

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTIST

Winnetka, Illinois

By Stephen J. Schnurr

EFFORTS TO FOUND a Christian Science Church for residents of Winnetka began in the spring of 1924.¹ The Winnetka congregation held its initial service on May 4, 1928, in the Masonic Temple.

The present property at the southwest corner of Ridge Avenue and Cherry Street was purchased by the end of that year. The cornerstone was laid on August 6, 1933, and the first service was held in the Sunday School area on November 5. For a time, the auditorium remained unfinished. The architect for the Colonial-style building of brick with stone trim was Spencer S. Beman of Winnetka, charter member of First Church and son of Solon S. Beman, well-known for his Christian Science Church commissions. The elegant yet modest auditorium seats 434. Services began in this space on October 16, 1938. Cleared of all debt, the church dedication finally occurred on Sunday, February 2, 1941, with three identical services in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Construction cost approximately \$128,000. The pewter and crystal lighting fixtures were imported from Czechoslovakia prior to the Second World War.

The congregation began receiving solicitations from many organbuilders as early as 1929 including Möller, Aeolian, Estey, Hinners, Votteler-Holtkamp-Sparling, James Topp, Pilcher, Reuter, Skinner, Kilgen, and Kimball. Kilgen offered to install a unit organ costing between \$750 and \$1,000 and would refund 85 percent of the purchase price if the church were to buy a larger organ from them within a few years' time.

Kimball made its first contact with the church in September of 1930. The organ was sold on May 24, 1938. The purchase price of \$5,130.41 was paid for by January 12, 1940, with funds from Zerlina Knox Winton, a church member. Her husband was David W. Kimball, who would become president of the Kimball firm. (Beman designed Kimball's residence.) The organ was to be installed by September 11, 1938.

The Swell and Great divisions are enclosed in separate chambers. The first recital was played on the organ by William H. Barnes of Evanston on August 21, 1938.

The W.W. Kimball Co. organ is tonally and mechanically unaltered, making it the oldest unaltered organ in the village and among the oldest unaltered organs along the North Shore. The Organ Historical Society presented its Historic Organ Citation No. 371 to the instrument on November 9, 2008. Presentation was made by Stephen Schnurr during a recital by First Church organist Robert E. Woodworth Jr., celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the organ.

¹ Prior to that, Christian Scientists of the North Shore attended First Church in Evanston (founded 1895), First Church in Highland Park (1900), and First Church in Glencoe (1921).