

NICKELODEON NEWS

Inside: New Exhibits, 2025 Events Recap, and New Machines!

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Donor Highlight: Beverly Lehman

Long-time volunteer, board member, and supporter of the museum Beverly Lehman had this to say about the benefits of her membership, "I've donated my efforts to various causes over 25 years, but the commitment to mission at the DeBence and the community treasure that the collection is have kept me coming back because I want to be a part of this effort."



We appreciate the support of every one of our volunteers, donors, and visitors. Whether its your time, funds, in-kind donations, talents, or something else, every little piece makes a difference! Your commitment to music history and music education inspires us everyday!

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 1st 2025

Museum regular hours end, by appointment through the winter

November 7th 2025 @ 7pm

Gravel Lick, Bluegrass Band concert

December 2nd 2025

Giving Tuesday global generosity movement! Keep the museum in mind for end of year giving

December 13th & 14th 2025

DeBence Antique Music World featured on the Franklin Preservation historic house tours

February 13th 2026 @7pm

Silent movie night at DeBence!



History Corner

An American Art: The Archtop Guitar

Almost no instrument can compare to the popularity and sheer number of guitars! The guitar is ubiquitous in American culture and music, although it was not born here originally. There are many, much older, European instruments which may be considered the ancestors of the modern guitar. However, one guitar which can be considered a distinctly American instrument is the archtop guitar. First patented as a mandolin in 1896 by Orville Gibson the archtop design took its inspiration from violins. Orville Gibson (yes of Gibson Guitars fame!) was born in 1856 on a farm in New York. At 19 he moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan where he established himself as a performer, musician, and craftsman. In the 1880s, while working as a shoe salesman, Gibson created his first unique musical instrument.

In 1896 his patent enshrined his name as the first to create an arched top mandolin or guitar. The carved top was painstaking to produce but created a much nicer sound. Instead of cobbling instruments together from many different pieces of wood Gibsons were delicately constructed of a few parts. Likely due to an inability to keep up with orders Orville sold his company in 1902 to a group of Kalamazoo financiers who formed the Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Manufacturing Company. The archtop guitars and mandolins that Orville created reached incredible popularity and are still revered today as beautiful examples of quality craftsmanship. Sadly, though Orville Gibson never saw the heights that the company he created would reach, passing away in 1918 at the age of 62. We wanted to highlight the history of the archtop guitar in this issue of the Nickelodeon News as we will be acquiring a collection of exceptional vintage archtop guitars for a new exhibit to open in 2026! Check out page 3 for the full story!

Calliope Rescued from Destruction

If you have been keeping up with our Facebook page you may have seen our posts regarding the retrieval of the replica 1928 Tangley Calliope. In May we drove to North Carolina to save this machine from destruction. It had been constructed for the Reynolda House Museum as R.J.R. Reynolds used to have a steam calliope. But the museum transferred the calliope to a local school where it was used by the mechanics teacher as a teaching tool for students.



After some years the calliope fell out of use and the building it was housed in was slated to be demolished, and the calliope along with it if nothing was done. Following a string of emails and through the support of our donors we were able to save this machine! Since its move to Franklin, it has found a home at the front of the museum where it is taken out on sunny days and will hopefully be used at events in the future! Without your donations we could not afford to make acquisitions such as this!



Silent Movie Theatre Bells Return to Pennsylvania

In August a set of original 1907 silent movie theater bells, manufactured by the Faraday Company of New York, were shipped to us from California. Originally used in a Philadelphia theater, the bells were played alongside silent movies by the organist until "talkies" became popular and the theater was closed. The bells rotted in a rabbit pen for many years until they were rescued by the Gibbs/Black family. The bells were carefully cleaned, wired, and mounted in a specially made case. If you would like to hear these bells played, we hope to see you at our February 13th silent movie night next year! Thank you to everyone who donated for their return!



Check us out online!

On our pages you will be able to find fun videos about the museum highlighting specific pieces, hidden histories, weird instruments, and fun tunes!



Vince Bastecki demonstrating Merlin the Magician for a group of kids during our Family Day program in July

2025 Events Recap

While saying farewell to summer we wanted to recap some of our amazing programming from 2025!

Allegheny River Music & Arts Festival

The museum attended the inaugural Allegheny River Music & Arts Festival where we handed out brochures, and educated people on our Raffin Street Organ.



2025 Concert Series

It's not too late to make it to our last concert of 2025! On November 7th at 7pm the Bluegrass band Gravel Lick will be playing. The 2025 concert series continues to be a success with incredible performers and good times all around!

If you have input on the time, date, or performers for next year's events please reach out as we will begin scheduling those soon!



American Music in the Postwar Period: New Exhibit 2026!

We are extremely excited to officially announce that in April of 2026 we will be opening a new exhibit for the first time in many years! Over the winter off-season our staff will be working to install "New Sounds and New Machines: American Music in the Postwar Period 1945-1970" on the second floor of the museum. This exhibit will highlight the presentation of mechanical music in the postwar period 1945 to 1970 as well as the changing sounds of the time which influenced, and was influenced by, new technology available in the period. This exhibit will incorporate many of the museum's later period artifacts including jukeboxes and radios.

The exhibit will be headlined by the incoming Bill Huber guitar collection. This exemplary collection of vintage archtop guitars will be on public display for the first time. Bill Huber is well known locally as an exceptional musician and teacher. His collection of archtop guitars exemplifies the craftsmanship and quality available in guitars of the postwar period as they rose to prominence as the instrument of choice due to the popularity of genres such as rock and roll. The guitar collection will work in tandem with the museum's collection of musical machines to illustrate the shifts in sound and technology that shaped our modern experience of music. The exhibit will be produced in partnership with a multitude of community partners including the Music Box Society International, United Way of Venango County, & the Venango County Historical Society. More information on this exhibit to follow! If you are interested in seeing this exhibit and other future exhibits come to the museum please consider a donation to support our work, we could not do so without you!

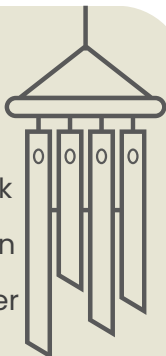


Members' Appreciation Day

Our first members' appreciation day was held on September 20th. Museum members enjoyed a talk on the intersections between gambling machines and musical machines, a giveaway, lunch, and tours of the collection. If you would like to become a member please fill out and return the attached form or you can purchase a membership on our website. We have tiers as low as \$20!

**Thursday
October 23rd
@ 7pm**

Richard Freysinger talk and demonstration of set of 100 year old shaker chimes



Repair of Wurlitzer 1930 Prototype

Thanks to the generosity of donors for our collections fund we hired Musical Restorations LLC to perform necessary work on our one-of-a-kind Wurlitzer 1930 prototype. During their visit they were able to diagnose the inconsistency of instruments playing in addition to replacing the machine's worn-out gaskets. The Wurlitzer, originally located on the carousel at Cabana Beach Park, is now playing well again. Without your support this unique machine would not be making music today!



Erie News Now Visit

On October 8th we hosted a visit from reporter John Last of Erie News Now. The resulting segment of "The Last Word with John Last" aired on Friday the 10th and can be seen on their YouTube page. We are appreciative that Erie News Now took the time to highlight our amazing museum!



Coming Soon: Interactive Education Space for Children

If you have been keeping up with the local paper you may know that this wintertime we will be working to bring to life an interactive kids-oriented display. The museum recognizes that there is a need for improving access to music and arts education in our area children. In accordance with our mission statement we value arts education as a means to living a more meaningful life and having rich and fulfilling experiences. We knew that our existing programming was not very kid-friendly and needed to be reworked in order to achieve our goal of music education for all.

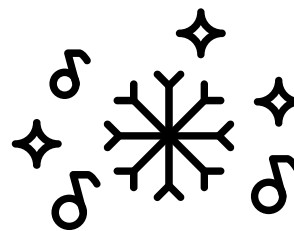
As the museum is host to such an unique collection that exemplifies the blending of arts and science principles we will focus much of the displays interpretation on these intersections, using music as an accessible means to understanding complex principles such as the physics of sound waves. We are extremely grateful to the Samuel Justus Trust for supporting our free tours for local schools' programs for many years. Thus, we were particularly excited to be able to bring the concept of a kid's area to them this year. We plan for this space to be open by the time we open in 2026 on April 1st. This space will ideally be used in the future for more youth-centered workshops. We appreciate all of our volunteers, members, board members, donors, and staff for their support of our ongoing efforts to get young people involved in the museum!



Rocky Grove High Schoolers during their 'Day of Service' program at the museum. Students organized reproducing player piano rolls, moved objects, dusted machines, vacuumed, tidied workshops and so much more! We cannot thank them enough for all their help!

Museum Membership

As we approach the holiday season museum memberships make a great gift! Give us a call if you would like to purchase a membership as a gift for a loved one. Membership allows free admission to the museum year-round as well as special discounts, events, and a quarterly newsletter, perfect for the music enthusiast who has everything!



End of Year Giving

We would sincerely appreciate it if you would consider a donation to the museum as part of your end of year giving. We are facing additional expenses due to necessary building repairs, additional programming, and multiple restoration projects. The museum recently took on a few machines which are in need of repairs including a Scopitone and a Wurlitzer band organ. Donations to support these preservation activities as well as our programming and general operations are always appreciated! Donations can be made by check, card, or cash, both in person and online.

Scan to Donate Online!



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Dennis Geib and Evan Wolfgang after their performance at the museum this spring.