

Cover feature

A. E. Schlueter Pipe Organ Company, Lithonia, Georgia First United Methodist Church, Atlanta, Georgia

Atlanta First United Methodist Church was originally organized as Wesley Chapel in 1847, and has maintained a long tradition of excellence in worship. The present church was built in 1903, when Mr. Asa Candler purchased the former church site for the headquarters of Coca-Cola. After moving to the new location, the church changed its name to Atlanta First United Methodist Church. Many Methodist luminaries have served this congregation, including the venerable Pierce Harris.

The first pipe organ known to be installed in the church was a two-manual Roosevelt in 1885. When the present church was built, this instrument was moved. In 1919, the organ was re-activated and rebuilt by Möller. Further changes occurred in 1953 when the organ was enlarged to 46 ranks by another firm. A new façade was built from new and existing pipes in a "pipe fence" array; while commanding in stature, the new façade did not pay homage to the architecture of the building and was poorly constructed. Fortunately, during the 1950s work, ten stops from the former Roosevelt instrument were retained; unaltered, they could be considered for inclusion in the new 2008 instrument. Over the succeeding years, the organ was rebuilt as sections failed and generally kept in working order. The organ provided the basic needs for service playing, but, quite simply, was too small for the space.

Jump forward to 2003 when senior pastor Rev. Wayne Johnson commissioned a feasibility task force to redefine the church's mission and plan for future ministry. As with many downtown churches, the community around the church was displaced as office buildings replaced homes. Yet this church saw opportunity. The feasibility task force determined it needed to continue its television ministry, continue its education through the Candler School (founded at Atlanta FUMC, but now only affiliated through the denomination), and renovate and restore the church building. It was noted that the organ needed to be addressed as part of the building infrastructure. The task force engaged an architect to provide possibilities for the chancel renovation. J. Donald Land, director of music and organist, led the charge to consider the organ and its renovation or replacement.

A. E. Schlueter Pipe Organ Company was one of several firms interviewed for the project. We viewed this as a real opportunity to build an instrument of significance in our hometown. It is not often that an opportunity develops to build a "Magnum Opus" in the same city as a firm's location. The Schlueter family decided that the building of this instrument was more important than simple financial gain. Trust that our pencils were very sharp because of this unique opportunity to create art. In our interview, we discussed with the committee the opportunity for an organ of multiple divisions and a wide palette of colors, in an organ case that would complement the church. Specific emphasis was placed on preserving the stewardship of the past. In our design, pipework from the two previous instruments was incorporated in the various departments of the organ.

Quality organbuilding is never the result of one individual but of the synergy of a team. In this respect, our firm was ably assisted by the Atlanta First United Methodist Church clergy, music staff, church staff, and feasibility task force. These individuals readily gave of their time and talents and provided invaluable assistance from the inception of the organ project to its installation and tonal finishing. Specifically we would like to recognize Dr. Bob Smith, chair of the feasibility task force, who was charged with the selection of the architect and organbuilder; J. Donald Land,

director of music and organist; Wally Colly, church liaison; senior pastor Rev. Wayne Johnson, deceased, whose vision propelled this project forward even in his absence; and current senior pastor Dr. Jim Ellison.

As part of the building renovation, the choir loft was to be lowered (it was eight feet above the pulpit). This meant that the organ case would need to begin from a much lower plane than the actual organ chamber. We designed the lower case walls to begin below the main organ chassis and act as a reflective shell for the choir. The interior layout of the organ was designed to allow the choir to hear the organ without taking the full brunt of large registrations. In effect, the organ "blooms" just forward of the choir loft.

At the center point of the organ, the chamber is only nine feet deep, so modest cantilevers were designed into the organ case to grow the chamber space without creating a large shelf above the choir that would hamper hearing the organ. Visually, these forward pipe towers give the illusion of a more forward presence.

The engineering that developed would require the organ divisions to be stacked one on top of another. Often stacked organs rely on the division above to form the ceiling for the lower division. This is a problem because the sound speaks into windlines, reservoirs or schwimmers, organ actions, or other parts. It is also mechanically difficult to service the above division because of the sea of pipes located below it; this is often remedied by placing additional perch boards over the pipes, thus adding more impediments to sound reflection. Our solution was a careful design that built dedicated floors and ceilings in each division.

The layout of the organ finds the Swell, String and Choir divisions located on the bottom level. The Solo and Great divisions are located in the top level of the organ, with the Pedal in an open two-story chamber in the center of the case. The Great is enclosed with a ceiling that allows it to speak into the center of the case and to blend with the lower divisions in the chancel, rather than going completely over the musicians' heads. This purposefully built chamber has proved very effective in coalescing the many divisions of the organ and eliminates geographic specificity of the individual organ stops. The rear of the church houses the Antiphonal, Antiphonal Pedal and Trompetteria divisions of the organ. The Antiphonal is situated at the same height as the Great organ, thus promoting tuning stability.

Because the church has a very active television ministry, there was a concern about the console being exposed and commanding behind the pulpit. A lift was designed that allows the console to be lowered to reduce its visual signature, and, when not needed for other church events, the console can be lowered down and rolled into a side parking location. The platform then can be raised to increase the available space in the chancel.

The console and organ case are constructed of quarter-sawn white oak. We made a conscious effort to incorporate elements of the church building into the console and organ case. Our design engineers, Howard Weaver and Robert Black, saw to it that arches, quatrefoils, and acanthus leaves became part of our vocabulary. It was clear that portions of the organ case would require large grille openings to provide maximum divisional egress into the room. We did not desire to use cloth grilles in the organ case. These impede airflow, are long-term maintenance issues, and affect sound. We designed wood grilles with an open quatrefoil pattern, which allow both the free passage of sound and airflow for tuning stability.

In designing the console, we were very concerned about the ergonomics of its layout. Those who have had the opportunity to sit at larger consoles are aware of their visual and physical challenges. To



A. E. Schlueter Pipe Organ Company, First United Methodist Church, Atlanta (photo credit Michael Mitchell, Creative Expressions)



Console and case (photo credit Patty Conley)

overcome some of the issues of actually reaching the playing surfaces, we foreshortened the organ sharps as the keys ascended from Manual I to Manual V. The keyboards are not sloped, but with subtle adjustment to the manual relationships even Manual V is comfortable to reach. A similar consideration was given to the pedalboard and expression shoes, which were designed using proportions normally found in our three-manual consoles. Special attention was given to the layout of the pistons, toe studs, drawknobs, and tilting tablets. The end result is that all of the controls can be used and seen without the leaning and craning about that occurs on a large console. It is a very comfortable console to play.

Some interesting facts about the organ:

- the organ contains 93 ranks with 5,360 pipes represented in nine divisions;
- in excess of 10,000 board feet of lumber were used to build this instrument;
- the organ contains over 10 miles of wiring for switching and control;
- the organ uses wind pressures that range from $3\frac{1}{2}$ " to 11";
- the main manual windchests are slider, with reeds on electro-pneumatic windchests;
- three divisions of the organ are located in the rear chambers;
- the Trompette en Chamade in the rear of the sanctuary is made from brass;
- the organ weighs over 44,000 lbs.;
- the front organ case stands over 43 feet tall;
- the instrument contains pipes of lead, tin, zinc, brass, and wood;
- the wind for the organ is created by three blowers;
- the organ is controlled with a five-manual console.

The tonal design of this organ was the result of many discussions. Prior to scaling this instrument, organist Don Land and I were able to visit a number of recent instruments built by our firm. Doing this in a short time frame was very helpful to determine tonally where we had gone and where we were going. Don brought in local organists Tom Alderman, David Stills and Richard Morris for their input to the specification and console layout. Tom Alderman worked as a consultant to Don. As a triumvirate, we worked through the myriad of decisions involving the final stoplist, drawknob layout, couplers, pistons, toe studs, and other controls. In the end, I recognize that I was offered a tremendous level of trust and generally an unfettered hand in the tonal design and scaling of the organ.

As the final specification became the math of scales, halving ratios, metal thickness, mouth widths, cut-ups, and languid bevels, I had the good fortune of having Daniel Angerstein and John Tanner to look over my notes. We have worked together on many projects over the years.

For tonal finishing, I was very ably assisted by a team led by Daniel Angerstein, with the assistance of John Tanner, Lee Hendricks, and Bud Taylor. I want to thank Daniel, John, Lee, and Bud for their input regarding division balance, dynamics, color, neutrality, fundament, harmonics, chifff (or lack of), treble ascendancy, and so many other factors. There must always be a final arbiter of design and direction and, in those instances where I followed a different path or tonal treatment, the civility for further discourse remained. I would like to personally single out Daniel Angerstein for his contribution to this project.

It is the daily give and take and discussion that allows art to flourish. It is a rule of organbuilding that you will not make everyone happy with your choices and decisions. The most important question is not "what will others think?" but "have I completed the work to the best of my ability and the charge or commission that I was given by my client to achieve their vision?" As a builder, it is important always to remember what the service role of the instrument will be, and that in the end, the instrument you are building is a tool for worship and is part of the church fabric. Just as your thumbprints are on the instrument, so must be the thumbprints of the church members.

On a project of this size, one challenge was keeping the organ in tune and making adjustments called for during tonal finishing. To make this happen, the voicers would work from 8 am to noon and then break. During lunch hour, members of our staff would take the opportunity to "punch-list" final items and adjustments. When the voicers returned, the room again would settle into the silence of single tones and "louder, softer, more flue, less flue," etc. After the voicers left in the evening, the crew was again released to make adjustments until 9 pm, when the tuning crew arrived to perform the nightly vigil of preparing the organ for the voicers in the morning. Where stops required work beyond a reasonable ability to perform it in the chamber, we would prepare sample Cs and remove the stop for voicing in our shop. The completed stop would then be installed into the organ for final finishing. This ballet of work went on for weeks on end, and I wish to thank the dedicated members of my staff for the completion of this instrument and for the internal support provided from one staff member to another.

Special recognition must go to our craftsmen, Marc Conley and Robert Black, who were ever present in overseeing the design, engineering, and building of all of the myriad parts that constitute an instrument of this stature. They ensured that the final fit and finish met our standards of quality in engineering and execution. Marc served on the "sharp end of the stick" and worked untold hours at the church to see the project to its completion.

Tonally, this instrument reflects our desire to create organs that possess warmth and clarity. In this room, which promotes clarity of tone and gentle unforced voices, we found wonderful bass presence but the need for an ascendant treble. In the tonal design, all of the divisions of the organ are based on an 8' principal chorus. We differentiated these principal choruses, in addition to the vast array of flutes, strings, and mutations to allow the performance and support of many schools of repertoire. The organ was designed with numerous strings and celestes. It is an absolute joy to hear a transcription on the organ or the subtle undergirding of a choir. With the plethora of solo reeds in the organ, we were able to provide differing reed choruses in the various divisions and pure ensemble function for some of these departments. The organ has reeds designed after English, German, and French styles. The completed instrument pays homage to the important organbuilders and organbuilding styles of the past but is not a copy of any particular builder or style.

This instrument was designed to play a role in all musical styles of worship, from traditional to contemporary. To support the non-traditional role, the instrument is equipped with MIDI capability and a separate chamber audio system. This allows other tones not normally associated with the organ to be generated and controlled by the console. In this manner the organ can blend its voices with other sounds and participate in services that might normally exclude the pipe organ.

Early on, the client had discussed the inclusion of some digital voices in the organ. There was a desire for some stops in the organ that would be considered secondary or tertiary in nature and were the type of stops that might normally be drawn out of a MIDI sound module. They did desire that these stops be voiceable and individually tunable, which specifically excluded MIDI voices. In our interview, we were asked if we would consider working with Walker Technical Company in the installation of these voices. Even though the majority of our experience had been limited to 32' and 16' extensions and percussions, we were aware of the high quality of engineering and sound quality provided by Walker.

As we considered the inclusion of digital voices, the primary question was how? It is probable that, in consultation with the client, we could have left prepared-for stops in the console, to be completed by a third party without our



Trompette en chamade (photo credit Dave Kocsis)



Console (photo credit Patty Conley)



Installing façade pipes (photo credit Patty Conley)



Façade (photo credit Patty Conley)



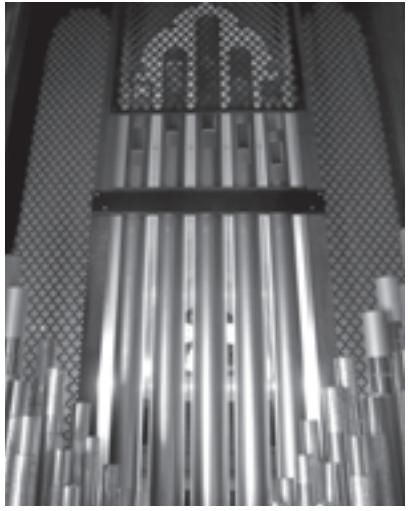
Console detail (photo credit Patty Conley)



Console detail (photo credit Patty Conley)



Interior pipework (photo credit Michael Mitchell, Creative Expressions)



View from behind the façade (photo credit Michael Mitchell, Creative Expressions)



Division orientation (photo credit Patty Conley)

direct involvement. In effect, the stops could have been added in a "don't ask, don't tell" fashion, which we considered unpalatable. I am well aware that this method of installing digital stops has allowed some firms to remain "intellectually honest," but I consider this method to be, at best, morally untenable. If you are providing for additions to the organ in the console and relays, which forces a digital solution because the chamber, winding system, or structure could never accommodate the proposed installations, you cannot pretend you simply did not know, and worse, you have ceded part of your tonal vision to a third party. We considered that if this were the desire of the client, we would work to ensure as seamless an integration of the adjunct stops as possible and to consult on the stops and their voicing.

One fundamental concern with the inclusion of digital stops is where does one start and where does one end once the genie is "out of the bottle." Our consideration was simple—even though there was a possibility to use digital voices, we strongly desired the organ to be able to stand on its own with the speakers and amps unplugged. There were instances where it would have been much easier to leave out that additional 16' register of pipes in lieu of a digital voice. I am proud to say we resisted this temptation and made organbuilder choices.

Bob Walker worked directly with our firm and Daniel Angerstein in voicing and tuning these stops, and we were very pleased with the final results. Where we desired the voicing and balances to be altered and changed, Mr. Walker was accommodating and worked to achieve a result in keeping with our overarching tonal philosophy for this instrument. The digital stops are as seamless as we had hoped, and the stops contribute around the periphery, as planned by the client, without overtly placing their presence on the stoplist. To the critics, I would say that our firm approached this instrument with integrity of design, and you can indeed play the organ successfully without any digital stop. There are now 93 ranks of wind-blown pipes where there were 46 ranks, and we have completed the tonal vision of our clients in a unified, cohesive manner.

In the end, how do we view this project? In truth, we are still overwhelmed by the opportunity presented to us and the fine work completed by our staff. It is as if we have been so close to the project it is difficult to see what we have done. Analytically, we are aware that the instrument is stunning to hear and see, and yet it will take time to back away far enough from the façade, console, and thousands of pipes to see and hear what others already know of this instrument.

Personally, I do know this—our firm was gifted with an opportunity to build an instrument that we could only have dreamed of at the beginning of our career. We are grateful for the trust placed in us by Atlanta First United Methodist Church and so very fortunate to have the talented and skilled staff that we enjoy. Our tonal philosophy is to "build instruments that have warmth not at the expense of clarity and clarity not at the expense of warmth." We are thankful to have been given such a grand canvas upon which to express our tonal ideals.

In summation, I would like to thank my father and our company founder, Arthur E. Schlueter, Jr. He is the foundation upon which our company was built and continues to thrive. His continuing role as artist, mentor, and president provides the ongoing oversight of our firm. I am humbly proud to call him both Boss and Dad, as we together work to build instruments for worship.

—Arthur E. Schlueter III

A.E. Schlueter Pipe Organ Company wishes to thank its staff including:
Arthur E. Schlueter Jr., president
Arthur E. Schlueter III, vice president/tonal and artistic direction
John Tanner, vice president of production/tonal finisher

Howard Weaver, senior design engineer
Rob Black, master cabinet-maker/organ engineer
Marc Conley, production supervisor
Bud Taylor, assistant production supervisor

Shan Dalton, office manager
Bob Parris, executive assistant
Barbara Sedlacek, office support
Mike Norris, woodshop foreman
Tony DiLeo, console builder
Bob Black, BSME, mechanical engineer
Joe Sedlacek, console wiring
Jeffery Chilcutt, CAD operator
Michael DeSimone, leathering and assembly

Dustin Carlisle, organ assembly
Sam Polk, organ assembly, tuning assistant
Kelvin Cheatham, organ assembly
Wilson Luna, assembly and wiring
Norma Renteria, leathering, assembly and wiring

Rockshaw Owens, organ assembly
Ruth Lopez, leathering and assembly
Kevin Cartwright, tuning & tonal assistant
Bob Weaver, leathering, assembly, tuning and service

Othel Liles, electrical engineer
Patty Conley, relay wiring
Herb Ridgely, Jr., sales & support
Mike Ray, electronics technician
David Stills, sales & support
Rick Stewart, sales & support
Dave Kocsis, program manager

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GREAT (Manual II, unenclosed)

32' Contre Bourdon	(Pedal)		(ext)
16' Bourdon	(Pedal)	122 pipes	
16' Violine		61 pipes	
8' First Open Diapason		61 pipes	
8' Second Open Diapason		61 pipes	
8' Violone	(ext)	61 pipes	
8' Harmonic Flute		49 pipes	
	(common bass from Rohrfloete)		
8' Rohrfloete		73 pipes	
5½' Gross Quint		61 notes+	
4' Octave		61 pipes	
4' Prestant		61 pipes	
4' Rohr Flute	(ext)	61 notes+	
3½' Gross Tierce		61 notes+	
2½' Twelfth		61 pipes	
2' Super Octave		61 pipes	
2' Waldflöte		61 pipes	
2½' Cornet III		183 notes+	
1½' Fourniture V		305 pipes	
¾' Scharf IV		244 pipes	
16' Contra Trompete		85 notes+	
8' Trompete	(ext)	61 pipes	
4' Clarion	(ext)	61 pipes	
16' Trombone	(Solo)	61 pipes	
8' Tromba	(Solo)	61 pipes	
8' Festival Trumpet	(Solo)	61 pipes	
Tremulant		61 notes+	
Chimes (enclosed with Solo)		61 notes+	
Cymbalstern		61 notes+	
Great to Great 4'		61 notes+	
MIDI on Great A		61 notes+	
MIDI on Great B		61 notes+	

SWELL (Manual III, enclosed)

16' Lieblich Gedeckt		73 pipes	
8' Violin Diapason		61 pipes	
8' Traverse Flute		61 notes+	
8' Stopped Flute	(ext)	61 pipes	
8' Viola de Gambe		49 pipes	
8' Viola Celeste		122 notes+	
8' Viol Dolce Celeste II		122 notes+	
8' Flute Celeste II		122 notes+	
4' Prestant		61 pipes	
4' Harmonic Flute		61 pipes	
4' Unda Maris Celeste II		122 notes+	
2½' Nazard		61 pipes	
2' Flageolet		61 pipes	
1½' Tierce		61 pipes	
2' Plein Jeu Grave IV–VI		330 pipes	
¾' Plein Jeu Acuta III–IV		208 pipes	
16' Bombarde		61 notes+	
16' Contre Fagotto		85 pipes	
8' Trompete		73 pipes	
8' Oboe		61 notes+	
8' Vox Humana		61 notes+	
4' Clarion	(ext 8')	61 notes+	
4' Fagotto Clarion	(ext 16')	24 pipes	
Tremulant		61 notes+	
Swell to Swell 16'		61 notes+	
Swell Unison Off		61 notes+	
Swell to Swell 4'		61 notes+	
MIDI on Swell A		61 notes+	
MIDI on Swell B		61 notes+	

STRING ORGAN (Manual III, enclosed with Swell)

16' Viol Celeste II		122 notes+	
8' Viol d'Orchestra		61 notes+	
8' Viol Celeste Sharp		61 notes+	
8' Viol Celeste Flat		61 notes+	
8' Dulcet Celeste II		122 notes+	
4' Violina Celeste II		122 notes+	
4' Dulcet Celeste II		122 notes+	
8' Vox Mystique		61 notes+	
Tremulant		61 notes+	
String Unison Off		61 notes+	

CHOIR (Manual I, enclosed)

16' Quintaton		61 notes+	
8' Weit Principal		61 pipes	
8' Voce Umana		61 notes+	
8' Bourdon		61 pipes	
8' Gemshorn		61 pipes	
8' Gemshorn Celeste		49 pipes	
8' Unda Maris II		122 notes+	
4' Principal		61 pipes	
4' Nachthorn		61 pipes	
2½' Nasat		61 pipes	
2' Wald Flute		61 pipes	
1½' Septieme		61 pipes	
1½' Terz		61 pipes	
1½' Quint		61 pipes	
1' Siffloé		61 pipes	
¾' None		61 pipes	
2' Choral Mixture IV		244 pipes	
½' Terz-Cymbal III–IV		208 pipes	
16' Corno di Bassetto		61 notes+	
8' Clarinet		61 pipes	
16' Dulzian		61 notes+	
8' Holzregal		61 notes+	
4' Rohr Schalmei		61 notes+	
8' Tromba	(Solo)	61 notes+	
8' Harp		73 notes+	
4' Celesta	(ext)	73 notes+	
Tremulant		73 notes+	
Choir to Choir 16'		73 notes+	
Choir Unison Off		73 notes+	
Choir to Choir 4'		73 notes+	
MIDI on Choir/Pos A		73 notes+	
MIDI on Choir/Pos B		73 notes+	

ANTIPHONAL (Manual I, enclosed)

16' Bourdon		97 pipes	
8' Principal		61 notes+	
8' Gamba		61 pipes	
8' Salicional		61 pipes	
8' Voix Celeste		49 pipes	

Gedeckt

8' Gedeckt		(ext)	
8' Flute Celeste II		122 pipes	
4' Principal		61 pipes	
4' Harmonic Flute		61 pipes	
2½' Nazard		(ext 16')	
2' Blockflöte		(ext 16')	
2' Mixture IV		244 pipes	
16' Contre Trumpet		61 notes+	
8' Harmonic Trumpet		61 pipes	
8' Flugel Horn		61 pipes	
Tremulant		61 notes+	
Antiphonal to Antiphonal 16'		61 notes+	
Antiphonal Unison Off		61 notes+	
Antiphonal to Antiphonal 4'		61 notes+	

SOLO (Manual IV, enclosed)

8' Major Open Diapason		61 notes+	
8' Violincello		61 pipes	
8' Violincello Celeste		49 pipes	
8' Doppelflöte		61 pipes	
8' Flauto Mirabilis		61 notes+	
4' Claribel Flute		61 pipes	
4' Clac		305 notes+	
8' Tromba		61 pipes	
8' English Horn		61 pipes	
8' Harmonic Trumpet		61 pipes	
8' Festival Trumpet		61 notes+	
8' French Horn		61 notes+	
16' Tuba Magna		73 notes+	
8' Tuba Mirabilis		(ext 16')	
4' Tuba Clarion		(ext 16')	
Tremulant		61 notes+	
Solo to Solo 16'		61 notes+	
Solo Unison Off		61 notes+	
Solo to Solo 4'		61 notes+	
MIDI on Solo A		61 notes+	
MIDI on Solo B		61 notes+	

TROMPETTERIA (Manual V, enclosed with Antiphonal in gallery)

8' Tuba Mirabilis	(Solo)	85 notes+	
16' State Trumpet		85 notes+	
8' State Trumpet	(ext)	85 notes+	
4' State Trumpet	(ext)	85 notes+	
2' Tierce Mixture V		305 notes+	
16' Trompette en Chamade TC		61 pipes	
8' Trompette en Chamade		61 pipes	
4' Trompette en Chamade		49 notes	

PEDAL (unenclosed)

32' Contre Diapason		32 notes+	

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