

ORGANS OF THE OHS FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY: ROUND LAKE AUDITORIUM AND ITS ORGAN DAVIS & FERRIS (1847) ROUND LAKE, NEW YORK

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Beginning with the February issue of *THE AMERICAN ORGANIST*, a series of five articles will focus on the organs of the 50th anniversary convention of the Organ Historical Society. The conference, scheduled to run between June 25 and 30 in Saratoga Springs, New York, is unique for the number of unaltered (or nearly unaltered) instruments. The 1847 three-manual Davis & Ferris organ in Round Lake Auditorium, Round Lake, New York, will be featured on Sunday evening.

The Village of Round Lake and the Auditorium

After visiting Martha's Vineyard during the summer of 1867, Joseph Hillman (1823–90), an insurance broker and prominent churchman, decided that the Troy Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church ought to have a campground of its own. Enlisting the moral and financial support of his colleagues, Hillman selected a site along the Saratoga—Rensselaer Railroad, just west of the shore of Round Lake. Impressed by the groves of pines, rich soil, and general peace of the setting, he purchased 40 acres in April 1868 from Rice Hall and John Moore, two local farmers. On May 1, 1868, the Round Lake Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the Troy Conference was incorporated by the New York State Legislature. Round Lake is known today for its concentration of Victorian architecture and unique street arrangement. Laid out like the spokes of a wheel, all roads point inwards toward the spiritual, focal, and architectural center of the village—the Round Lake Auditorium.

On September 1, 1868, the first ten-day camp meeting attracted 8,000 people. The following year, a few cottages were erected, and by 1871, 20,000 tent dwellers attended the National Holiness Camp Meeting. Larger buildings followed, including the Hotel Wentworth (1878) with 60 rooms, the Hotel Orient (1880) with 70, Alumni Hall (1884, still standing), the Griffin Institute (1886), the George West Museum (1887), Burnham House (1888), Garnsey and Kennedy halls (both 1886), and the Arcade (1888). In 1889, the Round Lake Summer Institute was granted a provisional charter by the Regents Department of the University of the State of New York. For the next three decades, the village thrived with significant arts and educational programs that brought thousands of summer visitors to the village annually.

With several devastating fires, particularly the one of July 11, 1921, when the Arcade and 17 cottages burned, the razing of many of the larger structures during the 1930s, and with the eventual cessation of most summer activities, the village fell on hard times economically. Residents attempted to dissolve the original Articles of Incorporation in favor of another form of government. This was suc-



cessful in 1969, when Round Lake became a village in the Town of Malta, governed by a mayor and board of trustees. Because of its history, Round Lake is on the National Register.

The Auditorium began in 1876 when canvas was stretched over a wooden frame to protect the faithful from the elements. A 600-pound bell was hung at the front near a preacher's stand. In 1884, an 80 x 140 ft. wooden building was erected costing \$3,125. It was dedicated on July 10, 1885, with the Rev. John P. Newman, DD, officiating; congregants sat on wooden benches. During the winter, canvas flaps rolled down over the

sides of the building to keep out snow and ice. In 1887, the front of the structure was completed with a set of nine risers, six stained-glass windows, and a raised platform for the organ. In 1912, the building took the form it has today: permanent seats were installed and the sides were enclosed with windows. There have been renovation successes in recent decades, mostly spearheaded by Edna I. Van Duzee Walter and Norman Walter. A great effort was accomplished in 2005, when the foundation under the front-end of the building (and the organ) was stabilized and restored.

The 1847 Organ by Davis & Ferris

New York, July 17th, 1852

[Vestry of Trinity Church, New York]

I would like you to hear and see my Organ at Calvary Church any afternoon you might name. I have had over 20 years practical experience as an Organ Builder, and I offer my services to build you an organ second to none in the United States.

I remain, Gentlemen,
Yours most respectfully,
Richard M. Ferris

Ferris was understandably proud of the organ his firm built in 1847 for Calvary Episcopal Church in New York City, at the corner of East 21st Street and Fourth Avenue. He frequently took potential clients there to examine the instrument. Critics shared the sentiment that the Calvary Church organ was something special. An anonymous writer in the *Musical World*, a mid-19th-century New York music journal, remarked:

The organ is the best we have heard for some time. The diapasons are remarkably full, and are not overpowered by the Sesquialtera, Mixture, and Fifteenth, as is the case in many Organs in this city. The Solo stops are all carefully voiced; the Hautboy is very even and clear. The touch is also well regulated and easy; and, we think the instrument [is], altogether, very creditable, both to the taste of the church and to the organbuilder.

Modern writers have also lauded Ferris's work. Frederick R. Webber (1887–1963), an early member of the Organ Historical Society, Lutheran minister, and noted authority on old American organs, opined: "... the old Ferrises had a singularly agreeable and silvery quality which set them apart." Robert C. Newton, director of old organs at the Andover Organ Company in Methuen, Massachusetts, called the instrument a "show-piece," and the Historic Organ Citation Committee of the Organ Historical Society designated it "an organ of exceptional historic and musical merit, worthy of preservation" in 1975.

Now located in the Round Lake Auditorium, this venerable instrument is believed to be the oldest large, three-manual organ built in the United States by a native-born maker to survive in nearly intact condition. Critics and audiences agree that the sonorous and colorful timbre of this instrument brings 19th-century music to life in a unique way. One hundred and fifty-nine years after it was built, the genesis and chronology of this instrument is an astonishing story.

The organ was built by an enterprise comprised of Richard M. Ferris (1818–58) and William H. Davis (1816–88), known as Davis & Ferris. The earliest documented work of the partnership is an organ built in 1844 for the Franklin Street Dutch Reformed Church in New York City. The men worked together until 1849, when each went into business alone.

The most important project of the partnership was commissioned by the music committee of Calvary Church in May 1846, despite competitive bids from Hall & Labagh and Henry Erben (1800–84). Founded "up-town" with nine members in 1836, the congregation of Calvary grew rapidly. By 1846, the parish was erecting a third building on Fourth Avenue to plans of New York archi-



tect James Renwick (1818–95). Perhaps the design was too ambitious, for by the time the building was finished, the congregation was bankrupt. Vestry minutes of September 3, 1847, include "Davis & Ferris—\$2,500" in a list of unsatisfied creditors. With no options, the organbuilders agreed to rent the instrument to the vestry for two years beginning May 22, 1848, but at the end of the first year, not even the rent had been paid. Ferris, by this time working apart from Davis, had a judgment issued against the parish, but the plan backfired. The magistrate ordered that the corporation's part of the rental agreement be sold at a sheriff's sale. Lucius T. Comstock, a vestryman at Calvary, attended the auction and bought the church's portion of the agreement for a high bid of \$10. Of course, Comstock immediately transferred control of the organ to a trust, blocking Ferris from further litigation against the congregation by simply paying the rent. Poor Ferris had to wait four years before collecting remuneration for the most significant instrument his firm ever built.

On July 23, 1852, an advertisement in the *New York Herald* announces the public exhibition:

ORGAN PERFORMANCE.—There will be a public exhibition of [the] Calvary Church Organ on Friday the 23rd inst., commencing at half past 7 p.m.

Richard M. Ferris

Throughout its 41-year tenure in New York, the instrument held its reputation as one of the better organs in the city. John S. Dwight (1813–93), editor of the music journal bearing his name and a sharp critic of organs, wrote that the organ was "a very good one." Clare Beames, the author of a series of organ articles in the *New York Weekly Review* during the early 1870s, wrote that the instrument earned Ferris "a considerable reputation."

Almost immediately after it was completed, the organ was altered by Ferris in 1852. Although the minutes are not specific, the work probably consisted of cleaning the instrument and retuning it to equal temperament. In 1868, Levi Underwood Stuart (1827–1904), Ferris's half-brother, altered the organ to a "C" instrument [CC-a³, 58 notes] from its former GG compass [GG-f³, 59 notes], and made one tonal change: the Second 4' Great Principal was replaced by a nondescript 8' string. In 1878, still other changes were made. The Choir was fitted with a new Cremona stop. Overhanging keyboards and a new playing action were installed, and two additional Pedal stops (a 16' Double Stopped Diapason and an 8' Violoncello) were inserted on a new chest above the Great division. No further changes have been made to the instrument other than the installation of an electric blower during the 1920s.

By 1887, the ideals of the Tractarian (or Oxford) Movement were influencing American Anglicans, and that year the congregation of Calvary Church voted in favor of a vested choir of men and boys. The music program was moved from the rear gallery of the church to the chancel, and a new three-manual organ was ordered from the Roosevelt Organs Works, Opus 374 (1887). The Davis & Ferris organ was sold to the corporate board of the Round Lake Camp Meeting Association for \$1,500. Dismantled, packed, and reassembled by Giles Beach (1826–1906) of Gloversville, New York, the organ was shipped to Round Lake by canal boat and railroad, arriving there on March 3, 1888. According to Schenectady newspapers, the instrument was playing by July 16; said the *Round Lake Journal* of July 1888:

There it stands on the new and grand platform, large, commanding, and powerful in tone. It seems as naturally there as if it grew there, and so it did: it grew by thought and plan and work and money. So do things grow in this world. It came to us from Calvary Episcopal Church, cor. 21st and 4th Ave., New York City. It was originally built by Richard M. Ferris and costs over \$8,000 [sic]. It has 1,980 pipes; has three manuals, and 36 speaking stops. It stands 24 feet wide, 16 feet deep, and 34 feet high. It has 23 large pipes in front, a foot in diameter ranging from 15 or 20 feet in length. Some of its pipes are huge enough for a workman to crawl through, and some of its pipes are small enough for a baby plaything. Its tone is rich and resonant and powerful. Mr. Giles Beach of Gloversville has had the work of removal and re-voicing. He is a master of organ work.

Until 1910, the Auditorium flourished with a significant arts program. The organ was used to accompany hymns, oratorios, concerts of sacred music, and later, silent movies. By the end of World War I, activities in the building declined, and by the 1940s, the organ was no longer maintained. The Rev. E.A. Boadway, one of America's more knowledgeable organ historians, describes its condition as "deplorable" when he saw the organ during the 1950s. When E. Power Biggs (1906–77) and Barbara Owen visited Round Lake in 1957, hoping to record selections for his long-playing record, *Organs for America*, the instrument's condition was so poor that an acceptable recording could not be made.

In 1954, Helen Hirahara (1896–1988), a local organist and longtime resident of the village, and her son, Jack Lewis, became interested in making repairs. The organ suffered from neglect and vandalism, and numerous action parts needed mending or replacement. By 1967, the first concerts were planned. One was held on June 22, 1967, for the Twelfth Annual Convention of the Organ Historical Society. Stanley Saxton (1904–2002), the organist of Skidmore College, played a program for members of the Society.

In 1968, the first concert series was organized by Edna I. Van Duzee Walter, a professional singer and university music educator, and a loyal member of the Organ Historical Society. During the now nearly 40-year tenure of her administration, she has mounted national fund-raising campaigns, sponsored recordings, chosen sympathetic performers, and filed a number of successful grant applications with the New York State Council on the Arts and Save America's Treasures. Under her tireless direction, the annual series has obtained a level of international success, receiving laudatory reviews from all the local newspapers, as well as such national papers as *The New York Times*.

The future of this venerable instrument seems bright. Twenty-two years ago, Norman M. Walter, a retired physicist, became interested in the organ. With his assistance, plans to restore the auditorium structure beneath the organ became a reality during the spring of 2005, and future goals include extended educational programs with the organ. Currently, the Auditorium is incorporated under the New York State Department of Education, and, because of the organ, is considered a museum. The entire Village of Round Lake has been on the National Register since 1975.

The cultural value and significance of this unique organ cannot be overstated: it is the only large American-made, three-manual organ from the pre-1850 period to survive in nearly intact condition. Yes, there have been changes, but those have been more associated with the mechanism of the instrument than the sound. Crucially, the organ's soundboards, wind system, and pipework—that is, all the sounding portions of the instrument—are intact, providing listeners a firsthand experience of how a large organ of the 1840s sounded to its period hearers. To use the words of Hans Davidsson, the Round Lake organ is a "mirror" of its time, one of America's greatest musical treasures, and a remarkable survival of a very large instrument from an early period of organbuilding in this country. While the organ has been tenderly cared for by Robert C. Newton and the Andover Organ Company for many decades, it remains unrestored.

On April 11, 1846, Richard M. Ferris wrote to the vestry of Calvary Church: "[I] have some pride in the construction of the instrument, and would prefer having it a monument to [my] fame, rather than to my disgrace." Today, the Round Lake organ has fulfilled his wish; it has outlasted every other large, three-manual instrument of the period.

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 "Ferris' 1847 Organ at Round Lake, New York, Will be Featured at '67 Convention,"

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GREAT (CC–a³, 58 notes)
 First Open Diapason "Metal"
 Second Open Diapason "Zinc"
 Stopped Diapason

First Principal
 Second Principal
 Night Horn
 Twelfth
 Fifteenth
 Mixture III
 Sesquialtera III
 Trumpet
 Clarion

SWELL (C–a³, 46 notes, tenor C division)
 Double Stopped Diapason
 Open Diapason
 Dulciana
 Stopped Diapason
 Principal
 Cornet II
 Sesquialtera III
 Trumpet
 Hautboy
 Clarion

CHOIR (CC–a³, 58 notes)
 Open Diapason (to Gamut G)
 Dulciana
 Stopped Diapason
 Principal
 Flute
 Pico [sic]
 Fourniture II
 Cremona

PEDAL (CCC–C, 25 notes)
 First Double Open Diapason 16'
 Second Double Open Diapason 16'
 Subbass 16'
 Violoncello 8'

COUPLERS AND MECHANICALS

Swell to Great
 Choir to Great
 Swell to Choir
 Great to Pedal
 Swell to Pedal
 Choir to Pedal