

## THE TRACKER

Unofficial newsletter of the  
unofficial "Organ Historical Society"

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### WHY?

On Wednesday, June 27, 1956, during the AGO convention, a group of organ enthusiasts met in the choir room of St. Bartholomew's Church in New York City. This was made possible through the courtesy of Harold Friedell, organist and choir director of the church.

There was no general announcement made at the convention about the meeting; but rather the word was passed via the "grape vine" to people who were known to have an interest in early American organs and their builders. The idea originated with Miss Barbara J. Owen, who was encouraged by all to proceed. Kenneth F. Simmons agreed to moderate the meeting.

The purposes for which the gathering was called were three-fold:

1. To determine if there were enough persons interested to establish an organization of any kind.
2. To see if a central file could be kept of information concerning old organs which are to be sold or scrapped, in order to prevent these examples of early American organ building from being lost or destroyed.
3. To possibly work out a newsletter or publication whereby notes of interest to this group and other data could be mutually exchanged.

A lengthy discussion of these topics followed in which was decided establishment of this newsletter. Mr. Simmons agreed to receive and compile all data. Albert F. Robinson volunteered to have all copy mimeographed and posted to the mailing list.

Miss Owen offered to keep a file on organs for sale.

No organization or society was officially established.

Those present were Horace Douglas, Dorothy Ballinger, Robert Clawson, Albert F. Robinson, Barbara J. Owen, Donald K. M. Paterson, Kenneth F. Simmons, Charlene E. Simmons, Homer D. Blanchard, and Randall E. Wagner.

The meeting was adjourned and later some present made a pilgrimage to some of the forgotten organs of Manhattan.

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### POLICY

As you all pretty well know, practically all organs imported from England in the 18th century were personally played by Handel. There are also a great number of first organs and old organs still in existence. In other words, there are many claims made concerning the old organs which on complete examination do not stand up. It is of the utmost importance therefore in our reporting that we take time to be accurate. It is likewise essential in all stop lists and data, that the names are spelled exactly as the builder used them. The more complete information is presented, the more value there is to the research to and for everyone.

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## POLICY (cont'd.)

Any identifying characteristics should be noted. Naturally, a stop list is not the real meat of an organ. When it is at all possible, one should examine the pipe work and record as much data as possible on material, scaling, and markings. This later phase of the builder's art of the past is all too often overlooked.

In the interest of uniformity it was decided, at the New York meeting, that we would ask that all use the format commonly **used** in The American Organist.

With the above words from me, I now throw this all to each of you. For this to be continued it is necessary for all to lend a helping hand. We can send out no news if we receive none.

Many of you have dug deep and uncovered a great wealth of information, and may feel that you should treasure it as your own. This of course is your privilege and we respect your thoughts.

However, there is so much more to be found that I personally doubt that the entire history of American organ building will ever be known. I have had the honor to meet and talk to Mr. F. R. Webber. There is no doubt but that his knowledge of the history of American organs is the most complete in existence. When he was asked why he has not written a book on the subject, his reply was to the effect that he did not have enough complete information. His notebooks cover at least a half century of searching. My point here is that this is such a vast field, and each of us knows phases that no one else can claim; and if everyone could contribute something, that would be a service to others. At the same time I do not believe that anyone stands to lose by our efforts.

Therefore further editions are dependent on what each contributes. The frequency of publication will depend on the rate that information is received. When these two factors are known we will be able to know what can be done, and report this to you. In the meantime all articles should be sent to me. Nothing will be published that is not specifically so marked. If you have any suggestions or ideas in regard to the newsletter, society, or interest, forward them to me. When a clear picture of your desires and interest are in hand, we shall call an open meeting similar to that of June and move forward at that time.

Names to be added to the mailing list of those who are seriously interested in American organ building will also be received at my address.

There is no charge for this issue, and none planned until we are certain that there is enough interest to establish this on a permanent basis. Everyone is contributing time and information without any financial remuneration. In the future any charges will cover only cost of publication. No one, including myself, has any plan for personal profit; everything is on a volunteer basis.

(Signed) KENNETH F. SIMMONS  
20 Devonwood Road  
Wayne, Pennsylvania

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## NEW YORK PILGRIMAGE

as reported by Barbara J. Owen

You are probably waiting for material to get the newsletter started, so I am enclosing the 'specs' of some of the organs we saw on our pilgrimage around down-town New York the day after our first meeting. This ought to be good to start off with. I'm afraid I don't have the 'specs' of the two in St. Peter's which are of great interest. (We hope to have these for the next issue.)

It appears we now have a name. Visiting one church that Thursday, en masse, a housekeeper asked us "Who shall I say is here?" Homer Blanchard came up with: "The Organ Historical Society". That's what we called ourselves the rest of that day!

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## NEW YORK PILGRIMAGE (cont'd.)

The tone is good, and the ensemble rich. Several of the individual voices are very outstanding, among them the fine, smooth Pedal Violoncello. A superb organ, on the whole.

The blowing mechanism deserves mention. It is said to be the first electrically-driven in the city. Whether this is so or not, it is certainly one of the oldest. It is completely effective, yet so silent it is installed right behind the case. It consists simply of an ordinary electric motor, which turns a series of belts and wheels attached to a crank-shaft which operates three feeders below the reservoir. The speed with which the motor operates is determined by a rheostat which is operated by a chain attached to the top of the reservoir, making it automatically speed up when there is any great demand on the wind. It supplies perfectly steady and even pressure, and seems to leave nothing to be desired.

Both divisions are on the same level and on one great chest, divided in the middle and winded at both ends.

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## Bowery Mission, New York

Great: 9 stops		Swell: 8 stops		Pedal: 3 stops	
Open Diapason	8'	Bourdon (T & B)	16'	Open Diapason	16'
Gamba	8'	Open Diapason	8'	Bourdon	16'
Doppel Fl8te	8'	Violin Diapason	8'	Violincello	8'
Stopped Diapason	8'	Stopped Diapason	8'	Couplers:	
Principal	4'	Viol d'Orchestre	8'		
Clarionet Flute	4'	Aeoline	8'	Sw-Gt	8' & 4'
Flute Harmonique	4'	Principal	4'	Sw-Ped	
ifteenth	2'	Cornopean	8'	Gt-Ped	
Trumpet	8'	Tremulant			
Compass of Manuals: 58 notes.		Compass of Pedals: 30 notes.			

This organ was given to the Bowery Mission by Princeton University about 1895. It was probably in the old chapel, or some other building, and apparently had been there for some time. The organ is in a front gallery above the pulpit platform, and the console is in a very small space attached to the C side of the organ. It was apparently rebuilt at the time of its installation in the Mission, and the case modified, as several painted pipes can be seen on offset chests behind the present case. The organ is no longer used regularly (".....we have a lovely \*\*\* downstairs!") and is deteriorating. The pipes are covered with a film of grease from the kitchen directly downstairs.

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## NOTES, QUOTES, and COMMENTS by K. S.

Today the family made a trip to Lancaster, Pa., to see the two Tannenberg organ cases still in existence there. The organ at Trinity Lutheran Church was in the process of being cleaned because of plaster which fell into it accidentally while an air-duct was being installed. The craftsmanship of this case and of the one in the First Reformed Church are worth the time of the visit.

Does anyone have any proof that Gustav Hesselius ever built an organ?

Johnson fans may be interested to know that a trip to Peoria, Ill., is fruitless as the Reformed Church and organ vanished around the turn of the century. (Opus 423) Opus 610 in Calvary Presbyterian Church is in the process of being rebuilt and moved. I was unable to get the stop list.

Spent considerable time dismantling and examining the pneumatic stack from Johnson Opus 781. The workmanship was excellent and the stack as good as new. Incidentally, this was not made by Johnson, but rather by Ira Bassett, 453 West Harrison Street, Chicago, Illinois. The patent date is August 1888.

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## INTERESTING "SPECS" (cont'd.)

Methodist Church, West Brookfield, Massachusetts

Hook (E. &amp; G.G.) - 1858

Manuals: 56 keys	Pedal: 25 keys
Great: 7 stops	Swell: 7 stops
Open Diapason ..... 8'	Open Diapason ..... 8'
Flute Bass ..... 8'	Stopped Diapason Bass ... 8'
Flute tf ..... 8'	(17 pipes)
Viola d'Amour tf .... 8'	Stopped Diapason tf .... 8'
Octave ..... 4'	String tf ..... 8'
Flute ..... 4'	Principal tf' ..... 4'
Fifteenth ..... 2'	Celestine Bass (17 pipes). 4'
Bellows Signal	Hautbois ..... 8'
	Tremolo

Pedal: 1 stop  
 Sub Bass ..... 16'  
 Couplers:  
 Swell to Great  
 Swell to Pedal  
 Great to Pedal  
 Hook down Swell Pedal

## Pedal actions:

Great, full

Great, piano single action in only

Federated Church, Warren, Massachusetts

Steer &amp; Turner, Westfield, Mass., 1875

Compass of Manuals - 58 keys

Compass of Pedals - 27 keys

Great: 10 stops	Swell: 9 stops	Pedal: 2 stops
Bourdon ..... 16'	Open Diapason .8' (12w&46m)	Open Diapason ..... 16'
Bourdon Bass ..... 16'	St. Diapason ..... 8'	Bourdon ..... 16'
Open Diapason ..... 8'	German Gamba. 8' (12 & 46m)	
Melodia ..... 8'	Salicional ..... 8'	Couplers:
Dulciana ..... 8'	Aeoline ..... 8'	Swell to Great
Octave ..... 4'	Harmonique Flute ..... 4'	Great to Pedale
Flute d'Amour ..... 4'	Fifteenth ..... 2'	Swell to Pedale
Fifteenth ..... 2'	Oboe ..... 8' (46 pipes)	
Mixture - III rks (174 p.)	Bassoon ..... 8' (12 pipes)	Bellows Signal
Trumpet ..... 8'	Vox Tremulant	Balanced Swell Pedal

## Pedal movements: (single action)

Great-Melodia &amp; Dulciana

Great-Full

Great to Pedal Reversible

Nameplate left of center over the manuals and gives the above spelling "Steer .  
 This organ is the most pleasing of the firm that I have yet heard. K.S.

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## ORGANS ON THE MARKET - by Barbara J. Owen

1. Johnson Opus 532, 2-17, 1879. Christ Protestant Episcopal Church, Red Hook, N.Y. Price \$500.00 - good condition generally, some repairs needed on action. (Latest I heard was that they are now considering restoration: K.S.)
  2. Johnson Opus 361, 2-19, 1872. Church of the Redeemer, Syracuse, N.Y. Organ is in pretty good shape. Price not known.
  3. George Stevens, 2-18, 1844. Baptist Church, Groton, Mass. Condition run-down but not serious. Will be for sale soon.
  4. George Ryder, 2-11, c. 1870. First Methodist Church, Potsdame, New York. Price \$800. Very good condition.
- R. Hook & Hastings, 1-5, c.1885. Roman Catholic Church, Greensboro.Bend, New Hampshire. Pretty good condition. Price not known.

