

# RECONSTRUCTION OF CHAUTAUQUA OUTDOOR ORGAN COMPLETED IN RECORD TIME

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In the December 1989 issue of THE AMERICAN ORGANIST (p. 76), I described the magnificent four-manual Massey Memorial Pipe Organ built in 1907 by the Warren Organ Company of Woodstock, Ontario, for the largely outdoor amphitheater of the Chautauqua Institution in upstate New York as having "a fine, rich body of traditional organ sound with an ample variety of solo voices appropriate to the ambiance of the huge amphitheater I was right. But when I went further and wrote that the organ had been "lovingly cared for," I had gone too far! I had assumed that, because I had never heard a cipher on the organ and because the organ continued "to inspire and thrill the thousands who hear[d] it," it had been properly maintained. I was in error.

While maintenance had been adequate for keeping the organ in shape so that it would not be an embarrassment to the institution, the fact that "this remarkable instrument in its unusual setting continued to inspire and thrill the thousands who hear it" appears to have been due largely to the artistry and ingenuity of the fine organists who played it rather than tender, loving care: about 50% of the organ had become nonfunctional through the passage of time and the neglect of repairs that were not immediately essential.

In early 1991, it had been determined by the Chautauqua Institution administration that whatever work might be needed to bring the organ to its maximum potential would be undertaken as soon as possible. At that time, the institution's vice president for operations W. Thomas Smith, consultant Fred Gluck, retired owner of Organ Supply Industries of Erie, Pennsylvania, and Paul E. Fischer of Paul E. Fischer Pipe Organ Sales & Service Inc. of Erie were asked to begin formulating a plan for the reconstruction project. Fortunately, the \$700,000 required to reconstruct the instrument and its housing

(which in 1907 had cost a total of \$39,000) became available through the generosity of the Carnahan-Jackson Foundation of Jamestown, New York; Arthur S. and Arlene Holden of Painesville, Ohio; H. Parker and Emma Sharp of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and the Margaret L. Wendt Foundation of Buffalo, New York. In addition to the \$600,000 required to restore the organ and its housing, a \$100,000 endowment was set up to provide funds for tuning and preventive maintenance. All reconstruction aspects, including chamber reconstruction, were put under the direction of Paul E. Fischer and his son Mark. Subcontractors included Artisan Classic Organ Systems of Markham, Ontario; Klann Inc. of Waynesboro, Virginia; Organ Supply Industries of Erie, Pennsylvania; and Harris Associates of Whittier, California.

The decision was made that reconstruction of the organ rather than replacement was "the way to go." Daniel L. Bratton, president of the Chautauqua Institution, explained:

*"The decision to reconstruct the organ rather than consider a new instrument had everything to do with Chautauqua's commitment to historic preservation. We realized it was imperative that the integrity of this unique instrument be retained, and Paul and Mark Fischer certainly proved the wisdom of our decision to hire them for the job. We're still basking in the memory of our joyous rededication ceremony, which took place the opening day of our 1993 season."*

Actual reconstruction of the Massey Memorial Pipe Organ began in September 1992 after the close of the 1992 season and was concluded only nine months later, in June 1993, in time for the rededication on June 27. This in itself was no small feat as the entire organ had to be removed from the chamber. New Pitman windchests had already been made, but 94 ranks of pipes had to be revoiced and racked and then the entire instrument had to be reinstalled in the reconstructed chamber. The intent of the Chautauqua Institution in restoring the organ was to "preserve the original Massey sound and freeze the organ in time." This was not totally possible because the organ had been tonally compromised in 1928 and again in 1972. It was determined that by adding three new ranks the original tonal scheme could be restored and the organ made fully playable. This further necessitated the addition of six drawknobs to the console. It is now possible to play the organ as it was first installed and also the way it had been known to performers in recent years. About 18 ranks of the original pipes had been transposed to other divisions or stored at several locations around the grounds of the institution. Others had been removed and given away as souvenirs. These were wood pipes and were all located and retrieved by the Fischers through public pleas for information.

The Chautauqua organ is the largest of five outdoor pipe organs in the United States, considered "outdoor" because their housings are not heated, air-conditioned, or otherwise climate-controlled in any way. The Chautauqua organ chamber is sealed off during the winter months although the temperature can drop to well below zero in the chamber. On January 19, 1994, the temperature in the chamber dropped to -24°!

Another outdoor organ to which the Chautauqua organ has been compared is the famous "Hero's Organ" in Kufstein, Austria, which is advertised as being the largest outdoor organ in the world, with 4,307 pipes. In comparison, the Chautauqua organ has 5,628 pipes, which almost certainly gives it the distinction of being the largest outdoor organ in the world.

In my 1989 article, I decried the fact that the Chautauqua organ in recent years had rarely been heard except in religious services. That unfortunate situation was somewhat alleviated in the 1993 inaugural season, when the renovated organ was heard in recitals by Chautauqua organist Kim R. Kasling, Jared Jacobsen, associate organist of the La Jolla Presbyterian Church in California, Wallace Weise, director of music, St. George Roman Catholic Church, Erie, Pennsylvania, James Bigham of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Buffalo, New York, and Tony O'Brien, the organist for the silent film, The Phantom of the Opera. The writer unfortunately was able to attend only the stunning Jared Jacobsen recital, which included Vierne's Carillon de Westminster and Franck's Chorale in A Minor, in which the instrument produced a remarkable French cathedral sound. The program concluded with Rimsky-Korsakov's Flight of the Bumble Bee and a rousing rendition of Sousa's Stars and Stripes Forever. The large enthusiastic audience did not want to go home.

Organ programs for the 1994 season include Thursday concerts on June 30, July 7, July 28, and August 4, with artists to be announced; a program for brass and organ with the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra brass section and Kim Kasling, organist, Wednesday evening, July 13; and a recital by Diane Bish on August 24. The organ may be used during Garrison Keillor's Prairie Home Companion program to be aired live from Chautauqua on Saturday, June 25.

The specification of the renovated Massey Memorial Organ at Chautauqua is as follows: