

# *the* GRAND OPHICLEIDE

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

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e-mail: [info@acchos.org](mailto:info@acchos.org) Website: [www.acchos.org](http://www.acchos.org)

ATLANTIC  
CITY  
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ORGAN  
SOCIETY  
INC

1009 BAY RIDGE AVENUE, PMB 108, ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21403, U.S.A.

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

1009 Bay Ridge Avenue, PMB 108, Annapolis, Maryland 21403  
www.acchos.org • info@acchos.org

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**On the Cover** — Felix Hell "playing" the Bombard Manual. This photo was taken in February 2001 during a videotaping for The History Channel's program, *The Most*, Episode 15, and for a German TV documentary. Note the ease with which Felix reaches the seventh manual – a testimony to the console's unique ergonomic design. The organ was not playing, but Felix was clearly practicing a dramatic passage from memory. *Photo by Antoni Scott.*

*Photos in this issue, except where identified, were taken by Antoni Scott, Harry Bellangy, Stephen Smith, and Charles Swisher.*





Above, Boardwalk Hall Left & Right Façade Detail (Please see page 4.)

Right, Aerial view of Boardwalk Hall. Building on the left has since been demolished.

Bottom left, The new ice rink in the main auditorium; bottom right, The Atlantic Ocean seen through the colonnade in front of Boardwalk Hall.



Photo: Martin Photography



**A PERMANENT MONUMENT CONCEIVED AS A TRIBUTE TO THE IDEALS OF ATLANTIC CITY  
BUILT BY ITS CITIZENS AND DEDICATED TO RECREATION  
SOCIAL PROGRESS AND INDUSTRIAL ACHIEVEMENTS**

These monumental engravings on the façade of Boardwalk Hall tell quite a story and help make clear the reason for the existence of "The world's largest pipe organ" in the building.

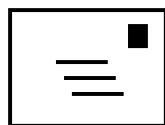
Ed Davis writes, in his remarkable book, *Atlantic City Diary - A Century of Memories 1880-1985*: "30,000 persons witnessed the dedication of our new Convention Hall, in June [1929]. Vice-President of the United States, Charles Curtis, was one of the principal speakers and Mayor Ruffu was the Master of Ceremonies. 'A Temple Of World Peace'....'The Geneva Of the Americas'...that was the prophecy of national and world statesmen at the opening of the new \$15,000,000 structure, at Georgia Avenue and the Boardwalk.

"Seats in the world's largest auditorium were available

mainly in the balcony, due to the National Electric Light Association exhibits being set up. The big show got underway at 10 P.M., and the hall's General Manager, Lincoln G. Dickey was a very proud man as he viewed the culmination of years of planning and construction. Two U.S. Navy units played important roles in the dedication. The battleship U.S.S. Wyoming, anchored offshore, fired a salute from her 16-inch guns to honor the Vice-President, while the dirigible, U.S.S. Los Angeles, moved silently overhead, then sounded a siren setting off an 'electric ear' on the ground, which automatically threw a switch. This turned on the exterior lighting of the great hall, creating an 'Aurora Borealis' effect!"

*(Reprinted with permission of the Author.)*

8<sup>th</sup> December 2002



**we get mail**

Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society  
109 Bay Ridge Avenue, PMB 108  
Annapolis, Maryland 21403

Dear Sirs,

I was terribly disheartened to hear that the magnificent Kimball Organ in the Ballroom was carelessly and unnecessarily silenced during the recent renovations to that space. I was privileged to play the Ballroom Organ on a visit to the Convention Hall in 1998, and spent an afternoon exploring its abundantly rich tonal palette. What impressed me initially was the instrument's comprehensive specification, including a wealth of Kimball's exquisite string and reed voices, together with complete Diapason choruses, right up to mixtures! Clearly this organ was designed to play all types of music and entertain all musical tastes: from Broadway show tune medleys, to Classical organ repertoire, to transcriptions of orchestral works. The Ballroom organ, unlike any other I have played, is three instruments in one: a Theatre organ, a Concert organ, and a Symphonic masterpiece. The Ballroom Organ specification is nothing short of brilliant.

Completely intact, vintage instruments are rare indeed, and must be cherished and preserved. Atlantic City is fortunate to possess one of Kimball's finest instruments, and I am confident that the people of Atlantic City, conventioners, and other visitors would greatly enjoy this instrument, once restored and properly showcased.

I trust that those in authority and those in charge of this musical gem will do everything possible to restore it in a timely fashion. I am happy to do anything I can to assist you in your efforts.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Richard Conte  
Grand Court Organist  
The Wanamaker Organ at Lord & Taylor  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

# *A Pictorial Tour of the Midmer-Losh organ*

**W**hile there has been considerable damage to the organ over the years (some of which has been shown in recent newsletter photographs) the vast majority of pipework is stable and intact. This is especially true in the Right Stage and Left Stage chambers, along with portions of the gallery and ceiling chambers. Some windchests in the gallery and ceiling chambers will have to be rebuilt due to water damage and other windchests will need releathering.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Midmer-Losh organ is that it is a true “original.” Its initial comprehensive design has never been altered over the years. There have been no tonal changes, addition or removal of ranks, or modifications made to the instrument in the intervening years, and thus it is ready for a remarkable restoration to take place.

The following photographs reveal some of the interesting design aspects and intrigues of the organ.



No, it's not a UFO sighting; these are pipes from the Great-Solo's English Horn stop (a cor anglais-type voice). Nearest the shades are some French Horn pipes.



Some of the larger pipes in the Choir organ's Dulciana rank. Stamped above the upper lip on the center pipe are: “171” (stop number), “5550” (Midmer-Losh opus number), “16” (pitch), “DUL” (Dulciana), “AAA#” (note).



## SPECIAL FEATURE



Heavy duty construction! Turnbuckle mechanisms secure the various parts of the 100-inch Grand Ophicleide's 16-foot pipe. Note, also, the bracket that holds the tuning wire in place.



Boardwalk Hall's west end, on Pacific Avenue. The organ shop measures approximately 60ft. x 25ft. and can be seen here behind the single-lancet windows on the left side of the building. Above this, is another room of similar dimensions. This unused room may be a possible location for some of the instrument's blowers — if the suggestion to move them "above sea level" is agreed.



The horizontally-installed basses of the Gallery III organ's Contra Diapason have received a thorough drenching at some stage(s) and the chamber walls, etc., are in a poor condition.



Although Dulzian stops usually have fractional-length resonators, this is not the case in the 64-foot version at the Convention Hall. This pipe, from the rank's trebles, actually has "Posaune" stamped on the underside of its block.

**SPECIAL FEATURE**



A chest in the Gallery IV organ which, over the years, has sustained considerable water damage. The brass pipes in the bottom of the picture belong to the Saxophone, stop #249.



Heavy duty construction! The tuning wire and weighted tongue of the 100-inch Grand Ophicleide's 16-foot pipe.



Wind regulator for the Gallery I organ's 100-inch reeds. Eight springs on the sides of this device exert some 3,000 pounds of pressure and the knife switch (seen at top) only makes contact — allowing the stops to speak — when the full pressure is reached.



**SPECIAL FEATURE**



A view showing most of the Unenclosed Choir organ's stop-keys on the main console. Note how the department's four-rank mixture, stop #170, is operated by two registers (Rausch Quint and Scharf Mixture), each controlling two ranks. How well do you know the Convention Hall organ? Can you identify the two registers belonging to the Unenclosed Choir that aren't viewable in this picture?

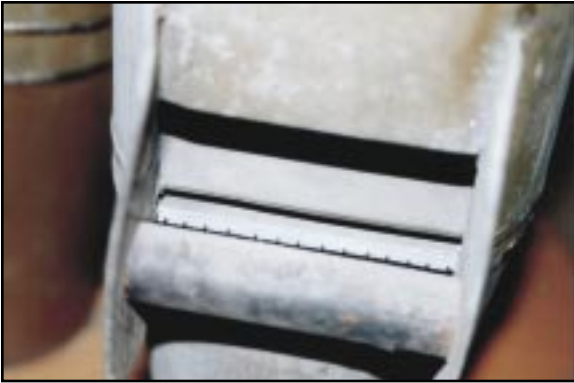


The Solo organ's four-rank Carillon mixture. Note the combination of open, capped, and harmonic ranks. On the picture's right, are some Wald Flute pipes with two solder lines — indicating that the second (double) languid was inserted after the pipes were originally made in the normal way. On the left, a couple of Tibia Rex pipes, with their very large ears, can be seen.



Dennis McGurk attempts to "get a grip" on the 32-foot pipe of the Diaphone rank in the Pedal Left.





A double languid pipe in the Gallery I organ's Mixture Mirabilis stop. Note the nicking on the lower languid but not on the upper (double) one.

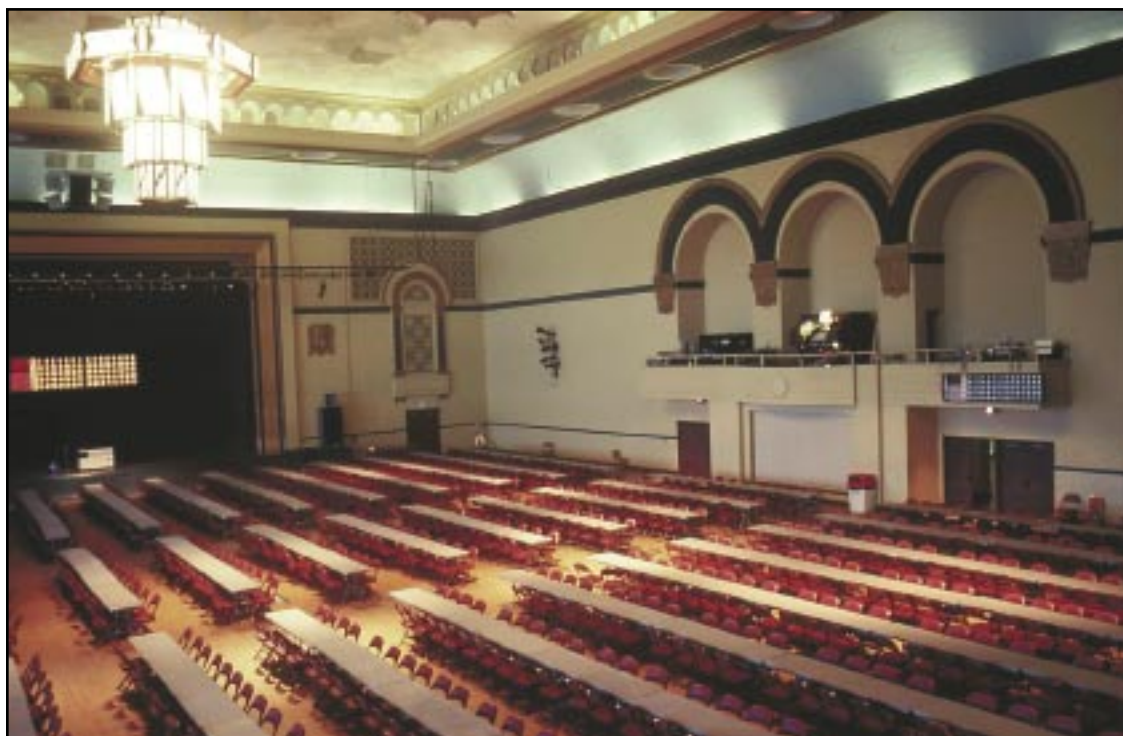


The 4-foot octave of the massively-scaled Stentor Flute in the Fanfare organ.



Interior of the "keyer" relay room for the departments sited in the Right Stage and Right Forward chambers.

## *The other Jewel in the Crown*



**View of the Ballroom. The right chamber can be seen in the center of the photo. The console is in the organ balcony to the right.**

**A**s if having a seven-manual, 449-rank pipe organ in its main auditorium wasn't enough, the Atlantic City Boardwalk Convention Hall also boasts a second *jewel* in its pipe organ crown; the splendid 55-rank instrument in the Ballroom by W.W. Kimball of Chicago, Illinois.

In another part of this monumental building is a 5,000-seat ballroom, measuring 181 feet long, 128 feet wide, and 75 feet high. The Kimball organ, like its sister in the main auditorium, was designed by Senator Emerson Richards who also supervised the installation and tonal finishing of both instruments. The shape and dimensions of the ballroom, together with its hard maple dance floor afford an elegant and rich acoustical setting for the organ, which speaks from two separate chambers, via decorative grills, flanking a large stage at one end of the room. The console is located on a balcony on the inside of the room.

The Kimball is extraordinarily versatile and is intended to serve as a classical and theatre organ. It has 19 straight voices and 23 units, totaling 55 ranks and 4,151 pipes. When designing the instrument, Senator Richards first specified a "major" Diapason chorus for the fourth manual and a "minor" Diapason chorus for the first. To these he added chorus reeds, including the only known Brass Trumpet stop made by Kimball. He then provided 23 unit voices, comprising flutes, strings,

and reeds of orchestral character. This 'combination' organ proved to be an outstanding success, being of solid and brilliant character. It was said to be both larger and louder than any theatre organ at the time. There is a full complement of percussions, including a grand piano that is no longer in place. The four-manual console has 357 stop keys and was the largest horseshoe console ever built by the firm. A Kimball "Soloist" roll-player action for 13 ranks is located near the console.

The instrument was designed in 1929 and the completed in April 1931.

After over 70 years of service, the organ is in need of a typical restoration. Some water damage to windchests from old roof leaks require attention. During the renovation from 1999-2001, the original relay and high-pressure blower had to be removed to make way for a new stairway. Plans call for the renovation of the console and the relocation of the main Spencer blower from the basement garage area to a designated space across a hallway behind the Ballroom stage.

The original Kimball concert grand player piano attached to the organ was sold many years ago. In 2002, it was located for sale by a dealer in Georgia. A trade for three old pianos stored in the organ workroom was made, and the partially restored piano is now safely stored in the workroom awaiting a time when it can be restored and re-connected to the organ.





"Toy counter" in the left organ chamber



Upper Left chamber: Tibia Clausa, Viola, Clarabella, Viola Celeste



The Kimball Console



Lower Right chamber: Brass Trumpet, Orchestral Oboe, English Horn, French Horn



Wooden wrench used to lift Diaphone pipes

**Boardwalk Pipes Exhibit at Ocean One Mall**



The Boardwalk Pipes exhibit was installed on the second floor of Ocean One Mall on the Boardwalk and dedicated on

October 13, 1999. Many thousands of visitors saw the exhibit during its three-year run, and numerous memberships were received from visitors as a consequence.

After three years the exhibit has been removed and stored in the Boardwalk Hall organ workroom pending a new location. Ocean One Mall has closed down completely for a planned major renovation that will take several years to complete.



Sample pipes on display. From left to right the pipes are: Muted Trumpet, Major Oboe, Vox Humana, Military Bugle, Bassoon, "Viol", "Piccolo", Doppel Spitzflute, Silver Flute #2, Silver Flute #1, Jubafloete, Gamba, Gamba Tuba

**Membership**

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