

# Wicks Organ Co. was incorporated in 1906

By Roland Harris - For the News Leader

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Wicks new office and factory on 5th Street, built in 1910 is the long building in front with sign near the roof reading Wicks Organ Co. The complete Wicks complex is shown in the Sept. 15, 1970 aerial photo taken by McLaughlin Air Service of New York, N.Y.

“Highland, a very progressive city, had another new manufacturer in 1906, with the start of the Wicks Organ Co. in the old wool factory, which had been purchased by Helvetia Milk Condensing Co. The milk company kept making additions to the Broadway and Washington buildings, but ran out of room and also needed a railroad siding. So, in 1903, the company started the new brick building at 515 Zschokke St. in Highland.”

The information from my column of Sept. 12 and 19, 2013 and my Wick file follows.

Page 210 of the *Centennial History of Highland* reads: “The Helvetia Milk Condensing Co. built (its) new building at 515 Zschokke St. in 1903.” (Today this complex is the box company, WestRock.) The old wool factory building had a new three-story building added to the rear of the old building, a new two-story building to the east on Lot 2, plus an office building. All of these buildings sat vacant for a number of years, except it was partly occupied for a time by the Wicks Pipe Organ Co.

“John F. Wick, the son of Louis J. Wick, a watch maker by trade, was asked by St. Paul Catholic Church to be the church organist. John studied in St. Louis, traveling by train, until he had developed his skills and became their organist.

“The old pump reed organ was needing replacement, so the priest asked if he would consider building a pipe organ. John and his two brothers worked diligently building a new organ for the church. This 1898 organ was secured again for their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2006. It was restored and played, during the celebration.

"The Wick brothers, John, Adolph and Louis, had built their first pipe organ for St. Paul Catholic Church on the second floor of their father's jewelry store (at 923 Main St., later the Seitz Jewelry Store and today The Giving Tree).

"The Wicks Pipe Organ Co. was organized in 1906 and incorporated in 1908. The list of men who became stockholders, was a 'Whose Who of Highland.' The 200 shares cost \$100 each. Shareholders were L.J. Wick, 53 shares; John F. Wick, 34 shares; Louis Spengel, 33 shares; Otto Geismann, 14 shares. The following had five shares or less: George Roth, Joseph Seitz, John Braun Jr., Dr. A.F. Kaeser, Eugene Schott, M.J. Schott, John B. Menz, Adolph Wick, Henry Rothley, Edward Leutwiler, John A. Leu, Louis Grantsow, William Clementz, Leo Seyfried, Peter Seitz Sr., Alvin Rinderer, C.J. Hug, Peter Grimmer, John H. Leef and Maurice Marcoot.

"Wicks built their building at 1100 5<sup>th</sup> St., about 1910." This quote was by Edgar Wick in the Feb. 1, 1984 *Highland News Leader*, after his retirement from Wicks Pipe Organ Co., after 71 years. The article was written by the late Katherine Oriez, the feature writer for the *News Leader*.

The article continues: "Edgar's father was Adolph Wick, one of the three Wick brothers, a cabinet maker by trade, and he worked on the first organ that the three brothers made, over the family jewelry store. Adolph continued to make consoles for their organs at their Broadway location and then their new building on 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

"Adolph then taught his son Edgar, the cabinet maker's craft and its application to making consoles for pipe organs. His father, Adolph, continued as cabinetmaker at the factory until his death in 1945. Then, Edgar Wick assumed his father's trade. All of the organs were numbered, and they were making No. 5977 when Edgar retired in 1984.

"The old wool factory, turned Helvetia Milk Condensing Co. complex, was then sold for a song to a group of five men from Highland: Louis Koch, Charles Hoefle, Adolph Meyer, state Sen. Josias G. Bardill and editor C.T. Kurz. It is believed that they later moved the milk company's frame office building, which was on Lot No. 3, to 1110 Washington St. (just behind the CC Food Mart at 920 Broadway).

"The five investors built, in its place, a brick office building, which served as Highland's post office for about 20 years. (See my column of Sept. 26, 2013 for the details about Lot No. 3.)

"During the World War II years, with material shortages, Wicks took a contract to build airplane wings, for which their shop equipment was well suited. Some of the Sitka spruce wood for the wings had to be mechanically bent for the wing contours and were greatly strengthened with the fabric skin, glue and paint. These wings were 13 ½ feet long and 12 inches thick. The insignia of a trainer plane was put on, and they were sent to St. Louis Air Craft Corp.

"Martin Wick, son of John Wick, one of the founders, became the president in 1948. The company continued to grow and expand, making new products to keep their employees working during slow times. The first plane built was in 1973, by Dick Hasse, called the 'Bowers Fly Baby.'

"Then, Martin started the Wicks Aircraft Supply Co., which was born in 1974 with a kit-built airplane called the 'KR2.' This plane was built in the organ factory in three months time and was very flyable.

"Martin had George Gibbons fly the plane to the Oshkosh, Wis., Experimental Aircraft Association Air Show. They received huge interest in the KR2 during and after the show. They decided to go in production of the kit, providing the plans, parts and materials, to people interested in building this aircraft. This was a hit, and a new factory was built across the road from the organ factory, where this kit was assembled, plus many others that followed."

They also supply materials for stock cars. You should visit their vast showroom, it is an eye opener. Scott Wick is now the president of Wicks Aircraft & Wicks Organ Co.

To keep the factory workers, when business was slow, they also made many grandfather clocks, roll-top desks, had a custom wood division and made three-wheeled bicycles.

Under Martin Wick and his wife Barbara's leadership, the company made more than 6,500 pipe organs. Martin was killed in an accident at his home in June 2002. Barbara became the president, and her son, Mark, became chief operating officer. Wicks went to "Smartsizing," having an auction of unneeded things, and set up their service department as independent contractor, BUT DID NOT GO OUT OF BUSINESS.

In the Aug. 15, 2013 *Highland News Leader*, it read: "Wicks Organ delivers organ to a North Carolina Church. Wicks recently built an 1,800-pipe organ for the White Plains United Methodist Church in Cary, N.C."

So, Wicks is still here! Highland can REJOICE! When will the next organ be built?

(Thanks to the Sesquicentennial Book, *Highland News Leader*, to Barb Wick for her pictures and information, plus Mark Wick for his Blog. Quotes from *Centennial History of Highland* and a copy of 1984 *Highland News Leader* from Barbara Wick.)



Wicks Pipe Organ Co. in 1906 on Broadway & Washington.