

Lancaster Farming *Antiques Center*

Retiree 'Works' at Restoring Antique Phonographs and Jukeboxes

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BURNHAM (Mifflin Co.) — Alvin Heckard of Burnham, Mifflin County, has a hand in keep-

ing music alive — two hands, actually, and a few tools and spare parts.

A "retired" tinkerer by trade, Alvin's interest in mechanical

things began with his father's belief that if something breaks, fix it. That led to Alvin fixing things for friends and that led to owning a television repair business for 25 years.

Now he repairs and restores, among other things, antique phonographs and jukeboxes.

Alvin stands in a huge room in the basement of a schoolhouse he owns that was converted into apartments. This room, with floor-to-ceiling shelves, houses his personal collection of more than 70 phonographs, plus parts, pieces, and phonographs awaiting repair.

"I began buying phonographs, parts, and pieces many years ago. I have the room, so I just stored them," Alvin said.

"Edison made the first phonograph in 1877. It was patented in 1878. He recorded on tinfoil," Alvin explains.

"There were three big companies Edison, Columbia, and Victor." Up until 1906, Edison used a banner-typed logo on the side of the phonograph that identified the model in the center of the logo. After 1906, just the Edison name was printed on the side of the phonograph. Between 1899 to 1929, the Edison models included the Gem, Standard, Fire-side, Home, Triumph, Concert, and Opera, ranging from the least expensive Gem to the top-of-the-line Opera.

The Gem sold for \$7.50 while the Opera sold for \$85.

"Back then, people made \$1 a day. That's why there are so many Standards."

Alvin points to phonographs by other manufacturers Aretino, Standard Model A, and Zon-o-phone. These machines only played the right record for the right machine. Each manufacturer made records or cylinders with different-sized holes.

Jukeboxes

"People think the first jukebox was the 1933 Debutante made by Wurlitzer, but in the late 1800s, some guys built some with cylinder records. They're really rare and sell between \$30,000 to \$40,000. The Debutante was a test model made in 1933. Production runs began in 1934.

According to Alvin, the old jukeboxes are getting harder and harder to find. The Wurlitzer jukeboxes built between 1946 and 1947 were a popular machine, so there are more of them around for parts.

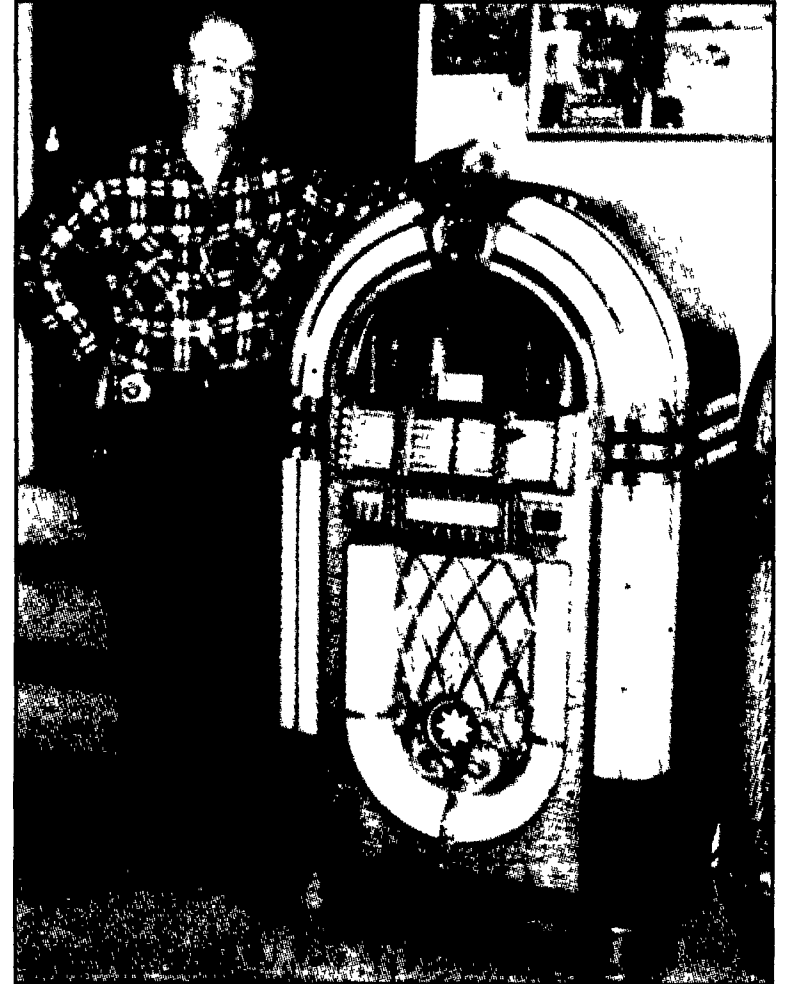
Three big jukebox companies flourished in the late 1940s and early 1950s — Wurlitzer, Seeburg, and Rock-ola.

Alvin uses a separate basement room to work on the 23 jukeboxes he owns. As he plugs one in, the beautifully colored lights shine brightly in the dingy basement. He slips a quarter into the slot and selects "Rock Around The Clock" by Bill Haley on a 78 rpm record.

"A lot of companies made conversion kits to play 45 speeds. I convert them back to 78s," Alvin said.

As the jukebox warms, the oil-filled tubes between the colorful lighting begin to bubble.

"In the few original jukeboxes around, the plastic is shrunk. A couple of companies make repro-



As this 1946 or 1947 Wurlitzer jukebox warms up, bubbles rise through thin tubes between the lights. Alvin Heckard of Burnham repairs his jukeboxes to their original state they need a quarter to operate. So far he's saved hundreds of dollars simply by slipping a quarter in a jukebox every now and then.

duction parts, and I have machines to use for parts I can't find. I have no interest in modern jukebox reproductions. The reproductions are made for 45s or compact discs (CDs). These old jukeboxes hold 24 records. With all the CDs in the modern jukeboxes, you'd never be able to listen to them all in one day!

"Actually, Wurlitzer reproductions are now manufactured by Rock-ola. They've begun making what was once their competitor's jukeboxes."

After the 1950s, Alvin believes jukeboxes were replaced by radios, television, and background music in restaurants.

"What hurts around here (in selling jukeboxes and furniture) is trucking and shipping requirements. Local trucking companies need to load a jukebox or piece of

furniture on a truck with other things such as steel. There are guys in other parts of the country who travel just to deliver these types of things.

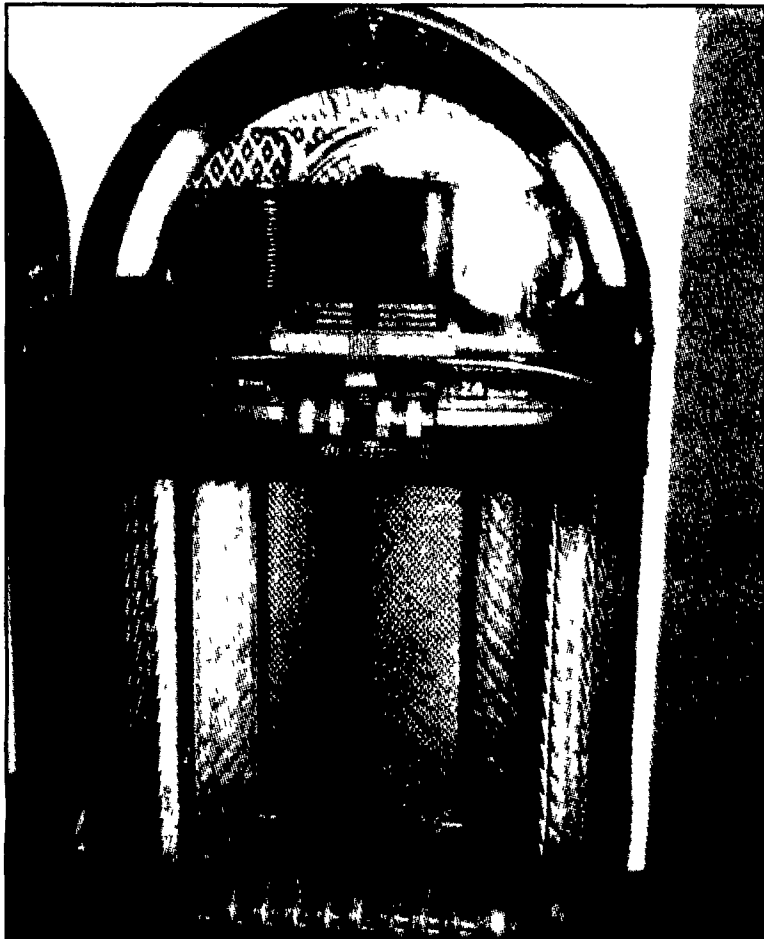
"I bought one jukebox in Georgia, and in two months they delivered it. They loop through the United States picking up and delivering things like slot machines, player pianos, and jukeboxes."

The basement also houses Alvin and partner Troy Snook's antique furniture repair and restoration business, called H & S Antiques. They also maintain a booth at Dairyland Antiques in Reedsville.

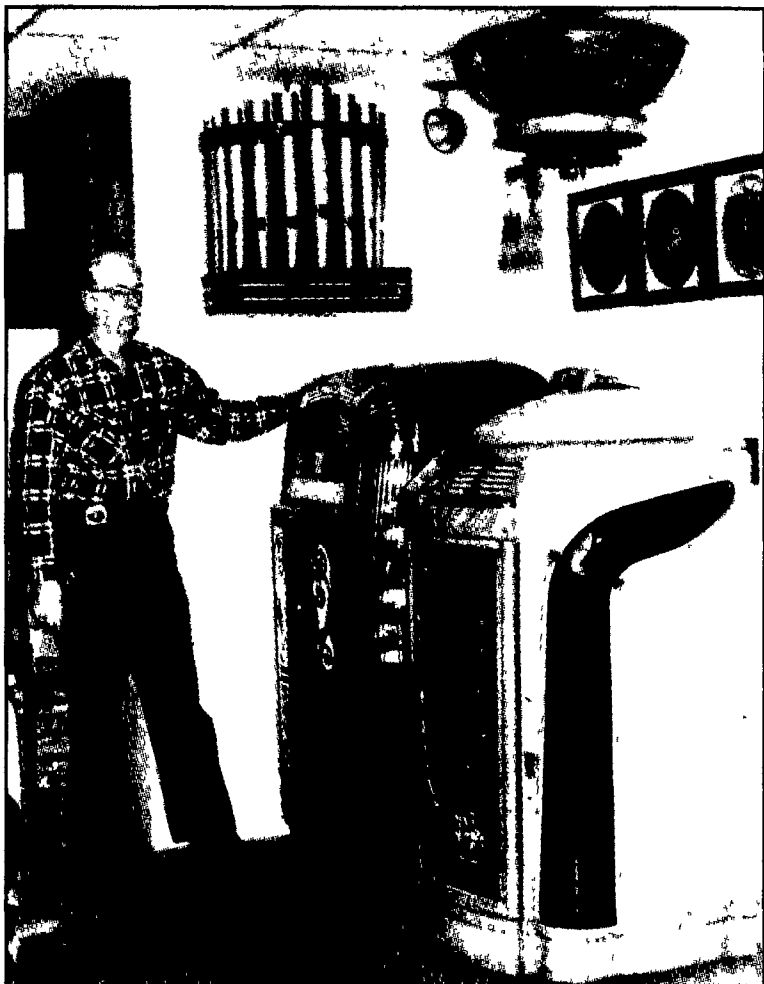
"I just like anything mechanical. I get something fixed, then I lose interest. I have more fun working on them," Andy said of his hobby.



Alvin Heckard owns a Victor Monarch phonograph with a rare wooden horn. This was built around 1902.



This Wurlitzer was originally manufactured in 1948 or 1949. He purchased two Wurlitzer's and combined their parts to make this one.



Alvin Heckard stands beside a Rock-ola jukebox and a Seeburg jukebox. Above the Rock-ola is a Seeburg wall speaker. Above the Seeburg jukebox is a Rock-ola wall speaker. The three framed albums include, from left, one with an Alvin record label because of his name, a Sun Elvis record, and a Vogue picture record. Heckard says many famous stars started with Sun Records.