

Historic organ gathering dust at EDC fairgrounds

By Peter Hecht, Sacramento Bee

In 1865, an immigrant from Goteberg, Sweden, with a grand vision for music opened a modest cabinet-making shop at 24th and Mission streets in San Francisco.

John Bergstrom wouldn't be long known for cabinets. He became renowned as a designer and manufacturer of exquisite pipe organs. They were towering creations – virtual cathedrals of sound – that reached toward the heavens with gold-leafed hardwood and intricately stenciled and painted musical pipes.

Aided by water pressure, his organs' sophisticated labyrinth of keys, pedals and pumps powered levers, bellows and air valves into a stirring symphony. By the mid-1880s, Bergstrom had built an estimated 66 pipe organs. His wonders of craftsmanship became musical and spiritual hearths in churches from San Francisco to British Columbia and Mexico to Hawaii.

Now volunteers are trying to find a new home for one of his last surviving creations.

For more than 50 years, a majestic pipe organ built by Bergstrom about 1885 has sat forlornly in a warehouse at the El Dorado County Fairground in Placerville. Few people get to see the 20-foot-tall marvel that occupies about 400 square feet, with its pipes nearly touching the ceiling.

The organ, sold to the Placerville Federated Church for \$2,500 in 1904, is occasionally a backdrop for fairground events such as mineral and gem or home accessory shows that are held in the warehouse known as "the organ building." Often it is merely covered by a drape.

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