



Canadian Organ News[®]

Volume 2 Issue 2

Published By: MBI Communications Ltd.

April 2007

The Organ Reeds

Contrary to what the name suggests the reeds in an organ are made of metal not plants. The design is similar to that of a harmonica in which air passing over the thin metal strip makes it vibrate thus producing a sound. In that regard it is similar to plant reeds of various lengths making a sound when air passes over top of them.

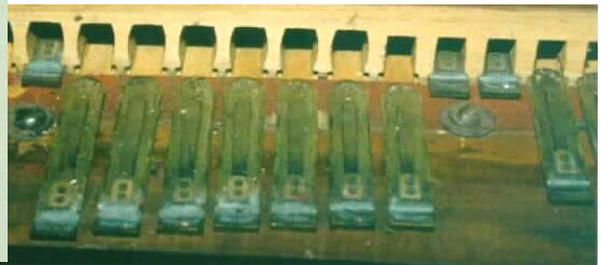
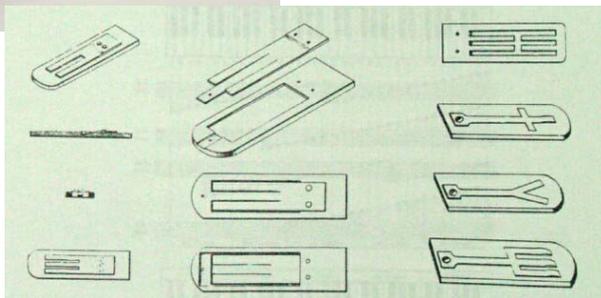
The organ reeds were of different thicknesses, shapes and lengths. They were each in their own wooden chamber. Together they made up the music chamber. Many patents were registered as to the music chamber shape and how air flowed in and out of it.



Left — Harmonica reeds
Right — Organ reeds
Below — Different reed shapes & sizes
Below right — Reeds sitting in front of their wooden chambers.



Reed diagram from William Ord-Humes book called Harmonium printed in 1986.



The Mouse Proof Pedal

Whether the organ was in a home or a church there was always a problem with mice nibbling on the pedal carpeting ends. In February 1887 the Bell Organ and Piano Company in Guelph, Canada introduced the 'Mouse Proof Pedal.' (1890 Bell organ at right)

This patented pedal design was actually a better foot pedal bellows connection. Since the carpet was surrounded by metal it prevented mice from chewing on it. The Bell Company's marketing person got the idea to promote this one feature which then sold many organs.

The W. Doherty Piano and Organ Company of Clinton, Canada was the only other company to patent a similar product in September 1887. Unfortunately there are no pictures of any of these organs.



Bell Piano Newsletter[®]



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Canadian Piano News[®]

A Brief Organ History

Musical organs have come a long way since George Joseph Vogler developed the first reed organ in 1789. Then in 1841 Louis-Pierre-Alexandre Martin in Paris had the reed struck by a felt covered wooden hammer that produced a bell like sound when struck.

In 1861 Mason & Hamlin had air being pulled over the reeds and became known as the American Organ. The European version pushed the air over the reeds.



Bell Harmonium 1890

With the addition of key stops both styles produced a variety of orchestral notes. By adding a musical playbook or roll this allowed the organ to become self playing. Attaching other instruments turned organs into moving musical orchestras. Then came pipe organs and steam powered organs are Calliopes.

All was not well in the organ business or as it is referred today as 'Mechanically Produced Sound.' The pumping of pedals to generate air flow was tiring and with more key stops required two people to play the organ. They also took up a lot of space not only in depth but in height and weight.

By the 1880s pianos were taking over and few companies organs past 1910. However two styles did survive. The portable harmonium and the table top harmonium.



Bell Melodeon 1880

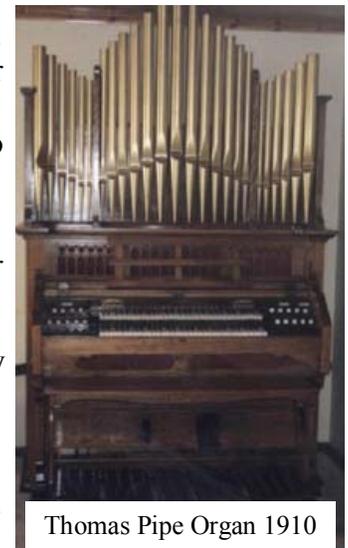


Hammond Organ 1960

Church tent revivals, missionaries, and the military used portable harmoniums until the 1950s. Then they were replaced by electronic and later digital organs.

Electricity and computer reproduced musical tones replaced the pumping and key stops. Today a small digital organ with quality sound rivals that of its predecessors. Its low cost makes it affordable for any home to have one.

There are still large areas of the world that do not have electricity. For them the table top organ with a few key stops and hand pressed bellows makes great music. It can be played by one person and easily moved from place to place.



Thomas Pipe Organ 1910

For over 215 years musical organs have entertained people around the world. They have been powered by human feet to electricity by hand.

Sizes have ranged from a desk to a room to a table top. Yet the cost has always been affordable with the quality of sound sweet and pleasing to the ear. The name may have changed to digital keyboard yet deep inside it is still that same reed organ, of long ago



Bina 17 Harmonium from India



Yamaha Digital Keyboard

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