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the GRAND OPHICLEIDE

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the **GRAND OPHICLEIDE**

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Organ Society, Inc.*

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On The Cover – This photo was taken in November 1998 and shows the excellent condition of the Right Stage chamber at the time thanks to the efforts of former Curator, Dennis McGurk. Douglas Keilytez is seen tuning. *Photo by Antoni Scott*



EMERSON LEWIS RICHARDS

Lawyer • Politician • Organ Architect

by Stephen D. Smith

October sees the 41st anniversary of the death of Emerson Richards. He died on October 21st, 1963 (one month and one day before John F. Kennedy was assassinated), aged 79. The cause of his death was a heart attack—which he suffered while eating some ice cream at his home, sited at the junction of South Carolina Avenue and the Boardwalk in Atlantic City. Richards lived at this location—1245 Boardwalk—almost all of his life, apart from a short spell in 1958 when the house and the adjacent bathhouse (which was reportedly the largest bathing establishment in the world) burnt down.

The last few years of Richards' life were dark and silent. Literally. A degenerative disorder firstly deprived him of his sight and, then, his hearing. When his sight failed, friends would visit and read loudly to him but, as the illness progressed, there came a time when he could no longer hear them. In addition to this, his wife, Adelina, sometimes made his guests feel unwelcome and many of them stopped coming. Adelina—Richards' long-standing secretary, whom he married on Christmas Day, 1943, when he was aged 59—was 18 years his junior and she survived him by 22 years (dying in December, 1985).

Their marriage was a volatile one, and the pair seemed to fight almost constantly, according to some reports, even when they were dining with friends. In one tale concerning an evening with Aubrey Thompson-Allen and his family, Richards and Adelina shouted at each other throughout supper, arguing over how many fur coats he had bought her!

Also living at 1245 Boardwalk—for some of the time, at least—was Rose, Adelina's sister. She and Richards also fought, but only in jest; with each taking verbal swipes at the other. In truth, "Sister Rose," as she was known to some, got on with Richards rather better than Adelina did!

Perhaps Richards' final gesture to Adelina was his burial arrangement; for his casket is entombed on the left side of the family mausoleum (in the

Atlantic City Cemetery at Pleasantville, N.J.), while provision was made for Adelina on the right. Also on Richards' side are his father and Mary Brown, a black servant of whom Richards was very fond. He promised that she could be buried with the family she had served so faithfully, and he held true to his word.

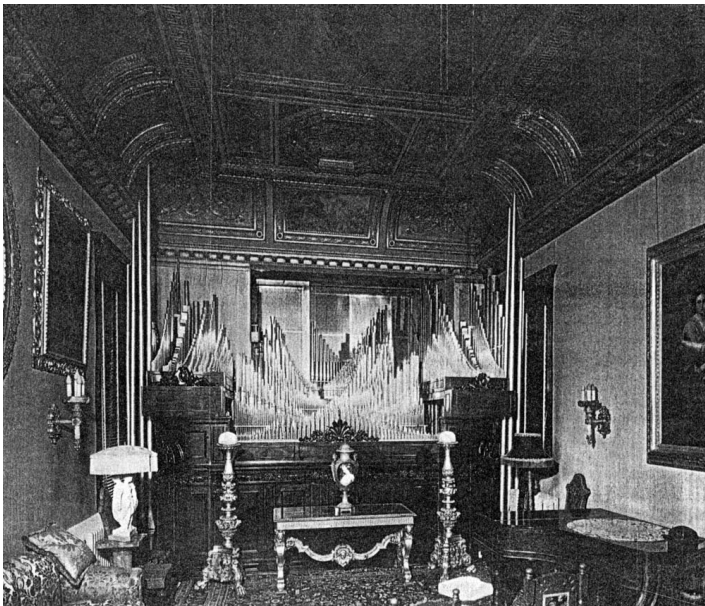
However, perhaps we should not read too much into the siting of the caskets within the mausoleum, since Richards'



Richards and Adelina on their wedding day. Guests included G. Donald Harrison and "Sister Rose" (both to the left of Richards).

mother—whom he adored—is also on the right side, while his father—whom he hardly knew—is below him.

Richards was an only child and was born into a family that had moved to Atlantic City in the 1880s, when the city was starting to become popular as a vacation and leisure resort. His father, Jacob, was an engineer, and it was partly due to his efforts that a new way of driving piles deep into sand was devised. This allowed large-scale buildings such as hotels and the Convention Hall to be built very close to the beach in Atlantic City. In this respect, it could be said that the Richards family contributed substantially to the city's development and growth.



The Music Room at 1245 Boardwalk

The family had humble beginnings in Atlantic City. They lived in a wooden-framed house (where Richards was born) but later moved into a more substantial property, to which they added the vast bathhouse. This venture was very profitable and seems to have been the main source of the family's income. As a child, Richards wanted for nothing. At the age of 15, he bought—or had bought for him—his first organ, a second-hand Estey of two manuals with tracker action. This was installed in the “Music Room” of the family home.

“An idyllic childhood,” you might think but, in fact, it too was tainted with sadness. This was because Richards' father was no longer on the scene. He was in California, where he was paid to stay. The reason? Because he had become a drunkard and, as a result, a liability. In short, he was given money to stay away from home, so as to not embarrass the family. He was, to use the phrase of that time, “a remittance man”—since a check was remitted to him each month and, presumably, he spent it on drink! Consequently, not only was Richards an only child but

his mother, Martina, was, in effect, a single parent. The result was a pair who were devoted to one another.

Both were also devoted to Atlantic City, their adopted home. Martina was a woman of unusual fortitude (bear in mind that we're talking about the 1900s, when women simply didn't take a leading role). In addition to raising her son and running the vast family home, she managed the bathhouse almost single-handedly for very many years—until Richards took it over, due to her ill health. This bathhouse was, for decades, one of the city's noted attractions and it brought in visitors from near and far. Its overall contribution to Atlantic City—both in terms of visitor numbers and dollars spent there—is inestimable.

Richards, after graduating from high school, went on to study law at the University of Pennsylvania. Having obtained his degree, he set up a practice in Atlantic City. Some years later, he became involved in local politics and, ultimately, served as Atlantic County's State Senator for 12 years, during which time he was twice President of the Senate. He also did a brief spell as Governor of New Jersey.

It was this period, the 1920s and '30s, that was the heyday for Richards—and, arguably, for Atlantic City too. It was during this time Richards designed organs for the high school and the Convention Hall. All three instruments were noted attractions that also brought visitors to the city.

Richards may have been “born into money” and, as a lawyer and politician, he certainly had the power to earn it. However, there has never been any suggestion that he received financial remuneration for designing the high school and Convention Hall organs. He gave his services free-of-charge because he believed he was doing something for Atlantic City; doing something for its visitors and residents; doing something for posterity. Additionally, he even gave his professional opinion gratis at times, according to William King Covell, who wrote:

...although not hesitating to ask substantial fees when circumstances warranted his doing so, he was always generous in giving time and helpful advice to worthy individuals having problems involving the law, politics or the organ.

Richards was a hard worker and it is surprising that he found time to accommodate his musical passions, such as the organ and the opera (which he attended in Philadelphia every Tuesday night of the season). As a state senator, his impact on



Emerson Richards demonstration console

the statute books was second only to that of Woodrow Wilson. As a lawyer, he was formidable, both mentally and physically. His large frame and powerful personality would have made him a feared opponent in court! But it wasn't only his sharp mind that was sometimes on display. At the hearings into matters surrounding the construction of the Convention Hall's Midmer-Losh organ, his temper got the better of him, and he rushed towards another lawyer, hurling abuse and threats of violence! The air was "blue" with his "colorful" language, according to newspaper reports at the time.

Nevertheless, this sort of behavior was rare and, it must be said, somewhat provoked by extreme duress. Among his "nicer" attributes was providing free alcohol (in the Prohibition days) for "the thirsty organists" attending the Convention Hall!

As previously stated, Richards was "born into

money." He didn't need to work, but he chose to do so and, whatever he did, he did for other people. His comprehensive revision of the state laws was for the benefit of New Jersey's citizens. His work as a lawyer also helped others. His organs were designed for the entertainment of people. Some work he was paid for, some he wasn't.

Free advice, free alcohol, and free organ designs were, however, only a part of Richards' social conscience. Allowing a black servant to be buried in the family mausoleum was also an act of generosity—and one that some people may have viewed as decidedly odd. His will provided a substantial donation towards Polio research—which was



The Richards family mausoleum (Photograph by David Scribner)

a major medical issue at the time.

These things are all a matter of record. However, what has never previously been told is the tale of Richards' "unofficial" son (and I must, at this point, thank Larry Fuerman and Dennis Cook, of Atlantic City, for their research into this story). Details are a little sketchy and I hope to research the matter further but, basically, it goes like this:

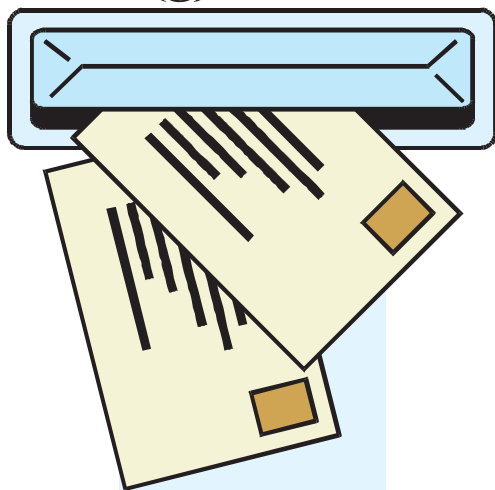
Richards took under his wing a young lad, let's call him John. Richards housed him, fed him, clothed him, etc. The precise circumstances under which the two met are now lost in the mists of time and the reason(s) for the lad not being with his own parents are also unknown. Either way, he was certainly down on his luck. However, with Richards' help he was able, in the fullness of time, to stand on his own two feet and live his own life. He later married and had a son, whom he named after Emerson Richards—who was also the boy's godfather. That boy grew up to be a doctor, and John's descendants have never forgotten Emerson Richards.

The point of this article is to say that we, too, should not forget Emerson Richards. He was not only the designer of the world's largest pipe organ, he also did much for a lot of people in many different spheres. So, next time you find yourself with a glass in your hand, raise it in a toast to Richards. And, while you're at it, spare a thought for his parents. His mother ran one of the city's top attractions, while his father's method of pile driving allowed the Convention Hall to be sited where it is. Collectively, the whole family put Atlantic City "on the map" in their own ways. Finally, while you're raising your glass, keep your fingers crossed that the Convention Hall and its organs—the last vestiges of the city's heyday past—have a place in the future of the still-evolving Atlantic City.



Illustrating the ergonomics of the seven-manual

we get mail



I'm not in complete agreement with the answers to your trivia questions in the Spring 2004 issue of the Grand Ophicleide (incidentally, congratulations on another fine issue).

Although Abraham Jordan is credited with the invention of the swell, and certainly was the first to introduce it in Great Britain, there is more than a suggestion that he picked up the idea from Iberian organs.

I wish the purpose of nicking were as simple as "to eliminate chiff." What it does is to corrugate the windsheet issuing from the windway in order to tame its erratic behavior. (By analogy, one can crease multiple folds in a church bulletin or recital program to strengthen it enough for a makeshift fan.) By doing so, much of the non-harmonic noise (random wiggles of the wind sheet) can be eliminated. For Diapasons one often uses relatively deep nicking which does indeed reduce the chiff, as well as cleaning up the tone. For Flutes, and in particular, stopped pipes, very fine nicking helps to get rid of the fizz (non-harmonic noise) and makes for a smoother tone. Strings likewise usually have rather fine nicking, and getting rid of the random activity of the windsheet makes it possible to develop a steady tone from an inherently unstable pipe. Getting rid of chiff is often more a question of getting the cut-up right and adjusting the speech precisely.

Although I haven't counted the measures I would have thought the Passacaglia & Fugue was a larger work than the Toccata & Fugue in F Major.

Cordially,
George Bozeman, Jr.

Dear ladies or gentlemen,

You've a great and wonderful instrument and I like the sound because I'm playing organ too and your organ isn't a church organ so its sound is new and fantastic for me.

I've 2 questions about the oscillations of the organ in fact about the deepest and highest tone as declaration in hertz. I'd like to know how many hertz the note C of the "Diaphone profunda 64' " has, and also how many hertz the highest tone of the organ has. Please write me back as soon as possible.

I'm sorry, but my English isn't so good.

Marko Heese
Germany

Dear Mr. Heese,

The low C on the 64' stop sounds at 8.17 Hz.

The top note of a 1-foot rank, if it doesn't "break back" is C7 (measuring one thirty-second of a foot), at 16,743.92 Hz.

Sincerely,
Charles Swisher
Vice President

Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc.

Organs such as Atlantic City's famous mammoth and the great Wanamaker and the West Point instruments are no string quartet in their concept but are mega symphony orchestras. While they are rare today it is not impossible that someday others will be inspired by these very organs themselves to reach those heights of organ accomplishment by commissioning new organs in the symphonic style rather than mere bare bone minimums such as one sees today. The Atlantic City organ will serve to inspire many future organ builders no doubt to try and achieve the glory that the King of instruments rightly deserves.

For those who love symphonic organs, you can be happy that the Cavaille-Coll school of symphonic organ building is alive and well. An American firm, C.B. Fisk, is making such organs. A Netherlands firm, Van den Heuvel, also builds symphonic organs.

Bill Roberts
Indianapolis

I am very happy to hear that plans are under way. I purchased the pictorial book and also both CD's and absolutely love playing them. Over and over again.

I have even permanently installed speakers in "surround" locations in my downstairs den so I can sit in the middle of all that beautiful sound. I absolutely love it.

If the 1998 recording was done with only part of the organ operational, one can only imagine what would sound like in full organ. Hopefully I will live long enough to hear just that.

Can you tell me what "100 inches wind" means? Can that be equated to pressure: If I were to guess, I would say it is 100" water pressure .. which would equate to about 4PSI of pressure. Am I close?

Also, I presume that the LP's I read about in the first edition of the Grand Ophicleide have long since been sold. If not, I'd certainly love to buy one. I have a small collection of mid-50's LP's and this would be the impetus to go buy something to play them on

God bless you in your work.
Bob Cleveland

I recently recently sent for and received the CD *Boardwalk Pipes & Bach On The Biggest*. I did not understand at the time just what would be on this CD but I would like to know if you have a CD which has on

it this pipe organ being played for those of us who are not pipe organists or classical music aficionados. I'm talking about classics like the Star Spangled Banner, Washington Post March, Religious, hits from the Sound of Music; music of this nature that we people can relate to and hum along with.

Thank you
Roland Full

I Charles,

Wow! Finally my (and everyone else's) dreams of the ACCHOS organ being re-built are coming true. What a true thrill it must be for you, Mr. Smith and all the others who have worked so diligently towards this goal.

I would like to thank you for printing my thoughts on the Pileata Magna. I do hope that you print my conclusions. These are as follows:

1.The voice of the Pileated Woodpecker is too soft to have anything to do with the stop.

2.The fact that a Pileum is a type of cap, I believe, holds the key to the name of this stop. Since this stop is capped (stoppered) I would believe that the name Pileata Magna translates as "Great Stopped Flute".

Although it is doubtful that absolute proof will ever be forthcoming, I would look to another strangely named stop...the Gamba Tuba. Both were designed by Van Wart and something tells me that he named the both the Gamba and the Pileata purely for esoteric and oblique fun.

Hoping that this finds you well,
Most Truly Yours,
Paul The Crazy Organist
Lisbon Maine

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

In Issue 25 of 'The Grand Ophicleide' there is some information about the stop 'Pileata Magna'. In two German organs I also found this stop: Steinmeyer Organ, Lorenzkirche, Nuernberg: Pileata 16' in Pedal, Epistle Organ at Passau Cathedral (built in the 'Italian style') Pileata 8' in Pedal. In Latin pileata (better: pilleata) means capped, so Pileata Magna seems to be a rank of stopped, large scaled (diameter) pipes. Maybe, the Latin name for something built like a Tibia (clausa) or Large Stopped Wood.

Best regards,
Karl-Josef Ziegler

Historic Citations

The Organ Historical Society has granted Historical Citations for the Midmer-Losh organ and Kimball organ in Boardwalk Hall.

“The Citations Committee uses a range of criteria to make decisions in awarding a citation. Both organs in Boardwalk Hall meet the criteria. Of special significance is the fact that there have been no alterations made during their seventy-five-year life. The original designs of both organs, spearheaded by Senator Emerson Richards, have remained intact. Both instruments are unique in the history of American organbuilding, for most instruments of that age have experienced some modification. Added to that is the fact that Emerson Richards is recognized as the creative force leading to development of the classic American symphonic organ, recognized throughout the world. It is little wonder, then, that Atlantic City draws visitors from across the nation and beyond who want to see and hear the musical treasures housed in Boardwalk Hall. To see both instruments restored to their original performance condition is the fervent hope of everyone who appreciates their intrinsic value and to countless individuals in generations to come who will for the first time be moved by the sound of the Midmer-Losh Organ. A fitting ceremony presenting the citation plaques could help bring this to pass.”

Formal presentation will be made on October 26 at a press conference in Boardwalk Hall.

Membership

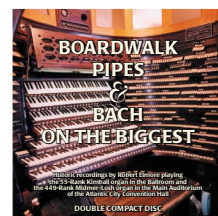
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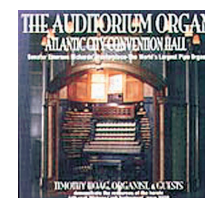
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