

# THE ESTEY ORGAN

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108 Birge Street, Brattleboro, Vermont 05301 • 802-246-8366 • www.esteyorganmuseum.org

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## Rare Estey Electronic Organ Comes Home

by Les Nicholas

In 1955 I was hired by the Estey Organ Co. as a troubleshooter of the electronic organ production line. I did much of my work in “final test”, where our chief engineer Harald Bode demonstrated electronic organs to prospective buyers and dealers. Harald decided my talents would be a greater asset in the Estey Electronics Lab than in the production line. And so it began.

The spinet model S was in production at the time, infamously known as the organ that cost twice as much to build as it was sold for. To reduce the cost of manufacture we “saved the sound” and built a new organ around it. With our knowledge, experience, and the top-of-the-line technologies and materials of the era, the model AS-1 was born.

The costs of the model S were reduced by 60 to 65%. Speed and ease of manufacture increased and mistakes decreased, a hundred fold. We then were competitive with all the big names in the industry at the time.

After the close of Estey Organ Co. in 1960, I opted to remain in this locale rather than move to Ca., as did other Estey electronics employees. And so I entered the vast field known as Consumer Electronics until retirement (and beyond). Because of my knowledge and work, electronic organs still remained at the forefront, even to today, when the digital era has given a whole new sound to the world of electronic music.

### **An Offer Arrives**

In early February 2012 Ned Phoenix received an e-mail from one Bernard Stewart offering to give EOM a model AS-1 Estey electronic organ, free. All sounded good until I looked up the fellow’s address, which turned out to be Yakima, Wa. That would take a lot of postage stamps. He had a few technical questions,



*Les Nicholas tests an Estey AS-1*

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one of which was how we produced our electronic “vibrato”. I answered in detail. Shipping that size and weight across the country by truck would have been in the neighborhood of \$1000 to \$1200 dollars, which neither he nor EOM could afford. We talked about maybe sending some small assemblies or parts by mail, or maybe we would just gratefully thank him for his offer. After this, I did not hear from him for quite some time, and I thought maybe he had stripped it and sold the parts, which was his original intention.

### **Help From FiberMark**

Meanwhile, a little sleuthing was taking place. My wife suggested I call a relative who visits his son in Wa. once a year -- but he flies; rats. He suggested I call his brother Mick at FiberMark in Brattleboro, where he schedules cross-country shipping by truck. I got him enthused, and he said \$212 will get the organ from Yakima to the shipping dock at FiberMark in Brattleboro. That’s a real good price, but still, neither of us had \$212 available. Mick asked management, and the company donated the entire cost to show their good will and to be a beneficial asset to the community, to the EOM, and as an employer.

I received an e-mail from Stewart whose computer had crashed. He found my email address on a scrap of paper, so we were in contact once again. I informed him of all that had transpired at this end, and asked if he would wrap up the organ and put it on a pallet so a truck could pick it up at his door. He was pleased with this turn of events, and so it was.

After it came all that way, the next step was to transport the organ from FiberMark to EOM. A good friend and neighbor sometimes drives home in a very hefty truck with a crane attached. His employer, Webber Fuels in Keene N.H., agreed to deliver the crated organ at no charge, and the AS-1 is once more home and sitting on the floor of EOM.

As this issue goes to press, the Estey AS-1 electronic organ is still unpacked due to construction in the Engine House. We don’t yet know if it works, but with the expression pedal and the volume control missing it would not make any sound. I will soon add a volume control so that we may operate it “manually” to check it all out.



*The Estey AS-1*

### **Thank You**

I, the EOM Trustees, and members of EOM wish to gratefully thank all those who have been involved with this project from its concept.

First to Bernard Stewart for having the foresight not to destroy a nearly intact organ, and to give it to us as a gift, even though he and the organ did live a few miles away.

Second to the management of FiberMark, to Mick Mundell, and to the dock crew, without whom none of this would ever have happened.

Third to the management of Webber Energy Fuels, their vehicle, and driver David Jordan, who made the last leg of this journey complete.

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you.*

*Get in touch today to  
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make a donation.*

# Upcoming Estey Organ Museum Events

2012 Engine House **Museum Hours:** Open every weekend from 2-4 p.m.

June 16-17 – Look for the Estey Organ Museum booth at the **Vermont History Expo**.

July 4 – **Brattleboro Goes Fourth** parade at 10 a.m. sharp on Brattleboro's historic Main Street features the Estey Museum float.

August 4 – **Make! Tune! Play! - The 2nd Annual Levi Fuller Extravaganza** at the Engine House.

September and October – Innovate and experiment with new workshops as part of the **Estey Labs**. Visit our website for full details.

September 9, 7 pm – **Whetstone Reflections**, a program of musical and informative depictions of the Whetstone Brook to benefit the Irene Longterm Recovery Fund. First Baptist Church, Main St., Brattleboro.

September 30 - **Estey Day** - an annual celebration of Jacob Estey's birthday, featuring Estey Labs Makers show and play.

October 7 - **Clark Anderson Pipe Organ Concert** at First Baptist Church.

Schedule a private tour of the Estey Organ Museum's Engine House by calling 802-246-8366.

## SPECIAL NOTES:

~ Make a donation to the new Estey Labs program today!

~ You can give a gift membership to the Estey Organ Museum any time of the year!

~ The museum's web site has been updated to better serve our members.

Visit the site at:  
[esteyorganmuseum.org](http://esteyorganmuseum.org)

~ *Thank you for your support!*

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Engine House  
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