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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
Atlantic City Convention Hall
Organ Society, Inc.*

1009 Bay Ridge Avenue, PMB 108, Annapolis, Maryland 21403
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The Atlantic City Convention Hall Organ Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) corporation founded in 1997 and dedicated to the use, preservation and restoration of the organs in the Atlantic City Boardwalk Convention Hall.

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On The Cover – Vic Ferrer at the console. Vic is the writer, producer and director of *The Senator's Masterpiece*, the new ACCHOS DVD. His company, Vic Ferrer Productions is based in San Francisco, and we are fortunate to have his great talent and dedication for the project.

Historic Organ Restoration Committee, Inc.

The HORC will meet again in March and more information about the restoration of the Kimball organ will be available.

America's Crumbling History

A new report says that heritage items in America's museums are deteriorating and require urgent conservation care. "Millions of items in American public collections that may be lost unless they receive urgent preservation attention. In a study to be released on Tuesday in New York, Heritage Preservation, a Washington-based conservation group, reports that many such collections are threatened by poor environmental controls, improper storage, inadequate staffing and financing and poor planning for emergencies like floods."

The New York Times 12/06/05

New ACCHOS DVD

The long awaited DVD documentary about the Midmer-Losh organ is now in stock and has become a best seller from the Organ Historical Society's online catalog. One of the first purchasers writes:

Greetings!

I bought the DVD from the OHS online store and received it today.

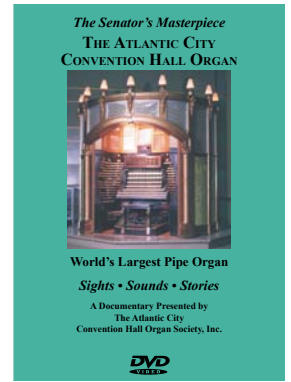
I'm very impressed with the huge wealth of historical materials that was offered on this DVD. The documentary and the extra materials were truly high quality and well presented.

I also liked the "home" movies too.

I recommend this DVD to anyone who appreciates the King of Instruments, and cherishes its history.

Superb job – highly recommended!

Larry Klug
Organ Enthusiast
Cincinnati, OH



Urban Legends Revisited

by Charles Swisher

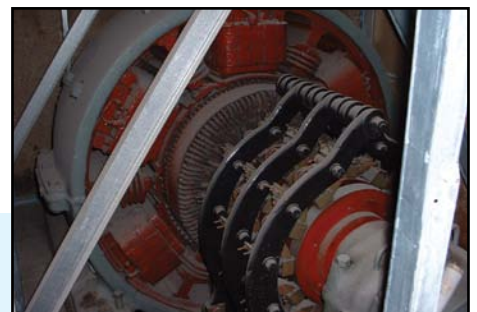
Over time there have been several Urban Legends about the Midmer-Losh organ that have cropped up here and there. Here are four of them from the 90s:

1. In the early days, before turning the organ blowers on, it was necessary to call the local power company so that they could bring another steam turbine-generator on line to handle the additional power load.
2. There were times when it was necessary to halt street car traffic in Atlantic City before turning on the ACCHO blowers in order not to disrupt local power service due to the additional heavy load.
3. The Atlantic City Convention Hall is to be torn down soon, and a parking lot will be built on the existing site. The pipe organ will be sold for scrap.
4. All the pipe organ chambers in the Atlantic City Convention Hall have been sealed shut with bricks and cement. The organ will never be used again.

The first two have a good answer. When the hall was built, it had one of the most advanced electrical systems ever installed. The photos show the original master control room in the basement. There were actually three Westinghouse rotary converters that converted AC power to DC power to operate certain systems in the hall. One rotary converter was for the organ; thus, when the organist and/or curator used the organ, it was necessary to call down to the engineer to start up the appropriate rotary converter. The old DC motors for the organ, totaling some 395 horsepower, were replaced with AC motors, totaling 600 horsepower, in the early 90s. The urban legends were thus born out of this specific electrical situation in the hall at the time.



(Top and middle photos) Master Control Room in the basement of Convention Hall; (bottom) Rotary converter



Comparisons:

ACHS & ACCH

by Stephen D. Smith

December 2005, marked the 83rd anniversary of the signing of the contract for the Atlantic City High School (ACHS) organ, so it might be appropriate to look at the relationship between this instrument and what has been called its “big sister,” the Atlantic City Convention Hall (ACCH) organ.

Such an article is perhaps doubly appropriate, since the ACHS organ has only recently been resurrected and is now playable again (although some changes have been made and, sadly, a number of pipes were not rescued from the crumbling High School). We hope to be able to include some pictures of the instrument in its new home in a future issue of *The Grand Ophicleide*.

Over the years, many comparisons have been made between the High School and Convention Hall instruments, both of which were designed by Emerson Richards and built by Midmer-Losh. However, is it fair to say, as is often claimed, that the ACHS organ was a prototype for the ACCH instrument?

The short answer is “no,” as Richards could not have foreseen, when designing the ACHS organ, the later ACCH instrument. Even though the High School organ was enlarged over a few years, Richards’ first reference to the ACCH organ is contained in a letter dated December 1927 — some two years after the ACHS organ was completed.

Despite this, there is a relationship between the two instruments, so the “big sister/little sister” analogy is certainly appropriate but comparison of the two schemes reveals contradictions as well as similarities.

Firstly, though... A

brief history of the High School organ, the largest ever installed in a public school: As originally conceived, there were to be four manuals and 73 ranks although it was eventually enlarged to five manuals and 121 ranks!

The contract for it was signed with (what was then called) Midmer & Son on 27th December 1922. Its design was what Richards described as a “combination organ,” consisting of both straight and extended stops. At the time, this was his favored type of instrument as he believed it provided flexibility with economy (later, however, he preferred only “straight” organs).

The departments were: Pedal, Choir (two divisions), Great (un-enclosed and enclosed stops), Orchestral (manual 3, two divisions), Solo, and Antiphonal (floating).

Like many of Richards’ schemes, the ACHS organ had an in-built grandeur about it. Although it was of moderate size (compared to ACCH), it somehow had a sense of being rather larger than it was. This impression was perhaps brought about by things like having a full-length 32-foot stop (albeit borrowed from the Pedal) on the Great organ — which had only 15 voices (plus two percussions).

While the majority



Atlantic City High School. The building has now

of the instrument was accommodated in two chambers on the stage of the school’s auditorium, there were two smaller chambers on the gallery that ran around the room. These housed the Antiphonal organ, which consisted mainly of echo-type stops, together with a handful of trombone registers.

The first relationships with the ACCH organ can be seen even in this early scheme for ACHS. The Antiphonal organ’s Trombone ranks, for

The school’s auditorium was 122 feet long (ex high. A gallery ran around the right, back, and sides and 28 feet at the rear. The seating capacity was 2,000. The console seen here is the enlarged, fi



The left case contained the Great and Solo organs, together with some Pedal ranks. Each organ chamber was 26-feet high and contained only pipes — as the blowers and other mechanisms were housed in basement rooms.





...v been demolished.

example, are obviously the predecessors of the Brass Chorus at ACCH. However, whereas the Brass Chorus consists entirely of straight ranks (16, 8, 8, 5-1/3, 4, 2-2/3, 2, mixture), the High School's trombones were extended (rank A: 16, 5-1/3, 2-2/3 and rank B: 8, 4). Of course, the ACCH version was, on the face of it, just scaled-up for the bigger organ but the lack of extension is interesting, because only in the most important departments did Richards omit extension.

clusive of the stage), 89 feet wide, and 27 feet left of the room, extending 21 feet into it at the city, including the gallery, was in the region of v manual version.



Indeed, whether by accident or intention, the Brass Chorus was the first department to be completed at ACCH — and quite ferocious it was too, by all accounts! Its lack of extension is part of Richards' progress towards the entirely straight organ.

Another early comparison can be made between the ACHS organ's second division on the Orchestral (3rd) manual and the Swell-Choir at ACCH. The Swell-Choir is duplexed to the Choir manual as the Choir-Swell, where it has its own registers. Likewise, at ACHS, the Orchestral manual's second division (known as the "Floating" organ — although it didn't "float" in the accepted sense of the term) was also playable from the Choir, via its own registers. The Floating organ at ACHS and the Swell-Choir at ACCH were not important as far as Richards was concerned and both departments included a large number of extended ranks. What constituted, for Richards, an "important" department? It was one that formed part of what might be called the "tonal backbone" of an instrument. On a stop-by-stop basis, any voice that could be put off without affecting the tutti was unimportant and not part of the instrument's "backbone."

These two similarities — the trombone ranks and the duplexed department — were the only major similarities, at this point in the High School organ's evolution, to connect it with what was to come in the ACCH instrument. There were, however, other superficial links. It's not until the ACHS organ was enlarged, between 1923 and 1925, that more similarities become obvious.

The most astonishing addition to the High School organ was the unenclosed Choir department. This has been well-documented in a previous article in *The Grand Ophicleide*, so it will suffice to say here that its intention was to "reproduce the old-fashioned 'little great' organ effect...a homogeneous ensemble similar to the Silberman organ familiar to Bach". This is how Richards described it. Despite this, he originally labeled it (in the supplementary contract) as a "second flute" department — even though it only included one flute stop. Its voices were: Diapason 8, Hohl Flute 8, Octave 4, and Repeating Mixture IV. A

fifteenth 2 was added later.

This tiny department was, for Richards, an experiment, and it was all-but-lost among the vast array of other stops on the instrument. However, it seems to have been a tonal success, because the ACCH organ was provided with a very similar department from the outset (the original scheme being drawn-up in 1928).

Another of the additions to the ACHS organ also pointed towards how things would be at ACCH. The "Harmonic organ," as it was called, consisted of extended ranks that mainly provided a variety of off-the-note pitches. These were designed primarily for creating synthetic tone colors. The department's inclusion reflected an interest in mutation stops that was emerging at that time. At ACCH, the Great-Solo and Swell-Choir departments were provided with a mind-boggling array of extended mutation registers — a logical progression, as Richards may have seen it.

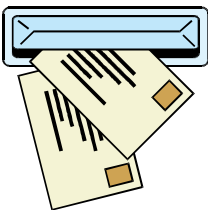
These, then, are the most obvious similarities between the ACHS and ACCH organs. Certainly, the later instrument included refined versions of some experiments conducted on the earlier instrument. With the benefit of hindsight, we are able to appreciate this but — and this is the point — the ACHS was not a test bed for the ACCH instrument because, as stated previously, the much larger Convention Hall organ was not known about when the High School instrument was being constructed.

A wealth of information about the ACHS organ can be found on the Internet at http://acchos.org/high_school/achs01.html



The five-manual console. The vertical stop-keys were couplers. The swell shoes, from left to right, were for: Antiphonal, Great, Solo (and Pedal), Orchestral, Floating, and Choir. The far-right shoe was the General Crescendo and the foot piston above the center shoe (Orchestral) switched all shades onto that shoe.

we get mail



Antoni Scott writes:

What is it about the pipe organ, especially big ones, that are so “thrilling”? One of the most incredible feelings I ever experienced was to play the “high octane” Toccata on the Midmer-Losh. I actually felt the hair standing up on the back of my neck and shivers down my spine. It was short-lived however, as the experience was to be repeated the next day when Stephen Smith played the “Ad Nos” [for the ACCHOS CD/01 recording].

Physiologically, the stimulus (powerful organ music is an unnatural event) causes the sympathetic nervous system to be stimulated rather than the parasympathetic system. This is an evolutionary “fight or flight” response which causes adrenaline to be instantly secreted, along with other hormones, which causes an instant “readiness” to react. Muscles are ready to respond, blood pressure rises due to a constriction of the blood vessels. The feeling of “elation” is due to the instant but transient readiness of the body to do something. If we don’t immediately run away or fight, and in the process use up the stored energy, we just feel good until the hormones are “used up.”

Organ music is made up of a wide range of dynamics from the low 32’s up to the shimmering mixtures. Low notes are interesting. Just because we can barely hear them, compared to a big Mixture or a loud Trumpet, doesn’t mean that it has no effect on our body. The energy in a low 32’ is thousands of times greater than a single 2’ pipe yet the 2’ pipe stands out. The Wanamaker 90 rank string division is also a good example. Each string pipe is a normal sounding pipe but the multiplicity of the same sound of all 90 ranks plus some huge 32’s underneath make for a lot of energy.

You would experience the same thing if someone let off a firecracker near you that you didn’t expect.

I won’t go so far as to say that organ music instills “religious” feelings, but it does instill feelings.

Antoni

Some messages from recent discussions on the email list piporg-1:

Date: Sat, 21 May 2005

From: Ben Baldus

Subject: Re: Atlantic City imagination

I heard this organ in 1966 on a trip east with my parents. It was mostly working and knocked our collective socks off.

Ben Baldus

Date: Sat, 21 May 2005

From: John Brosseau

Subject: Re: Atlantic City imagination

I’ve always been convinced that Wagner’s Ring could be effectively performed with organ accompaniment, supplemented by percussion. It would take a huge organ to do it, but think of the thrill of the revolution it would bring about if it were pulled off!

(I actually had this idea for the first time when I realized that a few churches, such as First Presbyterian in Glens Falls, NY, have two large organs. It might take four hands to realize such a project.)

John Brosseau
Bamberg, Germany

Date: Sun, 22 May 2005

From: Jarle Fagerheim

Subject: Re: Atlantic City imagination

What about Saint-Saens’ 3rd as an organ solo? I don’t know how many players would be necessary -- perhaps two at the main console playing the orchestra part and the “soloist” at the secondary console. Bach’s St. Matthew Passion (without choirs) would also make an interesting experiment!

Beste helsing / Best wishes / Beste GrüÙe / Bestu kvedjur

Jarle Fagerheim

Date: Thu, 17 Nov 2005

From: Stephen D. Smith

Subject: Re: ACCH organ

Atlantic City - once the most visited place on Earth - has certainly had a roller-coaster past. Its heyday in the 1920s and ‘30s, soon gave way to a long process of decay. By the late ‘60s/early 70s, anyone with any sense and/or money had moved

out of the place, leaving behind ruined buildings and poor people, mostly.

The decision to allow gambling in the City has turned out to be a lifeline, as the casinos inject millions of dollars into the local economy. The old, crumbling hotels that once accommodated City’s visitors, were replaced by new, high-rise casinos/hotels. Regardless of whether one likes this style of architecture, the fact is that they’ve made Atlantic City a more attractive and cleaner place. In the 15 years that I’ve known the City, it has changed (for which read “improved”) immensely.

It could be argued that criminals will always be attracted to “where the money’s at” but I don’t think Atlantic City is any worse in this respect than any other city. Politically, the City has really cleaned-up its act - there was a time when a considerable number of City officials faced corruption charges.

I have always thought the ACCH organ *can* be an attraction. People who have no interest in architecture go to see the Empire State Building. People who have no interest in ships go to see the Queen Mary. Why? Because they’re icons, and big icons, at that. There is, in my view, no reason why people who have no interest in organs should not want to see the ACCH’s instrument and, of course, the splendid building that houses it.

Sadly, it’s true that Atlantic City still doesn’t have a substantial resident population. People travel to work there but, often, live elsewhere. People travel to gamble there but invariably, live elsewhere. The attractions are indeed few, apart from the casinos. Nevertheless, like many beach venues, it seems to have a special magic that is attractive to many.

Anyhow... Regardless of what I (or anyone else) think, Atlantic City was still the most visited place on the planet a few years ago (when I saw visitor numbers which, as I recall, totaled 33 million people in one year). They’re obviously doing something right!

Stephen D. Smith

President - <http://www.acchos.org>
Webmaster - <http://www.organrecitals.com>

How It All Began

Here is the original email that got ACCHOS started on Piporg-l:

Date: Fri, 7 Mar 1997 19:17:34 GMT
 Reply-To: M A X I M A <maxima@globalnet.co.uk >
 Sender: Pipe Organs and Related Topics <PIPORG-L@CNSIBM.ALBANY.EDU >
 From: M A X I M A <maxima@globalnet.co.uk >
 Subject: [PIPORG] ACCH "Friends" group

Honourable and honorable List members,

Maybe the time is right for establishing something like the "Friends of the Wanamaker Organ" for the ACCH.

I have in mind the "Atlantic City Convention Centre Organ Society" (ACCCOS) — thus covering the Midmer-Losh (main auditorium) and the Kimball (ballroom) instruments. I have to say, however, that the majority (but not all) of such a group's attention is likely to be directed at the M-L organ. A logo has been designed too.

Anyone who would be interested in joining such a group please respond privately and I will compile a list of "members." Membership will be free until the group is properly established and ratified. When this has been done, the group can "go public" and those who have already "signed-up" can consider whether or not they wish to remain as members.

In the meanwhile, I would certainly be interested to hear from people who have experience of similar groups. Ideas for a constitution, officers, etc. would be most welcome. I should imagine that there would need to be a pro-tem committee to oversee the setting-up. Any ideas for a group name (other than the one I've suggested) or a logo would be most welcome too.

The idea of such a group has been mentioned to Tim Hoag (the ACCH's organist), but nothing agreed. The matter has not yet been raised with the hall's management, but will obviously need to be. The best way to do this will be decided by the pro-tem committee.

Okay, these are just the first tentative steps and suggestions, but I think they're important.

Stephen

"The organ is in truth the grandest, the most daring, the most magnificent of all instruments invented by human beings"
 —Honore de Balzac

In the earlier days of Piporg-l, there was often very colorful writing from no less than Carlo Curley, per this example:

Date: Thu, 24 Jul 1997 08:07:42 EDT
 Sender: Pipe Organs and Related Topics <PIPORG-L@CNSIBM.ALBANY.EDU >
 From: Carlo Curley
 Subject: Freakish Shenanigans

Dear Varied Ranks,

I can personally call to mind several recent instruments placed in respected concert salons which are far more meritorious of the appellation "freak" than the Atlantic City behemoth — and they are between thirty-five and seventy-five stops, reservoir-less with winding about as solid as a bowl of warm gooseberry jelly, utilizing that excitingly antiquated (surely "creatively anachronistic") system of ever-sensitive, wee sticks floating from key rump to soundboard, usually supplied with a stage console operated by that ever-evil, standard-debilitating, two-dimensional electricity.

While the Atlantic City organ is certainly excessive (and it is widely known that nothing succeeds like excess!), I would dare to venture that the memory of dear Emerson Richards and his visionary "magnum opus" will survive light-years longer than the majority of those mid-to-late 20th-century-builders (surely "vassals of historicism") who have slavishly devoted their every waking hour to reinventing 17th Century wheels (as successfully used on Arp Schnitger's bright red, low-pressured conveyance, *Der Werkprinzipspitzfloetehochgeschwindigkeitstigerungzimmelsternwagen* — constructed by an early arm of the Mercedes family), not to mention the perfecting of an ill-blending menagerie of duck-quack, shoe-box registers capable of blistering safety-glass and human patience at a hundred yards.

The ACCH colossus is a priceless monument to the seemingly unfashionable embodiment of power, color and fundamental in a single Temple of Tone and Forward Thinking; a benchmark to those of our time who actually care more for what happens above the toe-board than beneath it.

Carlo Curley

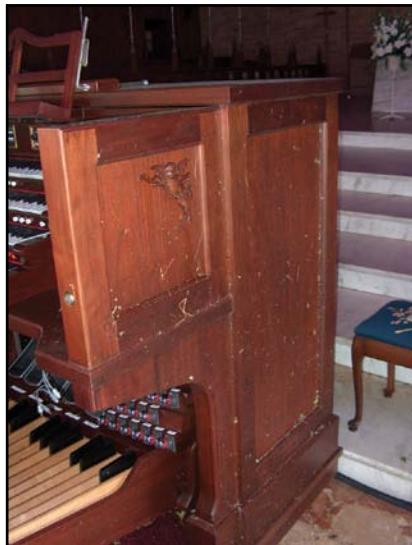
(An O.T.T. Subscriber & Discoverer of the Divine Intervention Celeste) Abbey of the Mauve Thought 32 - 64 Pandora's Box Boulevard, London-by-the-Thames

Hurricane Wilma In Fort Lauderdale



David Dunlap is the creative genius who does all the graphics and *Grand Ophicleide* issues for ACCHOS. David has been organist and choirmaster at the Second Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale for fifteen years. The two photos show the church organ hours after Wilma hit Fort Lauderdale. All

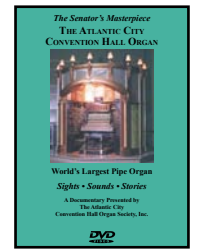
the large plate glass windows were blown out and the hurricane winds swept through the sanctuary plastering the console with leaves and debris. The dark pieces on the floor are broken tinted glass mixed in with the leaves. The organ was fortunately not damaged, and the church is preparing for a recital by Felix Hell on February 10, 2006.



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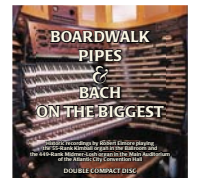
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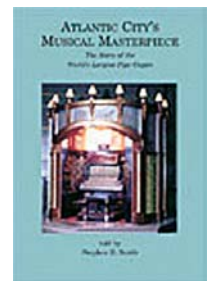
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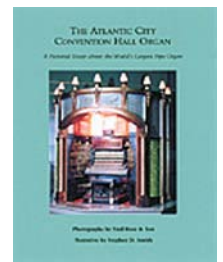
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Narrative by Stephen D. Smith

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