

the GRAND OPHICLEIDE

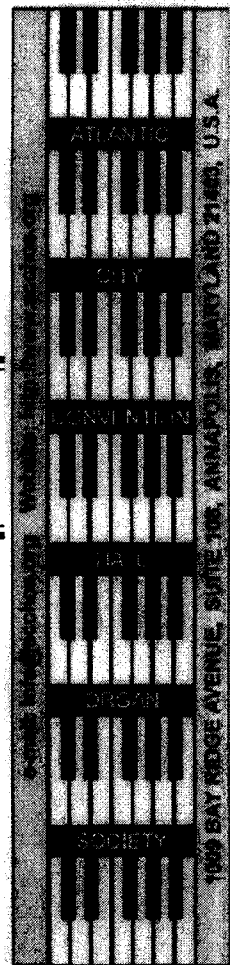
Journal of the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc.

Volume 1, No. 1

\$5.25

Fall, 1998

WELCOME to the first issue of the **Grand Ophicleide**, the quarterly publication of the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc. Founded in 1997, the Society is dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the organs in the Atlantic City Boardwalk Convention Hall. The largest of these organs is the 447 rank 7-manual Midmer-Losh instrument with over 33,000 pipes designed in 1928 by Senator Emerson L. Richards, New Jersey State Senator for Atlantic County



THE *NEW* RECORDING

BREAKING NEWS: As this issue goes to press, we can announce that a special recording session has been scheduled for early November in Atlantic City. A CD recording will be released demonstrating the Midmer-Losh organ in all its present glory. In addition to music selections there will be demonstrations of the Tuba Maxima and Grand Ophicleide on 100" of wind (never before recorded!) plus the 64' Diaphone and much more. Everyone will be notified as soon as this recording is available.

WHAT IS THE GRAND OPHICLEIDE?

The Grand Ophicleide is none other than stop No. 9 on the Midmer-Losh organ. Voiced on 100" of wind, it is listed in the Guinness Book of Records as the *loudest* in the world! This stop of 85 pipes is unenclosed in the right stage chamber and available on the Pedal Right at 16, 8; Pedal 2nd Touch at 16, 8; Grand Great at 8. Needless to say, it is the show-stopper on the organ!

the GRAND OPHICLEIDE

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

1009 Bay Ridge Avenue, Suite 108, Annapolis, Maryland 21403
<http://www.acchos.org> info@acchos.org

Stephen D. Smith, *President*
Charles F. Swisher, *Vice-President*
John H. Clotworthy, *Secretary-Treasurer*
Harry C. Bellangy
David C. Scribner, *Communications Director*

PATRONS

Jonathan Ambrosino
Organ Historian

Nelson Barden
Restorer-in-Residence, Boston University

Michael Barone
Producer, PIPEDREAMS

Jack Bethards
President, Schoenstein & Co. Organ Builders

Jean-Louis Coignet
Organ Advisor to the City of Paris

Carlo Curley
Concert Organist

Timothy S. Hoag
Organist, Atlantic City Convention Hall

William T. Van Pelt III
Executive Director, Organ Historical Society

Orpha Ochse
Professor Emerita, Whittier College

Professor Ian Tracey
Organist & Director of Music
Liverpool Cathedral, England

Peter Wright
Director of Music, Southwark Cathedral

The Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc. is a 501(c)3 corporation founded in 1997 and dedicated to the preservation and restoration of the organ in the Atlantic City Boardwalk Convention Hall.

the GRAND OPHICLEIDE is published quarterly for its members by The Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc.

Opinions expressed are those of individual contributors and do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the Society.



COMMENTARY

The **ACCHOS** has now been recognized by hall management and the slow and difficult process of focusing attention to the preservation and restoration of the organ has begun. The White House Millennium Project, *Save America's Treasures*, has received full information about the organ and hopefully might consider it a part of this important national effort.

The organ is fully intact and ready for restoration. It is based on a single coherent design and over the years no changes have been made to its tonal structure. For years large portions of the organ have become inoperational. The Fanfare and Echo organs in the ceiling chambers are inaccessible due to the presence of asbestos in the ceiling above the chambers. The hall is beginning a major \$70 million renovation project, and asbestos removal will mark the start of this large-scale project.

In 1944, a great hurricane caused water damage in the basement and the combination action was badly damaged putting it completely out of action.

The four left and right Gallery chambers are inoperative due to water damage from roof leaks.

.....

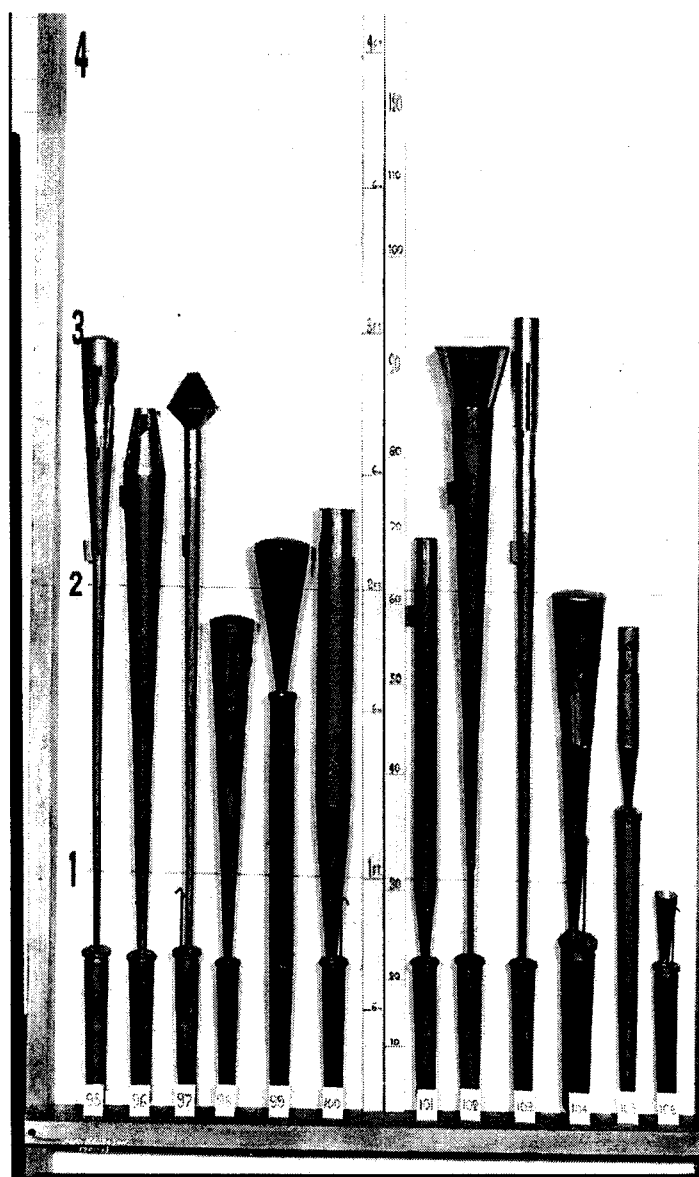
A REMEMBRANCE

"I will always remember the sounds of the great organ in Convention Hall at Atlantic City. I was a member of the All State New Jersey Chorus from Montclair High School in 1935 and 1938. The organ was the largest I had ever seen or heard. The magnificent tones filled the tremendous hall. I will never forget singing 'A Mighty Fortress Is Our God' with tears running down my cheeks as we were accompanied by the organ. *Please save this organ, the world's largest, for future generations to love and enjoy as much as I did.*"

Mrs. William G. Martin, Royal Oak, MD

THE FAMOUS FRED HESS & SON PHOTOGRAPHS

We have been fortunate to receive a donation of 170 of the famous Fred Hess & Son photographs taken during the installation and early years of the Midmer-Losh organ. The original negatives were made on 8x10 nitrate film. Thanks to the generosity of **ACCHOS** members it has been possible to print a complete set of these remarkable negatives. Many of them will appear in Stephen Smith's forthcoming hardback book about the organ. Plans are in the making to release a special volume of the collected photographs.



GREAT-SOLO REEDS, L-R: 95 Oboe-Horn, 96 Saxophone, 97 English Horn, 98 French Horn, 99 Vox Baryton, 100 Krummhorn, 101 Clarinet 8, 102 Orchestral Saxophone 8, 103 Orchestral Oboe 8, 104 French Horn 8, 105 Vox Humana, 106 Kinura 8.

AN OBSERVATION

Gentlemen,

It was with great interest that I read the short article in the current issue of "The American Organist" regarding the organ in the Convention Hall in Atlantic City. Only about three months ago, I was fortunate in having a private tour of the Convention Hall by Mr. McGurk, the Curator of both the 7 manual organ and the beautiful Ballroom organ. To play these historic instruments was the fulfillment of any organist's dream. I immediately wrote an article which was published in the Bulletin of the South West Chapter of the AGO. A copy of this article is enclosed herewith.

As Mr. McGurk indicated, the preservation of these organs is in real jeopardy. So I was delighted to see that an effort is being made to keep these valuable organs in a good state of repair. If you feel my article would be of any assistance in furthering this worthy cause, please feel free to use it. I am sure there is a financial burden attached to this task. I would be glad to assist either on a personal basis or through my AGO Chapter. Here is the article I wrote:

The Organs in the Convention Hall, Atlantic City

Unless you are a High Roller or a Slot Machine Freak, there is not too much incentive for an organist to visit Atlantic City these days. But let us not condemn this Seaside Resort out of hand. Just recently it was my pleasure and privilege to be given a private tour of what used to be two of the most important organs in the USA. They are both housed in the Convention Hall under the competent care of the Curator, Mr. Dennis McGurk, who kindly spent so much of his time to show me around.

The first organ we visited was the magnificent Classical/Theater organ housed in the Ballroom. The console is a four manual and pedal horseshoe type, controlling 55 ranks. (one rank more than the Wurlitzer in Radio City Music Hall). It was designed by Senator Emerson Richards, who also designed the main organ in the Convention Hall. The Ballroom organ was built by the W.W. Kimball Company of Chicago and is still in fine playing condition. There are 637 hand operated controls (stop tablets and pistons) and 52 foot operated controls. There is a total of 4,151 pipes, housed in two chambers. By today's standards, the organ sounds somewhat dull and a little mushy. However, one must think in the era of the 20's and 30's when such tone was considered most acceptable. Using the existing settings of the combination pistons, which were set up by the great organist, Robert Elmore, I was able to play

a Bach Prelude and Fugue as well as some popular ballads. Everything worked and it was a most enjoyable experience. Undoubtedly it would take a Hector Olivera to take full advantage of the organ but for a short time I felt 10 ft tall.

We then started the tour of the main organ. One tends to think that this was designed and built when the thinking was "Biggest is Best". The fact remains, however, that Emerson Richards was faced with the daunting task of filling the largest auditorium of its kind (it will seat 41,000) with music for every possible kind of event and occasion. To say that it needed an unusual organ would be the understatement of the year. The final result was a 7 manual console with 1,235 stop tablets which control the organ. The 33,000 plus pipes are housed in eight chambers around the room. Altogether, the organ contains 21 divisions. Wind pressures vary from a few inches to 100 inches for the Fanfare Trumpets. These are so loud that one cannot stand too close to them for there will be a significant loss of hearing. Built in 1929 by the Midmer-Losh Company of Long Island, New York, it was, and still is the largest organ in the world. No doubt purists would be horrified by such a "machine" but one has to be impressed by, not only the concept, but the sheer technical achievement of the whole organ. As Mr. McGurk lead me through the intricacies of the organ chambers I was amazed at the quality of the workmanship- of the pipes, windchests, swell shades, blowing equipment and the extraordinary wiring system. The 64 ft open wood Diaphone is a masterpiece of the woodworker's art.

To sit at the unique console, in which the top manual is almost vertical, is a remarkable experience. It was the proud boast of the builder that, in spite of its size, every keyboard and control was within easy reach of the organist. I would certainly agree with that statement. Compare that to the console of the 6 manual organ in the former Wanamaker store in Philadelphia where it is reported that a lady of rather short stature had to use an umbrella to reach some of the rocker tablets.

It is sad to relate that, due to lack of funds - and interest - this unique instrument in Atlantic City now has only the Great Division, Pedal Right, Solo, and Great-Solo in operation.

According to Mr. McGurk, all maintenance may be terminated by the end of August or, at the latest, by the end of this year.

John G. Keohane
Southampton, New Jersey, August 14, 1998

THE RECORDING ENIGMA

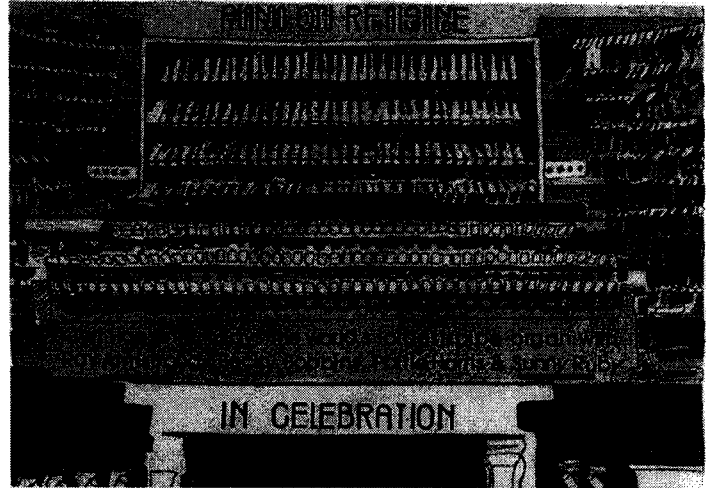
For mysterious reasons, the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ is perhaps the most *un-recorded* organ in the world. Only two known commercial recordings were ever made. In November, 1956, the famed Mercury Records recording team of Wilma Cozart and C.R. Fine recorded BACH ON THE BIGGEST released as Mercury Records MG50127 (mono) and SR90127 (stereo). Robert Elmore played Bach's Toccata & Fugue in D Minor, Wacht Auf!, In Dulci Jubilo, and Toccata, Adagio & Fugue in C. This record has long been out of print. Efforts are underway to have this recording, along with the album Boardwalk Pipes (recorded on the Ballroom Kimball organ by Robert Elmore), re-released as a single compact disc recording.

THE *OTHER* RECORDING

The **ACCHOS** has acquired a rare collection of 50 unsold copies of an LP recording made in 1977 featuring the Midmer-Losh organ. The album is titled Atlantic City Renaissance - In Celebration. Several tracks on the album were made with local vocal artists and recorded on an Allen organ at Atlantic Community College. The Midmer-Losh can be heard playing On the Boardwalk in Atlantic City, The Beer Barrel Polka, Down Mexico Way, The Skater's Waltz and La Paloma. This is the only recording left with representative quality of the big organ. Curt Haessner is the organist, and the sound of the great Midmer-Losh is unmistakable.

These recordings are being sold to the benefit of the **ACCHOS** with a percentage going to the Atlantic City Historical Museum, which graciously provided the recordings. They may be purchased for \$20 each plus \$3 shipping and handling (U.S. & Canada) or \$6 for overseas shipment. They may be ordered from **ACCHOS**. Here are some excerpts from the jacket notes:

"The organ, designed by Atlantic City's own Senator Emerson Richards, and built by Midmer-Losh in 1929 handily fills this great room with glorious



sound. That is the music you will hear on this album. It is a stunning sonic spectacular which high fidelity buffs will treasure for its unique range of sound.

The organ weighs 150 tons and was hauled into the city on 33 railroad cars. It has 33,113 pipes arranged in 455 ranks in 8 chambers. 12 more rooms contain the motors, electrical relays, and turbines needed to crank up and control this Colossus. The low 'C' of the diaphone profunda is the largest organ pipe in the world measuring 64 feet 9 inches in length. It is 10 inches square at the base and 36 inches square at the top. An Oregon fir roughly 785 years old provided the 3 inch thickness of its wood. The largest metal pipe is of cold-rolled zinc 5/16ths inch thick and weighing 1 ton. It is 38 feet long. The lowest note vibrates at 8 cycles per second and the highest at 10,000 cycles. 137,000 miles of electric wire connect its consoles, relays, pipes and chests.

This is a big sound in a big town...just what is needed for a really big celebration. The organ is in need of extensive repairs. In fact, at one point during the recording session Great Colossus gave out an earth shaking groan that filled the cavernous auditorium with a terrifying and eerie doomsday howl like the last paroxysm of death. Then it indeed seemed to die. We had to continue the session at Atlantic Community College on their Allen until Colossus was revived."

LIMITED EDITION PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

For a limited period of time members may purchase a special collection of prints made *directly* from the *original* 8x10 nitrate negatives. These prints will bear an authenticating backstamp indicating that they were made from the original Fred Hess & Son negatives. The prints will have selenium toning which adds to the overall stability of the prints. The full 8x10 negative will be printed on 8.5x11 paper. The following prints are being offered in this series:

- 5674-3 The 7-manual console in its kiosk
- 5565-2 The right stop jamb
- 4089-1 The 32' pedal diapason with workers indicating scale of pipes
- 4089-7 A portion of the Fanfare Organ
- 6044-5 The 5-manual portable console

This set of prints from the original negatives is available from the **ACCHOS** for \$125 postpaid.

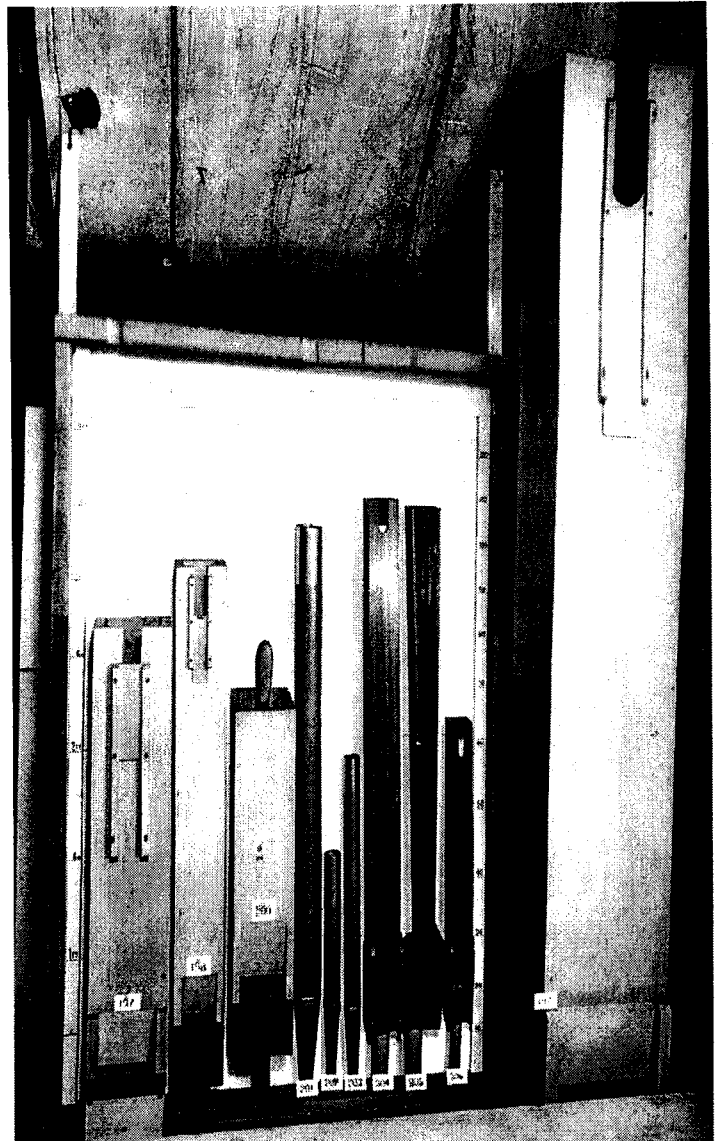
.....

PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Two publications are currently available from the **ACCHOS**. One is a 16-page pamphlet titled THE WORLD'S LARGEST ORGAN, by Stephen D. Smith. It provides an overview and stoplist for the organ and sells for \$6.

The other is a 28-page pamphlet titled INDEX OF STOPS ON THE MAIN AUDITORIUM ORGAN, by Stephen D. Smith. It presents a numerically ordered index which includes details of construction, wind pressure, scale, etc., and lists the pitches at which the stops are available on both consoles. It sells for \$10.

These publications may be ordered from the **ACCHOS**. All funds received from the sale of these publications are used in furtherance of the **ACCHOS** purpose.



FANFARE pipes, L-R: 197 Major Flute, 198 Stentor Flute 8, 200 Pileata Magna 8, 201 Flute Octaviane 4, 202 Recorder 22/3, 203 Fife 2, 304 Gamba Tuba 8, 305 Gamba Tuba Celeste 8, 306 Gamba Clarion 4, 197 Major Flute.

.....

KIOSK SPOTTED ON TV

Alert viewer, David Scribner, **ACCHOS** Director of Communications, spotted the organ console kiosk on TV at the end of the recent Miss America Pageant. It was seen briefly as the new Miss America was led offstage. This year's Pageant marked the first time in a number of years that the organ had been tuned and used during the Pageant ceremonies prior to the actual telecast. George and Bonny Jenista wrote saying: "Kinda wish that maybe a pageant candidate could play the organ in the talent competition!! Of course, it would be nice to reconnect the mobile console to facilitate its use as well." Maybe next year!!!