



# Canadian Organ News<sup>®</sup>

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A



B



C



D



E

## Where's the Serial Number

The three biggest questions that are emailed to us at MBI Communications regarding organs are; tell me about my organs history, what's its value, and where's the serial number. In this issue CON we will deal with the third question.

Whether the organ was made for the home (picture A), for traveling (picture B) or to impress (picture C) the organs sounds came from a sound box or music chamber that fitted just behind the keyboard. Everything else was an add on to impress the client in order for them to buy it. Key stops for additional sounds adjusted music box chambers.

Pictures A and C could have different tops or no tops. A serial number could not be put on the inside as it was not easy to open and each manufacturer did not want to reveal any secrets to the competition.

Serial numbers were placed on the outside left side. Picture E is the back of D and shows where the number would have been placed. Two circles are used in E as the number could have been in either location. Sometimes the master craftsman's name was added.

The back left was used as all workers were right handed. Even a left handed person worked with their right. It is easier for a right handed person to place a number on the left of an organ back then on the right.

Serial numbers were not used by all organ makers and there is no organ serial number listings. Any numbers found as to the year they were made are all best guess based upon what is know about them..

## Other MBI Communications Ltd. Publications

Below are two other publications MBI produces. They are emailed free of charge to anyone who wants them. Just email us with the request and they will be gladly sent to you.

The Bell Piano News is quarterly publication and has been produced since June 2005. It is currently being read in Canada, United States, England, Australia and Italy.

The Canadian Piano News is a new publication and its first issue will be coming out shortly. This publication has been developed because many email have requested information about pianos.

Please contact us with your thoughts about any of these publications and any ideas for future articles. Our hope is that you enjoy ready these newsletters as much as we enjoy producing them. Please do not reuse or reproduce the information for public use without the consent of MBI Communications Ltd. as some of this material is the property of other people and organizations.



## Bell Piano Newsletter<sup>®</sup>

## Canadian Piano News<sup>®</sup>



## The Thomas Organ Company

John Morgan Thomas began making small melodeons in Montreal in 1832 after immigrating from Ireland. The family moved to Toronto in 1839. Edward G. Thomas continued his fathers organ manufacturing in Woodstock, Ontario in 1875.

The following year the Thomas Organ Company won awards in a Philadelphia competition. The international buyers that were present commented on Thomas' quality of workmanship. Exports began and by 1885 a new factory was built. Pianos were now added to the product line.

In 1891 Edward Thomas died and John Dunlop took controlling interest. By 1895 with continued international success the name was changed to the Thomas Piano and Organ Company. A 1901 local newspaper review commented that the quality of the Thomas products were to perfection and fostered a taste for high class instruments.

By 1904 factory size had doubled with 90 workers producing 150 reed organs (picture A), 1000 piano stools, and dozens of pianos per month. (Downright Upright by Wayne Kelly 1992)

Exports were thriving in Australia, New Zealand, British East Indies, South Africa, and the British Isles. Pipe organs (picture B) were being marketed to homes and churches. Advertisements noted that the Thomas products were 'made by British labour in Britian's premier colony.'

In Arthur Ord-Hume's book Harmonium published in 1986 three Canadian organ companies are mentioned several times; Bell, Karn and Thomas. It noted that Thomas organs had the nicest and sweetest sound.

The first world war reduced production and the company survived by making furniture. Like many piano and organ firms business did not pick up after the war as phonographs and radios replaced home made music. Unlike other piano and organ firms Thomas quietly survived the Great Depression and World War Two.

George Thomas revitalized the company in 1950 with the invention of the electronic organ (picture C). Earlier versions were large yet designed for the home market. With the advent of television musical shows such as Lawrence Welk used Thomas organs in their productions. In 1956 the company moved to California and became the Thomas Organ Company once more.

In the 1960s Thomas used transistors shrinking the size of the home organ yet again. They developed more compact organs called 'baby' organs that were inexpensive and used by many rock 'n roll groups. Their products became so popular they were made available from a build it at home electronics company called Heathkit.

An Italian organ called the VOX, made popular by the Beatles was imported by Thomas. Later they bought the production rights. Thomas also got the rights to make and use the MOOG synthesizer. In the 1970s Thomas combined the MOOG and organ making it popular with musicians.

Even with this innovation it was not enough the keep the company going. In 1977 Thomas Organs closed. However, with new financing it was revived in 1979. (Frank Pugno's website about Thomas Organs)

The redesigned company re-introduced their products and slowly grew.

In 1997 they developed the touch screen organ and in 2004 the acoustic digital piano. Electronic and other parts for older Thomas organs be purchased for home or church organs. Thomas Organs Company and website is now called Thomas Piano Design at [www.thomaspianodesigns.com](http://www.thomaspianodesigns.com).



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