








the GRAND OPHICLEIDE

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

Issue 11

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

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On the Cover — Felix Hell "plays" the Midmer-Losh organ.

Felix Hell, the brilliant young German organ virtuoso, visited Atlantic City on February 7, 2001 for his first look at the Boardwalk Hall organ. A German television documentary team recorded his visit for a forthcoming story about him on German television. Due to the ongoing construction in the hall, the organ could not be switched on, but Felix got the idea and "played" like he had been on the bench there for years. *Photo by Antoni Scott*

A Pictorial Essay of the World's Largest Pipe Organ

The Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ

The ACCHOS is pleased to announce the forthcoming publication of a large format cloth-bound book featuring 95 of the famous Fred Hess & Son photographs reproduced in their original full size.

The black and white photographs in this collection were taken by Fred Hess & Son of Atlantic City during the construction of the Midmer-Losh Pipe Organ. Mr. Hess made periodic visits to the Convention Hall with a view camera to record the progress of the installation from 1929 to 1932. Over 170 images were made on 8" x 10" nitrate-base film negatives. They constitute a precious photographic documentary of extraordinary scope and interest. They afford views of the organ that can never again be photographed. They provide an unparalleled record of the organ's construction, and are true works of photographic art in themselves. In 1986, Nelson Barden of Boston acquired the entire collection of these negatives from Ed Schreier of the Atlantic City Photo Service, where they had languished for many years in a dusty cardboard box under the front counter. In 1998, Barden generously donated them to the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society to become a permanent part of the archives.

Michael Hager of Museum Photographic in Rochester, NY, has made a set of elegant contact prints from the 8 x 10 negatives. Ninety-five of these photographs are reproduced here in their original size, revealing the full detail of the negatives. This book will be a resource — and a treat — for historians, musicians, students of art and photography, and, of course, for organ fans. It reveals in remarkable detail the installation of the largest pipe organ ever built. Stephen D. Smith has prepared detailed captions for each photograph as the entire organ is toured. The book should be available by late summer, 2001. A special pre-publication announcement offer will be made to ACCHOS members when the delivery date of the books from the printer is determined.

Concert Hall Pipe Organ Renaissance

"In a grand fashion, the pipe organ has found its way back into major concert halls throughout the United States during the past decade. A look through the annals of this journal alone will reveal the organ's renaissance in places such as San Francisco, Dallas, Chicago, Seattle, [Jacksonville, FL, —Ed.] with upcoming installations in Los Angeles and Philadelphia."

(Opening statement in an article about the newly restored E. M. Skinner pipe organ in Severence Hall, Cleveland, home of the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra found in the January 2001 issue of The American Organist written by Jeffrey Dexter and Eric Gastier of the Schantz Organ Company.)

Let's add ATLANTIC CITY to the list!

▼ **The great English organist, Reginald Foorte, playing the Midmer-Losh organ.**



While my wife and I were in America in August 1938 to see the Moller organ being built at Hagerstown, Maryland, we went to Atlantic City and spent a fabulous day in and on the Convention Hall Organ. The Full Organ *without* the five Tubas on 100" wind was the most fantastically glorious sound I ever heard. But the pressure from the Tubas literally hurt one's ears.
It is the World's largest pipe organ ; note the seven manuals !

Welcome New Board Members

The ACCHOS welcomes two new members to the Board of Directors.

Stephen L. Adams is well known in the organ world. He has twice been a guest of Michael Barone on Pipe Dreams, has been a member of the AGO Fund Raising Adjunct Committee serving under Fred Swann, and a member of the AIO, serving on the Outreach Committee. Stephen is the donor of the Midmer-Losh sample pipes to the ACCHOS and has been a constant advisor since its inception in 1997. His story about the set of sample Midmer-Losh pipes is printed on the facing page.

He began his pipe organ career in 1973 with tonal finishing of the 5/117 Flli. Ruffatti at Coral Ridge Presbyterian, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, followed by a succession of Ruffatti and Rodgers instruments, including the 5/116 Ruffatti at the Garden Grove Community Church (later, Crystal Cathedral). As Pipe & Custom Products Division Manager at Rodgers, he was responsible for contracting, construction, installation, and finishing of the 5/189 Rodgers at Second Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, among others.

In search of high-pressure experience, Steve formed an alliance with David L. Junchen in 1975 restoring and finishing theatre pipe organs. The first instrument of the collaboration to receive international acclaim was the Reginald Foort touring Möller theatre organ installed at the Pasadena Civic Auditorium in 1980. This instrument was followed by a succession of large projects for wealthy families, culminating in the 5/89 Jasper Sanfilippo residence theatre organ with Tom Hazleton as tonal consultant.

As past President and director of the American Theatre Organ Society, Steve led the organization through the development of numerous outreach programs. Among the most notable of these programs was the establishment of board liaisons with the AGO, AIO, and the Smithsonian Institution. He also initiated an aggressive program of fiscal development and management that

made technical scholarships possible for ATOS members.

Antoni Scott has been involved with the ACCHOS virtually from its inception.

A Research Scientist at the Schering-Plough Research Institute in New Jersey, he has a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology and a Master of Science Degree in Physiology.

Antoni's special interests are photography and the pipe organ. He is the official ACCHOS photographer and has taken hundreds of photos of the organs with his Hasselblad camera. He performed two pieces on the Auditorium Organ CD released in January 1999, and his color photo of the Kiosk graces the cover of the CD booklet.

In recent years, Antoni has had the privilege of playing the following organs among others: St. Sulpice, Paris, Church of the Madeleine, Paris, St. Clotilde, Paris, Westminster Cathedral, London, St. Paul's Cathedral, London, Gouda, Holland, Bolsward, Holland, Kampen, Hooland, Dordrecht, Holland, West Point Military Academy, New York, St. John the Divine, New York, and the Atlantic City Convention Hall, New Jersey.

Professional Fund-raising Consultant

To help us develop a strategy, we have engaged the services of The Charles Webb Company, fund-raising counsel with headquarters in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and an office in New York City. The firm's 27 years of experience in planning and fund raising for cultural and educational institutions made it the best choice for our organization.

Charles Webb has served more than 200 not-for-profit institutions in his career. Clients include some of the most prominent organizations in the fields of art, music, dance, theater, historical preservation, science, conservation, education, and health and social services. Mr. Webb is a member of the National Society of Fund Raising Executives and a

founding member of the Theater Trustees of America. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London, England, he has also served on the Board of Trustees for numerous institutions in the United States.

The cost of a full and complete restoration has been estimated to range from \$8.9M to \$9.8M plus shipping costs ranging from \$600K to \$650K. An optional plan to relocate the seven blowers in the basement to a more environmentally friendly upper level in the auditorium is estimated to add \$2.725M to \$2.925M to the cost of restoration. In addition, a \$3M endowment is planned to support ongoing maintenance and operation from interest accrued.

The fund-raising program will be contingent on the availability of \$6.75M for restoration from government sources in New Jersey. The remaining \$9.75 million (including the \$3M endowment) will then be raised from private sources.



Errata

In issue 10 of the *Grand Ophicleide* we reproduced a letter from Lois Miller to D. Stuart Kennedy in which she stated that Arthur Scott Brook "was never the City Organist." Just for the record: In fact, he was officially appointed Municipal Organist for Atlantic City in 1923. He passed away, aged 78, in 1947 (his obituary appeared in *The Diapason* of March that year), though he probably retired some years earlier — as Ms. Miller seems to have taken over his duties at the Convention Hall and elsewhere in the city in 1942.

The origin of the Midmer-Losh Sample Pipes

By Stephen L. Adams

Past President, American Theatre Organ Society

The Atlantic City Convention Hall Midmer-Losh pipe organ has enjoyed the accolades of all who have witnessed its construction and sound. Arguably our nation's greatest testimony to the noble pursuit of musical expression in its highest form, the instrument also stands today as the legacy of a handful of world-class artisans and theoreticians.

David L. Junchen is best known as the author of *The History of the American Theatre Organ, volumes 1-3*. In his exhaustive work, (augmented posthumously in Volume 3 by publisher Preston Kaufmann) David defined the scope of the book as embracing "any pipe organ designed and used to play popular music of the day." At least in small part, he arrived at this definition in order to allow for the inclusion of one of his greatest favorites — the Atlantic City Convention Hall Midmer-Losh instrument.

In 1972, David was in search of a brass trumpet for a theatre organ project and was having no luck. He decided to contact Midmer-Losh along with other eastern builders to see if this rank lingered in their inventory. In his conversation with the aging George Losh, he discovered that one had been purchased from Wurlitzer for the Atlantic City project, but never used. It remained in inventory until Möller acquired it for the Reginald Foort touring organ in the late 1930s.

Dave's conversation with George uncovered the existence of one remaining sample pipe set of nineteen pipes made for Senator Emerson Richard's consideration during construction. Dave immediately purchased the set sight-unseen and placed it in storage with other valued and unique pipe organ artifacts. They remained in his collection until 1992 and his premature death, whereupon this author inherited them as part of his estate.



The sample pipes continued to linger in storage until a conversation with Charles Swisher revealed a groundswell of interest in reviving the great Convention Hall Organ. In 1998, the pipes were packed and shipped to the Schoenstein Organ Company of San Francisco for safe storage and anticipation of an eventual display project. An exhibit possibility at Ocean One Mall on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City became available in 1999 and the pipes were shipped to then ACCHOS Board Member, David Scribner, in Pensacola, Florida for examination and photo documentation.

Subsequently, they were delivered to Nichols & Simpson, Organbuilders of Little Rock, Arkansas. As a donation of time and materials, and under the direction and supervision of Timothy M. Bovard of that firm, they were cleaned and prepared for display. A display rack for 12 of the most suitable pipes was fabricated and the display was sent to Atlantic City.

The exhibit opened on October 13, 1999. The following pipes are now permanently mounted in a large Plexiglas display case in the center area of the exhibit:

MUTED TRUMPET
VOX HUMANA
MAJOR OBOE
MILITARY BUGLE
BASSOON
VIOL
PICCOLO
GAMBA TUBA
JUBALFLOTE
SILVER FLUTE #1
SILVER FLUTE #2
DOPPEL SPITZFLUTE

Editor's Note: The effect of the exhibit is quite dramatic, and nicely complements the "Welcome To Atlantic City" display which occupies the Mall space next door to the "Boardwalk Pipes" exhibit. The walls of the exhibit space are covered with an assortment of photographs and articles relating to the ACCH Organ. Many of these are enlargements of original Fred Hess and Son black-and-white photographs; others are contemporary color photos of both the great Midmer-Losh organ in the main auditorium and the beautiful Kimball organ in the Ballroom. The exhibit is free of charge and open to the public daily.



▲ Lemare is seated at the console in the balcony at the far left center of the photograph, playing *The Star-Spangled Banner*. The Echo Organ is in the center of the architectural flare in the upper right area.

Who says people don't attend organ concerts?

This rare photo composite has never been published. The two photos were a gift to Charles Swisher from Be Lemare, Edwin H. Lemare's daughter, from Lemare's private collection.

They were taken on Easter Sunday (therefore all the hats!), 1917, on the occasion of the rededication of Austin Opus 500 in the San Francisco Civic Auditorium before a crowd of 10,000 people. The 4-manual, 117-rank organ was first installed as the musical centerpiece for the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in 1915, and was given to the City of San Francisco by the Exposition Committee after the Exposition closed. The legendary English organist, Edwin H. Lemare was the Exposition Organist in 1915 and became the San Francisco Municipal Organist in 1917. He was p



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a salary of \$10,000 a year making him the highest paid musician in the world at the time. His popularity was staggering and always attracted large audiences.

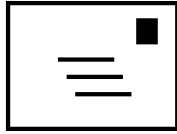
Lemare was a prolific composer, arranger, and transcriber — especially of orchestral works by Wagner, Tchaikowsky, Dvorak, and others. One of his most famous compositions was the “Andantino in D flat” — which a later composer made into “Moonlight and Roses.” He became adept at “thumbing” — the technique

of bringing out an extra melody. He achieved completely independent action of this thumbs, accompanying legato thumb melodies with trills and rapid figurations with the fingers. While his fingers played an upper manual, his thumbs dipped to the keyboard below for a melody on different stops. With both hands ranging over three or even four manuals simultaneously and another melody played with the right foot, the effect was of Lemare playing duets with himself.



▲ Edwin H. Lemare
Note the length of his fingers!

In a newspaper interview, Lemare explained his philosophy of using municipal organ concerts to educate the public: “The appeal is fundamentally spiritual or emotional. The normal listener to music doesn’t listen to an organ recital as he listens to an orchestral concert. The latter challenges his attention. The former woos it. There is that in an organ which passeth understanding. It is persuasive, spiritual, and golden. It is never merely pretty. It should be the musical center of the city, because it can be heard by the greatest number at the smallest cost. It must never be played in connection with any affair other than one which is essentially and intrinsically musical. There should surround it, at all times, the suggestion of the spiritual. After all, the organ comes to us from the church. And it makes little difference what church you worship in; the point is to get from the diapasons the deep, fundamental and reverberating suggestion of things divine.”



we get mail

Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to renew my membership in ACCHOS. Please find enclosed a Money Order in the amount of \$100.

I am thrilled with the CD I received and never tire of playing it. Clifton Stroud must have thought he had gone to heaven when, on a visit, he was asked to record 'Abide with me'. I listen as the volume builds with each verse and, almost breathlessly, wait for that final great chord. What a sound! I am sure I would die happily if I could sit at that console and play a chord like that. Congratulations to all who played or helped in any way with the CD.

I really look forward to the Newsletters, and the colored section in the last issue is really good.

Thanks to all, keep up the good work, it is appreciated.

*Edward Gill
Ontario, Canada*

News of the major restoration program for the Convention Hall has reached these distant shores and caused in me considerable interest. Over the last seven decades, the colossal musical instrument which inhabits the hall has become something of a legend throughout the world and is common with many organ enthusiasts I have a very great personal interest in it and its future.

The importance of the Organ of Convention Hall on a planetary scale cannot be overestimated. It is the largest and loudest musical instrument ever constructed. It is an incredible feat of engineering built on a scale the vastness of which is stupefying and utterly without parallel in organbuilding. The scope of its musical resources is by far greater than any other musical instrument ever conceived, and amongst the legions of richly varied voices are many which are the only examples ever built. From an historical perspective, its significance has few equals; it marks a turning-point in American organbuilding and contains several innovations which anticipated later trends by many years. In summary, it is a priceless treasure; a towering testament to the dream of one New Jersey man who, by his great ambition and imagination, defined the upper and outer limits of organbuilding for all time in this monumental machine.

The instrument is just as worthy of restoration as the greatest historic Organs of Europe, many of which have had much care lavished upon them in recent years. May I please urge you to explore every available possibility of including the restoration of the Organ as part of the Hall restoration program. The world await the joyous day when the great Organ of Atlantic City Convention Hall speaks again in all of its incomparable majesty.

*Stephen Walmsley
Oxford University, Oxford, England
April 14, 1998*

Mike Hammer asks and Stephen Smith replies:

Q There are several photographs that show "beaters." I've tried to figure out what a "beater" could be or how it works. The photos of beaters tell me little.

A "Beaters" are provided for diapason pipes only and, basically, they act in the same way as reed tongues, in that the wind pressure causes them to swing (beat) back and forth against an aperture (opening) in a shallot at the base of the pipe. This has the effect of chopping-up the wind and thereby causing a specific number of vibrations per second to sound for the note required. It is fairly unusual to find diaphones in church organs (though there are some) but they are extremely common in theater organs.

Q Two other terms I cannot find explanations for are "straight" and "unit" in the description of the stops.

A Technically, a "unified" stop (unit) is a rank of pipes which is either (a) available at a variety of pitches (e.g. 16-8-4) and/or (b) playable from more than one keyboard or department (e.g. an 8-foot stop which is "borrowed" from the Great to the Pedal and playable independently on either department regardless of whether it is in use on the other). However, the term "unit", in common usage, generally refers to the former, i.e. an extended rank. A "straight" stop is one which is neither extended or borrowed, i.e. it is not unified. Once again, unified ranks are not used a great deal in church organs,

though they are very common in theater organs (which, incidentally, were originally called "unit organs").

Q The last question: Does it matter where I buy the Boardwalk Organ CD? Will the committee receive equal compensation whether I get it from you -- or from the Organ Historical Society?

A More of the proceeds from the sale of the CD goes to the ACCHOS if you purchase it from us.

Q I never knew diaphones were reed stops.

A Actually, they can provide basses for a number of stop classes, including reeds, diapasons, and strings - it all depends on how they are voiced.

Q "Tuba mirabilis": Tuba (English tube?), I think, means a trumpet-like shape but what does "mirabilis" mean in English?

A *Mirabilis* is Latin for "wonderful".

Q "Ophicleide"? You might have defined the name of your magazine somewhere, but I cannot find it. What does it mean? I do know it's a gloriously powerful stop, the word itself — what does it mean?

A The Grand Ophicleide magazine is named after the ACCH instrument's loudest stop. As an instrument of

A Tribute to William R. Rosser

by Antoni Scott

ancient times, the ophicleide was a brass instrument which, in many ways, can be thought of as the predecessor of the tuba.

Once the organ is restored, I know I would be quite willing to pay for a CD that has a detailed demonstration of the various stops. I'm not alone. Stentorophone, Tibia Major, Fagotto, Egyptian Horn, Harmonic Clarion, etc. for instance. There are so many romantic and charmingly idiosyncratic names.

It is hoped that, at some stage in the future, such a demonstration CD can be produced.

Charles L. Derus, Jr. asks and Charles Swisher responds:

What I would like to ask is, would it be possible to formulate a top view diagram of the entire main auditorium based, say, on this center photo, and utilizing the same template of the chambers to give readers a better sense of just where the various chambers are located, (in the front, along the side, etc.) and just how extensive the pipe ranks are, in relation to the main console.

This is a good idea and a diagram is under preparation that will show the relationship of the Midmer-Losh organ console and the eight chambers in the main auditorium as well as the location of the ballroom and the Kimball organ and its chambers.

William R. Rosser was the second curator of the two organs at the Convention Hall, Atlantic City. I met him when I was attending a Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biologists Convention (FASEB) back in 1970. Fully knowing that the Midmer-Losh organ was in this huge building, I couldn't wait to take the time out from my meetings to see it. Although I had seen many photographs of the console, I was not prepared for what I was about to see. The photograph did not do the console justice, it seemed flat and undimensional, though it clearly showed the seven manuals and 1,235 stop-keys. Seen in real life, this immense console staggers the mind. Row after row of so many stops in one instrument seemed not to be possible, but there it was right in front of me. It left a lasting impression on me.

While the FASEB convention was under way, I took the time out to go up on the stage and join a dozen or so spectators surrounding the console. I suppose they were all organ enthusiasts of one kind or another looking at this amazing piece of organ building history. An unimposing gentleman, Mr. Rosser, arrived in a white shirt accompanied by a young girl. She sat down at the huge console and began to play some popular music (I always remember Burt Bacharach's "The Girl of Ipenema"). She looked lost inside this gigantic "controlling machine" but she was certainly in control. Thoughts that passed through my mind focused in on how long it would take someone to become familiar with this monster organ's vast resources.

As she played this popular tune, Mr. Rosser would take the opportunity to change stops at the end of the appropriate bars without disrupting the continuity of her playing. He went through the reeds one at a time on what was probably the Great-Solo (although I cannot now be sure). I was immediately impressed with not only the clarity of the

reeds, but the fact that they were of the right scale for the size of the room, and it was a huge room at that! They did not seem to be lost in the size of the building as I have heard happen with stops on so many other big organs.

When the organist was playing on her own, Mr. Rosser stepped down from the console, stood back and listened. I took the opportunity to introduce myself and express my interest in the organ. He offered to show me the inside of the organ. I had no idea at this time as to what a surprise it would be. Rattling off facts and figures, he must have sensed my interest because we toured the entire instrument — which took hours. Every organ chamber except the ones in the ceiling, were shown to me. I had seen enough. I went back to my hotel room and couldn't stop thinking about this organ. The scale of the pipes was beyond anything I had imagined. It raised the bar for everything I had seen before and everything after it.

The following day I met Mr. Rosser again at the console and started to talk to him about the interesting tour he had given me the day before. He did not seem uninterested in answering any of my questions. Many of which were not only about the Midmer-Losh organ in the hall, but about an organ I was about to inherit from a friend of mine in Pittsburgh; a nine rank Estey of 1911 vintage that would otherwise have been junked. It was in terrible shape and needed repair.

After transporting the Estey I started to assess the situation. Mr. Rosser was very helpful. He must have detected my enthusiasm because he always volunteered to help. He suggested that I convert the sluggish, noisy tubular-pneumatic action to electro-pneumatic. Everything up to this point was new to me. I new *nothing*, other than the basics, about how an organ really worked. Mr. Rosser was a veritable repository of

Continued on page 10

A Tribute to William R. Rosser

Continued from page 10

information. Little by little I re-leathered the nine ranks, converted the entire organ to electro-pneumatic operation and replaced three ranks of pipes that were severely damaged during the initial removal from the church prior to its transport to Pittsburgh. I also put a used, but like-new, console on the organ. It took me a over a year to do it, but it was thanks to Mr. Rosser that I was able to do it at all!

After completion of this organ, a friend of mine got interested in doing a similar thing. His church had burned down but half of the organ (six ranks) was undamaged. He removed the organ with the intention of rebuilding it for himself, but gave up before he got started, admitting that the project was too big. Fortunately, he gave me the pipes and a six rank windchest and I immediately planned to add them to my existing organ. Again, Rosser stepped in and offered assistance. After the entire project was finished the fifteen-rank instrument sounded magnificent.

I got to know him even better over the next few years. He asked if I would assist him in looking over a famous organ in Hoboken, New Jersey. This organ had apparently been designed by George Ashdown Audsley, the famous organ architect and was an example of his "Quintuple expression". Certain divisions were in several "swell boxes" and offered much greater flexibility than a single swell box. It was very interesting to go through this organ with Mr. Rosser. Afterwards, he stayed at our home and entertained my wife and I on the organ. Great times.

Back at Convention Hall, I was down there with my wife. He took pleasure in showing me some sample 50" reeds that he took from some of the chests. He asked me to blow on them. After a normal puff nothing happened. A harder puff, still nothing. A powerful puff and the most incredible sound came out of the reed pipe. Rosser laughed. He pulled off the boot to reveal the reed inside. I

can't remember what stop it was, but the shallot had an upward curve to it, rather than the straight shallot I was familiar with, and the reed was weighted on the end with a drop of solder that seemed to have been rather crudely applied. He also showed me a Clarinet pipe that had a free reed in it rather than a conventional reed beating against a shallot. He showed me everything in the organ from the now-defunct combination action, to the immense blowers, to the relay rooms under pressure. We were up in the Left Chamber where the immense Bombarde and Diaphone pipes reside. He walked over the pipes like they were tall trees and beckoned me to follow. I carefully negotiated my way across these huge pedal pipes asking what would happen if I fell down into one of them (that's how big they are, a person could easily fit into the top of one of these flared pipes). "Well," he said, "we would just have to throw you down a rope and pull you out, that is, if you went down feet first!"

One day I got a call from Rosser. He had a two manual, 2½ rank, Wicks Direct Electric organ. He said I could sell it for him and keep anything over \$1500. After assembling it in my home (it took an afternoon), I had it sold for \$2500 within a month. Rosser laughed and said he should have asked for more. The fact that he trusted me with it in the first place was an honor. I took the \$1000 and immediately put it into my "big" organ.

Another of Rosser's visits to my home ended with an entertaining evening playing the two manual and pedal reed organ. We spent hours just talking about the big organ in the Convention Hall and its possible future. It did not sound good. At that time, Casinos were starting to make an appearance in Atlantic City. This put a ray of hope in everyone's mind that some gambling profit "money" might end up in the organ. Thirty years later, we are still on square one, and waiting.

As long as I knew Rosser, he told me that the Left Chamber and all of the

Gallery departments did not work. He also told me that Robert Elmore only played on the two front chambers during his famous 1958 recording session of "Bach on the Biggest". He was present while it was being recorded. That must have been something.

Advancing years and failing health resulted in his inability to continue his duties maintaining the organs in Convention Hall. I found out that he left the Hall and retired in Florida, somewhere. I called him. Although he remembered me, he sounded very ill. His voice was weak but he still had a good sense of humor.

William Rosser made a big impact on my life. My knowledge of organs grew exponentially after meeting him. He was a generous person, always giving information, suggestions and help. He encouraged me to continue rebuilding the organ in my home and because of the knowledge I had gained from him I had no fear of enlarging it by six ranks. Rosser visited our home one time accompanied by a friend and he couldn't wait to show off my pipe organ. I had a sense of pride knowing that it was good enough for Rosser to show someone else.

Back in 1971 I got my chance to play the big organ in the Hall. Rosser had arranged for the "Electrical Union" to stand by while he did some adjustments to something up in the right chamber. He said, "Why don't you play that piece you like so much?" Half way through Bach's Toccata in D Minor, something went terribly wrong and hundreds of pipes ciphred at the same time. About 5 minutes later he fixed it and all fell silent. I think some bottom boards came loose, but he had to shut it all down. My chance to finish that piece that I like "so much" came some 27 years later when members of the ACCHOS gathered in November 1998, to make the historic third recording of this incredible instrument. Thoughts of Rosser came to mind while I was playing. It was an emotional moment for me. Thank you, Mr. Rosser, for being the person you were. I hope you liked it.

Atlantic City Star-Ledger, October 15, 1999

The restoration of musical marvel is in the pipeline

By Guy Sterling, Staff Writer

Vicki Gold Levi remembers the booming, swirling sound of Convention Hall's pipe organ well. She first experienced it in the late 1940s, as a young girl serving as a page at the Miss America Pageant.

"It was an all-filling and all-fulfilling sound at the same time, spiritual really," said Levi, an Atlantic City native and unofficial city historian. "It made you feel as close to heaven as you could be on earth."

Whether that sound, in all its power and glory, will ever be heard again is a question still to be answered. Age, neglect and damage from the elements have cost the organ—recognized as the biggest of its type in the world—more than two-thirds of its playing capacity.

A study to determine what's needed to restore the 70-year-old instrument and return it to full function began this week and should be finished before the end of the year. A key element of the final report will be cost, but there's also some concern over whether restoring or upgrading all of the organ's weakened, damaged or outdated parts is possible.

Renowned as an acoustic and mechanical marvel, the pipe organ in Convention Hall's main auditorium was designed by Atlantic City resident Emerson Richards, onetime Republican majority leader in the state Senate who died in 1963, and built by the now-defunct Midmer-Losh Organ Co. of Long Island. It took three years to build at a princely Depression-era sum of \$500,000 and was

first used in recital in 1932.

In its heyday, the organ was used during conventions, sporting events, Sunday ice skating sessions, Miss America pageants and for recitals. It was last used on a regular basis a half-century ago.

The organ operates with enough electrical wire to circle the globe twice and more than 32,000 pipes housed in eight chambers of different sizes situated around the gigantic hall. The pipes vary drastically in size, from as small as a pinkie finger and as thin as a nail up to the height and circumference of a 60-foot tree.

The organ's console, which sits on the building's main stage in a crown-like kiosk, features seven keyboards that can produce notes and rhythms of a full orchestra—everything from violins and harps to chimes, marimbas and a grand piano.

"You need a genius to play it," said Jean-Louis Coignet, curator of organs for the city of Paris who's helping the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society with the project.

Coignet described the Atlantic City Convention Center as "the mecca of the organ. Restoring it is a must . . . We can't even conceive of what it'll sound like once it's restored, it'll be that magnificent."

The effort to preserve the Convention Hall organ, as well as a smaller theater organ in an adjoining ballroom, has been led by the society, a group of several hundred pipe organ enthusiasts who got together a couple of years ago. Its president is Ste-

phen Smith, who gave up his job on the London Underground to work full-time on the organs' restoration.

But even with their vast knowledge of the instruments' intricacies, society members are facing daunting technical and financial obstacles to their effort to restore the organs to their full working potential.

Bally's Park Place Casino and Hotel kicked in \$10,000 to fund the feasibility study, but the society estimates the cost of restoring the Midmer-Losh organ at between \$3 million and \$5 million. Serious fundraising has yet to start. Even if the funding goals are met, it could take one to three years to restore the organ.

The corrective steps include cleaning, replacing or rebuilding water-damaged or metal-fatigued pipes, along with the wooden wind chests that support the pipes; re-leathering valve mechanisms and the bellows in the wind system; introducing solid-state electronic technology to the instrument, and cleaning the chambers.

The most difficult job may be upgrading the instrument's electronic switching system, said John Peragallo 3d, whose family's Paterson-based company has been restoring pipe organs for 80 years. It's also likely that any pipe smaller than eight feet will be removed and taken to a shop for repair, while the larger ones will be fixed in place, he added. "This restoration will take a considerable amount of time," Peragallo said.

Even when played at the present, significantly diminished capacity, it sounds as good as or better than most other pipe organs in existence, said Charles Swisher, the society's vice president. But the team study has so far found the organ to be in a highly restorable condition.

"It's a dream come true for me and the highlight of a career to be involved in this," said Jack Bethards, the study team's chief consultant and president of Schoenstein & Co., a San Francisco-based organ building company. "This is the Taj Mahal of pipe organs. It's the first picture you come to in the textbooks."

The building's \$76 million [now \$100 million —*Ed.*] rehabilitation budget included funds only to protect the pipe organ, but nothing for restoration. Bob McClintock, Convention Hall's general manager, said he's hopeful the society's fund-raising drive succeeds, as he envisions grander uses for the pipe organ down the line rather than merely providing background music at hockey games. "The challenge will be finding the best way to show it off to the world," he added.

That idea sat well with Anthony Kutschera, a co-founder of the Atlantic City Historical Museum and lifelong resident of the resort town.

"It would be great if the pipe organ were to become an attraction in its own right," he said. "This is a city that desperately needs attractions other than casino gambling."

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Statement of Purpose

The Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc. was formed in 1997 and exists to:

- Create a greater public awareness of and interest in the Convention Hall's organs, especially in terms of their future use.
- Promote both instruments through newsletters, magazine articles, and recordings; both audio and video.
- Arrange periodic organ recitals, and organize regular meetings of ACCHOS members.
- Encourage ongoing maintenance of the instruments, and seek funding for crucial restoration at local, state, federal, and international levels.

Membership benefits include: **the Grand Ophicleide**, published four times a year containing the latest news and developments concerning both the great Auditorium Midmer-Losh and the Kimball in the Ballroom, and the chance to help support the efforts of the Society in fulfilling the Statement of Purpose printed above.

Yearly ACCHOS membership dues are:

Regular - \$20	Seniors & Students \$15
Contributor - \$40	Donor - \$75
Supporter - \$100	Benefactor - \$250
Sponsor - \$500	LIFE MEMBERSHIP - \$1,000

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