

Ex-mayor's family gives to restoration of Organ



-Milnar Organ Co. and Ms. Barbara Kelly with her donated Toy Counter-

By Susan Pierce – Staff Writer “Times Free Press Chattanooga”

Another step in the restoration of the 1924 Austin Pipe organ in Memorial Auditorium was made last week with the installation of a new percussion section, according to Evelyn Gibbs, organ restoration chairwoman.

The \$13,000 section of mechanical instruments was given by the family of late Ralph Kelly. Judge Kelly served as Chattanooga's mayor from 1963 to 1969 and as a federal bankruptcy judge for more than 30 years. "Ralph always liked to beat the drum for Chattanooga, so I thought this was appropriate," his widow, Barbara Kelly, said.

Ms. Gibbs said the percussion, or toy counter as it is referred to in organ circles, consists of a 14-inch snare drum, a 26-inch brass drum, 18-inch brass cymbal, steel triangle and 34-inch Chinese gong. They are part of the organ's Solo division, the final section of the organ to be restored. The instruments may be played from the keyboard of the organ, controlled by use of console tabs, Ms. Gibbs explained.

"This organ is one of seven of this vintage remaining in the country," Ms. Gibbs said. "When the restoration is finished, the music club wants to bring Bob McDonald, who at Radio City Music Hall, to Chattanooga to play theater music. He'd bring a silent movie and accompany it, using the percussion section all the way through."

The organ restoration has been a project of the Chattanooga Music Club since 1985. Mrs. Kelly said she is a club member, as was her late husband. Club members expect to complete the restoration in the spring and dedicate the organ in July.

They have raised \$750,000 date through donations, grants and a \$20,000 gift from the city. Milnar Organ Co. in Eagleville, Tenn., is restoring the organ. Ms. Gibbs said when complete, the restored organ will be valued at more than \$2 million.