



Frances Bedford (photo credit: Charles Mize)

North of Chicago, at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, the centerpiece among the new Regional Arts Center spaces for the Music Department is the **Frances Bedford** Concert Hall, named in honor of the well-known Professor Emerita and author. A naming ceremony and gala reception took place as part of the two sold-out December performances of Handel's *Messiah*. On these occasions Bedford played harpsichord continuo, as she has done since 1993 for each of the triennial presentations of this beloved work. Also participating in the orchestra were three additional family members: oboists Monte Bedford and Leslie Outland Michelic, and Matt Michelic, viola.

One of the more memorable declarations from centuries of comments about musical instruments comes from **Giovanni Maria Trabaci**, who wrote in the Preface to Book II of his pieces "per ogni strumenti, ma ispecialmente per i Cimbali e gli Organi" (1615): "the harpsichord is the lord of all instruments in the world, and on it everything may be played with ease." ["il Cimbalo è Signor di tutti l'istromenti del mondo, et in lei si possono sonare ogni cosa con facilità."] While I am not always convinced about the "ease" involved, it does seem quite evident that, despite an ever-increasing overabundance of baroque music played on the piano, the lordly harpsichord continues to garner the attention of writers on music as it provides tonal sustenance and aural enjoyment to its own special audience. ■

Comments and news items are always welcome. Address them to Dr. Larry Palmer, Division of Music, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas 75275. E-mail: <lpalmer@smu.edu>.

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In the wind . . .

by John Bishop



Former glories

I love visiting church buildings. I love experiencing all the different forms these buildings can take, reading bulletin boards to try to understand what's going on in the place, meeting with church officials, hearing organs, imagining what organ from our lengthy list of available instruments might best suit a given church. I love the vitality of an active church—gaily decorated classrooms, purposeful rooms for the rehearsing and production of music, busy offices chattering and clattering away. I love the sense that all that activity and dedication of treasure is focused on the public worship of a faith community. And I love meeting with the committees charged with the task of acquiring a new organ for their church, discussing the various forms of the pipe organ, and helping them focus on how to conceive a plan and present it to their superior committees.

Around 2000 when I had just joined the Organ Clearing House, I visited a church building and was greeted by the organist who recognized me and asked, half in jest, "What are you doing here? We love our organ!" I guess my reputation preceded me. It was the first time I realized that I might be considered the Grim Reaper of the pipe organ. I like to think that what I do is bring beautiful vintage organs into church buildings, but I realize how likely it would be that I would be known for the reverse—taking organs out of buildings.

There's a church in suburban Boston that I've known for more than 25 years. In the early 1990's, my firm, the Bishop Organ Company, renovated the organ. We installed new pitman windchests replacing poorly designed and sluggish vented chests, releathered fifteen reservoirs, and installed a solid-state combination action and relay. It's a big organ, more than 60 ranks with nine 16' voices. It's a big church building—the sanctuary seats 1,200. But when we did this extensive project, there were only 75 pledging units—church-finance-speak for "families." The job cost more than \$250,000. Do the math.

Elsewhere in the building there is a dining hall that is served by a big commercial kitchen, all fitted out with the latest restaurant-style appliances from about 1952. Adjacent to the kitchen is a pantry lined with elegant oak-and-glass cabinets filled with what must be a thousand place settings of china, all monogrammed with the church's initials. It must be 40 years since they had a really big dinner, but all the stuff is there and ready to go. This church is doing pretty well. There's a relatively new pastor who is attracting new people, they have a good organist who is inspiring people to join the choir, and in general they are doing quite a bit better than holding their own.

There are many buildings like this around the country. Great big places originally built and furnished to serve huge congregations are now being operated by dwindling groups of faithful who struggle with fuel oil bills approaching \$10,000 per month, and 80-year-old roofs that are starting to fail. It's increasingly common for a congregation to worship in a chapel, parlor, or low-ceilinged fellowship hall during winter months to reduce the heating bill. And it's common for these churches to close.

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We at the Organ Clearing House have had many experiences with people who are losing their church. We organize the sale of an instrument, and arrive at the building with scaffolding, crates, and packing supplies to start the dismantling of the organ, and an elderly church member comes to us with a photograph of her parents' wedding taking place in front of that organ. Her parents were married and buried, she and her husband were married, her husband was buried, and her children were all baptized, confirmed, and married with that organ.

It's a regular and poignant reminder of how much the church means to people. There have been a number of occasions when people have wept as we start to dismantle an organ.

Last year I was invited to assess the pipe organ in a church building in New Jersey that had closed. It was a grand building with mahogany-fronted galleries surrounding the sanctuary, sweeping stairways, and an organ with more than 80 ranks. This place was unusual in that there had apparently been no planning for the closure. It was two years since the last worship service, and the place looked like a ghost town. It was as if the organist finished the postlude, the ushers turned off the lights, the sexton locked the doors, and no one came back. The last Sunday's music was still on the console music rack. Stuffed choir folders complete with lozenges and Kleenex were piled on the choir room piano. Half finished glasses of water were on the pulpit, there was unopened mail on the secretary's desk, and the usher's station at the rear of the nave was still stocked with bulletins, attendance records, and the neat little packets of biblical drawings and crayons for little children. All it needed was tumbleweeds being buffeted down the center aisle.

Some churches form a "disbandment committee" that is charged with the task of emptying the building, divesting of furnishings, and archiving parish records. I contact the chair of that committee when I want to bring a client to see and hear the organ. There's a myth that says that the nominating committee is the worst duty to draw in a church (or in any non-profit institution) because you get rejected so regularly, but I think the disbandment committee must be worse. Pageant costumes, Christmas decorations, hymnals, folding chairs, classroom supplies, communion sets, Styrofoam coffee cups, choir and acolyte robes, and all the other gear it takes to run a church are piled in corridors, destined for dumpsters. People leaf through it all thinking there must be uses for it, without registering that there are a hundred other churches in the state going through the same thing. You'd think you could sell a nave full of pews in a heartbeat, but more often, a nave full of pews is heartbreaking.



E. & G. G. Hook Opus 283, Woburn, First Congregational

There's a positive side to all this. Often we can save the organ, and when we do it moves to another parish representing a spark from its original home.

Woburn (WOO-burn), Massachusetts is a suburb of Boston with a population of a little under 40,000, located about ten miles north of the city. During the nineteenth century Woburn was a center for the tanning of leather—the high school football team is still called "The Tanners." It's the next town to the north from my hometown, Winchester, and when I was in high school I was assistant organist at the First Congregational Church of Woburn, home of E. & G. G. Hook's Opus 283 built in 1860, with three manuals and 31 speaking stops. I think I had an idea at that young age of how fortunate I was to be playing on such an instrument. William H. Clarke was the organist of that church when the organ was installed, and ten years later he was organist of the First Unitarian Church, just across the town square, when the Hook brothers installed their Opus 553 in 1870. (Note that Hook covered 270 opus numbers in ten years!) A few years after that, William Clarke left the Boston area to establish an organbuilding shop in Indianapolis, taking with him Steven P. Kinsley, the head voicer from the Hook factory.



Die Berliner Hook, Opus 553

Opus 283 is still in its original home. It is still playable, though the parish is not strong enough these days to mount a proper restoration. But Opus 553 is now in Berlin, Germany—widely referred to as "Die Berliner Hook." When the Woburn Unitarian Church closed in 1990, the organ was sold to the church in Berlin, and the proceeds from the sale were saved under the stewardship of former church member Charlie Smith with the intention that they would be used when an appropriate opportunity came along. (See "Hook Opus 553 to Berlin, Germany" by Lois and Quentin Regestein, *THE DIAPASON*, October 2001.)

Stoneham, Massachusetts is the next town east of Woburn, with a population of about 21,000. In 1995 the Stoneham Unitarian Church was closed, and the building was converted into a nursery school. A crew of organ lovers man-



Hook Opus 466, Follen Community Church, Lexington

aged to get E. & G. G. Hook's Opus 466 (1866) out of the building and into storage before the balcony was boarded up, and the organ was offered through the Unitarian Universalist Association to a "neighboring church that could give it a good home."

Lexington, Massachusetts is the next town west of Woburn (it also adjoins Winchester). It has a population of 30,000 and is home to the Lexington Battle Green, where the first battles of the American Revolutionary War took place. Facing the Battle Green is the stately First Parish (UUA) Church, home to a marvelous three-manual Hutchings organ. On the east end of Lexington on Massachusetts Avenue (Paul Revere's Ride) is the Follen Community Church (UUA), a unique octagonal structure built in 1840. In 1995, the organ at the Follen Church was a hodge-podge affair that had been assembled from parts by an enthusiastic member of the church. It had a 48-volt DC electrical system, unusually high voltage for pipe organ action, and as the organ deteriorated, the console emitted puffs of smoke that unnerved the parishioners.

When members of the Follen Church heard through the UUA that the Hook organ from Stoneham (#466) was available, they pounced on the opportunity. Organ committee chair Wendy Strothman spearheaded a campaign that raised the funds necessary for the restoration and installation of the organ. The organ was first played in its new home on Easter Sunday 1997.

As the restoration progressed, Charlie Smith of Woburn got wind of the story, and offered the Woburn organ fund to the Follen Church to support the care of the restored organ, and to support regular organ concerts there. So Hook Opus 553 wound up supporting Opus 466 in its new home—and Wendy and I are married!

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As I write, the Organ Clearing House is participating in another project that allows a redundant organ a fresh start. Christ Church (Episcopal) in South Barre, Massachusetts closed its doors last year after a long period of declining membership and dwindling funds. Their organ was Hook & Hastings Opus 2344, built in 1914, a sweet little instrument with three stops on each of two manuals, and a pedal 16' Bourdon. The impeccable craftsmanship of its builders and its mechanical simplicity combined to make the organ a remarkably reliable and durable instrument. The Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts contacted us about the disposition of the organ as the building was being offered for sale, but a few weeks later called again with a fresh suggestion.

St Francis Episcopal Church is in Holden, Massachusetts, about 15 miles east of South Barre. Several of the parishioners from Christ Church in South



Hook & Hastings Opus 2344, Christ Church (Episcopal), South Barre

Barre had begun worshipping in Holden, and some people wondered if the Hook & Hastings organ in Christ Church would be appropriate for installation at St. Francis. We compared measurements in the two buildings, and sure enough the organ would fit beautifully. The vestry of St. Francis put that project together in record time, and we are in the midst of relocating that organ now. It's especially meaningful for the members of the former Christ Church to be able to bring

their organ with them as they suffer the loss of their church and work to get used to a new worshipping life. As we came to town to start dismantling the organ, one of those members told me that she had been a member at Christ Church for 65 years. She lives across the street from the building. It's personal.

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Sometimes the relocation of an organ is an artistic exercise, taking an instrument from a long-closed building and seeing it through installation with little or no contact with the people who were its original owners. This is rewarding work, as we know we are preserving the craftsmanship of our predecessors, reusing the earth's resources by placing an organ in a building without having been a party to contemporary mining and smelting, and refreshing our ears with some of the best organ voicing from a previous age.

But when the relocation of an organ can involve the people who worshiped with it in its original home, and especially play a role in the blending of two parishes, the process is especially meaningful. It's personal. ■

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On Teaching

by Gavin Black



Recitals—questions and ideas

The topic for this month, and also next, is recitals, with an emphasis on planning and programming. Playing a recital—performing, in this case, solo organ repertoire in front of an audience that can be assumed to be paying attention—is an activity that gets to one of the hearts of what we do or care about as musicians.

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