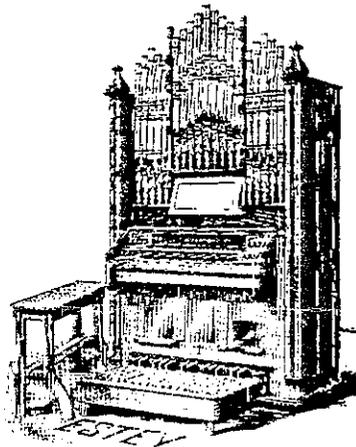


Announcing publication of  
**The American Reed Organ**  
and the Harmonium



by **Robert F. Gellerman**

1996

The all-new edition of the standard work on reed organs. 8½ x 11 in., 240 pages, liberally illustrated. Hard cover: \$39.95, soft cover: \$29.95, plus \$4 shipping & handling in U.S. Florida residents add 6% sales tax. VISA and MasterCard accepted. Outside U.S.: pay by credit card: shipping and handling will be billed at cost. Autographed on request.

Robert F. Gellerman, 2160 W. Dale Cir., DeLand, FL 32720  
Tel. 904-736-2230, FAX 904-736-4676

mantled to renovate the bellows, the rest of the "works" should be cleaned and repaired when the organ is apart. If the organ is intact, but is dirty and has a failing wind system because the rubber cloth and leather is brittle and leaky, it can be completely restored for about \$1000, and often less. Usually, all of the cloth and leather components are replaced, the reeds cleaned, the interior woodwork oiled or shellacked, and the case polished or oiled. The cost of a proper restoration is usually four or five times what the organ cost when it was new, and a properly-renovated reed organ is still a rarity among the scores of thousands that exist.

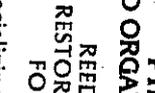
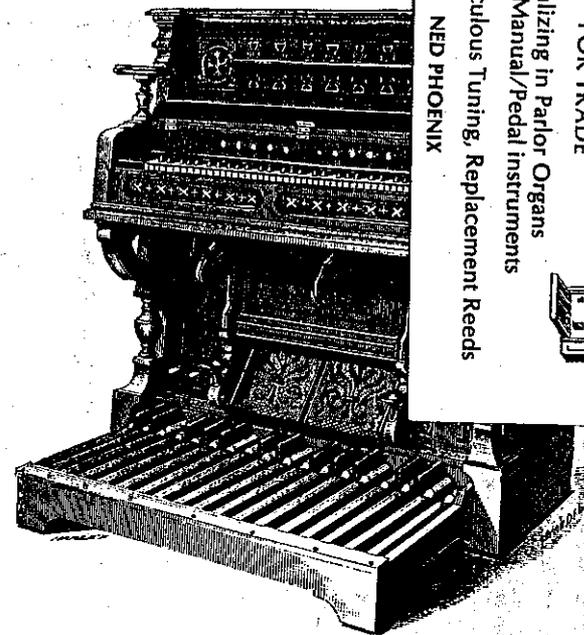
Two-manual reed organs, usually the property of churches and professional organists, are the most costly to restore, but their value is impressive when one considers that a new and very small Japanese reed organ costs \$8,000. If we have to replace parts, refinish or repair casework, and pick up and deliver the organ, the costs increase. If possible, you should consider bringing the organ to our shop at Watersmith Pipe Organs, the Baltic Mill, Enfield, N.H., for an estimate. Some owners come and assist in the work of restoration, which affects a considerable saving. Do not arrive unannounced, for we are often "on the road." You should write, rather than telephone us.

**Can I do the job myself?** — Yes, but you will need a lot of time, the proper materials, a book or two, some talent with tools, a good work space, a lot of patience, and some advice from one who has done such a job. Two good books obtainable from The Vestal Press Ltd., Vestal, N.Y. 13850, are *Restoring and Collecting Antique Reed Organs* by Horton Presley\*, and *The American Reed Organ* by Robert F. Gellerman. The latter contains a good deal of history, and two other books worth checking for information about your organ are Gellerman's *International Reed Organ Atlas*, and *Harmonium* by A. W. J. G. Ord-Hume, both published by Vestal Press.

We also appraise organs for gift and insurance purposes and provide information for genealogical and historical societies.

\* First published in 1977 by Tab Books

Replacement Reeds Available: for use in Parlour Reed Organs — send inquiry to Paul Toelken, P. O. Box 25017, Prescott Valley, AZ 86312.



**PHOENIX**  
**REED ORGAN RESURRECTION**  
 REED ORGANS  
 RESTORED, FOR SALE  
 FOR TRADE  
 Specializing in Parlour Organs  
 and Two-Manual/Pedal Instruments  
 Meticulous Tuning, Replacement Reeds  
 NED PHOENIX

HC 33 Box 28 Townshend, VT 05353 802-365-7011

**E. A. Boadway & Co.**  
**Reed Organs, Melodeons and Harmoniums**

Established 1962

1994 (603) 542-8142  
 Sample information from  
 one person who buys/sells,  
 restores, and  
 enjoys reed organs - especially  
 Esters.

We are often asked about the restoration of a seraphine, melodeon, harmonium, or reed organ. Such instruments, made by the millions from the 1820's to the 1950's, have never lost their usefulness, popularity, or musical worth, and many are a viable alternative to an electronic imitation organ. New reed organs are too high-priced for the workmanship that is absent. An old reed organ, properly restored, has both antique and musical value, and those with two manuals and a pedal keyboard are occasionally a very acceptable substitute for a small or cheap pipe organ.

In what has become known as "Walnut World," we maintain a very large inventory of melodeon and reed organ parts, including blowers, stop knobs, keyboards, springs, music racks, fretwork, "gingerbread," rosewood and walnut veneer, oak and walnut lumber, stools and benches, and hundreds of sets of reeds. Many one-manual instruments are always in stock for restoration and sale, and we rent such organs for special occasions and interim church use. Two-manual organs, usually having electric blowers, are rarely in stock for long, but we can obtain them upon sufficient notice. The work of the better American makers, such as Estey, Mason & Hamlin, Woods, Hinners, and Vocalion are preferred. Only in an extreme circumstance do we attach an electric blower to a foot-pumped organ without pedal keys.

#### The usual questions:

"What is my reed organ worth?" — Melodeons, made from the 1840's into the 1870's, often more delicate and handsome in appearance than later reed organs, are not especially desired as instruments for regular use. They are still available for less than \$300, unrestored, and occasionally one finds an uncommon two-manual melodeon. An early reed organ, with the case extending to the floor and built between 1860 and 1880, is worth about \$150 to \$300 if essentially intact. Even if the musical capabilities of such organs are often limited. Such a "late" reed organ can bring \$800, but usually sells for much less at auctions. While we see inflated prices in advertisements, one wonders how much such an organ really "went for." In the end, unless the organ is being purchased just for "appearance's sake," the value is directly related to the extent of the restoration required. In the reed

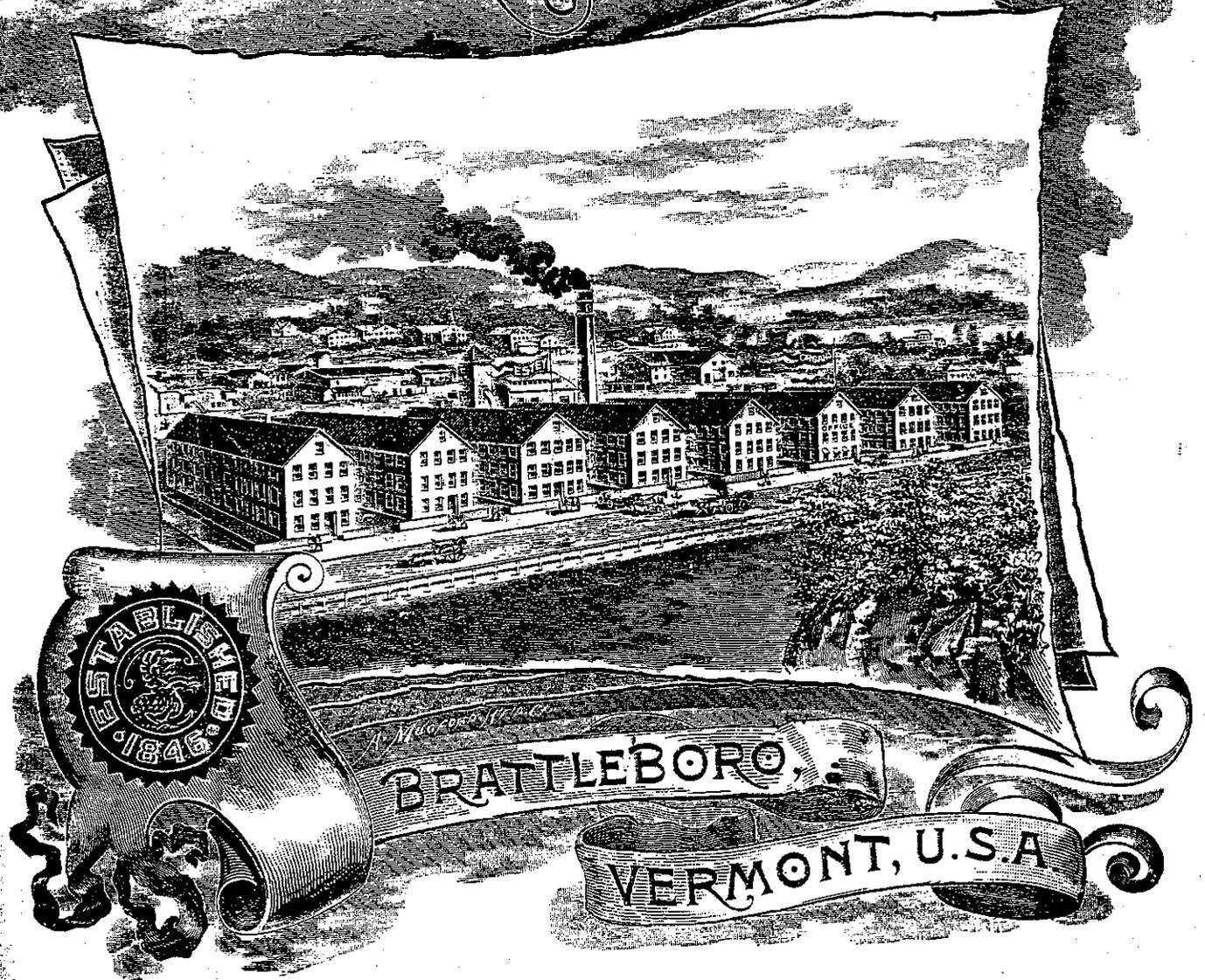
organ world, it's definitely "a buyer's market." A reed organ is much easier to handle and restore to playability than an aged piano, but any large and heavy musical instrument "in the rough" rarely brings a high price unless it's an exceptionally rare model or has especially unique casework. European harmoniums are scarce and valuable in this hemisphere, and are usually purchased by serious collectors and musicians.

"Do you buy old reed organs?" — Yes, but only if the organ is basically intact and, if a fairly common model, available for no more than \$250. But a seriously-damaged instrument always has value for parts, and two-manual organs receive higher offers. Few reed organs can ever be sold for the value of the labor that goes into restoration, so a high initial price is rarely paid. Condition, accessibility, distance, our schedule, and the owner's (sometimes inflated) price are factors to be considered. Good reed organs are still plentiful in antique shops, and we purchase one about every two weeks for well under \$300. If you want a large sum for a Victorian organ, advertise it yourself or contact an antique dealer for his advice and an offer. Most dealers have no idea of the cost involved in restoring any musical instrument! Geography is important — a handsomely-cased reed organ sells for much more in the Southern states, where such instruments are part of the vanloads of black walnut furniture taken south by dealers almost daily. In the west, what we consider a "basket case" is often lovingly restored by a proud owner.

If you advertise in other than a local paper, you should provide a buyer with the maker's name, measurements, the names on the stopknobs, your price, and, if possible, a photograph. Three national publications carry reed organ want ads, and we can supply you with addresses and rates. You are advertising a melodeon or a reed organ, not a "pump organ".

~~"What's involved in restoring a reed organ?"~~ — We repair, rebuild, restore, and tune reed organs full-time, and... We repair, rebuild, restore, and tune reed organs full-time, and... Most restorations are for owners who want **playable** antiques, and a few owners refinish the casework themselves. The recovering of the wind system is almost always essential, and because an organ has to be completely dis-

# ESTEY LODGE & CO.



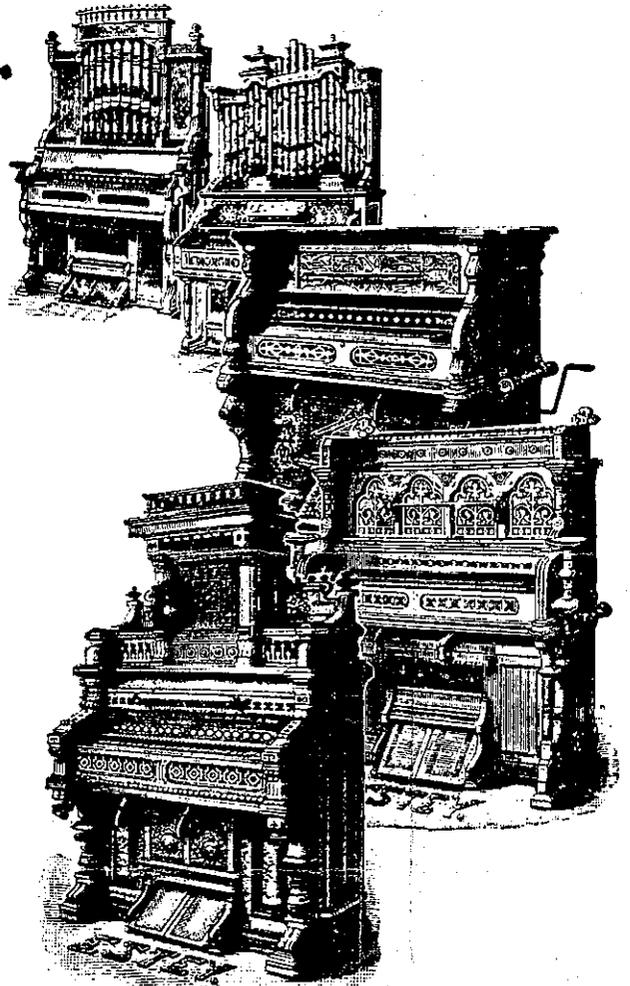
Cover of 1895 catalog  
from Whiting book

Available once again . . .

*Estey*

**REED ORGANS  
ON PARADE**

. . . a pictorial review of the many parlour, cabinet, boudoir, philharmonic, and other types of reed organs made over a 100-year period by the famous Estey Organ Company, together with a brief corporate history . . .



by Dr. Robert B. Whiting. Second printing, revised and expanded.

\$19.95 RETAIL (PLUS \$3.50 SHIPPING WITHIN THE U.S.)

DEALER OR QUANTITY DISCOUNTS PLEASE INQUIRE

EXCLUSIVE DEALER:

OUT-BACK MECHANICAL MUSIC

6 FRONT STREET, BAINBRIDGE, NY 13733

PHONE OR FAX: 607-967-8909

**Order Blank**

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ TELEPHONE(\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ APT. No. \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF BOOKS \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$19.95 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SHIPPING \$3.50 FOR FIRST BOOK; ADD \$1.00 FOR EACH ADDITIONAL BOOK \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NEW YORK STATE RESIDENTS PLEASE ADD 7% SALES TAX (SHIPPING IS TAXABLE) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL AMOUNT \$ \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE MAKE CHECK OR MONEY ORDER PAYABLE TO OUT-BACK MECHANICAL MUSIC

SEND ORDER AND PAYMENT TO

OUT-BACK MECHANICAL MUSIC, 6 FRONT STREET, BAINBRIDGE, NY 13733



## ESTEY REED ORGANS

September 6, 1999

John Collingwood  
PO Box 938  
West Dover, Vermont 05356

Dear friend:

We are pleased to have your inquiry about the Estey Organ Company and particularly the reed organs for which Estey was best known. This type of instrument has been called melodeon, harmonium, parlor organ, pump organ, cottage organ and other such names but the generic name is reed organ even though a harmonium is technically different.

Estey started building reed organs here in Brattleboro around 1846, continued to do so for over a century, and had built over 506,000 before going out of business in 1955. There were many other companies, mostly small, making reed organs in the USA and in Europe 1900, but Estey was the biggest and lasted longest. Also, Estey workers prided themselves on good materials and sturdy works, and many of these instruments are still in use. Estey tried to build pianos in NYC for a short time around 1890, and in 1900 started building some 3600 excellent pipe organs before closing in the 1950's. Enclosed is our BHS flyer on The Estey Org.

This explains why you are receiving a reply from our Brattleboro Historical Society. We receive many inquiries from people like yourself, so have listed Estey Organ Information under my office number in the telephone directory. Many want to know the age of their Estey so on the back of this page is a chart with serial numbers and dates. Estey put a sequential number inside the back of each instrument, usually stamped in wood, running to over 506,000 before going out of business in 1955. Yours should have a six digit number unless built before 1880.

There are books and resources related to reed organs and especially to Estey. I have listed some of these on a separate page. Enclosed is a photocopy of pages from *BEFORE OUR TIME*, an excellent pictorial history of Brattleboro which includes this account of Estey and the importance of Estey to our local history. Whiting on *ESTEY REED ORGANS ON PADE* and Gellerman *THE AMERICAN REED ORGAN* are excellent. The page from *Vestal* shows other books in print, but you might be able to see copies through your inter-library system.

For those interested, there is a Reed Organ Society with members all over the world, and I enclose a list of members in your area. As you can see this shows people who collect, restore, buy and sell these instruments, and they will probably be your best help in getting parts, in repairing, getting the value, and/or selling. Also there is a lively Great Lakes Newsletter.

Some events and displays are listed on that same page. BHS has a small exhibit at the Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, but we also have a large collection of Estey instruments and materials. If you should travel this way, I believe you would enjoy seeing our collection as well as visiting the old Estey factory buildings on Birge Street. Please call several days ahead.

As you can see there is no charge for this service and material. However, a donation to BHS of \$5 or more would be appreciated, and in addition a snapshot (if you have not already sent one) showing your Estey together with the serial number and a little information about its history and how you acquired it would be a nice addition to our BHS Estey archives.

Here is some general information for your brother - ROS members in England might be helpful. Sincerely yours,  
John H. Carnahan  
802-258-2363

MUNICIPAL CENTER

230 MAIN STREET

P.O. BOX 6392

BRATTLEBORO, VT 05302

Gellerman's International Reed Organ Atlas

ERIKSSON, A.; Ka Sweden, 1909. [Ord-Hume]

ERIKSSON, E.; Ge Sweden, 1909. [Ord-Hume]

ERIKSSONS, J.; Krogatan 7, Ostersund, Sweden, 1903. [de Wit 1903]

ERSTE PRODUKTIGENOSSENSCHAFT DER HARMONIUM-MACHER WIENS; Hartmannngasse 10, Vienna, Austria; established 11 by Josef Strizik at Hartmannngasse 15; J. Witeck, director in 1903. [Friberg, de Wit 1903, Ord-Hume]

ERSTE WURTT. RARATURANSTALT, HARMONIUM- & PIANO-FABRIK J.G. GSCHWIND; Gutenbergstr. 95, Stuttgart, GermanLucie Gschwind, prop. in 1903. Still active in 1913. Established in 1858 as *Pross, Gschwind & Co.* See Gschwind. [cWit 1903, catalog, Hartmann]

ESCHENBACH, BEIARD; Konigshoven, Germany. Made the Organo-violine in 1814, one of the first free reed instruments. [Ord-Hu Olthoff]

ESSIG, RUDOLF, & O.; L.-Gohlis, Mittlere Georgstr. 4, Leipzig, Germany; Rud. Essig & Rich. Muller, proprietors. Established 1902. Mooth pressure and suction instruments. [de Wit 1903, catalog]

ESTADELLA, CAYANO; 58 calle de Martinez de la Rose, Barcelona, Spain, 1930. [Ord-Hume]

ESTEVE; France; reanaker, established 1840; succeeded by *Leon Pinet*, (qv). Introduced a new alloy for reed-making in 1852. Had 44 work in 1872. Awarded a Bronze medal at the 1878 Paris Exhibition for excellent precision work. Awarded a First Prize Sydney, Australia in 1880. [de Wit 1883, Nugues, Fluke]

ESTEY & GREEN; ttleboro, VT 1855-1863; successor to *I. Hines & Co.*, Jacob Estey and H.P. Green, partners; the Main St. factory burned 1857, a new factory was built 1858 on the site later occupied by the Brattleboro House; succeeded by *J. Estey Co.*

ESTEY, J., & CO.; ttleboro, VT 1863-1872; successors to *Estey & Green*, the original partners were Jacob Estey, Riley Burditt, Silas W and Joel Bullard; a new factory was built in 1866 on Flat St. and the business reorganized with Jacob Estey, his son Jis J. and son-in-law Levi Fuller as partners; as part of the reorganization Riley Burditt and Silas Waite organized the *Bett Organ Co. Ltd.* in Chicago. A new factory was started in 1869 on Birge Street at the Dickenson Farm, later led Esteyville; reorganized as *Estey Organ Co.* in 1872 and as the *Estey Corporation* in the early 1930's, closed in 1959. ~~Estey name survives on electronic organs sold by Fletcher Music Centers, Clear~~  
Serial numbers:

1850--400	1880--100000	1896--298000	1915--400000
1855--2400	1881--120000	1898--310000	1920--425000
1860--5600	1882--127000	1900--322000	1925--449000
1865--9500	1883--132000	1902--334000	1930--469000
1866--13000	1884--146000	1903--340000	1935--483000
1867--14000	1886--170000	1904--345000	1937--449217
1870--24000	1888--194000	1906--355000	1940--493000
1872--35000	1889--215352	1908--365000	1945--496000
1874--48000	1890--221000	1910--375000	1950--499000
1876--62000	1892--250000	1911--377721	1953--501290
1878--79000	1895--280144	1912--385000	1955--506000

[catalog, Whiting, MichROS # 0236, Yao, Lamberth, Leverett]

ETIENNE, see *Christop& Etienne.*

**Macher Wien's.** Hartmannsgasse Nr 15, Vienna, Austria. Established in 1884 by Josef Strizik at this address; by 1912 was at V Hartmannsgasse 10. Makers of harmoniums and American organs.

**Eschenbach, Bernard.** A tax collector from Königshoven in the duché of Cleves, who, in 1814, conceived a free reed instrument which he called an 'organo-violine'. His cousin was the piano and organ maker Johann Caspar Schlimbach who in 1810 made a free-reed keyboard instrument with metal reeds and developed from the Jew's harp.

**Essig & Co.** Mitlerre Georgstr 4, Leipzig-Gohlis, Germany. Established in 1902, not listed 1909. Makers of harmoniums.

**Estadella, Cayetano.** 58, calle de Martinez de la Rose, Barcelona, Spain. Maker of reed organs, fl.1930.

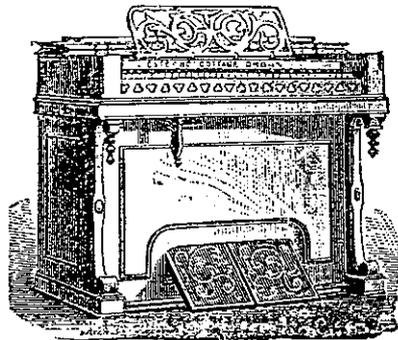
**Estey & Green.** see S. H. Jones & Co.

**Estey Organ Co.** Birge Street, Brattleboro, Vermont, USA. Originally formed out of S. H. Jones & Co (qv) which itself was established in 1846 as J. Estey & Co founded by Jacob Estey and Julius J. Estey. Also had branches in Atlanta (Georgia) and Boston (Massachusetts).

**JACOB ESTEY & CO.,**

MANUFACTURERS OF

**The Cottage Organ,**



Admitted by all to be the best instrument of the kind made in the world. Also the

**HARMONIC ORGAN, &C.,**

With Patent Bass Dampers. Harmonic Attachment and Manual Sub-Bass Improvements, found in instruments of no other makers.

**The Vocal Tremulo,**

Will be found only in our instruments. It is considered by all leading Artists the most beautiful, and far surpassing all other improvements ever added to a reed instrument.

Send for Circular. Brattleboro, - - - - - Vermont.

Prolific makers of high-quality American organs. Jacob Estey was born in Hinsdale, New Hampshire, 30 September 1814, to poor farming parents. At the age of four he was working on a farm. At the age of thirteen, he ran away after mistreatment and went to Worcester where he became apprenticed in a plumbing business and graduated from a manual labour academy. Returning to Hinsdale in 1834 to attend his father's funeral, he decided to invest all his \$200 capital in a Brattleboro, Vermont, plumbing venture. This he successfully ran until 1855. During part of this time, an area of a building he owned was rented out to a melodeon builder, Edwin B. Carpenter, whom he was later to join in a partnership which ultimately led to the formation of the J. Estey reed-organ business. Jacob Estey died 15 April 1900, active in the business to the very end. His partner, Levi Knight Fuller, was born at East Westmoreland, New Hampshire, 24 February 1841, of a German mother and Welsh father. Skilled initially in printing, he joined Estey in 1860 as an engineer. He married Estey's daughter Abby and ultimately ended up as governor of Vermont. After Jacob's death, the business was continued by his son Julius along with his two sons, Jacob Gray Estey and Julius Harry Estey. For more than ten years, the company was involved in litigation over an alleged patent infringement with a former founding partner in the old company, Riley Burdett, who by then had his own American-organ business (see Burdett Organ Co). The case was one of the major legal battles of nineteenth century America; Estey was the victor after the Supreme Court reversed a former decision made by a circuit judge. By October 1890, a quarter of a million organs had been produced; ironically, it was to take more than sixty years to double that figure. In February 1917, *Musical Opinion* recorded that:

The Estey Organ factory at Brattleborough [sic], Vermont, U.S.A. has recently seen the completion of its 400,000th organ constructed by this well known firm. A full page advertisement in 'The Music Trades Indicator' of Chicago gives an illustration of this instrument leaving the factory on a motor lorry, with the proud legend to the effect that it is No. 400,000 emblazoned on the packing case. The organ was en route for New York, and the entire journey of 196 miles was made by motor lorry.

The business prospered even in the face of declining interest in the reed organ, and managed to survive into the 1950s, the last reed organ being made in the mid-'fifties. In 1961, the business finally became Estey Electronics, Inc. During its existence, it made around half a million reed organs and around 3,500 pipe organs under the guidance of five generations of the Estey family. The London agency was originally Hodge & Essex of 42 Holborn Viaduct (qv) who exhibited Estey organs at the

Finally, though, this name was changed to the Estey Organ Co (Hodge & Essex), 12 Rathbone Place, Oxford Street. Still in business at that address as late as 1929. Patterson Sons & Co were sole agents for Scotland, and Thompson & Shackell for south Wales. See also Haskell, William E; also Howard, Samuel.

**Europa-Musikinstrumenten-Ges.** 109 Gumpendorfer Str, Vienna, Austria. Musical-instrument wholesalers and distributors who handled harmoniums, fl.1930.

**Evans, Wardle Eastland.** London. A noted nineteenth century maker of harmoniums. Born in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, and originally working there, he became a most skilled inventor and craftsman who did a great deal for the harmonium in England. Made double-manual instruments which enjoyed a vogue among amateur organists. Made a small reed instrument which he called the 'orchestrina-di-camera' which forestalled the tonal capabilities of the later American organ in that it could imitate the tone of the flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and French horn. This was a typical example of his skill in reed voicing. Inventor of a harmonium expression stop. He died aged seventy-four years in May or June 1884 as the result of a stroke. He had been negotiating the sale of his patent at the time. The business was originally at 2b Market-place, Great Portland Street (c.1866) but later moved to Marylebone Road. In 1860, *The Musical Times* carried an advertisement for: 'Evan's Improved Patent English Harmoniums, manufactured exclusively by Boosey & Sons, Holles Street, London, under the personal superintendence of Mr. W. E. Evans'. There follows testimonials from Sterndale Bennett, W. T. Best, M. W. Balfe and Alfred Mellow. Prices are from 10 to 44 guineas 'with single row of keys', and from 45 to 100 guineas 'with two rows of keys'. A notice in *The Illustrated London News* for 11 August 1860 mentions the Evans Harmonium manufactured by Boosey & Son, adding 'with/without percussion action. 2 octaves and one third of German pedal reeds plus self-acting wind apparatus. 10 to 140 gns. Mr Evans in attendance to demonstrate.' A notice in *The Musical Times* for July 1864 suggests either that the Boosey tie-up had been terminated, or that Evans kept a separate line going. It says: 'Evan's English Harmonium.- The Cottage Harmonium... 7 gns. The School Harmonium... Manufactured solely at 2b, Market Row [sic], Great Portland Street.' Immediately under this is a notice reading: 'The Cottage, or Six-Guinea Harmonium has a soft, agreeable quality of tone.. Boosey & Sons. Boosey's English Harmoniums, by Evans and other makers. An immense variety, new and secondhand, a greatly reduced prices..' Was this a stock-clearing exercise? See also Boosey & Ching.

**Excelsior Company.** Exhibited harmoniums at the Music Trades Fair, London, June 1901. No further details.

**Fabbrica Italiana Pianoforti.** 55 via Moretta, Turin, 1929.

Page From HARMONIUM: the History of the Reed Organ and Its Makers by Arthur W. J. G. Ord-Hume, Vestal Press, New York, 1986

## SOME RESOURCES

relating to

### REED ORGANS, ESTEY ORGAN COMPANY, AND ESTEY REED ORGANS

#### Books:

- Before Our Time: A Pictorial History of Brattleboro, Harold H. Barry et al., Stephen Greene Press, Brattleboro, VT 1974 (out of print)
- Estey Reed Organs On Parade, Robert B. Whiting, 2nd printing, \$19.95 + \$3.50  
Outback Music, 6 Front Street, Bainbridge, NY 13733 tel. 607-967-8909
- Gellerman's International Reed Organ Atlas, Robert F. Gellerman, Vestal Press, NY 1985 (out of print)
- The American Reed Organ and the Harmonium, Robert F. Gellerman, Vestal Press, 1996 new and updated edition, \$29.95 + \$4, 2160 W. Dale Cir, DeLand, FL 32720
- Restoring & Collecting Antique Reed Organs, Horton Presley, Tab Books 1977;  
2nd ed. 1986 Vestal Press, PO Box 97, Vestal, NY 13851 tel. 607-797-4872
- Harmonium: History of the Reed Organ and its Makers, Arthur W.J.G. Ord-Hume, 1986  
Vestal Press, PO Box 97, Vestal, NY 13851 tel. 607-797-4872
- The Estey Reed Organ: Imagination, Music, and Material Culture in Nineteenth-Century America, Dennis G. Waring, unpublished PhD dissertation,  
Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, 1987

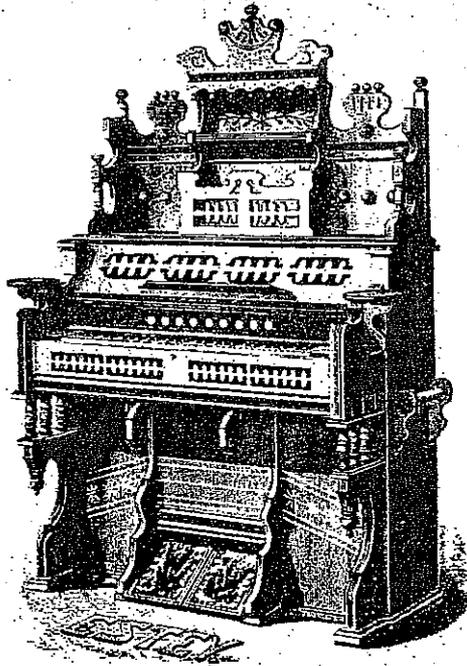
#### Periodicals and other materials:

- Guidelines for Reed Organ Conservation, Phil Fluke, 6 Albert Terrace, Saltaire Village, Shipley, West Yorkshire BD18 4PS, England. 1997 ed. \$8 plus \$3 postage to USA (detailed and excellent guide for the amateur)
- Reed Organ Society Bulletin (quarterly), c/o James Quashnock, 3575 Highway 258E, Wichita Falls, Texas TX 76308-7037 \$17.50 (always has articles on Esteys)  
Classified ads \$5. for 30 words to 609 Rix St. SE, Ada, MI 49301-9192.
- Great Lakes Reed Organ Newsletter, Editor: Fred Pelton, 3517 Mill Race, Caledonia, Michigan 49316 Bimonthly \$20.00 Lively report of collectors and events in Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Ontario, also carries classifieds \$5. per printing
- New England Organ Works, Craig Cowing, PO Box 145, Monmouth, Maine 04259-0145  
E-mail: organ@reston.com
- John K. Estell, 8055 Hillville Road, Bluffton, OH 45817 Reed Organ Home Page  
estell@bluffton.edu

#### Exhibits:

- Brattleboro Museum & Art Center, former Union Station, Brattleboro, Vermont.  
Open May to November. Tel. 802-257-0124
- Estey factory buildings, 28 Birge Street, Brattleboro, VT 05301 Tel. 802-257-1467  
Three buildings are now owned and being restored by Barbara George
- International Musical Museum, Deansboro, New York. Tel. 315-841-8774
- Pease Musical Museum, Palmer, Massachusetts. 413-283-7620/9203
- Lee Conklin Antique Organ Museum, Hanover, Michigan Tel. 517-563-8328
- Heiss Haus Antique Organ Museum, Nashville, Michigan Tel. 517-852-2239
- Victorian Reed Organ and Harmonium Museum, Victoria Hall, Victoria Road,  
Saltaire Village, Shipley, West Yorkshire, England BD18 4PS  
c/o Pam & Phil Fluke Tel: 0274-585601
- The Beehive Reed Organ Studio, Alfred, Maine Tel: 207-324-0990
- Brattleboro Historical Society, PO Box 6392, Brattleboro, VT 05302 Tel. 802-258-2363 believed to be largest public collection of Estey materials  
also some instruments made by Carpenter and other Brattleboro manufacturers

# THE ESTEY ORGAN



*'For generations, the name of Estey was, and perhaps in some places still is, literally a household word,' writes a business history magazine. 'Estey reed organs were found in homes and churches in the Americas, Europe, and even Asia and Africa. Near the end of the last century, the Estey Organ Company was reputed to be the largest manufacturing establishment of its kind.'*

Once Brattleboro's largest employer, maker of half a million reed organs.... Who and what was Estey and why was the reed organ so popular?

## The reed organ:

### a Victorian phenomenon

There are many instruments in the reed organ family, including the modern harmonica and accordion. The melodeon and harmonium were early versions of the reed organ, and the late 19th century instrument was also called a pump organ or a parlor organ.

In the days before radio, record players, or television, home music-making was more popular and important than it is today. As inventions and changing technology improved the reed organ in the mid-1800s, Americans had more money to spend on home entertainment. The reed organ was cheaper, lighter, and easier to keep in tune than a piano, so it was the obvious choice for the musically minded,

middle-class family.

The so-called Victorian era was the heyday of the reed organ. There were hundreds of manufacturers in the United States and thousands of organs were made and sold. Organs were advertised in magazines and sold door-to-door. Sears and Roebuck carried them in its catalog. Case styles could be varied to suit changing tastes.

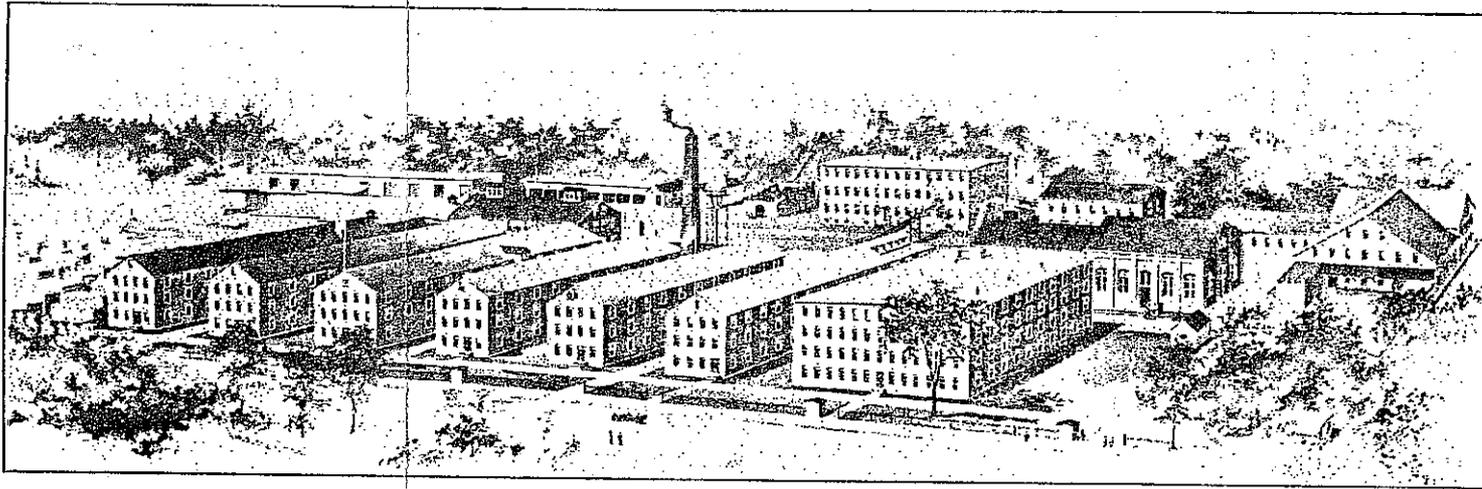
With its efficient factory, well-made product, and extensive advertising and dealer network, the Estey company was one of the largest reed organ manufacturers in the world. From 1880 to 1900 Estey made an average of 10,000 instruments per year. The company exhibited at Worlds Fairs and marketed internationally.



The trade card was a popular advertising medium of the late 1800s



A brass reed, actual size.



### Who was Estey?

The founder of the Estey Organ Company, Jacob Estey, was born in Hinsdale, New Hampshire, in 1814. By 1835 he had moved to Brattleboro and owned a plumbing supply business. His enterprises soon expanded to include a lumber company and one selling marble and slate products. Though the eventual Estey Organ Company in its publicity used 1846 as its date of founding, Jacob didn't get into the business until the early 1850s. That's when he became part owner of an organ company that began in 1846.

Instruments associated with Estey in the 1850s and 1860s are labeled 'Estey & Green' or 'J. Estey & Co.' Around 1870 Jacob took his son Julius and son-in-law Levi Fuller into partnership and the name 'Estey Organ Company' was born.

The Estey family was civic-minded and active outside of manufacturing. Jacob served in the Vermont legislature, as did Julius, and Levi Fuller became governor of Vermont. Levi was also a notable inventor, with many patents to his name. The family sponsored two national guard companies, donated to the Baptist church, and served on the local bank board. They are said to have been quite enlightened employers.

### What happened?

Estey's market niche was the reed organ, in which it ranked at the top in both quality and quantity. But reed organs began losing market share to pianos in the 1890s. Estey had established a piano company in New York City in 1885 and in 1901 produced its first pipe organ. (Some 3,000 pipe organs were eventually made by the company, mostly installed in churches.) But Estey was not the leader in either of these fields.

Jacob died in 1890 and his descendants continued to run the Estey Organ Company for another 60 years, with a few brief periods of outside ownership. The company closed down in Brattleboro in the late 1950s. Some Estey great-great-grandchildren still live in the area.

Of the half a million reed organs made by Estey, many still exist in homes and churches. Because most of them say 'Brattleboro, Vermont' above the keyboard, people often phone Brattleboro seeking information about the company. The Brattleboro Historical Society tries to answer these requests and also maintains a collection of Estey organs and memorabilia. The Brattleboro Museum and Art Center has a permanent exhibit about the Estey Organ Company.

### The factory on Birge Street

After fires and floods had damaged or destroyed several earlier factories downtown, the company moved its operations in 1870 to a terrace above the Whetstone Brook. There it constructed a row of three-story, 100-foot long, slate-sided factory buildings. Over the years more buildings were added. Old maps show a lumber yard, gas house, boiler, engine room, machine shop, blacksmith shop, shipping and packing building, horse shed, tramway, dynamo, and reservoir. Up to 700 workers were employed at one time.

More than half the buildings still exist, and the complex was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. It is now home to carpentry shops, artists, book publishers, a church, and a furniture warehouse.

For further information on Estey Organs contact:  
The Brattleboro Historical Society  
P.O. Box 6392  
Brattleboro, Vermont 05302  
802 - 258 - 4957

## Reed Organ

### RESTORING AND COLLECTING ANTIQU REED ORGANS (2nd edition)

This is a book designed primarily for the amateur craftsman who wants to know the nuts and bolts of restoring an antique reed organ. The author, a Professor of English by trade, writes so clearly that one should have no difficulty following his instructions. Chapters cover refinishing, stop actions, reed work, case work, trouble-shooting, and all sorts of details that will help make the job fun and the outcome rewarding. It includes a supplier list and full bibliography. Major topics include

- disassembly
- bellows repair
- action work
- reed pan and cell restoration
- repair of pallets, mutes, swells, couplers, and pitmans
- keyboard and stopboard repairs
- reeds and tuning
- restoring
- vibrato effect
- case restoration

5 x 9 inches, 316 pages, over 120 black-and-white illustrations  
Stock #562, softcover, \$16.95 [ISBN 0-911572-56-2]

### HARMONIUM

#### The History of the Reed Organ and Its Makers

by Arthur W.J. G. Ord-Hume

The author is a noted British scholar and authority on a wide variety of musical instruments from both sides of the Atlantic. Here is just a partial listing of the important chapters and appendices in this book:

- The History of the Free Reed in Musical Instruments
- The American Industry and its Achievements
- How the Reed Organ Works
- The Social History of the Organ
- Music for the Reed Organ
- The Development of Self-Playing Reed Organs
- Index of Makers of Reed Organs

7 x 10 inches, 256 pages, 171 black-and-white illustrations  
Stock #570, hardcover \$35.00 [ISBN 0-911572-57-0]



## The American Reed Organ and the Harmonium

*A treatise on its history,  
restoration, and tuning, with  
descriptions of some out-  
standing collections; including  
a Stop Dictionary and a  
Directory of Reed Organs.*

by Robert F. Gellerman

This is the much anticipated, completely revised second edition of Mr. Gellerman's *The American Reed Organ*. In addition to chapters dealing with the history, construction, manufacturing, tuning, and music of the reed organ, this edition reflects continuing research on the subject of the "reed" or parlour organ, once so popular in America, as well as its European counterpart, the harmonium. Also featured, are hundreds of new photographs from many reed organ catalogues and collections which can assist you in identifying your own organ's origins. Most of the reed organs which survive today are in need of some restoration and Mr. Gellerman offers complete and detailed information on this process, leading even a beginner through all the steps necessary to bring an old reed organ up to proper playing condition.

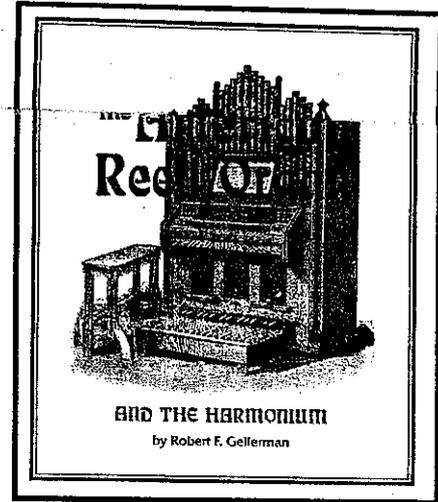
The 437 black-and-white photographs and illustrations include many pictures from the original reed organ catalogues of such organ-building greats as Crown, Beatty, Estey, Mason & Hamlin, and Wilcox and White, to name a few. The advertisements, postcards, and actual photographs show how much these instruments, which are so rare today, were once a normal part of everyday life.

This book also features a complete bibliography, index and appendices.

8 1/2 x 11 inches, 398 pages, 437 black-and-white illustrations

Stock #07X, hardcover, \$39.95 [ISBN 1-879511-07-X]

Stock #126, softcover, \$29.95 [ISBN 1-879511-12-6]



Excellent new book -  
To order - see over

Y16/98 Vestal Press no longer  
Westal Press Fall 96 business

## VICTORIAN HEYDAY



60. First Estey shop, Canal Street, ca. 1856.

61. Second Estey shop (left foreground), Plaza Park site, ca. 1860.

J. Estey & Co., manufacturers of parlor or "cottage" organs, was the most important commercial enterprise in the history of Brattleboro. Jacob Estey himself did not start the business, but in the best entrepreneurial tradition of the nineteenth century he built and guided it, creating a great popular institution as he did so. Estey organs from Brattleboro were carried as far as Australia and New Zealand.



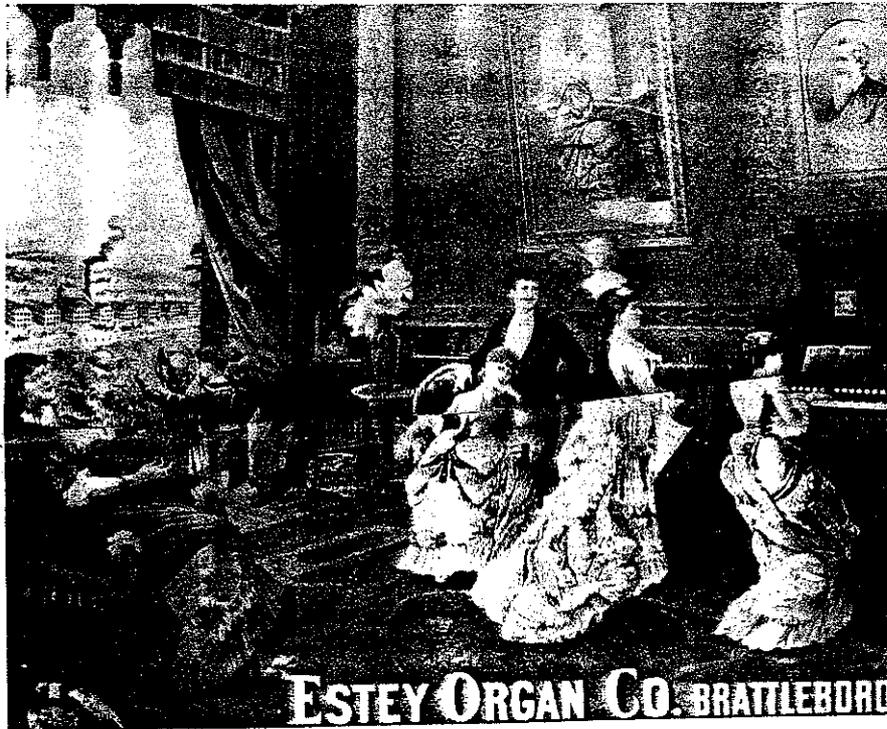
Estey's first workshop (60) faced southeast onto Canal Street, near the Main Street Bridge. His first undertaking in Brattleboro was the pipe and pump business on the right in the picture. Estey also dealt in gravestones, some of which appear to be leaning on the front porch—the location was convenient to Prospect Hill Cemetery. By the time of the photograph Estey had bought into the fledgling organ business. This operation was carried on under the name of Estey & Green from 1855 until 1865, when it was reorganized as J. Estey & Co. When the first building burned down in 1857, Estey built a new shop for his businesses across the street on the future site of Plaza Park (61). The building to the right in the picture, advertising "Furniture," was erected on the site of the burned out shop: Estey did not work there himself but rented out the space. (Note the cemetery on top of the hill at the left.)



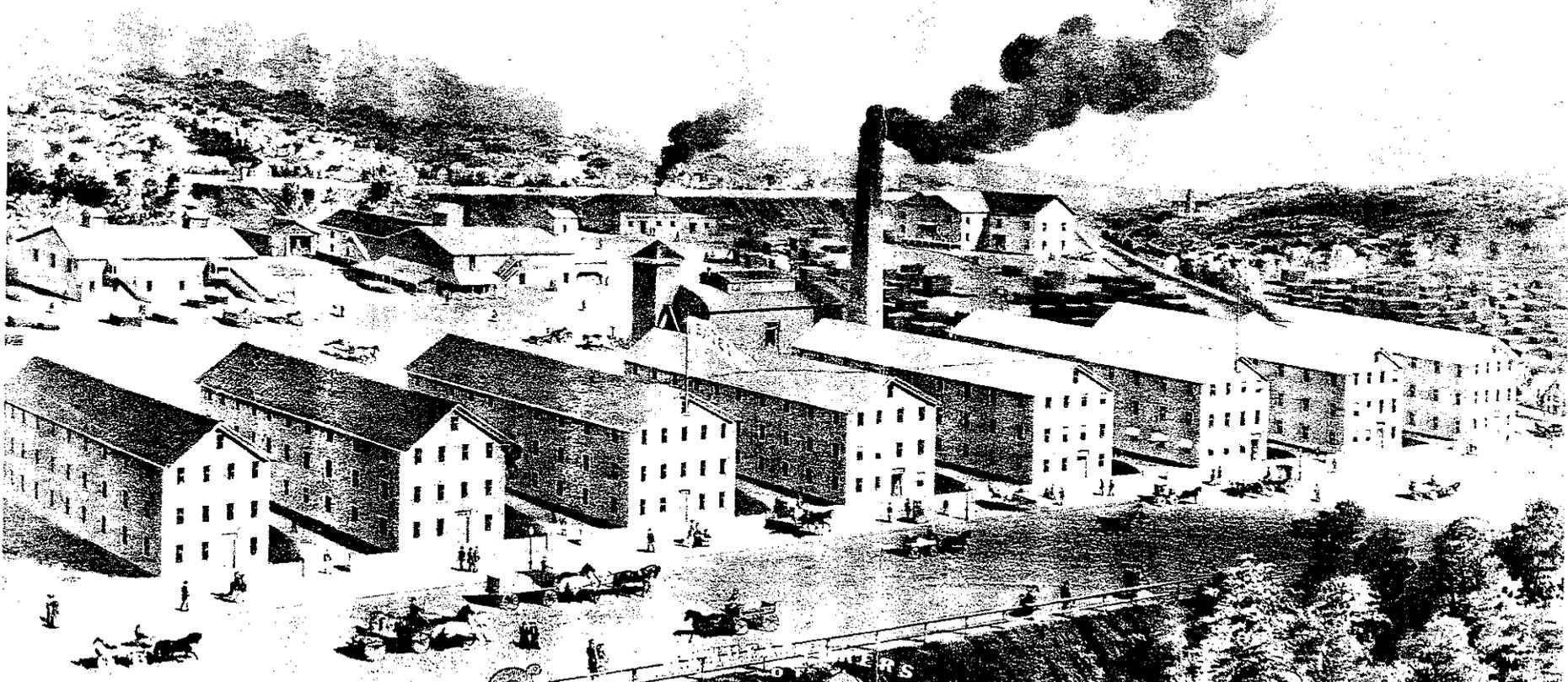
62. Officers of J. Estey & Co.

63.

Estey sold his gravestone business in 1858 and his pipe and pump business in 1864, and from then on concentrated in parlor organs. In 1866 he took his son and son-in-law into the business; this partnership guided the Estey fortunes through the firm's great years. In the portrait (62), from left to right, are Julius J. Estey, Levi K. Fuller, and Jacob Estey. They are posed with the firm's model *de luxe*, also featured in the advertising poster (63).



ESTES & CO

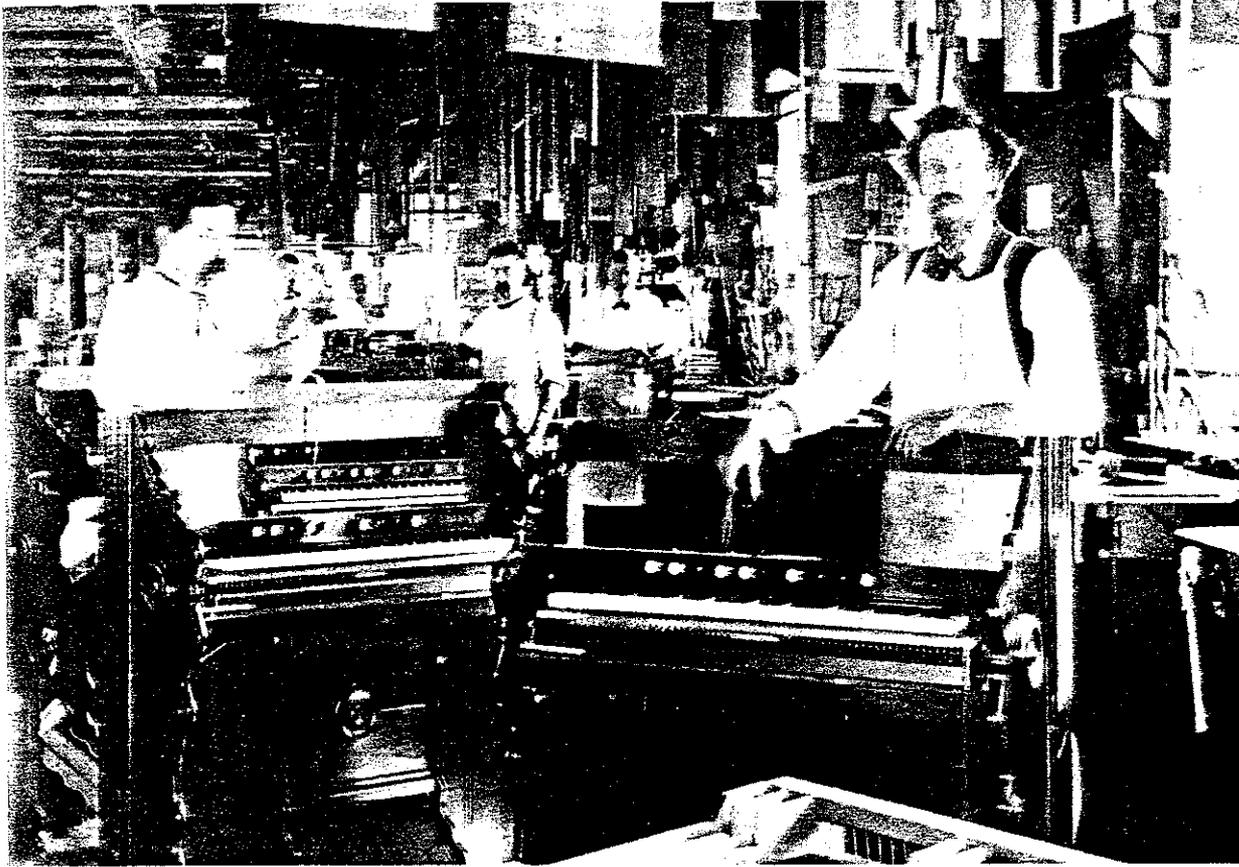


ESTES & CO  
**COTTAGE ORGANS**  
SKATELEVILLE

*The most exclusive*  
an the World  
VERMONT  
North American  
*Established*  
1857

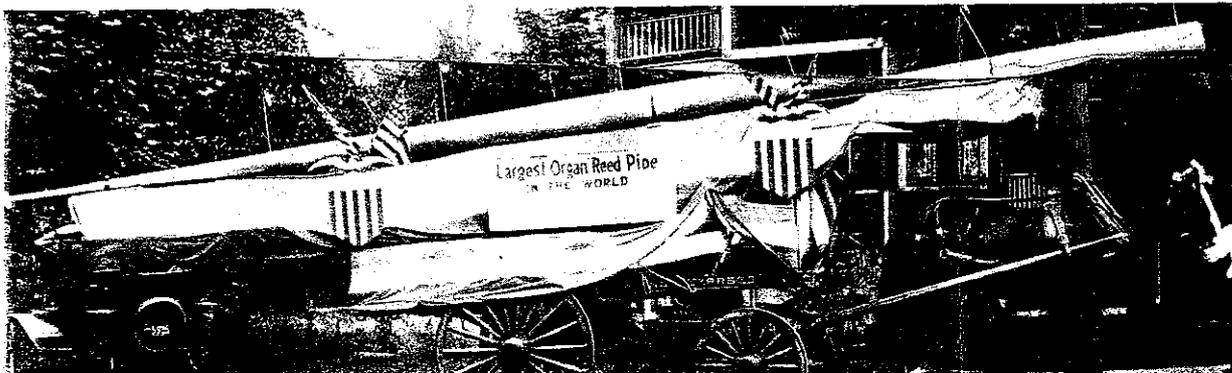


66. Estey Works, Birge Street, ca. 1880.

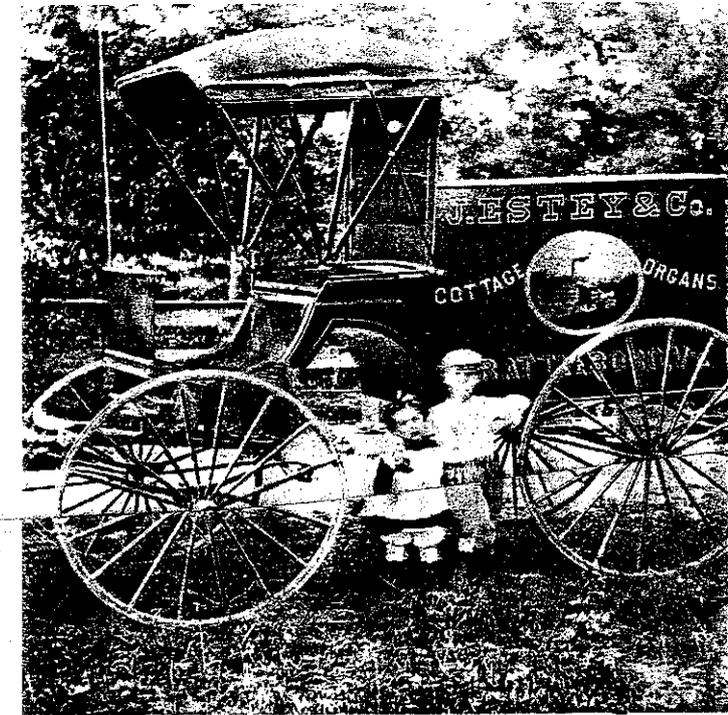


69. Estey shop interior, ca. 1870.

70.



The early workshop scene could well have been at the Frost Street factory, which appears to be represented in the medallion on the painted wagon (71). The proud display of the world's largest organ reed pipe took place on Washington Street, about 1921 (70).



71.

59