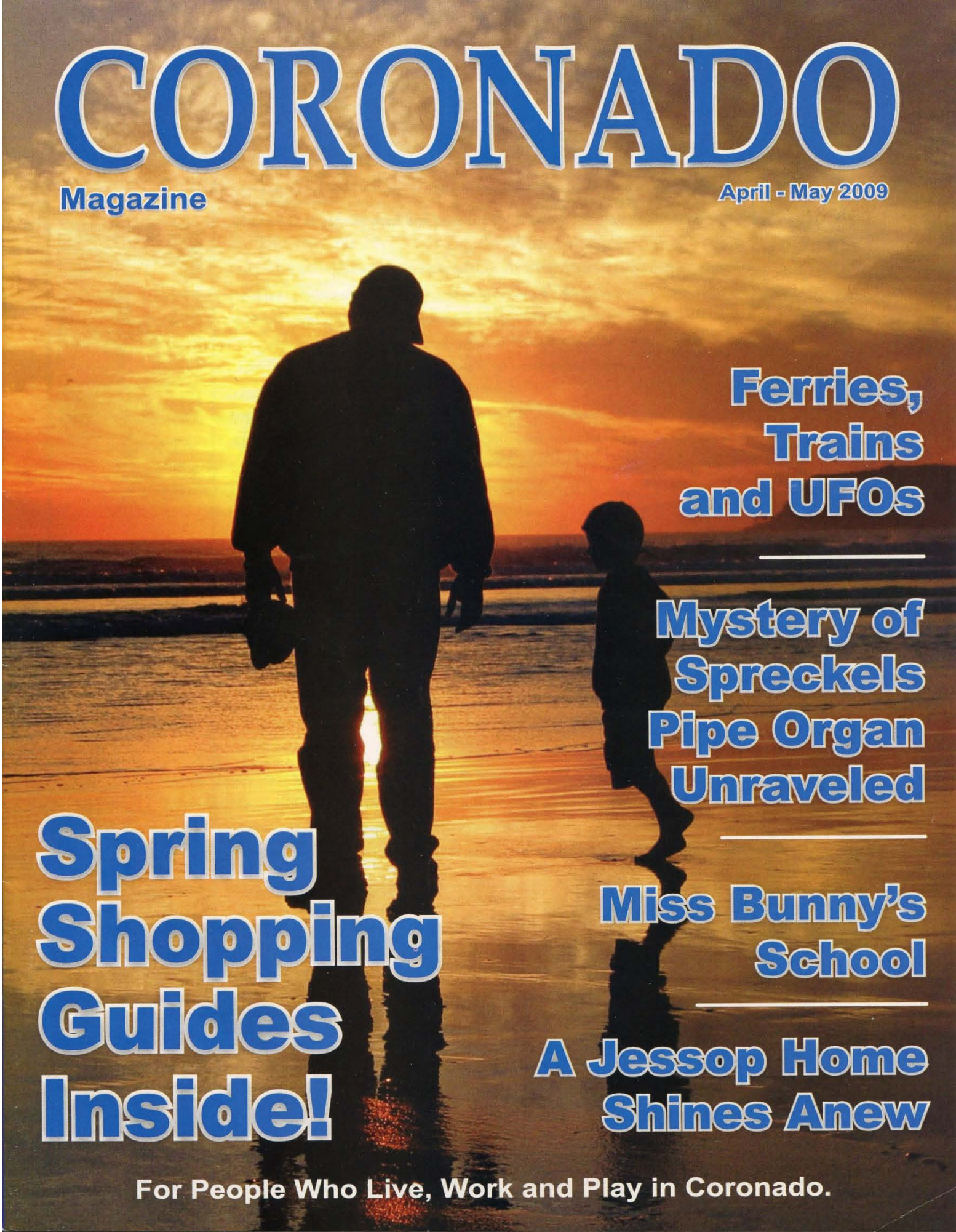


# CORONADO

Magazine

April - May 2009



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For People Who Live, Work and Play in Coronado.

# SPRECKELS' CORONADO PIPE ORGAN FOUND: Could Return To Coronado



*The Spreckels pipe organ is more than just the sum of its many parts. It's a book dating back to 1912 that was missing some pages. The pages have been found.*

One of Coronado's great mysteries has been solved with the discovery of John D. Spreckels' lost Aeolian pipe organ.

The prodigious church organ disappeared in 1971 and no one had been able to locate it despite the efforts of several historians and interested parties.

While examining the newly restored Balboa Theatre pipe organ last month in the Gaslamp District, a gentleman approached and claimed he had owned the famous organ that once resided in Coronado's Spreckels Mansion, now known as the Glorietta Bay Inn.

The story was so fantastic, and yet as he spoke missing pieces of the puzzle literally began to fall into place.

As it turns out, not only has the pipe organ been located, it has been fully restored to its original splendor and the owner wishes it to be returned to Coronado.

In 1912, John D. Spreckels ordered the large, Aeolian Opus 1345 pipe organ and had a special room built for it in his three-year-old mansion.

This was an incredible instrument, a church organ comprised of more than 2,000 pipes, three consoles, and weighing nearly 20,000 pounds. It had a dedicated pipe

room one story down to house the intricate instrument's many limbs.

Spreckels would entertain his guests by playing opera and classical compositions on the pipe organ, which had been affixed with an automatic reproducing capability similar to a player piano.

He owned a library of more than 150 music rolls. In 1912 this was as state-of-the-art as you could get.

The Coronado pipe organ brought much joy into the Spreckels household. So much so that in 1914, John D. and his brother Adolph Spreckels donated one of the world's largest outdoor pipe organs to the city of San Diego for the Panama-California Exposition.

Now known as the Spreckels Organ, this larger organ contains 4,530 pipes ranging in length from the size of a pencil to 32 feet. Since 1917 a civic organist has performed free, weekly Sunday concerts on the organ from its permanent home in the Balboa Park Organ Pavilion.

The late Deni Barr remembered visiting the organ room at Coronado's Spreckels Mansion as a young woman. "It was impressive," she recalled years later. "It was heaven and I shall never forget the setting." Barr described the room as all red mahogany

with deep blue carpet and over-stuffed furniture and the most incredible sounding music she had ever heard.

Around 1969, as the legend goes, Barney Padway, then-owner of the Glorietta Bay Motor Hotel and the former mayor of Coronado, decided he wanted to build a bomb shelter and had to get rid of the organ to make room for it. While the organ itself is relatively compact, the many extremities take up an enormous amount of space — much of that in another room or loft.

Wendell Shoberg and Edward Barr, pipe organ fanatics and restorers, heard about Spreckels' Coronado organ and came to visit.

They found the pipe organ pushed into the corner of the room it once dominated. It had been painted white.

"Old Barney Padway said he would give us the organ, free, just to get rid of it," remembered Shoberg. "The catch was that we had to remove it in 60 days. Padway was about to have it chopped up and hauled away when we got there.

"There was a large blower that was crucial to the organ and Padway didn't want to let go of that," said Shoberg. "He was certain he could use it to improvise an air conditioning system in the mansion."



Shoberg and Barr did indeed get the organ free, but had to pay \$400 for the blower. After weeks of dismantling, labeling and boxing, the pipe organ that had originally arrived by Coronado ferryboat in 1912 departed unceremoniously in a large meat packing van across the Coronado Bridge in 1971.

The organ was never again assembled or played in San Diego. In fact, the Shoberg and Barr had difficulty even finding a place to store the pieces.

Now completely dismantled, the organ was stored briefly in the Fox Theatre in a multitude of boxes, under the stage and in the former actors' dressing rooms. Later it would be stored in a warehouse owned by Ken Golden (of Golden Construction) at the foot of Washington Street.

The Museum of Man considered taking the organ but that fell through. The rescuers' efforts to raise enough money to restore and display the organ fell short again and again, and in 1982 Shoberg and Barr sold the instrument for \$20,000 to Sacramento ophthalmologist Richard Zipf.

Through Shoberg we were able to locate Zipf and the trail to the missing organ began to unfold. Zipf was quick to explain that he would like the organ to be returned to Coronado, where it belongs.

"Your call comes at a most fortuitous time," said Zipf by telephone from his home. "I'm 70 now, and I feel it is time to part company with the organ rather than leave this potentially difficult responsibility to my heirs."

*(Top) The Glorietta Bay Inn was originally the personal residence of John D. Spreckels, and home to the Spreckels organ.*

*(Bottom) Today Spreckels Coronado pipe organ has been completely restored to museum quality standards as a fully functional working instrument.*



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Zipf said he spent \$15,000 on the restoration and worked on the organ for 15 years, often 30 hours a week. "Today the organ is in fantastic condition and completely restored," he said.

Restoration included completely re-leathering all the mechanisms (pouches, pneumatics, valve facings) and repairing felt damage.

The process also included repairing, cleaning and re-shel-lacking all the pipes, de-rusting and painting the steel parts, and re-building and repainting the supporting structure and ducts. Zipf also repaired considerable moisture damage and repainted the chests.

The original pipe organ could be played manually or by utilizing the music rolls. Zipf installed a MIDI interface to the organ to allow it to be played from a computer sequencer, offering potentially unlimited musical arrangements to be enjoyed on the unique and historic musical instrument.

The asking price is \$130,000 but Zipf said that price is flexible if the buyer agrees to return the instrument to Coronado. It includes the 150 music roles that comprised John D. Spreckels' original music offering to his guests – classical opera and orchestral arrangements of the time.

"The organ has been meticulously restored and is worth every penny of the asking price," said Shoberg. "It's a one-of-a-kind musical instrument with an enormous amount of San Diego history behind it. I, too, hope it comes back to Coronado. That's where it belongs."

The question now is, will someone go the extra distance to bring this piece of Coronado history back home?

Serious inquiries about the Spreckels Coronado pipe organ can be made to Dr. Richard Zipf at (916) 487-9198 or at rfzipf@gmail.com.



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