

Peter Bacigalupi, San Francisco, California

Fred Dahlinger, Jr. © 2009

There were a number of people named Bacigalupi in northern California, in San Francisco's Italian colony, Italian immigrants and their descendants. One of these people, Peter Bacigalupi (1855-1925), became a pioneering and prominent dealer in the local phonograph, film and mechanical music instrument trade. Much has been written about the pioneering phonograph and film activity of Peter Bacigalupi, but no complete biography has yet been written.

Peter Bacigalupi was born on January 6, 1855 in New York, New York. One prominent source published after he became successful stated his family relocated to San Francisco in September 1860. There is reference to residency in Oakland, across the bay.¹ An earlier resource, judged more accurate, noted he quit school at age thirteen, spent six years in menial posts with the New York Equitable Life Insurance Company and then drifted to California, circa 1868, being resident there for six years, until about 1874. Following marriage in Oakland at age 22 and a disagreement with his mother-in-law, he "left in haste" for South America. The four dollars he had when he arrived in Callao, Peru, in April 1878 was stolen the first day. Fortunately for Bacigalupi, an American merchant in Lima named E. D. Adams hired him as his confidential clerk. Upon the death of Adams, Bacigalupi married his widow, Rosa (Rosanna?) Fournier Adams. The mother of five had five more children with Bacigalupi between 1883 and 1887.²

It is assumed that Bacigalupi took title to the Adams business, which burned in 1884, although one source says that he established his own firm in 1881. The statements are not necessarily in conflict; various reports suggest that he had multiple operations: "flying here, there, everywhere, attending to his dozens of 'irons' that are all in the fire at once, it is no easy matter to find him, or when found to pin him down to conversation." In South America, Bacigalupi flourished in the importation and sale of merchandise made in the United States, selling paper goods of all sorts, sundries and even agricultural implements, in addition to indigenous Peruvian artifacts to travelers. He served as the agent for a sewing machine company and was at the cutting edge in the importation and sale of devices that changed the world, Remington typewriters, telephones and cameras, including Kodak. Two boats were outfitted for hauling coal and pickled pork and Bacigalupi made more money serving as a commission merchant. Bacigalupi truly had something of a golden touch as a business entrepreneur.³

The real estate upon which the Theatre Principal had once stood in Lima was acquired by Bacigalupi and he outfitted it to

host traveling shows of all types on a year round basis. In June of 1889 he contracted with Nelson's English Circus, a troupe formed largely of children, to present a month of shows. Then in 1890 he erected an entirely new opera house on the property in sixty days. A journal of the time characterized him as: "Peter Bacigalupi, a very intelligent and enterprising merchant of Lima, his store and printing and lithographing establishment being the principal one in South America. He is also editor and publisher of a weekly pictorial paper." The publication was *El Peru Illustrado*, one of four newspapers printed in the city. His print house contained twelve presses and required 65 employees.⁴ Bacigalupi was identified as one of the richest men in Callao, Peru in 1891, with holdings in many businesses.⁵



Peter Bacigalupi, shown in this 1901-published portrait, was a prominent San Francisco dealer in phonographs, coin pianos, orchestrions and band organs from the 1890s until 1925.

Bacigalupi obviously thrived as a printer, merchant and impresario, and he accumulated considerable wealth. He was residing in Lima when he journeyed to Chicago to visit the incomparable World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. While there he was inspired by meeting a pioneer in the phonograph trade, Leon F. Douglass (1869-1940). The experience set a new course for his career and the friendship was cemented by Douglass marrying into the family. His 1897 bride, Victoria Adams, was identified as Bacigalupi's step-sister, but in two period references Douglass's wife was identified as Bacigalupi's daughter, presumably a step-daughter. Douglass was identified as the Vice-President of the Victor Talking Machine Company of Camden, New Jersey and later became head of the firm.⁶

The phonograph machines that had been present at the Chicago fair were purchased by Douglass and he set them up at the California International Midwinter Exposition in San Francisco. One cannot but wonder if Douglass and John Cocchi crossed paths at the event, or if Peter Bacigalupi might have been attracted to the organ display featuring a name similar to his own. When his manager departed, Douglass induced Bacigalupi, who was visiting his parents, to buy the devices and set up an arcade in downtown San Francisco. The acquisition, made by means of a promissory note, apparently caused Bacigalupi to later place "Established 1893" on communications that he circulated. The origin of their trade was assigned to the original installation at the 1893 Chicago fair.

Bacigalupi's pioneering establishment placed him at the forefront of an entirely new industry and secured him a place in history. It featured Edison phonographs and five Kinetoscopes, opening on June 1, 1894. Bacigalupi & McDonald conducted a trade at 644 Market Street, San Francisco. By 1895,

Bacigalupi's place at 946 Market Street housed Edison's Kinetoscope, Phonograph and Graphophone Arcade. Bacigalupi's Edison Phonograph Agency in 1899 was at 833 Market Street, filling a three-story structure and the basement. His daily take in 1904 was estimated at \$1,400. On a six-day per week basis, that approached close to a half-million dollars per annum.⁷ Bacigalupi also had machines shipped to Lima, where another establishment was opened. There was a Bacigalupi-owned Penny Arcade in the Phelan Building at 840 Market Street in 1904, with a second one in the Bella Theatre at 804 Kearney Street, near the infamous Barbary Coast.⁸

Bacigalupi's personal story of escaping the fire that followed the San Francisco earthquake was printed in the July 1906 issue of the Edison *Phonograph Monthly*.

Thomas Edison reportedly dubbed Bacigalupi "The Shark of the West Coast," presumably because of his aggressive marketing and substantial sales results. He was the single largest Edison wholesaler in the West and the top Edison retail seller. The huge number of surviving Edison machines and apparatus bearing Bacigalupi's name has given him legendary status in the phonograph collecting field.⁹

Bacigalupi quickly jumped into the beginnings of the film trade and continued in the field until 1906. Films were sold second hand in 1905 out of a wholesale operation at 786-788 Mission Street, where the trade was said to have been "enormous."¹⁰ The great earthquake and fire brought an end to much of the activity. His place at 786 Mission Street was entirely destroyed. Only some gold pieces in his vault survived the conflagration.¹¹ The business, styled Peter Bacigalupi & Sons, marking the entry of Peter Bacigalupi, Jr. and one or more of his siblings into the trade, was re-established at 1113-1115 Fillmore Street. The store front was noted for the quality of the displays. By early 1907 Bacigalupi and Emilio Cruells opened the Mission Phonograph & Piano Co. at 2628 Mission Street. Shortly after mid-year, Bacigalupi sold out his interest to his partner.¹²

Never content with existing operations, Bacigalupi always sought new products to sell. He commenced to trade in coin pianos, orchestrions and band organs made in the eastern United States and Chicago. In November 1903 Bacigalupi journeyed east to see the Rudolph Wurlitzer operation in Cincinnati and ordered a lot of merchandise for the coming Christmas holiday trade. In 1906, Bacigalupi became a middleman in the sale of a couple de Kleist-built Monster band organs that went into San Francisco area skating rinks. His establishment was one of those visited by Wurlitzer's representative, J. E. Gerlich, during a March 1907 tour of the West Coast music stores. Bacigalupi sold Wurlitzer electric pianos and other products, reportedly receiving five box car loads in mid-1907.¹³

Bacigalupi's local competition for mechanical music instrument sales was stiff. Major sellers included: the Eilers Music Company; Kohler & Chase; and the G. H. Leathurby Company.¹⁴ Machines were being sold for use in the growing skating rink trade, restaurants and in the front of nickelodeons, as well as to amusement parks, saloons, arcades and other places of public amusement where music created a desired

atmosphere. They proliferated in San Francisco as the community rebuilt following the earthquake and the more devastating fire that followed it. When Kohler & Chase was selling large numbers of Berry-Wood electric pianos, Bacigalupi countered with the sale of Wurlitzer machines.¹⁵ Bacigalupi represented the entire Wurlitzer line of organs and orchestrions, having a portfolio of photographs illustrating the breadth of their variety. One copy of the album bears an identification of Peter Bacigalupi & Sons, 1021 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, California.¹⁶

At the same time that Gerlich was promoted to Wurlitzer's general traveling sales manager, the firm dropped Bacigalupi and made Kohler & Chase their San Francisco and northern California representative. It was a business decision: "Kohler & Chase have superior facilities for giving the line a larger representation in the territory named, though the former agents worked it to the limit of their capacity." Wurlitzer was looking for increased sales. Bacigalupi transferred both his Wurlitzer and Jacob Doll holdings to Kohler & Chase, who in turn sent him their Edison phonographs.¹⁷ Undaunted by the loss of this leading line, the veteran salesman sustained his George P. Brent piano line and signed up new product lines.

The spring of 1910 was a time of change again for Peter Bacigalupi & Sons. He continued his Crown, Concord and automatic piano lines and also commenced to trade in organs and other devices from Wurlitzer's competitors, the North Tonawanda Musical Instrument Works and the Niagara Musical Instrument Manufacturing Company. The long time position he had handling the Edison phonograph wholesale trade was also concluded. He switched over to Zonophone products. His Edison clientele was said to have spanned from Victoria, British Columbia, Canada to Cape Horn. Bacigalupi continued to sell Edison machines via a retail store into the future. One of his new features was a North Tonawanda Pianolin, which arrived in May. The month before the firm sold several hand organs, brand unknown.¹⁸

The Market Street store occupied by Bacigalupi was too big for his operation and he sought to change premises in 1910.¹⁹ The issue was resolved by negotiating with the building owner; Bacigalupi moved to the upper floors and the street level location was filled with a new theater. The new business cards confirmed that Peter Bacigalupi & Sons was now located on the second floor of the Douglas Building at 908 Market Street.²⁰ The firm put a proud face on the relocation, citing improved window lighting and a \$700 decrease in the monthly rent. The multiple changes were steps backward for Peter Bacigalupi & Sons, but they picked up the Marquette Piano Company's Cremona line of electric pianos before the year was out. Sales of both Cremona products and North Tonawanda instruments were reported in 1912 and 1913, with a high point coming with the sale of a \$3000 orchestrion to the Roberts resort on Ocean Boulevard.²¹

Starting in 1913, San Francisco prepared itself for the many visitors that would come to the city for the Pan Pacific International Exposition in 1915. For many public houses this meant the acquisition of an electric piano or some other means

of providing good music at reasonable cost. It caused a boom in such sales for Bacigalupi and other dealers. Eiler's handled the business separately from their other lines and Wurlitzer established a branch store of their own at 985 Market Street to boost local sales. All sorts of special efforts were being made to push everything from coin pianos to photoplayers into area amusement establishments.²² Bacigalupi was one among many recipients of a form letter extolling the features of North Tonawanda's Ideal Motion Picture Orchestra in December 1914.²³ Bacigalupi relocated again in mi-1917, moving to 1261 Market Street, near the Hotel Whitcomb. The site provided an incredible 12,000 square feet for his operation.²⁴ There is no mention of Bacigalupi retail sales thereafter in music trade journals. Presumably he dropped public sales and tended to his route operations.

Information about Bacigalupi route machines, meaning coin-operated musical instruments in places of public amusement, is not abundant. One of the few remarks revealed in the current search reflected that collections were down at large establishments in early 1908. Significantly, in 1912, Bacigalupi already remarked upon a growing movement for the prohibition of alcohol in California, but felt that it would not impact his trade. Changing times would dictate otherwise. Bacigalupi was still concerned about the legality of liquor in 1916, expecting sales to blossom as soon as a "wet and dry election" was behind them.²⁵ Eventually the issue achieved adequate state support to proceed.

The implementation of Prohibition, which started on January 16, 1920, was indeed a hard blow to Bacigalupi's trade, hitting both in collections and in the market for his coin-operated music machines. Immediately the demand for mechanical music took a steep nose dive. Taken out of service were dozens of electric pianos and orchestrions, and cast iron coin boxes that had the Bacigalupi name cast into them.²⁶ There was little market for any of them, at least in legal places.

Bacigalupi liquidated his huge inventory of excess music machines that were withdrawn from route service, the stockpile aggregated together at the 1261 Market Street location. The offerings covered the full range of roll-operated devices, from basic player pianos to orchestrions, moving picture orchestras and band organs. There was also an abundance of rolls, which Bacigalupi had acquired by buying out Eiler's stock. They included Wurlitzer, Berry-Wood, Welte reproducing piano and Freiburgia orchestrion rolls, plus Mills Violano-Virtuoso, Regina-Sublima and Peerless rolls. On top of that were 10,000 player piano rolls. It was a bargain sale to mark the end of an era.²⁷

In early 1925, the downsized Bacigalupi business was relocated to 107/111 Golden Gate Avenue. The site was in the heart of San Francisco's motion picture film and supplier business, with which they had a large trade.²⁸

Peter Bacigalupi was 70 years old when he suddenly passed away of heart disease on February 21, 1925. He was survived by his wife and four children. He was reverently termed an "Old Timer," but given tribute: "He was a picturesque character whose ways were original, and it is remem-

bered that he was an innovator in ways that made him distinctive." One attitude that made Bacigalupi a great salesman was his perception that "everybody was a musical instruments buyer, even after he said an emphatic 'no.'"²⁹

A son and daughter of Bacigalupi continued the business for a few months, but it was all over and sold out by October 1925. The remaining instruments were sold to Sherman, Clay & Co.³⁰

What should be clear from this discussion is that Peter Bacigalupi & Sons never engaged in the arrangement or manufacture of band organ rolls, particularly in the 1910s and early 1920s. Given that they represented the interests of the Wurlitzer company only between late 1903 and March 1910, the dates would likely restrict the sale of any Peter Bacigalupi & Sons labeled Wurlitzer band organ rolls to that period of time.

Peter Bacigalupi did have a branch business that made and issued photograph records, and actively sold music rolls produced by known instrument manufacturers. However, there is no primary evidence or other reliable documentation that confirms that he, his children, or anyone associated with his operation ever actively engaged in any activity related to music roll arrangement, or manufactured perforated paper rolls of any type for any mechanical music machine. When it came to mechanical music instruments, his business was strictly along the lines of wholesale purchases and retail sales.

The last vestige of the once great Bacigalupi trade in mechanical music was a wonderful collection of catalogues and associated literature that were sold by his son, Joseph Bacigalupi (1887-) to Q. David Bowers. Joe had worked as a tuner in his father's firm before enlisting for military service in World War I and upon his discharge and return planned to resume his position within the firm.³¹ The papers formed a fundamental resource in the preparation of his various works, including the landmark *Encyclopedia of Automatic Musical Instruments*. In that regard, Bacigalupi's paper legacy has been one of the most important to the study of mechanical music instruments.³²

Notes

1. Wellington C. Wolfe, *Men of California*, (1901), page 209, includes a portrait. Background on Italians in northern California is in Deanna Paoli Gumina, *The Italians of San Francisco 1850-1930*, (1978).
2. "A Peruvian Yankee," *New York Times*, January 11, 1891; <http://www.gracyk.com/leon.shtml>. 3. *New York Times*, January 11, 1891.
4. *New York Clipper*, June 22, 1889, page 238 and July 6, 1889, page 274.
5. *New York Times*, January 11, 1891; *Oakland (CA) Tribune*, February 3, 1891.
6. *Music Trade Review*, April 28, 1906, page 23, and July 29, 1911, page 47.
7. A view of the interior is at: <http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/recording/pix/23300002.jpg>; *Oakland (CA) Call*, June 18, 1904.
8. *New York Clipper*, September 17, 1904, page 694; <http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/ew16.html>. 9. See <http://www.edisontinfoil.com/baci.htm>.

10. *Billboard*, July 15, 1905, page 47; *The Sunset*, 1904, page 7; *Music Trade Review*, February 11, 1905, pages 39 and 42.
11. Bacigalupi's film start is documented in "San Francisco, Cal., Dates Back to the Year 1894," *Moving Picture World*, July 15, 1916, which also included his portrait. It is reproduced in Q. David Bowers, *Nickelodeon Theatres and their Music*, (1986), page 10. *Music Trade Review*, April 28, 1906, page 23, and June 23, 1906, page 39.
12. *Music Trade Review*, September 29, 1906, page 38; February 23, 1907, page 42; August 17, 1907, page 23; and August 21, 1907, page 36.
13. *Music Trade Review*, November 21, 1903, page 35; March 2, 1907, page 44, and March 9, 1907, page 28; and June 15, 1907, page 21.
14. Q. David Bowers, *Encyclopedia of Automatic Musical Instruments*, (1972), pages 673 and 694.
15. *Music Trade Review*, March 21, 1908, page 24.
16. Howe Collection of Musical Instrument Literature, University of Maryland. A second copy is noted in Jens Wendel, "The Phillips Paganini Monstre Restoration Project," *MBSI Journal of Mechanical Music*, XLVIII, 2, pages 28-38, wherein the name is incorrectly given as Bacigalupo.
17. *Music Trade Review*, August 15, 1908, page 22; March 5, 1910, page 15.
18. *Music Trade Review*, March 26, 1910, pages 21 and 42; May 14, 1910, page 23; and April 30, 1910, page 21.]
19. *Music Trade Review*, May 7, 1910, page 19.
20. Trade card and stamped catalogue sheets, Howe Collection.
21. *Music Trade Review*, October 22, 1910, page 19; November 5, 1910, page 15; November 26, 1910, page 43; December 31, 1910, page 35; and August 2, 1913, page 31.
22. *Music Trade Review*, January 31, 1914, page 13.
23. *Treasures*, pages 240-241.
24. *Music Trade Review*, July 21, 1917, page 35.
25. *Music Trade Review*, January 4, 1908, page 38; September 4, 1912, page 9; September 23, 1916, page 9; and November 11, 1916, page 27.
26. An example is illustrated in Bowers, *Encyclopedia*, page 711.
27. Card reproduced in Q. David Bowers, *A Guidebook of Automatic Musical Instruments*, (1967-1968), I, page 19.
28. *Presto*, January 24, 1925, page 3.
29. *Music Trades Review*, March 7, 1925, page 5; *Presto*, March 21, 1925, page 13.
30. *Presto*, May 9, 1925, page 19; June 27, 1925, page 10; and October 10, 1925, page 16; and *Music Trade Review*, June 13, 1925, page 43.
31. *Music Trades Review*, May 17, 1919, page 13.
32. The documents are largely now in the Howe Collection. Bowers related the spirit of his discussions with Joseph Bacigalupi in "Nickelodeons on the Barbary Coast," *MBSI Technical Journal*, XX, 6, pages 355-357.

In memory of . . .

COAA member **Tony J. Beugelsdijk** passed away on August 23, 2009, at the age of 59. He is greatly missed.

Some years ago on a visit to Waldkirch, Germany, Tony fell in love with the sounds of the mechanical organs he heard there, perhaps reminding him of the street organs he heard in his childhood growing up in Holland.

The Waldkirch experience prompted him to launch a search on the internet regarding all things relating to mechanical musical instruments. One of his discoveries was COAA which he and Mary joined over three years ago. As members of COAA, Tony and Mary were a fun part of the 2008 Bumbling Bruder Tour.

Tony was a scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory where he built the laboratory's robotics and automation program, leading a group of more than 30 scientists and engineers. He was not only interested in current automation principles but was fascinated by the early forms of automatic controls. This prompted him to order the Stanoszek plans and begin building a reproduction of a Wurlitzer 105.

Tony was a master craftsman as reflected in the quality of his 105. It is much better quality than an original Wurlitzer. Tony was so interested in doing it right that he built all the Wurlitzer unit valves from scratch, and being the engineer that he was, he built a unit valve test rig to assure all the valves were working perfectly.

He delighted in sharing his progress with school children who were amazed when they saw how these early mechanical music instruments were made. Most of them had never even seen an instrument of this type. Tony had completed about 3/4 of the 105 project before his passing.

It was always evident that Mary, his wife, was the joy of his life. Tony's love of life, people and learning was ever constant in his daily walk.



John Iles

From the Membership Chairman:

COAA membership status for calendar year 2009, which ended June 30, 09

- * COAA started 2009 with 429 members.
- * We finished 2009 with 466 members, a gain of 37 (8.6%) new members
- * At present we have 454** paid members.

**Because of the great effort of our current members to recruit new members, COAA continues to grow.

Dan Danko