

AN INFORMAL HISTORY OF PIPE ORGANS
IN
THE CHURCHES OF ROCK HILL, S.C.,
AND AT
WINTHROP COLLEGE (now UNIVERSITY)
1897 --- 2007

by

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Contributed by Morris Spearman

I. PIPE ORGANS IN THE CHURCHES OF ROCK HILL, S.C., FROM 1905

The first pipe organ installed in a Rock Hill church was a 2-manual, 18-rank, second-hand tracker instrument bought from and installed by John Brown of Wilmington, Delaware. The dedication recital was played by Prof. Joseph McLean in July, 1905. This organ was probably Opus 51 of the renowned New York builder Hilborne L. Roosevelt (he was a first cousin of President Theodore Roosevelt). Preliminary research indicates that the organ was built about 1878-1880 and was installed new in St. Michael and All Angels Protestant Episcopal Church of Baltimore, Maryland. After about twenty years the Church sold the organ and purchased a new and larger instrument. It is likely that it was John Brown who bought the old organ and then sold it to **the First Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill, S.C.** The organ was first supplied with wind by a water motor which was attached to the city water system in Rock Hill. An electric blower was installed about 1914. The first professional organist of the First Presbyterian Church was Miss Nancy G. Campbell, chairman of the Music Department of Winthrop College. After she removed to Philadelphia in later years, she was one of the founders of the Westminster Choir College, Princeton, N.J. She served the Rock Hill church as both organist and choir director from 1909 to 1914. The Roosevelt/Brown organ was used regularly from 1905 until it was taken down in 1960 to make room for a new instrument. The old organ was eventually given to Davidson College as a memorial to a former pastor, Dr. Walter Lee Lingle, who was also a president of Davidson College. The organ was to have been installed (after restoration) in the Lingle Chapel at the Davidson College Presbyterian Church.

The second church organ in Rock Hill was a 2-manual tubular-pneumatic instrument bought from M. P. Möller in 1910 and completed in 1911. It was Opus 1189 of Möller. At that time **St. John's Methodist Church, Rock Hill**, where the organ was placed, was located on the northwestern corner of East Main Street and Caldwell Street. This organ was used until 1924, when it was dismantled and sold to another church. The first organist at St. John's to play this 1910 instrument was Mrs. Isabel Field Johnson, a teacher of piano in the Music Department of Winthrop College and the wife of Julian B. Johnson. She was a native of Boston, Massachusetts, and a cousin of Eugene Field, the poet. She was organist at St. John's until 1947, at which time she was succeeded by Miss Mary Elizabeth Dunlap, also of the Winthrop music faculty, who served the church faithfully for seventeen years. The 1910 organ had ten ranks and eighteen registers (stops).

The next instrument was a 1-manual organ of five ranks, Opus 1206, built by M. P. Möller in 1911 for **the Episcopal Church of Our Savior, Rock Hill**. This organ had 10 registers (stops). The first organist to use this was Miss Ermine Wilfong, a member of the music faculty of Winthrop College. She was organist of the Church from about 1905 to 1940. The Möller Opus 1206 was still being used after Miss Florence Smyth became organist of the Church. Evidently the organ was dismantled and discarded in 1948 when the Church purchased an "Artiste," a small two-manual unit organ (made by Möller), from the Episcopal Church of the Advent, Spartanburg, S.C.

The original pipe organ in the **First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill** was a 1911 Möller, Opus 1303, of 20 registers (stops). This instrument was of the tubular-pneumatic type and had about 12 to 14 ranks. The tone of this organ was excellent and the sound, pleasing and well suited to the size of the room. The organ was in regular use until 1971. In that year the Church bought the Möller organ in the First Baptist Church of Laurens, S.C., for \$2,000. The cost of moving it to Rock Hill and erecting it in the Church was \$5,000. This work was done by Mr. Albert Discepoli and associates. This organ was Opus 7071 of Möller, built for the Laurens Church in 1942. It was rebuilt by Möller for the Laurens congregation, and was given the new number Opus R-602. Since it was removed to Rock Hill, there have been several additions made: a new trumpet stop in 1976 and a mixture in 1981.

The Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church was organized in 1913. Within a year or two this congregation had purchased a pipe organ for their new building, which had been completed in 1912. This instrument was built by Henry Pilcher's Sons, of Louisville, Kentucky. This was a 2-manual organ of about fifteen to eighteen ranks. The case was finished in a mahogany color. The instrument was used regularly until the 1960's. After a few years, during which time several types of organs were tried out, the Oakland Avenue Church purchased a large 2-manual instrument from Casavant Frères, Limitée, of Québec, Canada. There is with this organ an antiphonal division. It has always been a mystery to this writer that the Church did not install a 3-manual console, since the cost at the time would have been negligible and since there were so many stops to be shared by only two manuals, with the antiphonal division to be accommodated also. But church music committees have always been laws unto themselves, other people's advice to the contrary notwithstanding. The technical advisor to the organ committee was Dr. Richard Peek, of Charlotte, N.C., who steered the committee to Casavant.

The First Baptist Church, originally located on Hampton Street in Rock Hill, had an organ identical to the Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church instrument, the only difference being the finish of the case, which in this instance was natural oak. The Baptists evidently bought this Pilcher organ at the same time that the Presbyterians bought, and that would have been about 1914-1915. When the Baptists built their large new structure on East Main Street, at the corner of East Main and Oakland Avenue, in 1922, they moved the Pilcher organ to the new site, where it remained until a large 3-manual Kilgen organ was installed in 1951. Kilgen Organ Company, of St. Louis, Missouri, furnished the Church with 31 ranks, including the Echo Organ in the rear balcony. This organ was a gift to the Church by Mr. and Mrs. L. F. Waldrop.

It was in 1923-1924 that the congregation of **St. John's Methodist Church** built their new church building on Oakland Avenue Extension. The Church had been so pleased with their first pipe organ (Möller Opus 1189) that they purchased another Möller organ, Opus 4008 this time, an instrument of three manuals. This was the first 3-manual pipe organ to be installed in a Rock Hill church. The building of this organ was supervised by M. P. Möller himself, and the organ has been durable indeed, being eighty-

three years old this year and still going strong. While the organ is not rich in the number of ranks, it does have a good, solid tone, well-suited for accompanying congregational singing. There are fifty-eights stops (registers), and over twenty-five ranks of pipes, all large-scale pipes of substantial capacity. To say the least, this is the oldest pipe organ in a Rock Hill church.

After the **Episcopal Church of Our Saviour** sold their Möller "Artiste" organ to Winthrop College, the Church was the recipient of portions of the old organ of Christ Church (Episcopal) of Greenville, S.C. This had been originally built by the renowned E. M. Skinner probably in the 1920's, with substantial changes made in 1953 by Austin Organs. After this organ was used for a number of years in Rock Hill, it was rendered unfit for further use by the collapse of the roof over the organ chamber. The Church then purchased from Austin Organs in 1984 a three-manual organ designed by Dr. David Lowry, of the Winthrop music faculty. Substantial additions were made and the organ was completed in 1993. One of the best organs in the city, it is not long on quantity, but on quality. There are twenty-two voices and 27 ranks of pipes (1,588 pipes).

In 1961 the **First Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill** installed a 38-rank Möller designed, voiced, and dedicated by the well-known American organ authority Ernest White, of Hagerstown and New York. This is one of the two largest church pipe organs in Rock Hill. The instrument has been praised by several distinguished recitalists, including Langlais and Cochereau. In 1992 an 8-ft. Principal was added to the Great division of the organ and mechanical improvements were made.

Oakland Baptist Church of Rock Hill installed a 3-manual Möller organ in their sanctuary in 1963. While the scale of the pipes in this organ is not large, the sound produced by the instrument is good and well-suited to the structure in which it speaks.

Westminster Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill, located on India Hook Road, placed a large 3-manual Austin pipe organ in their new building in 1987. Dr. David Lowry was the technical consultant to the organ committee. This is one of the two largest church pipe organs in the city. The present number of pipes is 2,236. Two additional divisions are projected. If they are installed in future years, the total number of pipes will be in excess of 3,500.

Ebenezer Presbyterian Church of Rock Hill purchased from M. P. Möller in 1988 a 3-manual instrument of modest proportions but pleasing tone.

I have little information on the organ in **Grace Lutheran Church in Rock Hill**. It is a small 2-manual instrument located in the rear gallery, as I recall.

II. CHURCH ORGANISTS THAT I REMEMBER

First Presbyterian Church: Miss Hattie Thompson, Mrs. Beulah Barron Johnson, J. Ed Reid, Mrs. Ben M. Fewell, Miss Nancy G. Campbell, Miss Mary E. Jenkins, Mrs. J. Stevenson Davies, Miss Georgia B. Dickert, Dr. Walter B. Roberts, Ben L. Strozier, William B. White, Jr., David B. Richardson, Mrs. Janet Miller. *

St. John's Methodist Church: Mrs. Isabel Field Johnson, Miss Mary Elizabeth Dunlap, Mrs. Elizabeth Hardin Cogburn, Mrs. Nancy O. Hull, Mrs. Jane Arant, Richard Crofts, Wm. B. White, Jr., Debbie Bagwell, Billy Fallaw, Wesley Revels.

The Episcopal Church of Our Savior: Miss Ermine Wilfong, Miss Ruth Stephenson, Miss Florence M. Smyth, William Dixon, Dr. Jess T. Casey, Mrs. Beth Schrader Harrill, Mrs. Julian Hinson, Mrs. Susan Hayes Kelly, Dr. David M. Lowry, Mrs. Shirley H. Fishburne.

First Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church: Miss Ruth Stephenson, Miss Mary E. Jenkins, D. C. Youngblood, Mrs. Herbert Crawford, Patrick Robinson.

Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church: Miss Nancy G. Campbell, Mrs. Edwin R. Jeter, Mrs. Toney B. Jackson, Mrs. Jack Baker, Mrs. Jack V. Tait.

First Baptist Church: Mrs. E. R. Treverton, D. C. Youngblood, Mrs. Starr Chambers, Miss Virginia Eckleberry, Miss Mary Ina Sigmon, Miss Joyce Hall, Mrs. Robert H. Marett, Mrs. Jo Dozier.

Oakland Baptist Church: Mrs. Robert H. Marett.

Westminster Presbyterian Church: Mrs. Jack Lee.

Ebenezer Presbyterian Church: Mrs. M. C. Newland, Mrs. Starr Chambers, Wesley Revels.

Woodland Methodist Church: Billy Fallaw, Mrs. Jack Lee.

*Also, Miss Marion Roddey (later Mrs. Sam Miller of Columbia, S.C.), who was one of the organists before Miss Nancy G. Campbell.

III. PIPE ORGANS USED AT WINTHROP COLLEGE, ROCK HILL, S.C. FROM 1897

1. The first pipe organ at Winthrop College and, indeed, the first pipe organ ever brought to Rock Hill, S.C., or York Co., S.C., was Opus 182 of M. P. Möller Organ Company, Hagerstown, Maryland. This organ was installed in 1897 in the Main Building of the College and was a 1-manual instrument of 18 registers (stops). The late Miss Mary Elizabeth Dunlap told me that this earliest of organs was no longer in existence by 1928, when she first studied at Winthrop. No one seems to know what was done with this historically significant organ.

2. The next organ at Winthrop College was a 3-manual instrument built by Henry Pilcher's Sons of Louisville, Kentucky. It was installed in the auditorium of the Main Building in the year 1913. Clarence Eddy, renowned organ recitalist of that day, gave the dedicatory recital in the year given. (See the Rock Hill **Herald** 9-26-1913, p. 1, c. 3, for account of this recital.) The total cost of the organ to the State of South Carolina was about \$10,000. I remember the organ well, and even played it once or twice. It had a rather bland tone and was not what we would call a large organ, but it did boast the first 3-manual console ever brought to Rock Hill. The organ was taken down before World War II. It was put back into service by Dave Woodall & Son about 1945 or 1946. Ultimately, the organ was discarded. Let me say that I heard Robert Noehren, of Davidson College, give a recital on this organ about 1946-1950. Even though this was not the best organ I had ever heard, the occasion brought forth the most beautiful performance of the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. Finally, my late father, W. Boyce White, once told me that when he was a teenager (between 1920 and 1925) he worked with an organ crew that had been engaged to clean and refurbish the 3-manual Pilcher organ. The organ case was made of oak.

3. A 2-manual organ from Henry Pilcher's Sons was installed in the balcony of the auditorium in Johnson Hall. Later the organ was taken down and moved to one of the upper floors of the new (1939) Music Building and used there as a practice organ.

4. Another 2-manual organ from Henry Pilcher's Sons was placed in the Recital Hall of the new Music Building (1939-1940). The console was at the front of the room, on the main floor, just in front of the stage. An organ of modest proportions..... the instrument's pipes were housed in two chambers at the rear of the Recital Hall, a chamber on each side of the main entrance.

5. Next, we come to the great 4-manual Aeolian-Skinner organ designed and voiced by the foremost organ authority in America in his day, G. Donald Harrison. The organ was made in Boston, Mass., in the year 1955. It was installed in Byrnes Auditorium as a memorial to Dr. David Bancroft Johnson, founder and first president of the College. By the way, Harrison, an Englishman, attached his personal seal of approval to the console, thus pronouncing the organ one of the best he had ever built. Virgil Fox said the same thing about the organ. The money for the organ was raised by the

Winthrop Alumnae Association, of which the late Miss Ruth M. Williams was executive secretary at the time. Dr. Walter B. Roberts was chairman of the Organ Committee which purchased the instrument. Miss Jeannette Roth, of the organ faculty, was also a member of the committee, as I recall. I think it would be safe to say that this instrument is probably the finest pipe organ installed in South Carolina in the 20th century. The acoustics of Byrnes Auditorium contribute mightily to the beauty of sound produced by this masterpiece of the organbuilder's art. Virgil Fox gave the dedication recital before two capacity crowds of 3,500 each.

6. There is a practice organ in the Music Building built by Angerstein and Associates, of Stoughton, Massachusetts.

7. There is still another practice organ in the Music Building. This one was built by the Möller Organ Company. It is called the "Artiste" Model and was purchased from the Episcopal Church of Our Saviour in Rock Hill when that church decided to install another organ.

8. In the Recital Hall today (1987) there is a 2-manual pipe organ built by Gabriel Kney & Company, on London, Ontario. This organ is a tracker instrument, of mechanical action. I do not have the date of its installation.

Winthrop once owned two other organs, but they were not pipe organs. The first was a reed organ, two manuals with pedals. This old curiosity was installed in the Music Building adjacent to the studio of Miss Roth, the organ teacher. I played this organ many times and always enjoyed the experience. The second organ was an electronic organ -- a Hammond organ to be exact. It was purchased by the College for use in the College Amphitheater, in Byrnes Auditorium, and at any other place where an organ was needed in the days before there was an organ in Byrnes Auditorium. This Hammond organ was built like a Mack truck and it had to be built that way, because it was hauled around from place to place by the Winthrop maintenance crews. I recall that Mr. Gore (Emmett Gore) often used that organ in conjunction with his Winthrop College Orchestra and also with the Winthrop College Band, also conducted by Mr. Gore.

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(Extract from Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Winthrop College, June 4, 1913.)

Dr. David Bancroft Johnson, president of the College, is reporting to the Board, as follows: "In accordance with the action of the Board, I have contracted for a great pipe organ to be placed in the new auditorium this summer by the old and reliable firm of organ builders, Henry Pilcher's Sons, of Louisville, Kentucky. The contract price is \$9,750.00, to be paid in annual installments. A discount of 5% on the original price was given in view of the fact that another pipe organ is to be installed in Rock Hill by this firm at the same time at which Winthrop's organ is to be installed."

The organ at Winthrop was installed before November, 1913.

IV. THEATER ORGAN

In addition to the pipe organs installed in Rock Hill churches and at Winthrop College (now University), a pipe organ was installed in the Stevenson Theater, a motion picture theater in the downtown section of Rock Hill, in January, 1928, following the completion of the new theater building (between Penney's Department Store and Phillips Drugstore). A newspaper account states that the new theater's organ was built by the Geneva Organ Company and that it was "an instrument of marvelous power in orchestral effects," that could simulate "a great orchestra." The organ was used between movie features each day. The manager of the Stevenson Theater, Ben L. Strozier, was also the theater organist. He was organist of First Presbyterian Church from 1940 to 1945. The theater organ was used regularly from 1928 to about 1938. This writer, a movie fan, started patronizing the Stevenson Theater on a regular basis beginning in 1940, and the organ at that time was nowhere to be seen or heard.