

Alain Papineau Collection

By Helmi Harrington



A World of Accordions Museum proudly announces receipt of Alain Papineau's antique accordion collection consisting of 350 of the rarest and most beautiful instruments from the century after Cyril Demian's first patent (1829). This donation, added to the 1,400 free-reed aerophones currently exhibited and the 750 in reserve at the *Harrington ARTS Center*, affirms the Superior, WI, institution as largest and most comprehensive in the world.

About 70 of the newly acquired antiques are currently shown ahead of permanent displays honoring Charles Magnante, Dr. Willard Palmer, Hugo Herrmann, Pietro Frosini, the Deiro brothers in our *Duane Sellman Special Display Area* in the *Hanni Strahl Concert Hall*. We expect to include Dick Contino here by 2022.

HOW THE PAPINEAU DONATION CAME ABOUT

This spectacular windfall acquisition has a decades-long history. In a 1997 meeting, museum curator Helmi Strahl Harrington, Ph.D., met accordion enthusiast Alain Papineau (*World Bank* architect) and viewed his Washington D.C. collection. A quarter-century later on her 76th birthday, Papineau offered Harrington the gifts of his lifelong achievement, many instruments of which were never described in any organological references. Along with the accordion family instruments were 90 boxes of music and supportive reference materials that will greatly supplement the museum's books and recordings libraries. This is but the latest major contribution to the museum's resources, which also include numerous estate collections.



The first of several internationally renowned artists to bequeath their musical estates to *AWAM* was that of Charles Magnante in 1996. It inspired the *American Accordionists' Association, International* to affiliate with *AWAM* and to base its *Archival Collection* in our library through documents and writings of American historians Elsie Bennett and Joan Grauman. Then came the Dr. Willard A. Palmer estate of over 900 volumes, his unique accordions and the magnificent harpsichord that graces our concert hall, the George Curletto electronic instruments estate, the free-reed instruments collection from the *Schubert Club Museum* (St. Paul, MN), Art Metzler, Frank Gaviani, Faithe Deffner, Sylvia Prior, the complete publications of *Deiro* and *Pagani* music publishers, and many more smaller estates. The museum expects arrival of the musical estate of Dick Contino by 2022.

ABOUT THE TRIP TO WASHINGTON D.C.

When told of the monumental offer of 350 antique accordions, some of our busiest, long-standing board members jumped to the challenge of picking them up in Washington D.C. Our volunteer-participants, Roger Schmitz [Technical Engineer], Rob Dingmann [Financial Officer], Kevin Friedrich [First Vice-President, Website Designer], and Tracey Gibbens [Band Conductor, Maintenance Advisor] were joined by Charlie [Concierge] and wife Krystal Harrington, Cheryl Wrencher [my 13 year-old granddaughter] and me. For a few days, we deliberated on logistics and considered alternatives. It was clear that the museum could not afford to have them packed and shipped to us. Even though we provided manpower, the cost of travel, truck rental, and miscellaneous expenses amounted to over \$5,000. Each person donated travel expenditures, refused reimbursements, never mentioned loss of income,—or fatigue. Magnificent gestures in benefit to *AWAM*!

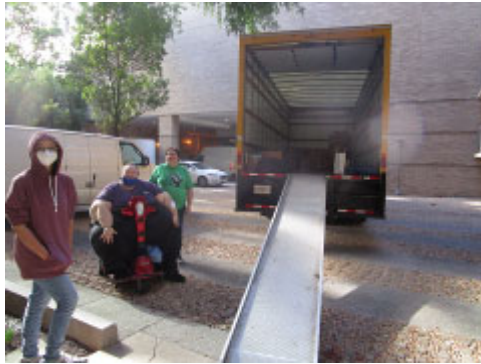
As soon as we learned that Alain expected completion of the move before the end of June, everything had to happen in rapid succession. Fortunately, Judy Carrier, Alain's trusted friend with access to his apartment, was tasked with bringing all the packing materials from an Arlington storage unit to prepare the instruments for transport. By the time we arrived, it was a relatively straightforward matter to load hundreds of pounds of instruments, music, books, recordings, shelving pieces and sound equipment that had been stacked awaiting transport.



Simultaneously, we rented a 24' Penske van and met at the Papineau apartment on Monday, June 28. Roger took on the task of driving the van and arranging contents into it. The weather was in the °F 90s as we worried about the effects of heat on the instruments and heat exhaustion on the people.



The van didn't stay empty long as everyone pitched in to work. (Below: Cheryl, Charlie, Krystal, Kevin, Rob)



And Roger's sweat-soaked shirt soon showed the stress of his work.



While the men were hard at work, I took the liberty of opening one of the boxes knowing it would be a *Flutina*. Judy and her son Ethan watched. The second box I opened was the rarest of the rare instruments—a piano accordion with two keyboard arrays. Great surprise and delight!



To my astonishment, everything was loaded in about six hours.



Below, the whole crew: (L to R) Cheryl Harrington Wrencher, Krystal Wolfe Harrington, Robert Dingmann, Ethan Carrier, Judy Carrier, Carrier nephew, Kevin Friedrich, Roger Schmitz, Helmi and Charlie Harrington



Driving out of the small courtyard loading area was as tight and dangerous as getting in. With only inches to spare, Roger masterfully managed both.



Rob directs the sharp turns.







Congratulations to Roger! Awesome !

After a little rest, we gathered to celebrate a job well done.



Tracey joins Kevin to begin the drive to Superior after breakfast on June 29.



Kevin bites fingernails apprehensively



14 boxes of Joan Grauman's AAA items, specially delivered by Dan Grauman, were added to the load.

Because Tracey previously owned a 24' moving van (whose engine he rebuilt), he takes command of the 1,200 mile drive with Kevin sharing equally in the task.



In heavy D.C. traffic and confusing street directions, they take a dead-end road requiring a turn-around at the *Kennedy Arts Center*. That brought them onto the property of the *Center* as nervous guards came to investigate. Now the men can say they made their debut at the *Kennedy Center*! Big smiles follow as this story is repeated!

After 25 hours, they approach their goal.



Parked and ready for unloading.

A moment of discovery by helper Aiden Gort. Within hours of arrival, Kevin and Aiden carried all the boxes into our building and up to the third floor concert hall balcony.



Then came the pleasure of selecting some instruments for the “Special Display Area.”

Kevin made the initial 50 choices, which were soon increased to seventy in number.



Cheryl got the first jobs--cleaning grills, adding grill cloths and polishing beautiful instruments.



Some things needed to be moved to the library, with which Dr. Joshua Kropko, wife Rebecca, Sandy Caywood and others provided hands-on assistance.



A good reason for celebrating ensued.

The next day was July 4—appropriate for a red-white-and-blue display, thanks to Kevin and Cheryl.



Every celebration deserves music! As the Superior parade passed in front of the museum, Mayor Jim Paine acknowledged us with a special wave while we played patriotic favorites from our steps.



(L-R) Aiden Gort, Anne Velasco, Helmi, Nina Ford, Kevin Friedrich, and “Saturn.”

This episodic great adventure has not ended. It has already brought the museum accolades from diverse new directions. And it brings us great pride and awe in acknowledging international prominence for *AWAM*.

TRACEY ADDS TO THIS STORY:

Our first experience of driving was one of getting lost! For the first hour of trying to get out of D.C., and confronted with road construction, we were unintentionally seeing the sights, due to Alexis tardily telling our route. We would go through an intersection and once through the intersection, our computer voice would tell us to turn at the intersection we had just gone through. We saw many views of the Washington Monument (from all angles) and We even visited Kennedy Center where we were intercepted by guards. Over the rest of the 25-hour drive. The only stops were for food and comfort.. The truck was a challenge to drive, and we had to be very alert at all times. The engine had a governor on it, allowing only limited control of acceleration, which caused some difficulty. Maximum accelerator speed being 70 mph, the truck would bog down to under 40 mph going up the many Appalachian hills of I-70 and then careen down the far side to as fast as we dared, with heavy use of the brakes. I -70 in Indiana was in very very poor shape, and Kevin “enjoyed” driving at 30 mph through heavy rain and lightning storm near Dayton. Cars and trucks were parked at the side of the freeway, but we felt that it was less safe to pull over in the black night than following the tail lights of the truck ahead of us. We timed our journey to round Chicago at 2 to 3 am, and you would not believe how much traffic was on the road at that hour.. I can’t imagine what it would be like during daylight hours! After Chicago, it was smooth sailing, with clear roads and dawn breaking. We were getting tired, however, and as we did throughout the whole journey, we alternated driving responsibilities judiciously. We arrived in Superior around 1 pm, and parked behind the museum. We unloaded what we could, but I needed rest, and went home to sleep. Kevin kept at it, and Aiden Gort stopped by that late afternoon to help out, so unloading with the two of them was able to be completed only at 7 PM.

Whew! It was quite a stretch. Kevin was a wonderful partner in driving with his humorous and cheery demeanor. All in all, it was an experience!

KEVIN ADDS: “Here's my take on retrieving the Papineau collection”

When Helmi first contacted me about retrieving the Papineau accordion collection, I thought "Oh boy, this is going to be a logistical challenge". We had to work within the constraints of a short deadline, making sure the instruments were packed safely and maintaining a realistic budget. In the end, I was amazed at how well all of the pieces came together. Volunteers stepped up to help exactly where they were needed and even the truck was an exact fit for the courtyard that it had to be backed in to.

The instruments were all packed in cases or boxes by the time we arrived in DC so I only got to see one or two of them while we were loading them. It sure was a pleasure to see them unpacked a few weeks later in the museum balcony and special exhibits area. It was incredible how many unique and interesting instruments could still be added to the museum's already extensive collection.

CHARLES HARRINGTON: “A never to be forgotten event”

The surprise opportunity to see Washington D.C. after many years absence was unique in importance. It was a time to celebrate together and to imagine.

CHERYL HARRINGTON WRENCHER: “Amazed at the sights”

[Helmi's 13 year old granddaughter from Austin, TX, was spending a few months at the museum studying accordion matters when the opportunity to acquire Alain's collection came up. She reflected:] “I was amazed at the whole experience. Being involved in the teamwork that accomplished what would probably never be repeated was something to brag about. Roger managed the most awesome driving and parking feats. I enjoyed everything about the trip to Grandma's.— memories made with new friends, new foods especially lobster, visiting sanctuaries for wolves, bears, and llamas, learning about history, and I was inspired to learn more about various accordions.”

THE NEXT CHAPTER: The new collection has social impact

Superior Mayor Paine and his Chief of Staff Nick Raverty came by to see the exhibit and offered space in the 4'x12' glass encasement at the front of his office gallery. The instruments have been selected and will soon be placed as an enticement to municipal visitors to come to the museum.

Dr. Brett Jones (Chair) and five professors in the UWD music department spent hours listening to Tracey and me explain the importance of the new collection and then studying the main museum displays.

The seventy-plus instruments on special exhibit have been photographed and cataloged by Tom Klein, volunteer from Madison, WI. I have begun to write a special booklet incorporating his work, focusing on the importance of this acquisition. After restoration efforts, some examples already have been incorporated into museum displays.

We are using glass cubes and floor-standing plastics that were acquired as the Yonkers department store closed. Most of the truckloads of items we hauled away were free and now put to best use. Many thanks to our energetic volunteers who helped pick out items and load them into cars and trucks.

The 280 instruments remaining in the balcony will soon find new honors in displays currently being set up in place of the first pews of the balcony. The displays will project above the balcony rail, viewable by audiences below (in the concert hall) as well as people seated in higher levels of the balcony.

Visitors to the Museum have been awed by the array and diversity of instruments that have been entrusted to A World of Accordions by Alain Papineau, several of which will be showcased at the upcoming World Accordion Day and Palmer Festival celebrations being held in May, 2022.