

THE ORGANS AT THE ASCENSION

by Michael Sparks

The first organ at Ascension was a Conn electronic which stood together with the choir in the balcony of the old church, now known as Ware Hall. As there was a door from the balcony to the roof, members of the choir occasionally took cigarette breaks during the sermon!



When Bob Lockard became the rector, the Conn was barely playable. The church was also running out of room. A decision was made to build an addition to the sanctuary. Parishioner Jim Mitchell of Henry Sprott Long and Associates designed the addition.

As a part of the project, Ascension replaced the electronic organ. Alan Walker, then music chair of the diocese, referred the church to Phares Steiner of Louisville, KY. Steiner received the contract to build a small organ of five voices and ten stops. Gottfried Reck, who had joined Steiner after immigrating from

Germany, did much of the actual construction and installation.

Because of the lack of space and other considerations, the organ case was placed in a carved-out niche in the balcony, with the console (the keyboards, etc.) standing at the other end of the church. The choir was relocated to the northeast corner near the console. This ended the smoking breaks, but the distance between organ and choir made accompanying virtually impossible. Microphoning the organ with speakers near the choir provided a stop-gap solution. This was the instrument that I inherited when I first came to the parish in 1978.



Though larger, the room was still barely adequate and we regularly had three Sunday services. We also had no parish hall. After much soul searching, the church decided to build a new sanctuary, giving us a better environment for worship and allowing us to turn the old sanctuary into a parish hall. Jim Mitchell was again called on to serve as the architect. The consensus was against building another "contemporary" church, and Jim's final design is the beautiful building we worship in today. We moved into the new church in 1987 and shortly after, the church was equipped with all new furniture. The only

things kept from the old church were the baptismal font and the organ.

During the 80s and 90s, the choir was growing, but the organ remained the small parish instrument that it had always been, frustrating the choir and stifling congregational singing. With a large congregation, the organ was barely audible. It was clear that the new church, the choir and the congregation deserved a new instrument. This organ would be adequate for choral accompanying, leading the congregation in singing and performing the majority of organ literature. In short, it would be the last organ we would ever need.

An organ committee, chaired by Tom Cochran, and a fund were established, and we began to move slowly towards our goal. Over



Shrimp Boil '98

This allowed us to finalize a design and sign a contract.

The design of the organ and just who should build it had never been far from my mind. Over the last fifteen years, I had served as the consultant to several churches and had first-hand experience with several builders. One I admired was Gottfried Reck. Gottfried had become a partner of Phares Steiner, the builder of our small organ, and had succeeded him after his retirement. He had built many organs and had received several awards for distinguished design. As our little instrument had provided nearly twenty-five years of



trouble-free service, he was the obvious choice to build the new organ.

To be successful, the new organ would require a sufficient number of voices, as well as a style of scaling and voicing that would be both gentle and majestic. Above all, it had to work in tandem with the choir. I believed that this vision could best be fulfilled by scaling and voicing much of the organ in style best described as English, and Gottfried supported this idea. I suggested that we employ Trevor Crowe of Dublin, Ireland to provide scaling (dimensioning the pipes) and voicing expertise for this particular style. I had worked with Trevor on several occasions and knew his work to be first-rate. As Gottfried often employed extra help during the finishing process, it was a natural next step.

A long period of construction followed. In early 1999, the little organ was sold to Church of the Resurrection in Gadsden and Gottfried supervised the move. Jim Mitchell, together with Riley Stuart, provided plans and crew for preparation of the chancel.

At last, on August 15, 1999, two large trucks together with Gottfried and his crew arrived and were greeted by an eager crowd waiting to unload. We had asked for the help of twenty-five or thirty people and received almost three times that many.



Unloading the truck

The physical installation of the organ took almost a month. Trevor Crowe arrived on September 18, and he and Gottfried began the painstaking process of tonal finishing. Each one of more than 2,200 pipes was adjusted for color, speech and pitch.

The result is a spectacular instrument. Gottfried's case is visually stunning and impeccably executed. A sophisticated eye

pointed out that the case looks as though it has always been here. No less ingenious is the mechanical layout. The aisle behind the organ was saved, and intrusion into the chancel was minimized. Service access is excellent. By



choosing to build the console into the organ, we were also able to add an extra choir stall on the organ side, adding much needed space for the choir, and properly balancing its layout as well.

Trevor's choice of scales proved to be perfect for the room. The musical sensitivity and the

tremendous skill of both Gottfried and Trevor have provided a level of refinement in voicing to which many aspire, but few achieve.

We now have a magnificent new instrument which will serve Ascension for many generations to come. It can accompany any choral literature, lead even the largest congregations with authority and accurately render the vast majority of organ literature. Our sincere thanks go to all who have helped to make this instrument a reality.



A MESSAGE FROM THE BUILDER

by Gottfried C. Reck

When planning and building the new pipe organ for Church of the Ascension, our goal was to follow precedence of the old masters and apply them to today's needs. We chose specifically to build an instrument which reflects the clarity of those played by Bach and his contemporaries, while also displaying the warmth and gentleness of the 19th century English organ. It also contains colors essential to the interpretation of the music from other countries and periods.

The result, we feel, is an instrument with a tonal palette in which varied compositional styles can be adequately accommodated, and with a visual design reflecting the appreciation of the Ascension's architectural features.

The versatility of this pipe organ was enhanced by judicious unification and the attached console, with its 64-level memory system and touch plate stop controls, is designed for function, convenience and reliability.

The success of this project was due not only to the use of a variety of materials and developments in technology, but also to the talents, ideas and dedication of the many people involved. I particularly want to express my appreciation of the continuing interest and support of Bob Lockard, the Vestry, Organ Committee and Mike Sparks. Here in our workshop, I want to acknowledge the members of the group who worked on this instrument--Glen Doyle, Jessica Meyers, Keith Kauffman, Hans-Georg Reck, and during the tonal design and voicing phases, Treyor Crowe.

THE ORGAN COMMITTEE

<i>Jack Barclay</i>	<i>Tom Cochran, chair</i>
<i>Jim Busbin</i>	<i>Lynn Hammonds</i>
<i>Bob Carr</i>	<i>Sarah Heaslett</i>
<i>Ben Chastain</i>	<i>Mike Sparks</i>
	<i>Elizabeth Tanner</i>