

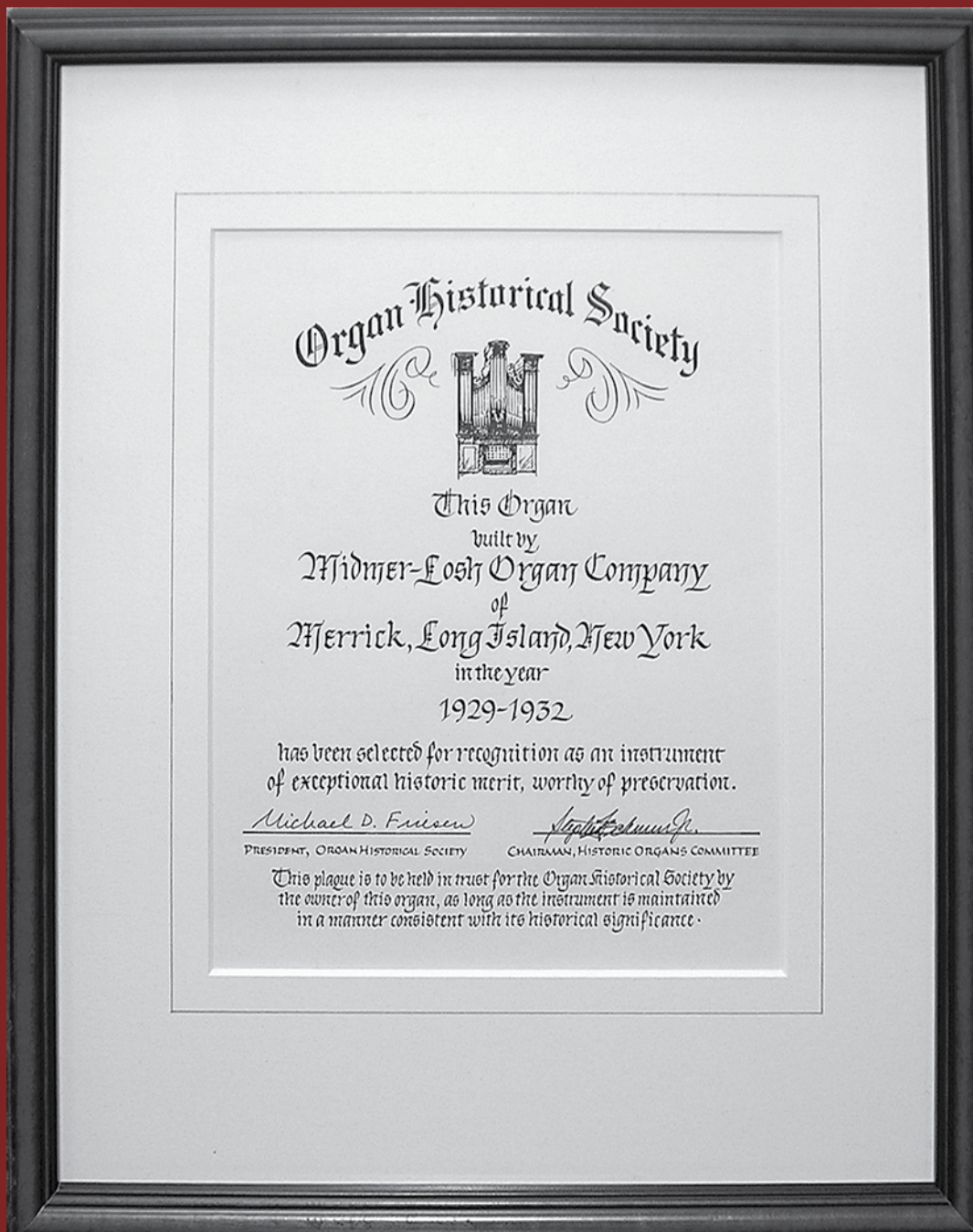
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The GRAND OPHICLEIDE

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

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the **GRAND OPHICLEIDE**

*Journal of the
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Organ Society, Inc.*

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On The Cover – The Historic Citation presented to the Midmer-Losh organ in Boardwalk Hall. Photo by Harry Bellangy

Historic Citations Presentation

On Tuesday afternoon, October 26, 2004, officials of the Organ Historical Society National Council presented Historic Organ Citations to the two organs of the Atlantic City Convention Hall, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society (ACCHOS) Board Members were hosts for daylong activities celebrating the history of the instruments in Boardwalk Hall. Guests and visitors included members of the newly formed Historic Organ Restoration Committee, representatives from the New Jersey Sports Exposition Authority and the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority. The public was invited and a number of local citizens and other visitors attended the ceremony.

Barbara Fesmire was a special guest. She became the “official” hall organist following the retirement of Lois Miller in 1969 until 1978 and was featured in Issue 19 (Spring 2003) of *The Grand Ophicleide* newsletter. [N.B. Barbara Fesmire and Barbara Williams are one in the same person in that issue. Williams was her married name.]

The day began with a tour of selected chambers of the organ for invited guests. After lunch at the nearby Trump Plaza, a press conference was held on the stage of the Hall. During the news conference, led by Charles Swisher, Vice-President of ACCHOS, officials from the New Jersey Sports and Exhibition Authority (NJSEA) and the Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority (ACCVA) were on hand to accept the Citations. OHS Vice-President Scot Huntington presented the citation for the 1929–1932 Midmer-Losh organ to Joanne Cocchiola of the NJSEA. The ACCVA Executive Director, Jeffrey Vassar, received the citation for the 1929 W. W. Kimball organ from Paul Marchesano, OHS Councilor for Education.

After the news conference, photographs were taken at each of the Midmer-Losh organ’s consoles and interviews were conducted by local news journalists and videotaped by Vic Ferrer Productions of San Francisco for a forthcoming DVD release about the Midmer-Losh pipe organ.

Vic Ferrer conducted a video interview with Vicki Gold Levi, the Atlantic City historian and author, who is leading the fund-raising arm of the restoration committee. She said the members are “just getting our feet wet,” but sounded confident that the committee will be able to do its job and let the organ do its thing again.

“I won’t say it’s going to be easy, but I think it’s going to happen,” she said. And when it does, it will be a major addition to a building that has become a major addition to Atlantic City



At the 7-manual Midmer-Losh organ console, left to right: Charles Swisher, Vice-President, ACCHOS; Jeffrey Vassar, Executive Director, Atlantic City Convention & Visitors Authority; Joanne Cocchiola, Associate Counsel, New Jersey Sports & Exposition Authority; Scot Huntington, OHS Vice President; Paul Marchesano, OHS Councilor for Education; Stephen Schnurr, OHS National Council Secretary and Chair, Historic Organ Citations Committee

— again.

Other interviews were videotaped with Barbara Fesmire, Curt Mangel, and Scot Huntington. These interviews will be included in a planned DVD recording release in 2005.

On Wednesday, John Goodman arrived for a video interview. John was substitute organist for Lois Miller in 1950–53 while working at Convention Hall. (He also did substituting at Morton Hotel’s Quarterdeck Theatre for Lois and in the lounge with dinner music for Frank Imhoff, set designer for Convention Hall. From 1960 to the present, John has been house organist at the Hershey Theatre.)

Vic Ferrer, with his brother Ben as cameraman, videotaped extensively in the Right Stage and Left Stage chambers, marking the first time professional video recordings were made inside the chambers.

As an experiment, ACCHOS Board Member and photographer, Antoni Scott, re-created his 1998 recordings of the Toccata in D Minor and Psalm 100, ‘finger-syncing’ while video recording were made. When edited, these video recordings, done in several takes with various camera angles, will reveal the ease with which an organist can perform on the 7-manual console with its extraordinary ergonomic design as further testimony to the genius of the organ designer and builders.

SPECIAL FEATURE



The Grand Ophicleide! The red jewel indicates a stop on 100" of wind. These new remarkable close-ups were taken with Antoni Scott's Canon PowerShot S45.



More stops on the left jamb with some interesting names.



Ranks I–VIII of the amazing ten rank diapason chorus.



How did Donald Trump's name find its way to the organ?



View behind the 7-manual console showing stop tab wiring and angles of the seven keyboards.



OHS Vice President, Scot Huntington, seated at the 5-manual console.



Barbara Fesmire, Official hall organist from 1968-1979.



John Goodman, who was Lois Miller's substitute organist from 1950 to 1953.



Members of the Historic Pipe Organ Trust, Inc. From left to right: Anthony Krutchera, Lillian Levy, Curt Mangel, Redenia Gilliam Mosee, and Vicki Gold Levi. Pictured elsewhere in this issue are Joanne Cocchiola, Chairman and Jeffrey Vassar.

Organists' Stories

Barbara Fesmire and John Goodman regaled us with many stories of their times at the organs.

Barbara recalled the dedication of the West Hall when a drum and fife band was to lead dignitaries from the new West Hall into the main auditorium for ceremonies and music. She could not hear the musicians at such a great distance, so a stagehand held a walkie-talkie to her ear while another stagehand held a walkie-talkie in front of the marching band as they entered the hall, and she was able to keep time with the musicians.

She also recalled at least one rowdy convention where she had to have security guards protect her at the console while she played as the proceedings became rather violent.

John Goodman had other stories. In those years (1950-1969) the Midmer-Losh was nearly all operational and John told stories about playing duets with Lois Miller using the 5-manual portable console then located and operational on stage right.

During an Ice Capades production, he recalled coupling everything possible to the Great and let loose during a practice session. He said the ice cracked from the monumental sound and vibration created in the hall, and the vibrations could be felt on the Boardwalk in front of the hall. Wish we were all there!



The Historic Citation presented to the Kimball organ in Boardwalk Hall. (Photo by Harry Bellangy)



Panoramic View created by ACCHOS Board Member, Harry Bellangy. The kiosk is on the far left, and the video interview setup for the



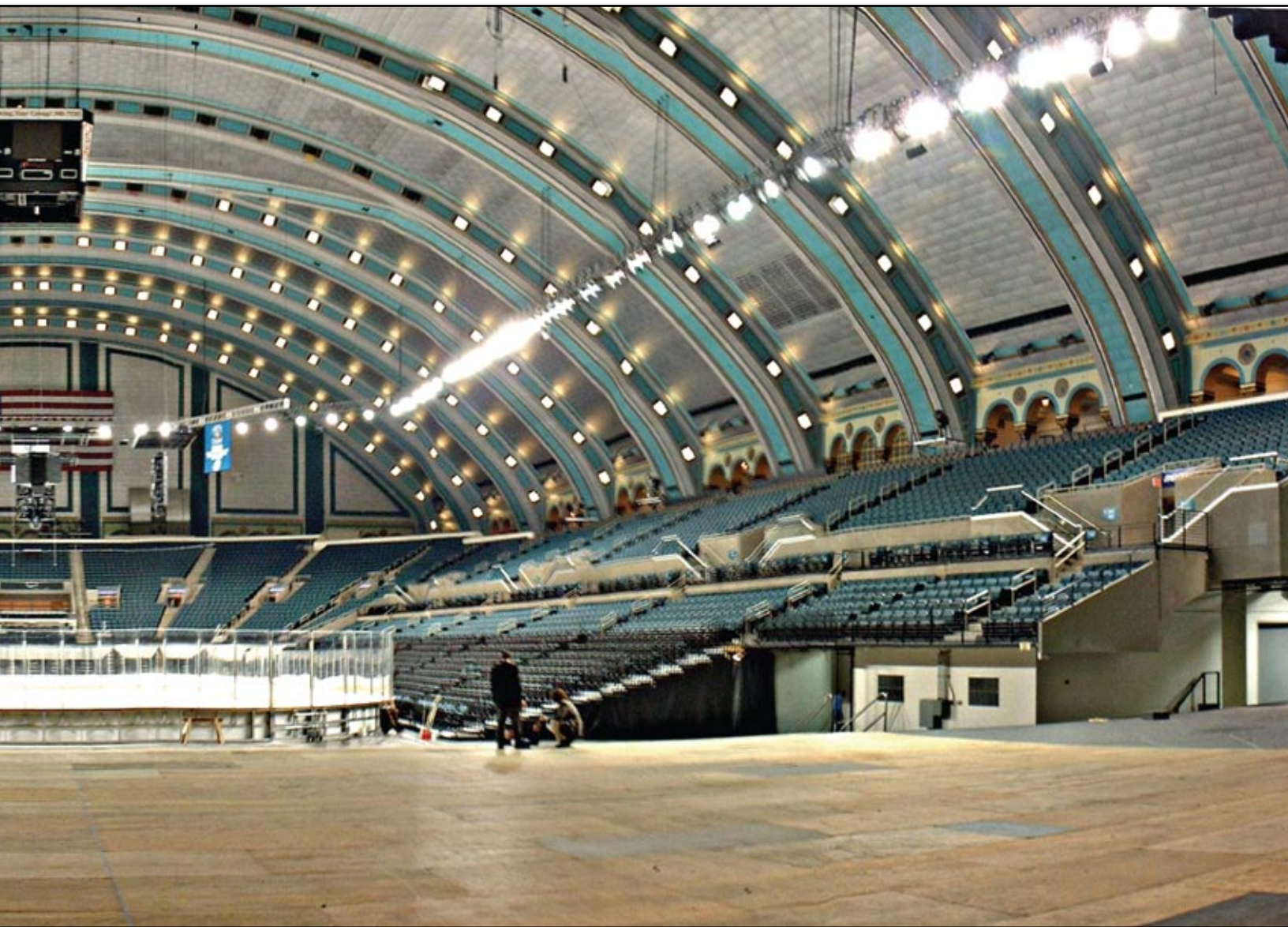
THE ATLANTIC GLOBE

Blown Glass, Vitreous Pigments, Leaded
 Created by J. Kenneth Leap of Runnemed, New Jersey in 2003

This new artwork, prominently located in the ceiling of the Boardwalk Hall lobby, was designed to create a dialogue with the stained glass globe in the proscenium arch above the stage. Rather than showing the world and its continents, as the historic piece does, the imagery here presents the Atlantic Ocean. Fish depicted in the design are species found in the waters off the New Jersey coast. Two female figures swim gracefully around the sphere, inspired by a medallion on Boardwalk Hall's ocean façade. The mermaid in the design wears the Miss America tiara.



View of main arena floor can change color



Historic Citationa presentation is underway on the left.



auditorium with ice rink in place. The new ceiling lighting colors much like the original lighting design.



The steel skeleton for Boardwalk Hall takes shape in 1928. The Left and Right Stage chambers will be installed at either end of the stagehouse steel work seen in place. (Photo courtesy of *Atlantic City: 125 Years of Ocean Madness* by Vicki Gold Levi & Lee Eisenberg)

The Diapason, May 1, 1928

A Look Back

Organ For The Steel Pier

MIDMER-LOSH INSTRUMENT TO BE INSTALLED IN ATLANTIC CITY

The famous steel pier in Atlantic City, whose musical program for the year includes everything from grand opera to old-time minstrels, with famous concert bands and symphony orchestras, has contracted for a Midmer-Losh organ which will be provided with seven octaves, melody couplers and other special devices for which the Midmer-Losh product is noted. This organ will be installed in the casino of the pier and is intended for both solo numbers and the accompaniment of motion pictures, as well as the occasional religious serviced held there.

The Community Church at Ventnor, N.J. has a new Midmer-Losh organ for its Palm Sunday service. Powell Evans, the widely known Welsh baritone, is musical director at this church and also the organist.

Chicago "Pumpers" Meet

FORMER BLOWERS CELEBRATE THEIR OBSOLESCENCE AT DINNER

Veterans of a lost cause mourned their obsolescence with rejoicing on the evening of April 10 at the Atlantic Hotel in Chicago when the Guild of Former Pipe Organ Pumpers held a dinner and reunion. About forty men who pumped the organ in the days before the water or electric motor, and who thus laid the foundation for future usefulness in industry, gathered around the table and had several hours of informal good fellowship, accompanied by the singing of old hymns, to the accompaniment of a reed organ blown by hand. The agility displayed by those at the handle proved conclusively that while laborsaving machinery had robbed them of their jobs, they had not lost their technique. Chet Shafer, "grand diapason" of the order, a magazine writer whose article a few years ago in the Saturday Evening Post pointing out that not all famous men had earned their first money selling newspapers led to the formation of the guild, was in the chair. Beside him sat Benjamin F. Affleck, Chicago "grand quint", president of the Universal Portland Cement Company and recently elected president of the Union League Club of Chicago. At the right of Mr. Shafer was Julius Rosenwald, head of Sears Roebuck & Co. and one of the leading men of the American business world. Reed G. Landis, world-war ace and son of the well-known arbiter of baseball, Judge Kenesaw M. Landis, was also at the speakers' table. A number of other men prominent in the business world were present, besides two confessed organists, two organ salesmen who concealed their business and at least three publishers. Mr. Shafer explained the policies on principles of the guild, summarizing its history, and emphasized the fact that this is the only admittedly non-essential organization in existence. Mr. Affleck told of his experiences blowing the organ at Belleville, Ill, in his boyhood at 35 cents a week, which included two services and a rehearsal, and Mr. Rosenwald and a number of others made numerous allusions to their one-time valorous efforts in providing organ music in churches.

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Correspondence invited.

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The New Kimball Method for the Reed Organ

“The New Kimball Method for the Reed Organ,” a hard-cover book prepared for distribution after the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition by W.W. Kimball Co, contains the following advice for aspiring organists in its “Elementary Department”:

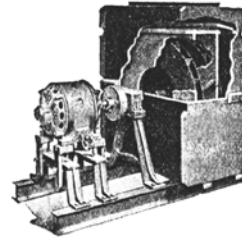
Take your seat before the center of the long row of keys which constitutes what is called the *keyboard.* Sit far enough away from it to enable you to use the pedals and knee-swells easily, but avoid getting away so far as to be obliged to stretch the arms or incline the body in order to play comfortably.

Sit still! If it be necessary to reach to either extremity of the keyboard, do not allow the body to follow the movement of the arm. This would not only be wholly unnecessary but would make the player appear exceedingly ridiculous.

Sit erect! Throw the shoulders back and be careful to keep the elbows near the body. You have been taught how necessary this latter injunction is when at table; it is no less so when seated at an organ.

Do not smirk or pucker the mouth; no matter how difficult a passage may be, it will be made no easier by such contortions. In a word, sit easily and gracefully at the organ as at the table, or in a friend’s parlor.

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Videographer Vic Ferrer and his brother, Ben, who jointly created video interviews, studies inside the Right and Left Stage chambers, and scored imagery to Antoni Scott's 1998 performances of the Toccata in D minor and Psalm 100. A DVD video presentation is now in the works.

Vic Ferrer writes:

I attended the press conference because I am producing a documentary about preserving America's historic pipe organs. After traveling the country and visiting numerous pipe organs, to see an instrument of such monumental size and scale left me in awe. As a boy I read about the Midmer-Losh organ in Reginald Foort's book "The Theater Organ." To finally see it up close and personal all these years later was truly a highlight of my professional career as a producer. I hope to hear it playing someday soon.

The console with its 1,235 stop-keys, seven-manuals and seven swell shoes was mind-boggling. Sitting at the console, everything was easily reachable and ergonomically designed.

I saw three of the seven blowers, one of which was nearly the size of a VW bus. There are relays that go on forever and more pipes than I have ever seen in one location (and I only toured one of eight chambers!). The scale of some of the 32' pedal ranks was like walking in the land of the giants: pipes so big, you could easily fall down inside of them - short fat little pipes scaled the size of a quarter! - 100" and 50" of wind is found all over the place, and a quality of workmanship of which any organ builder would definitely approve.

Even though instruments of this magnitude are clearly examples of sheer exuberance and ego, they are representative of an era of grandeur, greatness and permanence. From an artistic and auditory perspective I cannot comment on its sound except for the recordings I have heard. While in Boardwalk Hall, a small stereo system played cuts from some of the various CDs of the Midmer-Losh. Hearing the recorded sound of the organ bouncing around in that beautiful acoustic provided me a hint at what will someday be a soul-moving experience.

I had the opportunity to interview L. Curt Mangel, III. Curt is the curator of the Wanamaker organ at the Lord and Taylor department store in Philadelphia. He also is chairman of the Technical Committee of the Historic Organ Restoration Committee, Inc. As such he will play an important role during the restoration of both the Kimball and Midmer-Losh organs. His track record in pulling together and managing the team, which successfully finished restoration of the Wanamaker organ, makes him a perfect match for this monumental project. After speaking with Curt at length, I experienced first-hand his confidence to take on a project of this enormity. He is the right person to bring this project to fruition. When Curt is finished with this project, some six years after restoration begins, he will have accomplished in his lifetime having a direct influence in putting back together two of the greatest pipe organs in the world — the Wanamaker and Atlantic City organs.

Boardwalk Hall is a national landmark and is listed on the National Register of Historic Sites and Places. The building and organs are owned and operated by the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority.

This instrument is worthy of preservation because it represents an important part of American culture, American history and the art of organ building in America.

I encourage everyone to consider becoming a member of the Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society (ACCHOS) and to voice their support of this national treasure.

A QuickTime movie of the OHS citation presentation will be posted on the ACCHOS website soon, so please visit the site often to stay informed on the progress being made. (www.acchos.org)

Vic Ferrer
VicFerrerProductions.com



One of the most dramatic photos taken by Fred Hess & Son, circa 1932. It shows the String III organ behind the Fanfare Organ in the Left Upper chamber. It is the instrument's most remote department, being some 325 feet from the main console.

Newly Discovered Master Tapes

Thanks to Barbara Fesmire, former Hall Organist, ACCHOS has received four master tapes recorded on November 1, 1964 by John Armstrong. The recordings were made during a day-long session at Boardwalk Hall hosted by former curator, William Rosser. The morning program was played on the Ballroom Kimball featuring Barbara Fesmire and Ed Weimer. In the afternoon, the group moved to the main auditorium where Barbara Fesmire and Lowell Ayers entertained the audience. Portions of these recordings are planned to be incorporated in a forthcoming DVD recording release that is being edited. The session was in the form of an "open console" activity and not a formal recording session.

Membership

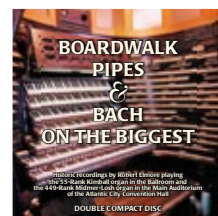
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 Narrative by Stephen D. Smith
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