

# IDAHO — lots of land, but not many organs

by George E. Brown

Editor's Note—Up in the wild and woolly wilds of Idaho, Organ Buff George Brown has managed to collect organs, organ components in quantity, and has installed a theatre organ in his home. Now he's the owner of a Wurlitzer. This is the story about its removal. The organ, incidentally, is for sale. )

Photos by Leo Malberg and George Brown

For the theatre organ enthusiast, it's a common story. You know it's there, no one's happy with it and it is unloved. You want it, you are sure someone else wants it too, and the problem is how to get it.

Such was the case for the past six years, after a little five-rank Wurlitzer still remaining in Idaho became known to me. Idaho did not boast of many theatre pipe organs, and this one still being within the statelines made it more unusual.

Six years ago, due to a reason I do not recall, I became aware of the organ installed in the auditorium of Northwest Nazarene College in Nampa, Idaho, west of Boise. A trip to the campus, and a talk with the organ instructor and director of music gave me a tour of the instrument and a chance to play it. Unless you entered the chamber it was impossible to tell it was a Wurlitzer.

The original console had been removed and a new church style blonde console added. All that remained of the original Wurlitzer console was two manuals and the combination action box, stored in the chamber. A trip to the easily-accessible chamber revealed a five-rank Wurlitzer chest and offsets, with a 49-note Tibia Clausa, 8 foot Salicional, 8 foot Diapason, 16 foot Flute and a 61-note 4 foot Principal. And an actual "Vox-In-A-Box"—a cardboard box.

The Vox had been removed and the four-foot Principal added to the specs to augment the church sound the college needed for its organ instructions. So the Vox sat in a box under the main chest. A large Wurlitzer trem was located on the other side of the auditorium, disconnected, out in the open in the balcony. I quickly picked it up and returned it to a safe corner in the chamber.

To reach the chamber, one walked up a wide stairway that connected the balcony with the stage-left area. Part of the balcony had been sealed off and the organ installed therein. However, finding light switches, and moving aside dead birds and mounds of blown-in insulation made the trip a little more than just a walk up a flight of stairs. As



1931 ADMINISTRATION BUILDING has auditorium wherein lurked a 1920 five-rank Wurlitzer, which had been installed in 1935 for student use.

we tread each step, fluffs of insulation and bird feathers puffed up around our feet.

However the chamber was clean, and I won't forget the sight of the pipes and the sound of the organ when I first heard it. While I was standing in the chamber, the instructor played Widor's Toccata. It sounded... uh... unusual! Her playing was excellent, but have you ever heard the Toccata played on an untremmed Tibia, Diapason, String, Flute and Principal while standing in the chamber? However, I still remember it, and it did give me goose bumps.

Where did this little Wurlitzer come from? According to the late Gene Nye's lists, it was originally installed in 1920 in the Lewiston Theatre (Theatorium), Lewiston, Idaho. On April 2, 1935 the organ was presented as a gift to the college by a doctor from Houston, Texas, who was a friend of then college president Gilmore. It was installed by Balcom and Vaughn, and the dedication played by Lew Wells, Jr.

Subsequent trips to the college meant occasional visits to what was becoming an old friend. The original Wurlitzer relay/switchstack did not have a pedal relay, only for accompaniment and solo. Pedal switching was done at the pedal contacts. Accompaniment and solo relays were replaced with Klann electric, and a pedal relay was added, although the original switchstack was retained. This slowed the action down.

Pipe organs and water seem to have an attraction to each other, and this organ got a small share of liquid attention, mostly in the form of a plaster ceiling that partially crumbled, and some water leaks down the walls of the chamber. These problems were repaired and minimal damage occurred to the organ.

I knew I wanted this organ, but the school was not ready to sell. They knew they needed to replace it with something that would better serve the instructional needs, but money was not on hand for a new instrument. The old Wurlitzer that tried its best for many years just was not suitable for teaching since the first day it was installed. The swell shades put sound onto the stage and into the right balcony, which hindered the organ sound in the entire auditorium. It was strictly a practice instrument and the teachers were not happy with it. I knew that soon the time would come when it would be replaced.

A five-rank Wurlitzer fits its place, but not with an organ teacher who prefers tracker action. The organ

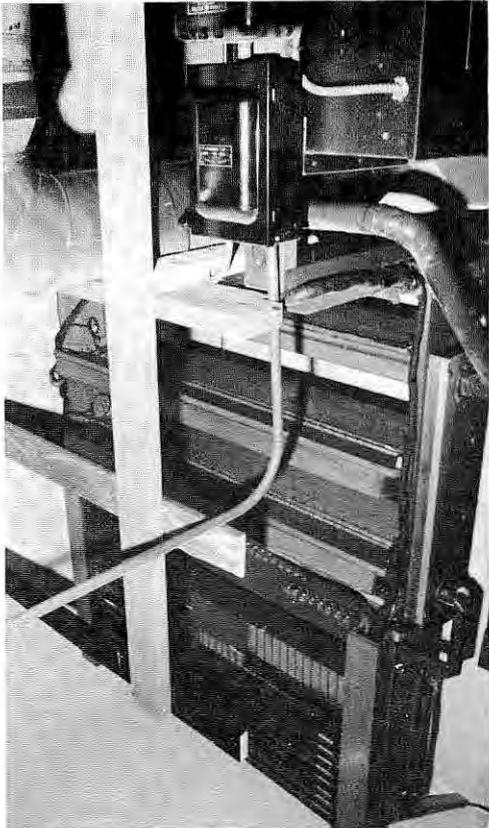
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WHERE IT WAS—In the college auditorium the pipe organ occupied front end of the right balcony—white shades were masked by red velvet. The Rodgers electronic console can barely be seen on right side of stage; pipe organ console is hidden behind the backdrop. Organ chamber: also has swell shades opening onto stage as well as into the auditorium.



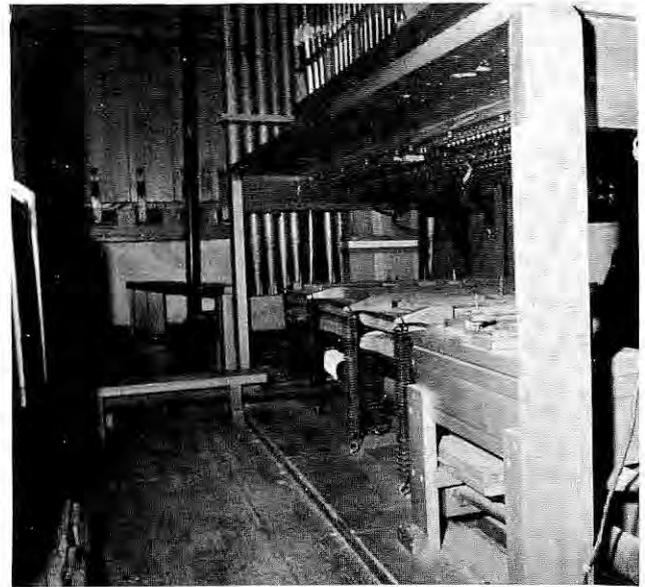
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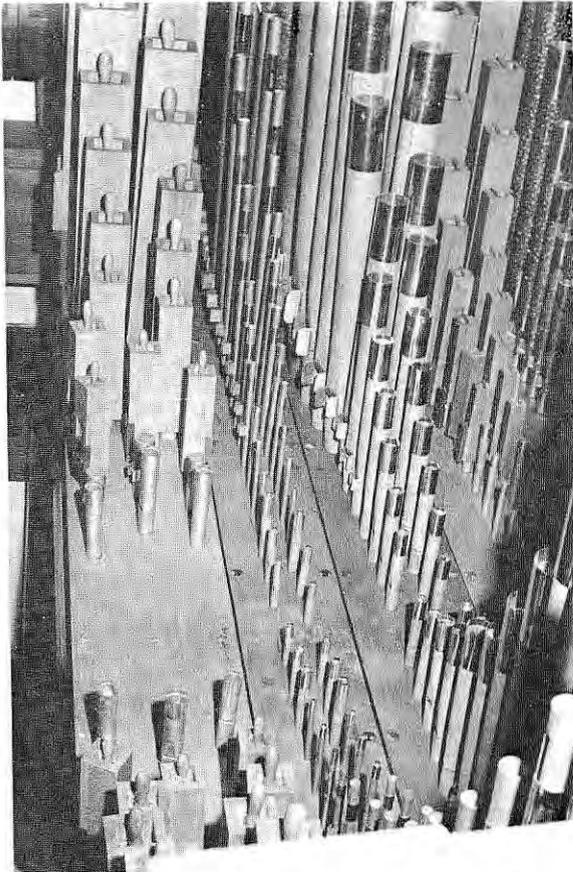
RELAY/SWITCHSTACK was mounted on a platform outside chamber directly over stairway. Main wind line from blower makes right-angle bend into chamber.



LOW CEILING was no problem. The 16 foot Flute and 8 foot Diapason were mitred to fit chamber. Chamber layout was not squeezed in, yet was compact.

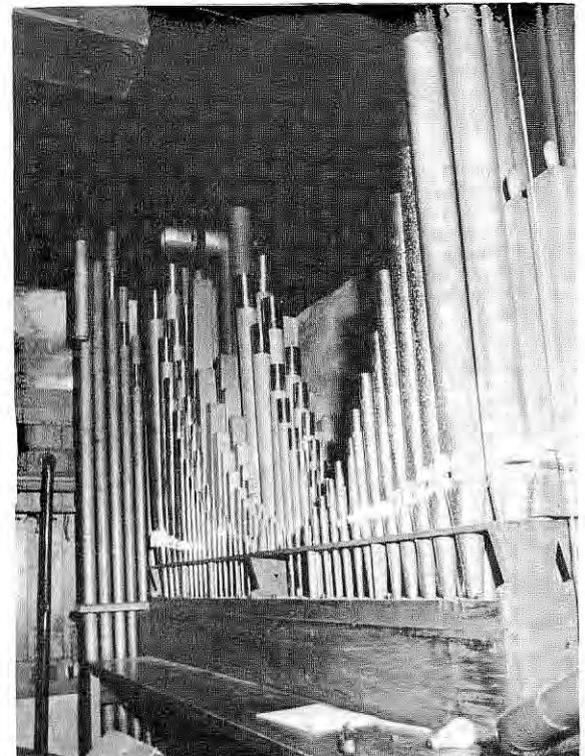


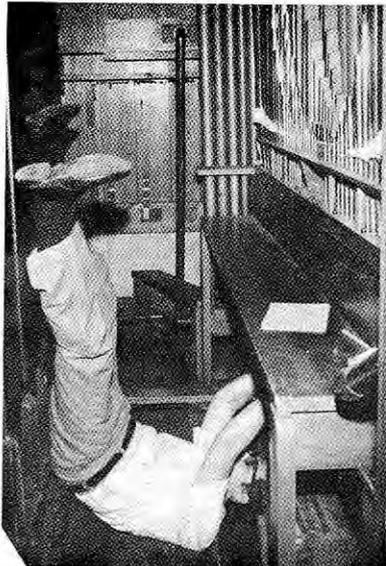
COMPACT—view shows regulators and tremulant for Vox Humana look-in through chamber door. Swell shade opening onto balcony seen in background and offsets for Flute and Diapason were aligned along the wall to left.



LOOKING TOWARD C# end of chest showing, l/r—Tibia, Salicional, Diapason, Flute and Principal. Tibia occupied space originally marked as Trumpet and Principal was racked in Vox position.

FIRST VIEW of chamber as one enters doorway. Pipework went through many years not being handled and is in mint condition.

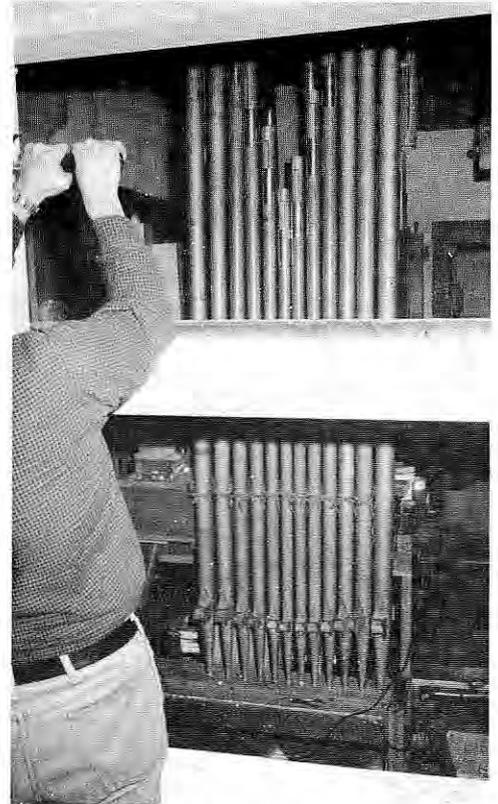




**VIOLENT YOGA**, standing on head, can be advantageous for organmen because some organ parts are not known for ease of accessibility.



**LEO MALBERG** removes 8 ft. Diapason pipe through swell shade opening. Hole in wall in lower left corner was knocked into chamber to run computer lines through chamber.



**RATHER** than negotiate curved stairway into chamber, it was decided to remove organ through swell shade opening. The 8 foot Salicional is seen as swell shades are taken out.

**IDAHO—Lots of Land, But Few Organs** —continued

moved only twice in its lifetime, and is in excellent shape—the pipes in superb condition. Either at the factory, or before installation at the college, the specs boasted a Trumpet, or so the chest stamp says. The Trumpet was removed as the 49-note Wurlitzer Tibia Clausa added. A new rack board was made for the Tibia, but the upper octave toe holes were left off the rack board.

So through the years, the school and I kept in touch. Whenever I could play the organ I did so, and each time it seemed to be getting less and less attention. And then it happened. Monies were donated in 1979 and the school purchased a large Rodgers electric classic organ, and the Little Wurlitzer fell into disuse. In early 1980, I happened to contact the school's director of music and he said, "incidentally, the pipe organ is for sale. Would you be interested?"

Answers to the question being obvious, then started a "wait and see" approach to buying a pipe organ. A couple of other people were interested in it, my college contact was going out of the country for the Summer, the business manager had to be contacted, on and on—and the organ sat languishing, untuned and unused.

Having already purchased a 2/9 Smith and a 2/6 Wurlitzer, I wasn't in any great hurry, and convinced myself that someone with more money than I could afford would purchase it. I mentally wrote the whole thing off as not feasible. Then the surprise phone call in October, 1980. The school official said an offer had been made by one of the students, but since I had made previous offers, they would sell the organ to me for the same price.

I had purchased another organ! Doesn't everybody need three?! My plans for the 2/9 Smith and 2/6 Wurlitzer previously purchased are to combine them into a 3/12 instrument. So it was decided this new Wurlitzer would be carefully removed and immediately installed in the chamber in my home in Twin Falls. This would allow me a playable organ while the rebuilding of the 3/12 progresses.

The original intention was not to hurry the removal of the organ, however Winter was rapidly approaching, and Thanksgiving was just around the corner. Also a December trip to California was planned—and then cancelled for hurried plans and preparations got Leo Malberg and me to Nampa the following weekend. It turned out to be a wise move. We left the afternoon of November 6th, loaded with tools.

Someday there is going to be an organ removal project that will not have any hitches. This was not one of them. Mostly removal can be easy, albeit hard work, but there's always something to cause heart flutters, or the next step down—partial cariac arrest—and minor consternation. We arrived at the Nampa campus, check turned over to the school, papers signed, and keys to the chamber secured. Late in the afternoon we journeyed to the auditorium in the administration building. The place was in upheaval as chairs were removed from the back for additional office space. Quickly I walked to the door blocking the stairs to the chamber. It was wide open, and all the lights were on!

Bounding up the stairs, I found the chamber door wide open and the lights on. Visions of damaged or missing pipes flashed through my mind, but soon my fears were allayed. All organ parts and pipework were in place, untouched. The college was installing a computer system and large wiring conduits were routed to the back of the hall where a computer room was being constructed. One of the conduits was routed through the chamber, but the only work done was knocking a hole in the chamber wall. The following week a conduit was run through the chamber, and I hate to think what would have happened to the organ if I had waited a couple of weeks before removing it. So Leo and I started to check all of

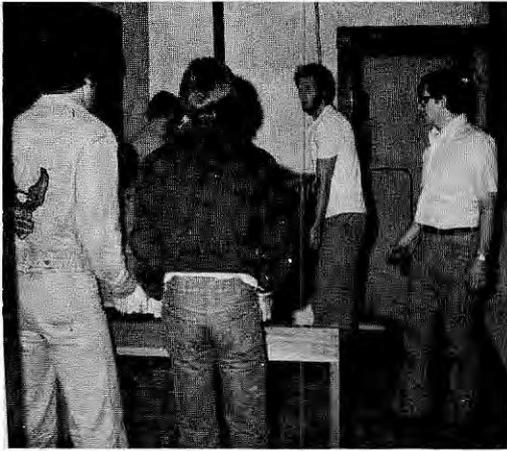


**PIPEWORK** and offsets removed, leaving only the big chest, regulators and relay (on other side of doorway), Leo dismantles swell shade action on stage side of the chamber.

the notes in the organ. We found only four dead ones. Of these, one was due to a loose solder joint, and another due to a pipe not speaking. In the meantime, while we were checking out the organ, a stream of interested college students dropped by to say goodbye to the little Wurlitzer. Occasionally a student would show up to practice on the Rodgers and our work would have to attenuate to "as quiet as a church mouse!"

One of the students decided he, too, desired a pipe organ, and he purchased the church console controlling the Wurlitzer, thus eliminating the need of moving and storing and then trying to re-sell a church keydesk. I probably spent as much time explaining the workings of a pipe organ to this budding organ buff as I did removing the organ.





AUTHOR, right, gives college student help final instructions on moving chest.

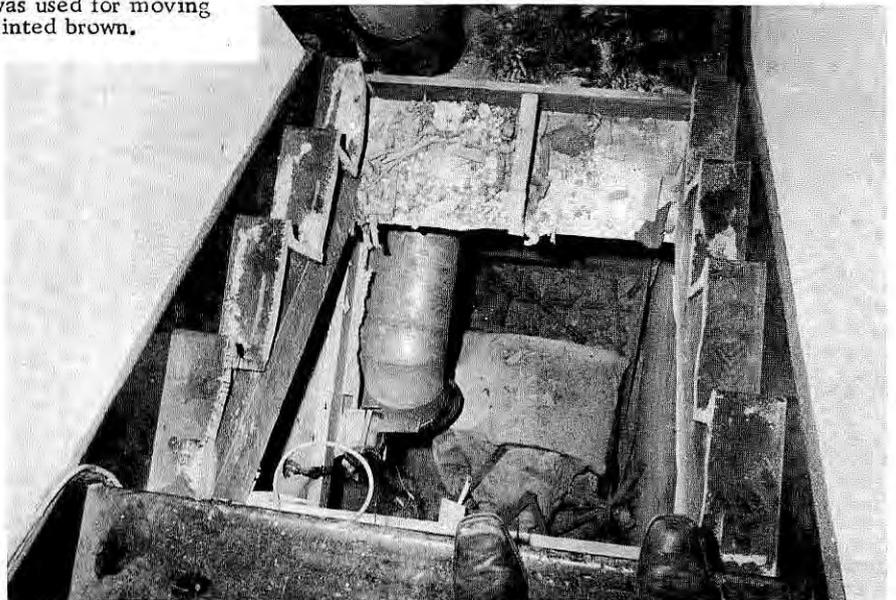


LEFT--Four haulers had to step through shade opening and not twist. Here they have chest moving along balcony to a stairway. Four, five and larger chests are very heavy unless disassembled; it requires strong backs to move them from place to place.

BELOW--Main chest has made it to the ground floor and the waiting truck which was backed up to main entrance of college administration building to facilitate loading.



LEO LOADS WINDLINE into small trailer that was used for moving odds and ends. All windline in chamber was painted brown.



SMALL BLOWER—BIG PROBLEM—The two-horsepower blower couldn't come out the doorway, so the alternative most simple—cut a hole in the stairway and hoist it out (see hole above). Organmen must be carpenters, electricians, tinsmith experts, wreckers and restorers. After the blower had been removed the stairway had to be repaired and ceiling where blower had been restored to good condition.

IDAHO—Lot's Of Land, But Few Organs  
—continued

But in between social chats, visits, practice sessions and classes, Leo and I carefully removed the pipes, wrapped and packed them. We debated the best method of removing the organ, either down the stairway to stage left, or go through the swell shade opening onto the balcony. As the seating had been removed from the balcony the latter route was selected, as it gave us a protected area where we could store pipes. The disadvantage was everything had to be moved down flights of stairs from the top floor of the administration building to the ground level. It was about four flights! We left that chore until Saturday.

The location of the blower, in a corner of the basement under the chamber, was something to be reckoned with. A wall had been built to enclose the wind maker. And this area was the Registrar's office. The blower could not be removed through its door because the opening was not wide enough to accommodate it—and the Registrar herself! was blowing more hot air than the blower... get the picture? She was bound and determined to protect her Student Records, and she wanted no one in her area. You know the type... the sort that would not have trusted Moses with the Tablets?

This is a point where an organman is either very clever with his own hands or ingenious in substituting manual labor with someone else's. The college maintenance department was, fortunately, very helpful, and they took on the task of determining how to remove the blower with removing the wall. I felt that its removal would have been by far the easiest way to get it out, but for reasons known only to them (and possibly a certain Registrar), they decided to remove it—straight up!

Beneath the chamber at stage level was another flight of wood stairs going to an exit. The maintenance men removed a large portion of these stairs, leaving a hole large enough for the two-horsepower Spencer Orgoblo to travel up through the stairwell. After rigging a comealong and some two by six timbers to support the blower, we all retired for the evening. It was Friday night.

Saturday, we completed removal of swell shades and everything that Leo and I could handle ourselves. Then we tackled the job of getting the blower up out of its home in the basement and moving to the loading area to put on the truck. After several false starts, we had to re-rig the chains and the cables, we managed to raise the machine up out of its hole, in half-inch increments. One of the maintenance men came by to assist in the job of removal, and as we were just getting it above stair level, the four students who had been hired to help load the organ into the truck showed up. With their help, the blower was hoisted out of its hole, slid down the stairs onto an awaiting dolly. It had required about three hours to get it out of the basement, and about ten minutes to get it into the truck!

By prior arrangement, the four husky college boys were on hand at 11 o'clock Saturday morning to assist moving heavy items such as the chest and regulators, and haul the rest of the organ to the waiting truck. In an hour and a half the organ was removed from the auditorium, to the immediate vicinity of the truck, with no damage. It was the first time these boys had moved an organ, and they earned their money for their toil. But it paid off.

Leo and I dismissed the helpers after paying them, and started loading the truck. It was large enough with room to spare, and by three o'clock that afternoon we pulled out of Nampa, headed for Twin Falls with another organ.

Sunday, with the help of my mother and father, we unloaded the organ into my basement. The chest was moved by taking off the bottom boards. This reduced what otherwise would have been an impossible task without the added assistance of more muscle power.

As of this publishing, the organ is expected to be playing in my basement, music once again sounding forth. The Principal was removed and the Vox re-racked. Everything was cleaned, although the instrument did not undergo rebuilding. Efforts are being made to locate a two-manual Wurlitzer console and percussions so the organ can be restored to a semi-original configuration. And, in the meantime, work progresses on the restoration of the 3/12 scheduled for eventual in the chamber occupied by the little five-ranker.

Everyone gets something different out of the pipe organ hobby. For me it is the enjoyment of working on them—the restoration. There's also a little bit of the competition in trying to buy them that stirs the blood. But the frosting on the cake is their beautiful music—from their softest tones to the majesty of the full organ sound filling filling the air—and sharing all of it with enthusiasts and



A COMEALONG was rigged to 2 by 6 timbers on landing below chamber and attached to chains lashed around blower. Here muscle power is uniting Comealong and steel cable.



SLOWLY, in half-inch increments, the blower was lifted out of its tomb in the basement, taking almost two hours after several false tries. Hearts palpitated and went throatward several times, especially when the machine caught on far edge of the opening through which it was being hoisted. Prying finally loosened it for removal.

and the general public. The more we can share this, the King of Instruments, with everyone, the better future we build for it.

Additional photos of the removal and delivery of this five-ranker to the home of George Brown in Twin Falls is published on the following page.



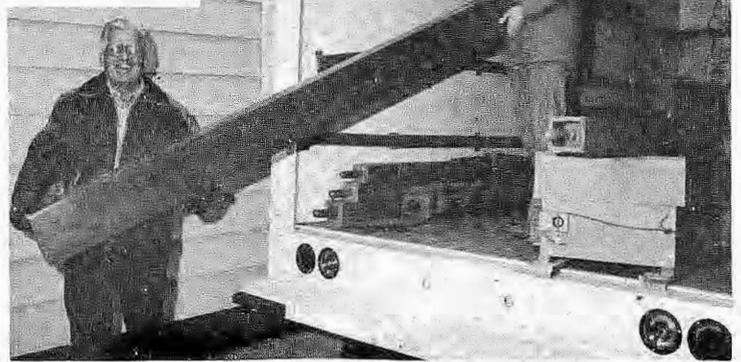
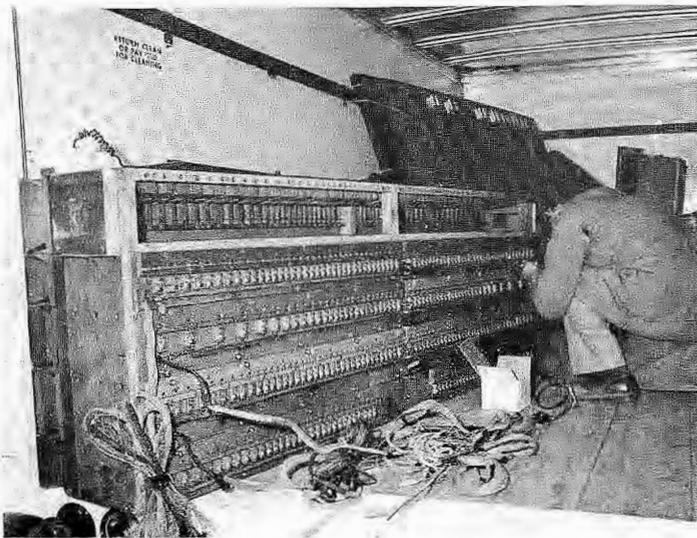
HEFTY HELPERS finally get blower to truck and with a mighty heave load it on. Blower went out back door of auditorium and was moved around side of the building to the loading area.



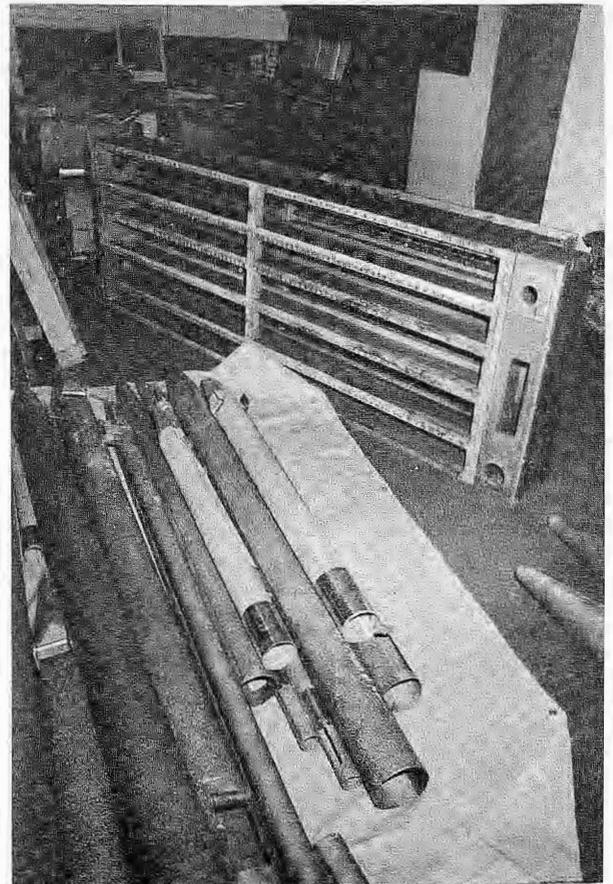


UNLOADING COSTS DROPPED when the truck arrived in Twin Falls—everybody got into the act, including the author's mother, Marty, who just concluded a radiation treatment for cancer. The weather was cold, causing the truck to be emptied quite quickly.

BELOW—Dad got into the scene, too. Dr. George Brown helps the author unload one of the bass Flute pipes. They paused long enough for this photo. The organ was hauled down to the basement where it could be sorted out and marked for placement in the chamber. It will play during the period Brown puts together his 3/12 theatre organ.



WITHOUT HUSKY COLLEGE STUDENTS, bottom boards were removed from chest to make it easier to move. At this time it was discovered all secondary pneumatics had been recovered.



JUMBLED PUZZLE sits waiting to be sorted in the Brown basement. Within three weeks after this photo was taken, the entire organ was set up in the chamber. Only winding and wiring remained.