

the GRAND OPHICLEIDE

Journal of the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc.

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*Journal of the
Atlantic City Convention Hall
Organ Society, Inc.*

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On The Cover — A rare photo of the trebles of the Grand Ophicleide located in front of the Great organ's reeds, and a close-up of the Grand Ophicleide stop tab on the left jamb of the Midmer-Losh console. The red warning jewel was inserted on all four stops on 100" of wind. The sound of this stop is thrilling and distinctive, but not overpowering. Please see more details on page 4 in this issue. *Color Photo by Antoni Scott, and the main image is from the Fred Hess & Son collection.*

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Curator's Report



Carl Loeser

As the organ restoration projects begin to move forward, there is not yet much visual evidence of what is taking place; however, there has been a great deal of recent activity directed at the organs.

One of the first tasks has been to get the wind systems operational. Most of the blowers are located on the garage level (or lower) in a normally damp environment. When operated regularly, the heat created by the motors and electrical control equipment helps prevent moisture from building up. However, it has been several years since most of the blowers have been operated, and they have been subject to moisture during that time, so the motors and control equipment are being inspected, and repairs made as necessary. Presently, the following blowers have been checked out and are now operational:

Midmer-Losh organ:

High and Low pressure for the Right Stage Chamber
100" Compressor for the Right Stage Chamber
High pressure for the Left Stage Chamber

Kimball organ:

Main Blower

An investigation is being made as to the best location to re-install the Booster blower for the Kimball organ, which was removed during the building renovation. Also, the blower rooms themselves will be cleaned, re-painted and fitted with new air intake filters.

In addition to the blowers, the wind conveyances have been inspected for damage. There are a few locations where the lines have been or will have to be re-routed due to renovations to the building, including those that ran through the now non-existent space where the Left Stage Chamber relay used

to reside. Overall, though, it appears that the winding system is in pretty good shape.

The four functioning blowers on the Midmer-Losh organ have been operated at once, allowing the Grand Ophicleide and Tuba Imperial to be heard again. This was, indeed, quite an exciting event!

The Right Stage chamber has remained relatively cipher free as troubleshooting continues. As ranks of pipes are made playable, the process of cleaning and tuning them will begin. On the other hand, the High Pressure blower for the Left Stage Chamber created a very large chorus of ciphers, but a welcome sound, since this chamber has been silent for quite some time. Even in the absence of a relay system, some work can begin on those ranks as well.

Each time the organ has been turned on, its sounds have captured the attention of members of the Boardwalk Hall staff who hear it. They have displayed genuine interest and excitement at the idea of the organs being put back into use.

The 100" Compressor in the Right Stage chamber blower room



Docent Tours



Attendees at a recent tour. Docent Harry Bellangy is on the left and Carl Loeser is fourth from the left.

The initial Docent Tours of the Boardwalk Hall organs have been successful and met with great interest. The plan is to schedule these tours on a monthly basis. Information about tour dates is available by email at acchos-tour@gmail.com — an auto-reply will indicate upcoming dates.

Harry,
Thanks so much for the tour yesterday. Bob Wirth and I enjoyed it and found it interesting and informative, well worth the four-hour drive from Southern Maryland. Unfortunately the camera's flash was inoperative and we didn't get good pictures of

us seated at the console inside the kiosk. Guess we'll just have to return again for this photo op.

Incidentally, we were chatting with the folk at the visitor's information counter down the street. Apparently they have received several inquiries about seeing the organ, but have no information. Perhaps if future tour schedules could be provided them you'd have greater participation. Just a thought. Restoring that awesome beast to full operation is going to be a challenge indeed. I wish you the best of luck.

Thanks again, Harry. You're an outstanding tour guide!

Charlie Sakran

The Grand Ophicleide

For decades prior to 1999, the Grand Ophicleide stop on the Midmer-Losh organ was listed in *The Guinness Book of World Records* as “the world’s loudest organ stop.” Some would argue that the State Trumpet at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City is subjectively louder; however, in the case of the Grand Ophicleide it is Timbre not Loudness that makes this stop so thrilling to hear.

The Grand Ophicleide is the loudest of the organ’s four 100-inch ranks. When the instrument’s builder, George Losh, first heard the stop he remarked that it sounded “like Sousa’s band playing fortissimo. Quite a thrill!”

Arthur Carkeek said, in a thesis on the instrument: “The 8’ Ophicleide must surely be the loudest organ stop in the world. It is a very clear, beautifully voiced trumpet tone, but with quite a bit of body behind it. One note from this stop brings people from all over the building to see what is going on. It tops all the rest of the organ, but yet is pleasant to listen to, probably because [of] the huge space the tone has to expand into.”

In an article entitled “Voice from America,” published in *The Organ* of October, 1951, Aubrey Thompson-Allen wrote on the subject: “Although there are three other 8ft. reeds on one-hundred inch

wind, the 8ft. Ophicleide is the outstanding fellow in all aspects. It represents a unique piece of reed voicing and is undoubtedly the world’s most powerful stop; both its articulation and its sustained tone are unbelievably fine, clear and steady.”

Stephen Smith opined in *Atlantic City’s Musical Masterpiece*: “It is of trumpet tone, not trompette tone, with a considerable amount of both weight and clang. However, the weight does not thicken the timbre and the clang is not too thin. In terms of decibel output it is undoubtedly the loudest organ stop in the world, yet when heard in the Auditorium it is not as powerful in effect as, say, the west end State Trumpet at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, New York, or the new Trompette Militaire in the tower at Liverpool Cathedral. Carkeek is correct in his assertion that the tone is refined by the vastness of the room but, even so, it makes its presence known in no uncertain terms. However, rather than swamp the tutti, it blends with it and enhances it. There used to be a sound reflector (a sheet of hardwood, angled diagonally towards the Auditorium) above the treble pipes of the Grand Ophicleide but it was removed during the 1990s.”

Finally, according to *The Guinness Book of World Records*, the stop has “a pure

trumpet note of ear-splitting volume, more than six times the volume of the loudest locomotive whistles” — although this probably refers to steam locomotives.

The first two 100-inch stops — the Gallery I reeds — were constructed by “Harry” Willis but the Tuba Imperial and Grand Ophicleide were made by former Wurlitzer employee Roscoe Evans (who went on to become the ACCHOS organ’s first curator). A lesser-known fact about the Ophicleide is that some of its experimental pipes were re-used as resonators for the Pedal Left’s Diaphonic Diapason rank — where the Ophicleide’s stop number (9) can still be seen on some of the pipes.

This stop can best be heard on track 12 of ACCHOS CD/02, *Boardwalk Pipes & Bach On The Biggest*. It is Bach’s “Wachet Auf!” played by Robert Elmore. There is also a demonstration on track 13 of ACCHOS CD/01, *The Auditorium Organ*. There are also places where it can be heard on the ACCHOS DVD *The Senator’s Masterpiece* in the home movie section of Special Features.

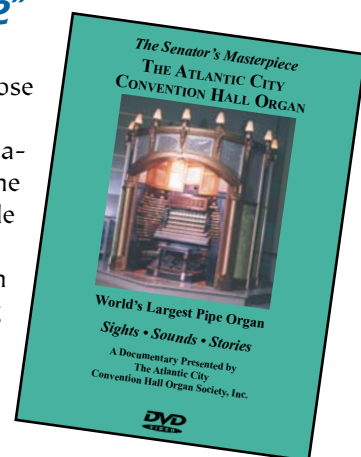
The stop is pictured on page 17 and 91 of *The Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ – A Pictorial Essay* about the World’s Largest Pipe Organ. Detailed information about this stop can be found on page 161 of Stephen’s Smith’s book *Atlantic City’s Musical Masterpiece*.

Re-Visiting The ACCHOS DVD “The Senator’s Masterpiece”

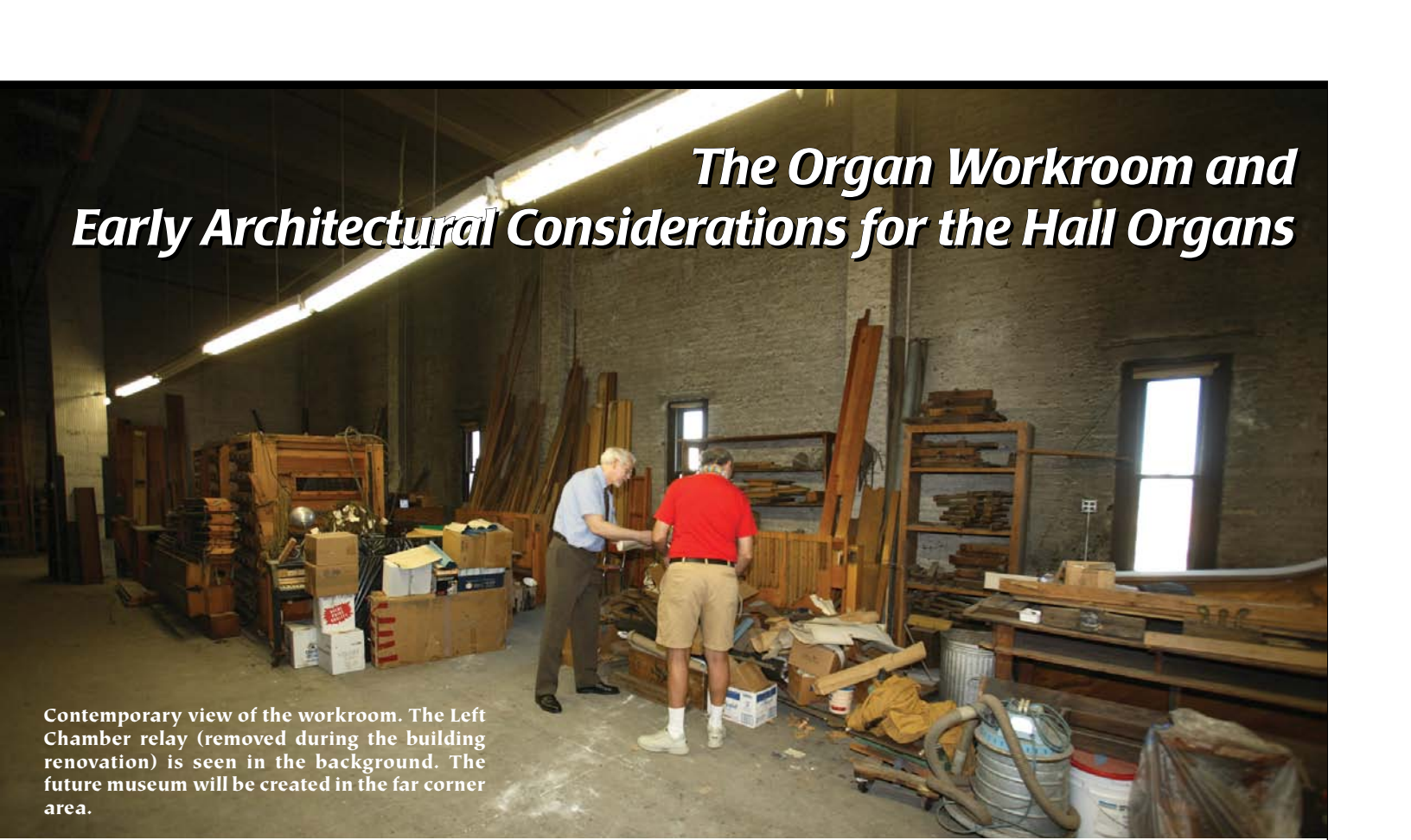
The ACCHOS DVD, *The Senator’s Masterpiece*, released in 2005, is worth re-visiting for those that own the DVD and worth a purchase for those who haven’t seen it yet.

One section that might have been missed during initial viewings is found in the Special Features, namely “The Midmer-Losh Home Movies” and The Ballroom Kimball Home Movies.” The DVD producer, Vic Ferrer, managed to garner four different collections of home movies made from 1963–1999.

These rare videos provide rich visual and sonic insight into both organs. The 1998 John Ledwon recordings saw the Midmer-Losh on a downhill course tuning-wise facing the impending renovation that began in 1999; however, the enthusiastic comments, sounds, and excitement of the visitors says it all. There are aural glimpses of the Grand Ophicleide stop on 100” of wind. Likewise the other videos are intriguing including the Kimball Soloist roll player once again playing the roll left on the player when it was last used.



The Organ Workroom and Early Architectural Considerations for the Hall Organs



Contemporary view of the workroom. The Left Chamber relay (removed during the building renovation) is seen in the background. The future museum will be created in the far corner area.

Construction of Convention Hall began in August 1926. Planning for the building began well before that. Emerson Richards noted in a letter dated December 23, 1927 to Henry Willis that he had "been retained by the municipality to design the organ for Convention Hall." The contract for the organ was awarded to Midmer-Losh in May 1929.

Emerson Richards and Seibert Losh collaborated on the Atlantic City High School organ. That contract was let at the end of 1922 and the organ was completed in 1925.

The Hall's architects, Lockwood, Green & Company of Boston, opened a field office in Atlantic City with Alexander H Nelson from Atlantic City appointed as associate engineer.

Here is a little more time-line history from the Boardwalk Hall website:

1910 An article in the June 9, 1910 Atlantic City Evening Union revealed that Councilman Victor Freisinger advocated "We must have a convention hall here... the resort needs some such institution in order to keep abreast of the growing demands of national bodies which meet in annual convention, and will urge the

importance of the scheme for a convention hall as long as there is any possibility of its becoming a reality."

1915 Local architect Seward G. Dobbins presented a proposal to the City to purchase land and construct an exhibition hall with adjoining apartments and retail stores on a site that would eventually be known for a short time as Rendezvous Park. The purpose of the building was to position Atlantic City as a major convention city and develop a year round industry.

1923 In November, Mayor Edward L. Bader initiated a public referendum during the general election at which time residents approved the construction of a Convention Center. The city passed an ordinance approving a bond issue for \$1.5 million to be used for the purchase of Rendezvous Park, finalized September 30, 1924. Rendezvous Park, an amusement playground, was considered a desirable site as it was situated between the Reading and Pennsylvania Railways and centrally located among the resort hotels.

1926 Final plans for the building,

submitted by architects Lockwood, Greene and Co. of Boston, were accepted on July 15. M.B. Markland Co. demolished the buildings on the Rendezvous Park site and became General Contractor for the new project.

1929 The new Convention Hall was dedicated on May 31, replacing a temporary exhibit hall located on the beach next to Million Dollar Pier. United States Vice President Charles Curtis gave the dedicatory address at 10:00 p.m. In addition to the Vice President, speeches were made by Sir Esme Howard, British Ambassador, U. S. Senators Walter E. Edge and Hamilton F. Kean. U. S. Representative Isaac Bacharach, New Jersey Governor Morgan F. Larson, and Atlantic City Mayor Anthony M. Ruffo.

What does all this mean? With the final plans for the building accepted on July 15, 1926 and construction beginning that year, Emerson Richards and, possibly, Seibert Losh, would have had to worked closely with the architect in 1924 or 1925 - at least to conjure up the architectural spaces needed for what

Continues on page 6



Pipe construction in the organ workroom. The door is the entrance to the Right Stage chamber. Seibert Losh can be seen standing in a dark suit.

Continued from page 5

would become the World's Largest Pipe Organ.

In other words, at the time Richards and Losh were finishing the Atlantic City High School organ, Richard's vision for the great organ must have been well in place in his mind in order to work with the architect on space development for the organ in the hall and the eventual shaping of the 23 rooms that were needed to support both the Midmer-Losh and Kimball organs. Perhaps the most likely scenario is that Richards began serious thought and planning about the organ as far back as 1923 or even earlier when the City's thoughts turned to the construction of the Convention Hall. Richards well could have begun work on the organ in 1915 at age 31 when plans for a new building were first announced.

In his book "Atlantic City's Musical Masterpiece" Stephen Smith has this to say about the chambers:

"Although there are now eight pipe chambers, there were originally to be only four; the Stage and Upper pairs. The number of chambers was increased by the addition of a Center pair (located directly below the Upper chambers) and, later still, by a Forward pair. Therefore, the

first specifications for the organ detailed an instrument [of 43,000 pipes!] housed in six chambers, whereas its successors were to be accommodated in eight."

Stephen comments further:

"The Stage (Main) and Upper chambers were part of the building from the outset. In other words, they were designed into the structure. The other four chambers, however, were additions to the building.

The Center Gallery chambers were originally to be known as "new echo organ chambers" (bearing in mind that they were to be sited below the two Upper chambers - both of which were originally to house the Echo organ, which was to be much larger than at present). They were created by simply bricking-up sections of the gallery, thereby creating rooms. Grilles, set within three arches, were provided on the auditorium-side of each room to allow the pipes within to speak into the great hall. The same method of construction was used to provide the Left and Right Forward Gallery chambers.

The Center Gallery chambers were particularly useful from the point of view (or "point of sound"?) of keeping large audiences "together" when leading/accompanying their singing. The Gallery I organ, with its 100-inch reeds and Mixture Mirabilis, and the Gallery III organ's "Schulze-type" diapason chorus undoubtedly made their presence known in the middle of the Auditorium



Early photo in workroom showing the reservoirs for the Right Stage chamber.

and beyond. Add to this the Gallery IV organ's brass ranks, perhaps with Octave and Sub-Octave couplers, and the blaze of sound in this area must have been awesome!

Although the Fanfare organ, with its barrage of mixtures and high-pressure reeds, is also now available in the middle of the hall (in the Left Upper chamber), it was originally to be sited in the Left Stage chamber where it was to be thought of as a "super" Swell organ.

There is little doubt, in my opinion, that the present arrangement of the departments in the chambers is far better than any of the earlier plans. Although some people might, logically, suggest that a department at the rear of the hall would be useful, too, think of the time lag - well over a second - for the poor organist at the opposite end of the room!"

Here is a list of what the Architect



In June 1928, construction is well under way on the hall, but dedication of the newly constructed facility won't take place until the following May. In years to come, the structure would be called Boardwalk Hall.

eventually provided for the organs:

Known Organ Rooms at Boardwalk Hall

(width × depth × height)

These represent locked and keyed spaces

1. Right Stage (main) chamber #2 – 44'x17'x44'
2. Left Stage (main) chamber #1 – 47'x21'x44'
3. Right Forward chamber (at gallery level) #10 – 35'x15'x15'
4. Left Forward chamber (at gallery level) #9 – 35'x15'x15'
5. Right Center chamber (at gallery level) #8 – 35'x11'x16'
6. Left Center chamber (at gallery level) #7 – 35'x11'x18'
7. Right Upper chamber (ceiling - Echo organ) #6 – 35'x11'x18'
8. Left Upper chamber (ceiling - Fanfare organ) #5 – 35'x11'x18'
9. Organ workroom
10. Workroom storage closet
11. Left Stage blower room
12. Right Stage blower room
13. Left Gallery/Fanfare blower room
14. Right Gallery/Echo blower room
15. Combination action room 1
16. Combination action room 2
17. Combination action room 3
18. Kimball left chamber
19. Kimball right chamber
20. Kimball relay room
21. Kimball blower room
22. Kimball console in organ balcony
23. ML Auxiliary blower room

The 1928 photo of the steel framing going in place shows the massive stage-house flanked by the left and right main organ chambers. The organ workroom is not framed yet, but sits behind the right chamber and extending left from the stagehouse to the end of the building. The workroom is approximately 93' long, 28' wide and 24' high.

Richards conceived this space as he knew that much on-site wood construction would be required to build many of the enormous pipes. The room was fitted with a wide variety of power and hand tools, most of which were eventually (and unfortunately) sold off many years ago.

Over time the workroom fell into a state of disrepair, but now that a new Curator is on site, plans call for the area to be put back in order and an area set aside as a museum for appreciation by future generations to see. The museum items will include the two huge relays for the Left Stage chamber and the Ballroom Kimball, the set of a dozen sample pipes Emerson Richards commissioned, an example of one of the original DC blower motors, a rare 4' double languid sample Diapason also commissioned, plus other items and graphic displays.



[This is the colorful newspaper account of the dedication of the Ballroom Kimball organ on May 25, 1930]

PIPE ORGAN AT HALL DEDICATED WITH MUSICALE

Dr. Rollo Maitland Gives Fine Program Before Appreciative Audience

Creation of a complete symphony in the presence of the audience featured the recital by Rollo Maitland, noted organist, dedicating the world's largest theatrical organ in the ballroom of the Atlantic City Auditorium last night. The concert was enjoyed by a capacity attendance of music lovers

The four themes or tunes selected for the improvisation by Mr. Maitland had been submitted by the audience and the themes providing each of the themes were played before the symphony was composed in order to familiarize those present with the tunes.

Another outstanding number was a fantasy, "A Trip to Atlantic City," conceived by Mr. Maitland especially for the dedicatory concert. It bordered frankly on the descriptive and suggested all the happenings of the trip from the start of the family to the shore

to their return home, tired, but happy. This novel composition gave full opportunity for a dramatic display of the many musical effects with which the mighty instrument is equipped.

During the rendition of several of the numbers, the unusual lighting effects of the ballroom were appropriately used to dawn, the breaking of a storm and other parts of the various movements.

In the playing of Liebestraum (Love's Dream) and The Spinning Song, originally designed for the piano, Mr. Maitland featured the grand piano situated on the stage and played electrically from the organ console.

The recital was opened with the Grand Festival March, an unpublished composition for orchestra by Victor Herbert, transcribed for the organ by Mr. Maitland from

the original score, which was loaned by the late Irish-American composer especially for the purpose.

Other numbers in the recital were the overture, "William Tell," Allegro from the sixth organ symphony [Widor] and Southern Rhapsody.

The organ built by the W.W Kimball Company, Chicago, was designed by Senator Emerson L. Richards. It has 4,115 pipes and is controlled by 354 stops. It is of the orchestral concert type, containing faithful representations of all the voices in the orchestra, including the violins, second violins, cellos, contra bass, trumpets, trombone, French horn, English horns, clarinet, saxophone, oboe, oboe horn, flutes, piccolos, drums, traps, harps and the electrically controlled grand piano. The console is the largest ever built by the Kimball Company.

Hand-written letter dated May 26, 1930 from E. Hagstrom on Hotel Monticello stationery to O.J. Hagstrom at the Kimball Company in Chicago:

The organ opened officially last night and behaved fairly good, we had one small pipe squeal a little once, but we were prepared and caught it quickly so I don't believe any one in the audience noticed it as they had a large and not very quiet crowd there.

Mr. Dickey, the Manager, is very pleased with the organ and plans to use it a good deal.

Yours very truly
E. Hagstrom

Letter to Emerson Richards from W. D. Hardy, Manager, Pipe Organ Dept. at W.W. Kimball Company, Chicago:

August 2, 1929

Senator Emerson L. Richards
Atlantic City
New Jersey

Dear Senator Richards:

I have been away for a few days and have fallen behind answering my correspondence.

I have your two letters regarding changes in the specification or layout and don't see how any of these can be made without some delaying of the work. The chests are partly finished and the ones which are not finished, are cut and bored, the relays are laid out, and the stock for the switchboard is cut and is being assembled. In other words, the entire organ is in the works, and every change made now means throwing out something which is already made, even if only partly finished, and substituting in its place, something which requires a change usually not only of an individual part, but everything else in relation to it.

We are all anxious to have this organ completed as quickly as possible, and the way to accomplish this it to go right ahead with our present lay-out. Considerable time was unavoidably lost due to the enlargement of the specification, but this was necessary and understood by all of us at the time.

From the way things look now, it won't be very long before you can come on here and get a good look at what you are going to get.

Last night I attended the opening of the organ in the Chicago Stadium, which so far as I can judge, sounds like the usual \$15,000 theater organ magnified about ten times. Even this falls short of the announced \$250,000.00 price. I stayed until the intermission, which was really enough to ask of anyone. Maurice decided to stay on until the end. The next to the last number was a group of imitations, one of which was to be three hundred calliopes, even this could not hold me any longer, as the organist who was performing is probably the worst I have ever heard. He wasn't even clever in his imitations and apparently had no knowledge of the harmony of any of the well known pieces of music he was playing and very often only a hazy idea of the melody. The next time I see you I will give you all of the details, which are too long to get into a letter on a busy morning and too much to ask you to read.

Yours very truly
W.D Hardy
Mgr. Pipe Organ Dept.
W.W. KIMBALL COMPANY

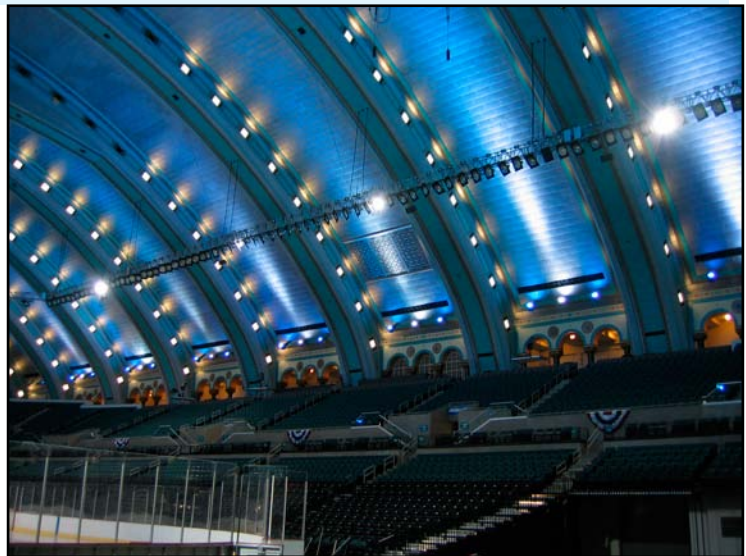
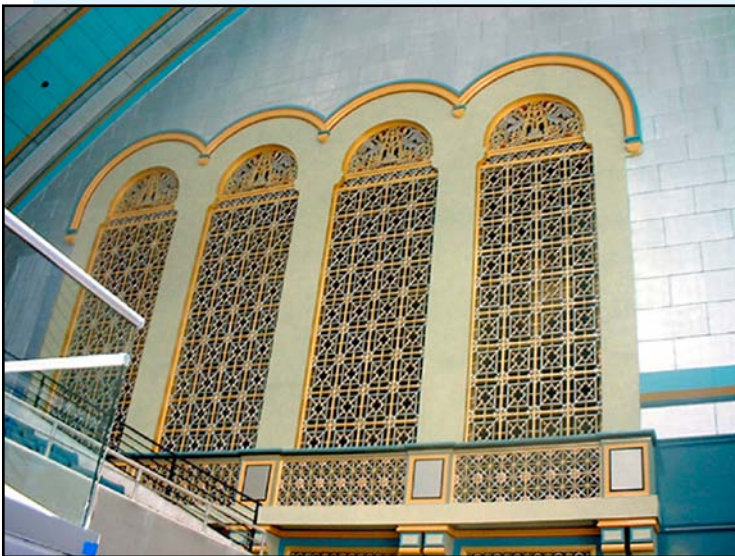


(Above) View of the proscaenium arch and the restored original asbestos curtain. The red, white and blue bunting was in place following 9/11 at the time this picture was taken.

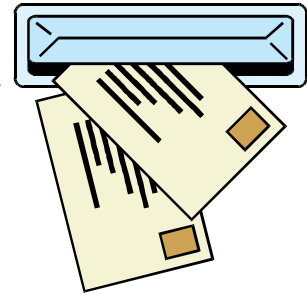
Photo by Harry Bellangy

(Bottom left) The Left Stage chamber with its legendary unenclosed choir division and 32' metal Diapason. This

chamber is scheduled to be brought back online once a new solid-state relay is installed. Photo by Harry Bellangy
(Bottom right) The auditorium ceiling and illumination with the Fanfare organ grill in view above the left center gallery chamber. Photo by Antoni Scott



we get mail



Godspeed to Carl Loeser on this restoration "labor of love." My grandfather Wallace Allergies played ice hockey to that organ music in the 1940s. I grew up in Pleasantville and now reside in California. Best of luck with this labor of love.

Thomas Long
I will send a donation
Thank you

Harry,

Thank you, once again, for another great tour. I'm enjoying 5550 more and more each time I go into it!

It will be great to hear it play again, but I'm in agreement that the Kimball comes first. It's in better shape and much smaller, therefore suggesting that less money is required for bringing it to 100%.

I'll be keeping my eyes open for the next tour.

Tom

Many thanks for this excellent 1998 recording on the great Midmer-Losh organ. I've played it for many people at work. Everyone is blown away by those awesome blowers and the 64' reed.

Whoever decided to put that silly baroque D Minor Toccata on the CD instead of Antoni Scott's excellent full version doesn't have a clue what that piece is about. I was willing to forgive the ridiculous baroque registration thinking that this was all you had working at this time.

When I heard the "high octane" version on the Internet, I realized I was very wrong. And so were you. This is the version that I want to show to people. And this is what Bach himself would most likely have done had he had access to such rich resources. Good God! The world's largest pipe organ sounding like some small silly church organ. What a waste!

But I can at least enjoy the blowers and the 64' reed. And the Liszt building up the Ophicleide, I think.

Man that's great.

And yes, I have your excellent remastered CD of "Bach on the Biggest." Of course, this is the version of the Toccata that I play for people.

Please keep up the good work.

I can hardly wait to see the DVD.

Your Friend,
David Crofford

Hi David:

Thank you for your nice comments regarding my performance of Bach's Toccata in D minor. I, too, was disappointed at the member's decision for not selecting the "high octane" version to showcase the remaining (160 ranks) resources of the "world's largest organ." Like you, I felt that the "high-octane" version would have been appropriate since the previous recording (Bach on the Biggest) was well known among those that seek out the sound of the world's largest organ. I do believe the decision was based on the fact that so many reeds were out of tune at the time. I thought that at least both versions should have been on the CD so that listeners could appreciate the immense range of the organs dynamics, listening to the same piece of music. Fortunately, the small version of the Toccata demonstrates the delightful clean and clear mixtures in a way that has never been heard before on a recording of this organ. I hope the CD more than makes up for your disappointment in the incredible performance of Stephen Smith's conclusion of Franz Liszt's "Ad nos." We were all there on the stage while the organ thundered away in a way that is impossible to describe. The incredible bass of the 64' Diaphone, the immense Great division with it's amazing Diapason's (10 ranks), reed after reed, topped by shimmering Mixtures, was an experience. Then on the last chord, the 100" Ophicleide!!!!!!

Antoni Scott

This email is for Stephen Smith,

regarding his two excellent books on the ACCH organ.

Wow! Read through them several times over. The Hess photographs really put you back in time to the initial installation of the instrument.

Thanks many times over for the tremendous research you must have done to get this work out. Thanks to you and the ACCHOS group, I now know a lot more about this instrument than I ever did before.

And the books do exactly what you must have intended them to; generate further interest in the outstanding instrument. I agree; it's a masterpiece.

Antoni Scott told me it's an incredible instrument to play. I'm so happy that the right chamber will be up and running soon.

Please keep up the good work. I'll do what I can to promote interest in the project too.

Warmest regards,
Your Friend,
David Crofford

Dear Mr. Swisher,

Thanks for your response and giving me an idea of your time line of the restoration.

The organs seem to be in very good hands under your cause. Regarding the Midmer-Losh, I was impressed particularly with what I saw of both of the main chambers, not just their sizes and contents, but, more importantly, how well kept they appeared to be.

More power to you all and keep up the good work!

Tom Walters

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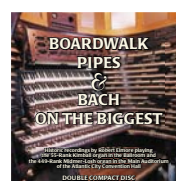


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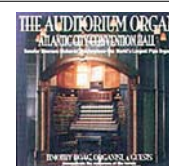


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