

By Carolyn Lee

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In 1989, the city of Imperial purchased and installed a Steinway grand piano in the Imperial Theatre, to be used for recitals and concerts. Now, the city is seeking input on the future of the piano.

Members of the Imperial Theatre board are discussing the possible sale of the piano, with the resulting funds to be used for an improved sound system in the theatre.

At the time of the piano's purchase, the stage area in the theatre was used by the Chase County Area Arts Council and others for musical presentations. After the construction of the Chase County Schools and its auditorium, use of the stage and piano dropped sharply, board members said.

Former Imperial resident Dr. J. Gordon Christensen, who was instrumental in purchasing the piano, used it annually for recitals for his piano students. Now, with his departure, board members anticipate "there will be very limited use of the piano."

Since the community raised the money to purchase the piano, the board would like input regarding the possible sale.

Dr. Christensen discovered the Steinway 6'4" grand piano in a piano liquidator's shop in Denver around 1987.

The Model A was in excellent shape, according to Dr. Christensen. It had its original bench, the original ivory keys and the original Steinway Coat of Arms intact on the sound board.

The piano was built in 1916 and was purchased the same year by a Cheyenne, Wyo., business family. It remained in the same family until 1981 when it was inherited by the original owner's daughter.

She had the piano refinished and rebuilt by Karl Siebert of Denver, a native of Hamburg, Germany, who learned his trade as an apprentice to the Grotrean-Steinweg factory in West Germany.

After Dr. Christensen discovered the piano, a piano fund committee was established to raise \$13,000 for the piano. A number of fund-raisers were held over a two-year period, and a \$3,375 Peter Kiewit Foundation matching grant was received.

A storage area underneath the theatre stage was constructed, utilizing a hydraulic lift system. The storage area was climate controlled.

One of the problems facing the city, according to Administrator Jo Leyland, is that since no one is using the piano, no one has been checking the dehumidifier in the storage area.

Awhile ago, the dehumidifier evidently quit, and the piano became covered with mold. It has since been cleaned.

"You have to check on it all the time," Leyland noted, adding that it really isn't the theatre board's responsibility to do so.

"We could use the money for other things if we sell it," Leyland stated.

Members of the theatre board may be contacted for input. They are Judy Gaswick, Jill Moline, Nancy Terryberry, Sherri Wheeler and Amy Leibbrandt.