DENVER, COLORADO
August 4-8, 2004

I spent Wednesday at the Annual Board Meeting in the Gold Nugget Room. The convention committee had arranged for a phone for conference calls, which worked out great. The continental breakfast was superb. Later in the day, I checked out the Hospitality Room which was large and accommodating with lots of instruments to play.

Day 1 - Thursday: The Welcome Breakfast was second to none. The welcoming remarks and Denver orientation were very informative. The multi-media presentation “100 Years of Automatic Music in Colorado” by Dick Kroekel and Art Reblitz was both informative and entertaining. What a great trip to Silver Plume and the Georgetown Loop Railroad, Georgetown, and Central City. During a torrential downpour in Georgetown, Halie Dodrill and I took refuge in a doorway prior to getting back on the bus. The Pumper Contest was one of the best ever. The Hospitality Room was great. I enjoyed Yousuf Wilson’s banjo; the workmanship is unbelievable—it is the best.

Day 2 - Friday: The convention committee did a “travel agency” job organizing our visit to Garden of the Gods in Manitou Springs. Our evening trip to 4-Mile Historic Park was like stepping back in time to the Old West. The chuck wagon dinner was fun and the cowboy poetry by lantern light was a nice way to end an exciting day.

Day 3 - Saturday: The workshops were very informative. I attended three: Yousuf Wilson – Back to Basics, Chris Finger Pianos – The Piano Disc System, and Bob Billings – Perforators. All were very good. I had a good day selling at the Mart as I sold a few extra things I had on hand. Thanks to everyone who made a purchase.

Jeri (in top hat and tails) gave Nadine and I a ride to the Banquet in his Lincoln convertible. That was a real treat. My first thought was why were we going a couple of blocks away from the hotel? As soon as we arrived at the Pinnacle Club 38th Floor, I knew why. What a view and the dinner was excellent. Music by the Queen City Jazz Band was the frosting on the cake for Nadine and I. Their vocalist Wendy is the greatest. Did anyone see the fireworks off in the distance—just for us?

Day 4 - Sunday: The Farewell Breakfast and Annual Meeting went very well. After seeing the Northern Lights Chapter presentation, no one should miss next year’s convention in Minneapolis, MN. We missed the concert at the Paramount Theatre and Open Houses as we headed off to Mount Rushmore.

An important thing for me was visiting Art Reblitz—Art is amazing. Getting the Rocky Mountain Chapter on line again is a good thing for all AMICAns in the area. It is apparent that Jere had a good group of people all working together. Each year the conventions get better. I say that every year and mean it. Thank you Jeri and crew. Those who did not have fun each day must have stayed in their room.
Art Reblitz center attraction in his shop.

Art's beautiful Seeburg "G" with AMICA member dreaming it was his.

Linda and Galen Bird enjoying the pizza.

Janet and Peter Tallent in Silver Plume.

Dianne and Marvin Polan couldn't resist this musical merry-go-round in Georgetown.

Carl and Halie Dodrill getting on the bus for a tour.

John Motto-Ros holding sign at Van Briggle Art Pottery which says: "If you break something, it’s our responsibility. Enjoy yourself."

Board members on Mount Rushmore.

Art Reblitz center attraction in his shop.
Frank had wanted to have a convention in the Denver area even before he became Convention Chairman, and when he approached Jere DeBacker about it Jere said he would see what he could do. Next thing we knew Jere had taken the bull by the horns and the 2004 Denver Convention was on the way with its theme “Music a Mile High”.

This convention was so much fun, and the time was so filled with events that it just seemed to fly by. Jere and his committee used the area and the Western theme and went with it to great effect.

The Holiday Inn Hotel was situated right in downtown Denver, close to many of the sights Denver is famous for: The Denver Capitol Building, with its golden dome, the Molly Brown House, the Brown Palace Hotel, and many more. Add to that all the restaurants and shops in easy walking distance and you have a great setting.

Wednesday started off the activities for the officers and board meeting, but for the rest of the attendees it was a day to arrive, get settled in and relax. There was a tour of the Chris Finger Piano Shop, and the hospitality room was open with an assortment of reproducing pianos.

Thursday started off with a welcome breakfast followed by Art Reblitz and his remarkable presentation of “100+ Years of Automatic Music in Colorado”. Art has spent 36 years researching automatic instruments and their history in Colorado’s old mining towns to the west, major cities along the front range, and high plains to the east.

His multimedia presentation included many photos of historic instruments along with their “then and now” locations, presented in a thoroughly enjoyable manner. Many of us urged Art to make this fascinating presentation into a CD or other venue available to other chapters for presentation at their meetings.

After breakfast and the presentation we boarded buses for the Georgetown-Central City Tour.

Central City used to be a small town, not quite a ghost town, but a quiet, quaint place. All that changed when a few Casinos opened, and now it is a thriving area for gambling.

We, however, were more interested in the old section of town, and many of us took a tour of the old opera house. This is a lovely old theater, and the paintings on the walls alone were well worth the trip.

Others of us wandered down to see “the face on the barroom floor” in the Teller House. This is an interpretation of the famous picture made famous in the poem by Hugh Antoine D’Arcy in 1887. Now lest you think that’s too far back for anyone today to know, this poem has been the subject of a movie in 1914 directed by Charlie Chaplin, another movie in 1998 starring Mickey Rooney, on television adapted for “Touched by an Angel” with Roma Downey as the face, and even a Star Trek episode. The original poem told of a down and out drunk coming into a bar begging for someone to buy him a drink. Finally someone does, and he tells the bar hangers on that he was once a famous painter, but his downfall came when he fell in love and his girl left him for his best friend. After a couple of drinks he offers to show them what she looked like, and he paints her portrait on the floor, then promptly falls over dead on the portrait. This was also made into an opera, but the story was expanded somewhat.

As you might guess, this whole area is an historical treasure trove.

We had a fine lunch in Georgetown, complete with accordion music, furnished by Joe Saman and John Roberts in costume.

From there we went by bus to take the Georgetown Loop Railroad trip. What a fun trip it was, and the scenery was beautiful. We skirted the storm clouds, and while we got a few “drops” of rain, for the most part it was fine.

Thursday evening was the pumper contest, and boy, these things are getting better and better. This was really a good group of contestants, and this time the audience had to choose, and three winners were selected, with Roger Stumfol from Kansas the #1 winner, Alex Thompson was #2 and Julian Dyer was third.

When the contest was over the piano roll for the Convention was presented, and when I say “presented” I mean it was quite a presentation, with four “cowboys” singing and acting out the songs, who in real life were not actually Tex, Slim, the Kid or Monty, although they certainly would fit the parts. Actually, they were Joe Saman, Jan Myers, Barry Weiss and Jerry Hutt, with Art Reblitz on the Player Piano and Dick Kroockel on the piano. (These guys all might have an up and coming career in “show biz”???) I have never seen anything like it, and it was marvelous. They were such a big hit that the audience voted to have them repeat the performance at the banquet on Saturday night.

After a good night’s sleep we rose early Friday, had breakfast and boarded the buses again for a lovely trip to Colorado Springs, nestled at the base of Pikes Peak about 60 miles south of Denver. The scenery is decorated by the Rockies (Colorado has more peaks over 14,000 feet high than anywhere else), and the trip detours through the Garden of the Gods. This is one of the most photographed spots in the Rockies, with its ever-changing panorama, and its red rocks jutting up from the ground in many shapes and sizes. Yes, they really, really are red.

From this wonderland we went to the workshop and home of Art Reblitz, a real treat. Art’s shop is a place where many of the world’s largest, most rare, and completely fantastic mechanical musical instruments are reborn. Add to that the fact that this is where many of the hobby’s most referenced books have been written. Art is a walking encyclopedia of this hobby, and we were most honored to be able to visit his home and shop. He and his wife Jeannie continue...
opened their home to us, and Art’s associate Bob Grunow helped with showing the shop and the instruments in various stages of restoration there.

Our lunch stop today was Fargo’s Pizza, which was a fitting stop before going to visit Art and Jeannie, since this is home to a large orchestrion which was built by Reblitz Restorations over 20 years ago, and is still splaying beautifully. There are other nickelodeons in this great Pizza Parlor, too, and all you have to do to hear them is put a coin in the slot.

A century ago, several daily narrow-gauge steam trains made the trek from Cripple Creek, “The World’s Greatest Gold Camp” on the west side of Pike’s Peak, downhill and around the mountain from Colorado Springs, delivering tons of gold ore to several large mills for refining. The ore mills are gone, except for one large smokestack, but an enormous pile of mine tailings and two historic stone buildings remain: the Midland Terminal car repair shop and the original roundhouse, which marked the eastern end of the railroad.

Today, the repair shop houses the Pikes Peak Ghost Town Museum, which provided old-time fun, including several coin-operated pianos restored by Art Reblitz in the early 1970’s. The roundhouse is occupied by Van Briggle Art Pottery. We had the good fortune to be able to explore both places. A lot of pottery items went home with AMICANs.

For our evening meal, Jere and his crew had arranged for us to go to Four Mile Historic Park for a real, live chuck wagon meal, put on by a gentleman who owns an authentic chuck wagon and prepares everything just as the cook would have done on a trail ride. The food was really fantastic, and there was lots of it. Four Mile Park was the last stage stop outside of Denver, and the distance? You guessed it…Four miles! The home in this park is the oldest residence in Denver. This is part of the Colorado State Historical Society, not just a tourist attraction.

The park is really a neat place, and nearly everyone managed to take a stagecoach ride around, and go through the old homes. It was interesting.

After dinner, the “chef” put on a program of cowboy poetry, and he was just great. He told several stories, all in poetry, some funny, some sad, but all entertaining. He is really a showman, and we enjoyed his show immensely. It was a real taste of western history and hospitality.

Saturday was workshops and the mart, which kept us busy until about five p.m., then up to the room to freshen up, dress up a bit and walk the block and a half to the restaurant where the banquet was held on the 37th floor.

The view from this banquet room was just breathtaking, with all of Denver lit up for our pleasure. We also had one of the prettiest sunsets you could ever want, and Jere said it was the first one they had for weeks due to bad weather, so we were really fortunate.

The “Queen City Jazz Band” furnished the music for dancing and listening, and they were a big hit. The whole evening had such a wonderful ambience to it.

Sunday morning was the business meeting and breakfast. There was an organ and piano concert at the Paramount Theatre in the afternoon, “An Afternoon of American Music” with Dick Kroeckel (ragtime pianist) and Patti Simon.

There were open house tours in the evening, with the hospitality room open, too.

This was convention filled with fun and friendship, and we owe Jere and his crew a big vote of thanks. They didn’t even have a Chapter of AMICA when they started, although they did start one back up now.

Jere gave me a list of people who worked on the convention, and we want to thank all of them. I am not going to list their jobs, since most of them probably managed to do much more than just one job.

Here are those who made this successful: Kathe Graham, Anita Nickels Johnson, Art and Jean Reblitz, Dick Kroeckel (who played the souvenir roll, which Art recorded and edited), Barry Weiss, Ben Haass, Don and Ginger Hein, Don and Owanah Wick, Jan and Lucy Myers, Jerry Hutt, Jim Bratton, Joe Saman, Joe and John Roberts, John Wilkens, Larry Kerecman, Louise Lucero, Clara Wingfield, Steve McCormick, and Tom Zook.

Frank and I also want to thank Mike Kukral, who gave us such great coverage in the bulletin for the convention. Another special thanks to Bob Berkman and QRS Rolls for the super job on the convention roll.

Great job, everyone. We all know it is a big job to put on a convention, and you made it look easy, which shows what a good job you did.

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Diane Lloyd and Roy Beltz
(it’s a friendly chapter)
On the Georgetown Loop Railroad

Robin Biggins and Ardis Prescott

A stagecoach with AMICA members

Bob & Diane Lloyd

"Ragtime Cowboy Jere"

On the Georgetown Loop Railroad

Richard Ingram

Ken Hodge and his daughter Marlowe

Bill Klinger
Pumper Contest-Alex Thompson
Pumper Contest-Joyce Brite
Pumper Contest-Julian Dyer
Pumper Contest-Dick Merchant
Pumper Contest-Jere DeBacker

Pumper Contest Winner
Roger Stumfoll

Yousuf Wilson & Automatic Banjo

Photos
Contributed by
Tom Rosenbusch

Art Reblitz

PUMPER CONTEST

Automatic Banjo

PUMPER CONTEST

Pumper Contest-Dick Merchant
Pumper Contest Winner
Roger Stumfoll
Pumper Contest-Jere DeBacker
Richard Reutlinger, Cynthia Craig

Arnold & Annegret Guminski

Dick Kroeckel, Patti Simon

Cowboy Dinner

Richard Reutlinger, Cynthia Craig

Cowboy Dinner

David & Anne Saul

BANQUET

Miriam Hanscom, Jodi Trittipo, Anne Saul, Liz Barnhart

Richard Reutlinger, Cynthia Craig

BANQUET

Durrell Armstrong, Jack Johnson, Steve Holland

Richard Reutlinger, Cynthia Craig

Durrell Armstrong, Jack Johnson, Steve Holland

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