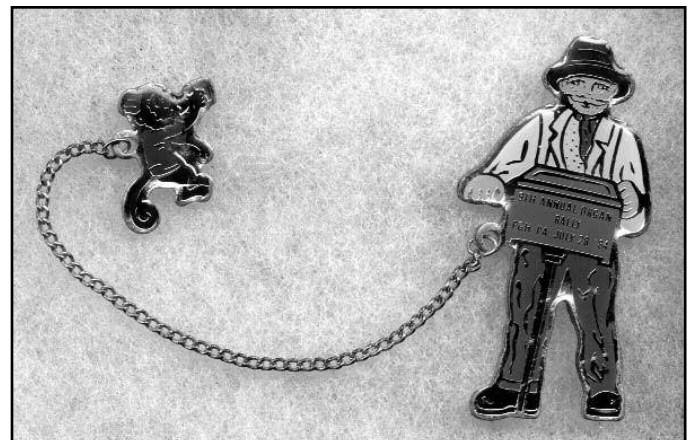


Figure 3. A most collectable pin today is this 1984 organ grinder with monkey, designed by Bob and Diane Yates.

In 1988 Sylvia and Jim Caporale made a large pin featuring a Stinson band organ on a carousel. The use of other associated rally features (carousels, fairs, etc.) has continued with the 2004 Mid-America Rally pin even incorporating a hot-air balloon (two lucky Mid-America members were fortunate to ride in one at a pre-rally affair).

In 1984 there were two pins offered, one representing a Tangley Calliope and an unusual organ grinder with attached monkey (**Figure 3**). When recently questioned, rally organizer Bob Yates noted that they liked the idea of offering two pins instead of one. The design for the grinder with monkey was an original done by Bob and his wife Diane.

The idea of organ rally pins quickly spread to other related organizations with the Heart of America Chapter (A.M.I.C.A.) taking the lead. Since 1988 the Heart of America Chapter has produced several rally pins (**Figure 4**) beginning with a North Tonawanda 146 military band organ and others such as a Hanchett calliope in a 1976 Cadillac hearse, an O.G.M. hand organ and an Alan Pell 45-note trumpet hand organ.

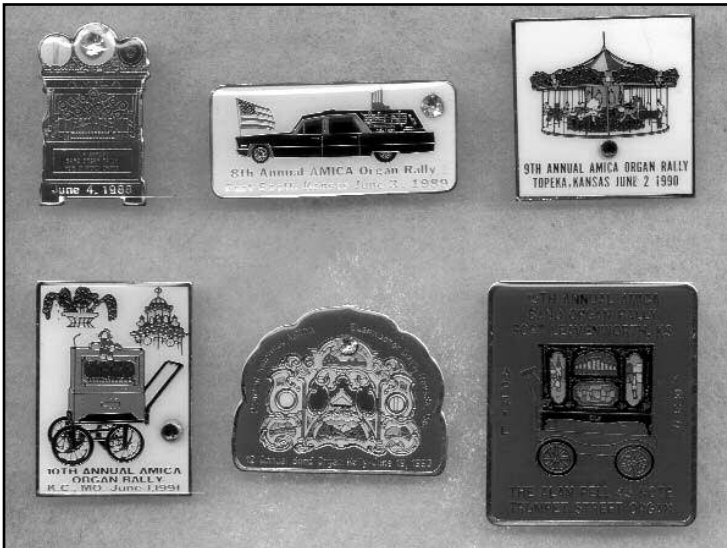


Figure 4. Some of the organ rally pins produced by the Heart of America Chapter (AMICA). Note the jeweled inserts on some of the pins, an extra consideration for those members that brought organs to a rally.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s both organizations occasionally would set in artificial diamonds into pins as a differential marker for those who brought organs. Those that just attended or bought pins would receive a like pin but without the diamond. Examples are noted in Figure 2 (all three pins on the third row down) and in the first five pins noted in Figure 4.

Once the momentum began on the rally enameled pin it was not long before individuals produced pins of their own organs for either self-promotion or sale. The first such pin was that of an 89-keyless Carl Frei organ, an organ acquired by Herb Brabandt from Dan Slack. Herb was so proud of the organ that not only did he make a large pin (by the standards of the day) measuring 3" wide, but he also made a never-to-be-done-again pin, measuring a whopping 6" wide by nearly 3" tall (**Figure 5**). It weighs several ounces and has three pin-clasps on the back. I don't know if anyone has every worn the pin—it was produced primarily for decorative use. Herb openly admits it was a "vanity" idea. Herb still owns that 89-keyless organ and still has pins available.

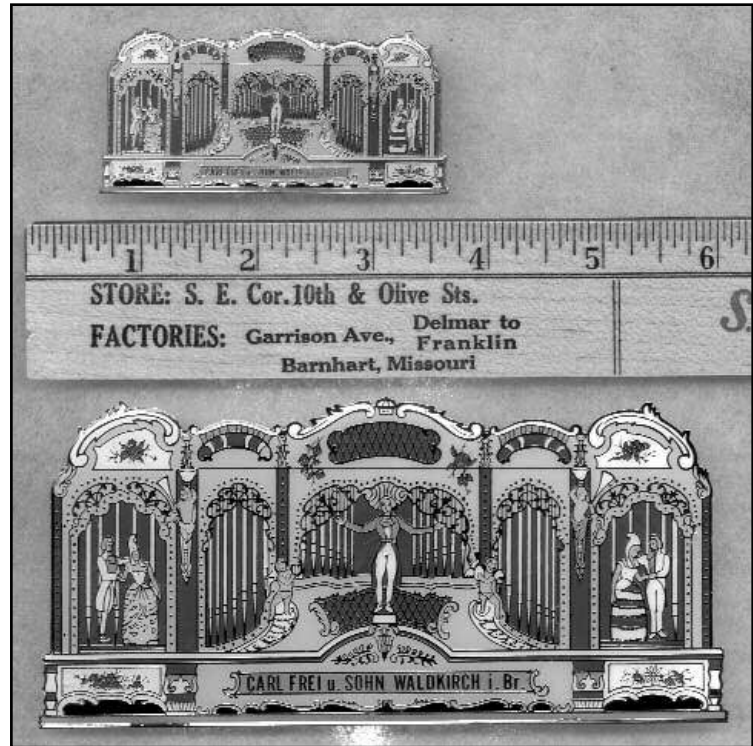


Figure 5. Two large pins offered by Herb Brabandt depicting his 89-keyless Carl Frei street organ. The top pin is 3 inches wide and the bottom version measures 6 inches.

There are almost as many non-rally organ enameled pins in circulation today as many collectors have adopted the idea of promoting their favorite organ. American organs (**Figure 6**) are prominent and include such organs as Wurlitzer's Style 103 (on a golf cart), Style 105, Styles 146A and others. Organs made by Artizan and North Tonawanda Musical Instrument Works are also found.

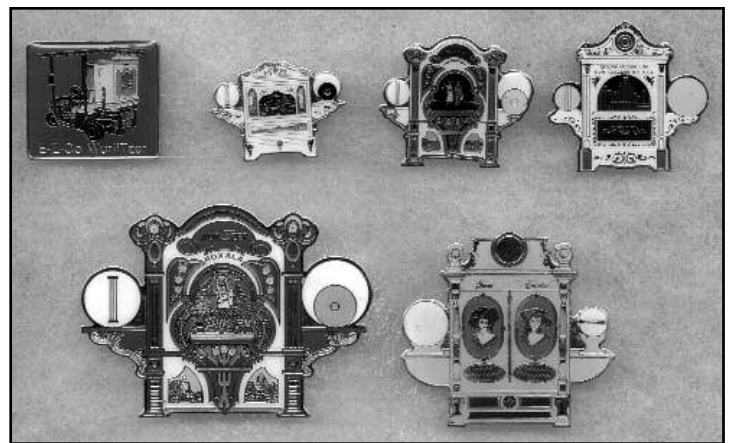


Figure 6. American organs offered by organ owners include those by Wurlitzer, Artizan and North Tonawanda.

European organs are found as well, with several Bruder organs (**Figure 7**) represented. Other fair organs (**Figure 8**) include Frati, Limonaire Freres, Richter and Gavioli. The end is limitless as far as what type of pin can be represented on an enameled pin.

Of course, the calliopes can't be forgotten and in **Figure 9** several examples are noted (as well as those in Figures 2 and 4). **Figure 10** details some of the hand organs available.

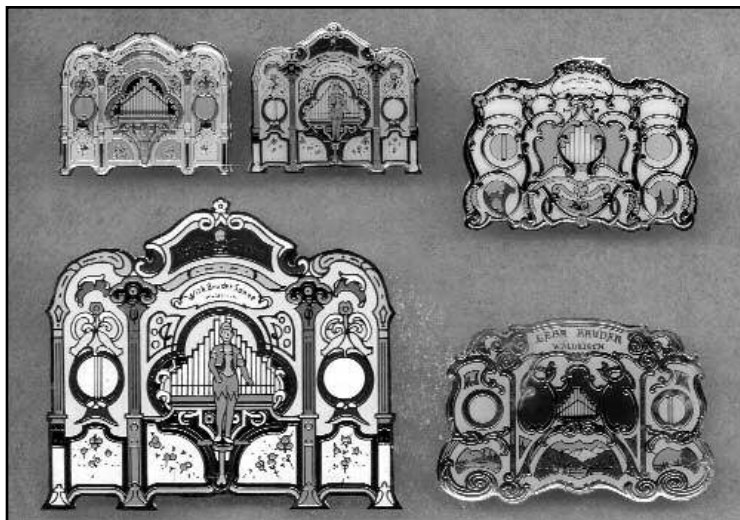


Figure 7. Bruder organ pins are well represented.

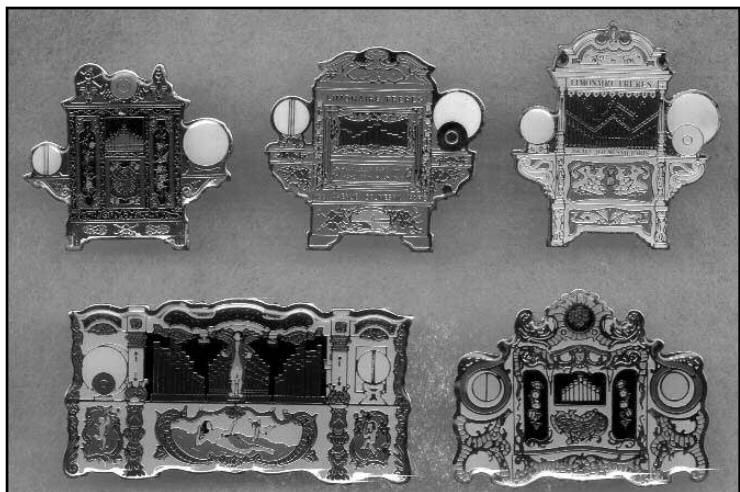


Figure 8. Other European organs represented are those of Frati, Limonaire, Richter and Gavioli.

The production of pins can be accomplished by several sources but the primary source has been a firm in Taipei, Taiwan under the name of Blue Huang doing business as Houng Ween Enterprise, Inc (P.O. Box 67-68, Taipei, Taiwan) . Usually orders of 50 or more are welcome but occasionally a minimal amount of 25 have been produced. Sending a photograph of your organ as well as instructions as to the size and what type of clasp (along with a \$10.00 bill) will get you a sample pin and instructions/prices for placing an order.

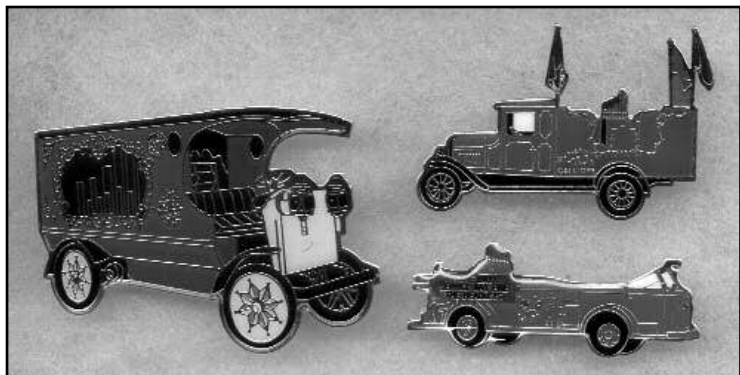


Figure 10. Pins representing calliopes.

These rally and/or band organ pins appear to have passed their peak in popularity, as there are fewer being offered or seen at rallies and collections today. An exception is the Mid-America Chapter of the M.B.S.I., which continues to reward organ owners who bring their prized instruments to a rally. And of course, a recent addition to the collection of pins is the colorful COAA pin depicting a Wurlitzer Style 153 carousel organ (Figure 11).

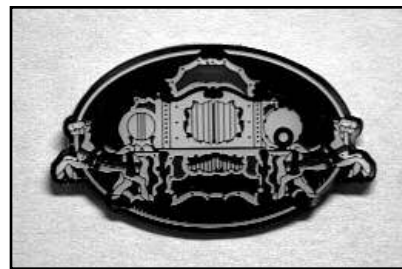


Figure 11. The newly-designed COAA organ pin.



Figure 12. Display cases holding a collection of organ rally enameled pins.

What does one do with a collection of pins? Some, such as myself, have them displayed in protective cases (Figure 12). Many others, however, have adopted the organ rally vest, red in color, promoted by the late Frank Rider, to display the vest. A recent photo of COAA member, Bob Yates, shows a full display of pins (Figure 13). While somewhat heavy, it is certainly a method to display a collection. What ever your way you choose, however, don't just leave them in the bottom of a dresser drawer. These pins represent the wonderful world of outdoor mechanical musical instruments and the sounds that they produce, "The Happiest Music on Earth!"



Figure 13. A display of organ rally pins on the vest designed by the late Frank Rider.

Ron Bopp live on Grand Lake O' The Cherokees in Northeast Oklahoma with his wife, Mary Jo. He is currently editor/publisher of the *Carousel Organ*.