

Inventory of the

**Wurlitzer Company**  
DeKalb, Illinois

Records

In the

Regional History Center

**RC 169**

## INTRODUCTION

The Wurlitzer Company donated its records to the Northern Illinois Regional History Center on March 12, 1984. Addenda were added to the collection at various dates.

Property rights in the collection are held by the Regional History Center; literary rights are dedicated to the public. There are no restrictions on access to the collection.

Linear feet of shelf space: 2  
Number of containers: 2 + 2 volumes  
Northern Illinois Regional History Center  
Collection 169

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

A portion of the Wurlitzer Company records was microfilmed by the Regional History Center and the original collection was donated to the Smithsonian Institution (Museum of American History) on November 11, 1992. The microfilm was retained by the Center along with a folder containing histories, photographs and the Wurlitzer Centennial Edition of the DeKalb Chronicle. The six volumes contained in Box 2 were donated after the transfer of the collection to the Smithsonian.

## HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Wurlitzer Company began in 1856 when Rudolph Wurlitzer, a Cincinnati bank clerk, sold \$700 worth of musical instruments he had bought from family and friends in Germany. The business was incorporated in Ohio in 1890 under the name "The Rudolph Wurlitzer Company." For the first fifty years, Wurlitzer was primarily a retail instrument business operating out of its Cincinnati Store headquarters. Although fire destroyed the company's headquarters in 1904, a new building was completed in time to celebrate Wurlitzer's fiftieth anniversary in 1906.

In 1908, the Wurlitzer Company bought the DeKleist Musical Instrument Manufacturing Company in North Tonawanda, New York. The Rudolph Wurlitzer Manufacturing Company continued production of automatic musical instruments: player pianos, military bands and pianorchestras. In 1910, the Wurlitzer Company bought the Hope-Jones Organ Company and began to manufacture unit-orchestra pipe organs at their North Tonawanda plant. These were pipe organs equipped with bells, gongs, horns and sirens. They became known as Mighty Wurlitzers and provided the musical background in silent movie houses all over the world and were also built for churches and private homes. In 1919, Wurlitzer bought the Melville-Clark Piano Company of DeKalb, Illinois. Wurlitzer pianos were then manufactured at the DeKalb facilities under a variety of names: the Apollo Piano Company, the DeKalb Piano Company and the Wurlitzer Grand Piano Company. Each name designated a different quality, price range and style.

With the decline of sales during the 1920's and 1930's, production of automatic musical instruments ceased until the manufacture of the first juke box in 1934. For a brief time, radios and refrigerators were made by the Wurlitzer controlled All-American Mohawk Corporation. It was not a successful venture and ended in the mid-1930's. Many of the Wurlitzer retail stores were, at that time, in bad locations and needed repairs. The solutions to these problems came about with a reorganization of the company in 1935. With the reorganization, many retail stores were sold, piano manufacturing was consolidated in DeKalb and many subsidiaries were dissolved or absorbed completely into the Wurlitzer Company.

During World War II, Wurlitzer halted production of musical instruments. The company's defense production efforts were recognized in 1943 and 1944 when its North Tonawanda and DeKalb plants received the Army-Navy "E" Award. In 1946, peacetime production resumed and the Wurlitzer Company introduced two new instruments: the electric organ (1947) and the electric piano (1954).

In 1956, the Wurlitzer Company celebrated its centennial. That same year a new plant at Corinth, Mississippi, was completed. Later, plants were opened in Holly Springs, Mississippi (1961), Logan, Utah (1970) and Hullhorst, West Germany (1960). The new facilities replaced those at North Tonawanda and DeKalb. The North Tonawanda plant ceased production of juke boxes in 1974, becoming the company's engineering and research center. In 1973, the DeKalb plant ended production of pianos maintaining only marketing and administrative offices. In 1977, the Wurlitzer Company's corporate headquarters moved to DeKalb, including the engineering and research center from North Tonawanda.

Leadership of the company, after Rudolph's death in 1914, was assumed by his three sons. Each son acted as president and, then chairman of the board, successively. IN 1934, R.C. Rolwing was hired as vice-president and general manager. It was his reorganization that helped the company through the Depression years. Rolwing succeeded the last of the founder's sons in 1941 as president of the company and in 1966 as chairman of the board. Farny Wurlitzer, Rudolph's youngest son, died in 1972. Rolwing died in 1974 and was succeeded by A.D. Arsem as chairman of the board. W.N. Herleman, president of the company, was succeeded by George B. Howell, current president of the Wurlitzer Company.

### SUBJECT TRACINGS

DeKalb, Industry  
 Juke Boxes  
 Musical Instruments  
 Organs  
 Pianos  
 World War II  
 Wurlitzer Company

COLLECTION INVENTORY

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>
1	1	Histories; Photographs, Wurlitzer Company and WWII Products (5)
	2	Photographs, WWII Production (8 proofsheets) WWI Savings Bond Rally (1)
		Microfilm of Wurlitzer Records, 9 rolls
	Roll 1	Historical publications, informational pamphlets, company descriptive (1939), certificates of incorporation and by-laws (1980's) company annual reports [1936-1986], minutes of meetings (1890-1899, 1916-1926)
	Roll 2	Minutes of meetings continued, DeKalb Piano Company minutes (1926-1927), Apollo Piano Company (1919-1921), Wurlitzer President's Reports (1921-1926), Dayton Photo Products Company minutes (1920-1923), Milner Music Company articles of incorporation (1908-1937) and minutes of meetings (1907-1937), Robert L. Loud Music Company minutes of meetings (1918-1936), Youngstown Music Company minutes and correspondence (1926-1932), Caldwell Piano Company minutes (1908-1921), Lyric Piano Company minutes (1909-1937) and dissolution papers (1937), Wunderlich Piano Company minutes and correspondence (1918-1928), Eagle Radio Company minutes and reports [1922-1927], All-American Mohawk Corporation minutes (1928-1934), Western Industries Corporation minutes (1928-1934) and dissolution papers (1936)
	Roll 3-6	Company publications: <u>Wurlitzer Booster</u> (1913-1914, 1916), <u>Lyre</u> (1937-1938), <u>Wurlitzer World</u> volume one, <u>Wurlitzer Bulletin</u> (1939-1953), <u>Field and Factory</u> (1954-1973), <u>Keynote</u> (1973-1981), <u>Keyboard Notes</u> (1975-1976), <u>Noteworthy</u> (1977)
	Roll 7	Product catalog, 17 <sup>th</sup> edition (1877); history of mechanical music (1969), military band catalogs [1901-1929], automatic musical instruments catalogs [1912-1927]; motion picture orchestra catalogs (1921, 1924), player piano and violin piano catalogs (n.d.), music rolls and records catalog (1917), military band price list (1933), instruction and care manuals for automatic musical instruments (1923, 1925), placards and posters and testimonials [1904-1919]

<u>BOX</u>	<u>FOLDER</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	4
1	Roll 8	Piano histories, catalogs, price lists, instruction and care manuals [1948-1960], testimonials (1926-1928); organ histories, catalogs, price lists, testimonials, dedications [1910-1984]; Mightiest Wurlitzer and Wurlitzer Hall (1976-1978)	
	Roll 9	Violin catalogs and testimonials [1925-1938], harp catalog (1924) and history (1986), accordion catalog (1936), general musical instruments catalogs (1919-1932), juke box catalogs [1940's-1960's]; "House of Wurlitzer;" nine frames of retakes from rolls 1-8: covers of annual reports (1975, 1984), <u>Bulletin</u> covers (May 1945), <u>Field and Factory</u> covers (April 1961, October 1963, November 1971), violin catalog cover and pages (n.d.), promotional posters	
2	1 volume	Record of Investments, 1902-1931	
	2 volumes	Cash Book, Pension Fund, 1927-1936	
	1 volume	Private Journal, 1929-1935	
	1 volume	General Ledger, 1916-1917	
	1 volume	Cookbook Correspondence, 1956	
Oversize	2 volumes	DeKalb Chronicle, Wurlitzer Centennial Edition, 1956	
Oversize Drawer 20, Folder 19		Plant Layout, April 1, 1965	