

Meet Your Member—John and Mary Lou Van Dorn

I must have been born liking band organs. I grew up in Des Moines, Iowa and heard band organ music at the Iowa State Fair. In fact I worked twelve-hour days during the Fair, about 50 feet from the carousel so the music was imbedded in my brain.

From high school I went into the USAF and studied electronics, I spent most of my Air force carrier at Otis AF base, Cape Cod, Mass. Where I met my lovely wife, Mary Lou and we started collecting clocks.

Then I worked for IBM for four years and found our Victorian Home in Sugar Grove, PA, where we reared four children, collected more clocks and worked on “The House.” I sold insurance for 12 years all the while repairing clocks part time.

Some time in the mid 1980s I took the family on a little vacation to a band organ rally in Fremont, Ohio. It was amazing! We had never seen so many band organs. Someone had unicycles and our sons had great fun learning to ride them. Angelo Rulli was there with a busker organ and there was a popcorn wagon giving away free popcorn. This event stayed in the back of my mind, a few years passed but I thought about having a band organ.

Twenty-five years ago we began Van Dorn’s Clock and Music Box Shop where we not only repaired clocks but also sold a large selection of clocks and music boxes.

Then I learned of a band organ meeting in Pittsburgh. I think this was about the time I joined MBSI. Mary Lou was in California babysitting a grandchild. I went to the meeting in Pittsburgh and



met a guy from Canada, who said he could rebuild my reproducing grand piano and build me a small band organ. Well the piano “rebuild” didn’t last long and in the end I rebuilt the organ with many additions and learned as I went along. The organ plays 125 Wurlitzer rolls and I have now electrified it.

I am a collector; my family thinks I might be a hoarder. However I think it normal (well, maybe just a little sick) to now own almost 2000 antique clocks. We have a collection of reed organs, disk &

cylinder music boxes, automata, several monkey organs, a couple player pianos and some organ related memorabilia. My Prinsen organ is one of my favorite organs partly because I met Arthur Prinsen in Belgium and got to play one of his organs there. I was lucky enough to buy the last small book organ Mr. Prinsen made. It is a sweet sounding organ.

I always wanted a larger band organ and last summer at the Painesville, Ohio meeting I was able to buy a Wurlitzer #103 band organ from a local lady that was trying to sell it by showing pictures to everyone in the park. So restoring it is my current project. I hope to have it done by next summer. I have run into a few snags, but hope the rest of the restoration will go smoothly.

We still repair and restore clocks as we have been doing for the past 40 years. We winter in Florida now where I spend spare time rebuilding reed organs and servicing grandfather clocks. My latest passion has been collecting firearms. Yes, this collecting stuff just “might” be called a sickness.

2012 Organ Rally Dates

2012 Mid-Winter	St. Cloud (Orlando), FL	Bill Hall 407-892-1144	February 25-27, 2012 mortier121@aol.com
2012 COAA Rally #1	Lake Winnepesaukah (“Winnie”) Rossville, GA	Jonathan Bopp 706-266-4061	May 26-28, 2012 jbopp@berry.edu
2012 COAA Rally #2	Knoebels Amusement Park Elysburg, PA	Mark Chester 610-933-4069	June 9-10, 2012 mschester@msn.com
2012 COAA Rally #3	Heritage Gardens Cape Cod MA	TBA	July early to mid, 2012
2012 COAA Rally #4	Cooperstown, NY	Mary Margaret Kuhn	July Late to August early
2012 COAA Rally #5	Quassy Amusement Park Middlebury, CT	Ron Gustafson 203-758-2913	August 25-26, 2012 Ron@quassy.com
2012 COAA Rally #6	Festa Italiana St. Paul, MN	Angelo Rulli 651-775-7575	September 21-22, 2012 angelorulli@gmail.com
2012 COAA Rally #7	Soulé Steam Fest & Rail Fest Meridian, MS	Ted Guillaum 615-226-5098	November 2-3, 2012 organgrinderted@bellsouth.net