S. L. Huntington & Co.

29 BAYVIEW AVENUE, BOX 56, STONINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06378 (401-348-8298)

Tracker Organ Builders

Report for:
Park Avenue Congregational Church
Arlington, Massachusetts

New Instruments
Preservation
Restoration
6/05

It was very interesting to see this instrument again after a span of 17 years. It hardly seems like it was that long ago. As I read my report from May, 1988, I realized that my advice and position has not changed at all in the intervening years, but that I have a more enhanced perspective than I did at the time. Today, I have the benefit of the original contract which I did not have in 1988 (and which answers a number of puzzling questions), and I have performed tonal restorations on a number of E.M. Skinner instruments since I last saw this organ (also giving me for in-depth experience than I had in 1988).

If anything, the popularity of E.M. Skinner organs has increased dramatically since the OAC was last here, making this instrument even more of a treasure than it was considered at the time. When last seen by us, the instrument was in a state of disrepair with a host of mechanical problems that to a large extent, have been addressed. At the time, the organ was not receiving regular maintenance, and this problem too, has been addressed.

Several tonal changes have been made in the intervening years, which I counseled against in 1988, and which I propose should be reversed. I do not feel as though these attempts to "modernize" the instrument tonally are totally successful. Luckily, you chose a builder to do this work who is scrupulous about saving old material, and many of the original pipes still exist and can be returned to their original positions. A number of tonal changes were obviously made when the organ was installed here, or were made to the instrument in its original home. Since the original evidence is now lost, it might not be prudent to reverse these changes to return the organ totally to its original condition. However, the non-original pipework needs to be voiced to blend with the old material- at present it is an unfortunate oil/water mix. I believe there are a number of modifications to the original installation here that could maximize the instrument's effectiveness. These coupled with judicious tonal regulation and reversing of the latest tonal changes, would make this instrument singularly successful, and a treasure-trove of original EMS material and thought.

possibly

One of the old changes to the Swell division- the removal of its 16' and 8' stopped flute ranks and the substitution of a non-original flute rank playing only at 8' pitch, is the most unfortunate loss. I will propose what I believe to be a good compromise plan, that will incorporate some of the past changes, (albeit better adapted to the original material), and yet will strive to regain the flavor (if not the historical accuracy) of the original instrument.

To begin with, there is a problem with the amount of dead air space above the expression shutter opening in the chamber for the Swell division. This dead space is a sound-trap that is absorbing a substantial amount of sound produced by these pipes. The acoustical coupling of this division to the room therefore, is compromised and extremely inefficient. It has also been mentioned, that the choir members sitting to the far side of the choir gallery opposite the Swell chamber, can not hear the Swell properly- the sound exits into the church and they only hear reflected sound.

My solution is this: either open the wall above the Swell shade frame and install a second set of shutters so that when the shutters are open, the entire chamber air-space can couple to the auditorium, or lower the ceiling in the chamber. The danger with the latter suggestion, is that this will distort the height-width-depth proportion. In an ideal world, a chamber is half as deep as it is wide, and twice as tall as it is wide. The depth of the chamber in proportion to its width in this case, will likely preclude this as an option. The second recommendation I will make in this regard, is to open the chamber wall that opens into the Great division, with another set of swell shutters. This should be controlled by the same pedal that controls the main swell shades, but with a selector switch that allows each set of shutters to be controlled by the pedal independently, or together. If a set is not selected, that set of shutters would automatically close. The advantage of this is the opening on the side will allow the choir members to hear the Swell division better, and the organist can elect to keep the front set closed, and use only the side set to accompany the choir (allowing the organist to use quite full combinations without the singers being overwhelmed).

Parenthetically, the choir pews should be replaced with light, easily moveable seating to maximize the seating and sight lines for the choir members. It might also prove expedient to pierce the reredos, to trap less sound from the singers within the loft area.

Since 1988, many portions of the organ have been releathered, which should leave the organ is reliable mechanical condition for a good many years. There is still at least one reservoir (for the the Great 16' *Quintatön*) that is leaking badly and needs releathering. There may be additional action work to releather, however this information was not available to us during our visit.

The organ chambers in general are in need of far better lighting. A program of fluorescents and service outlets is in order (you can never have too many). There needs to be lighting both above and below the windchests for work not only on the pipes but on the action as well.

Without further intensive examination, I am unable to say what original stop channels now control which of pipes, but I can easily deduce which stops are new and can ascertain the likely provenance of the pipes currently stored in various parts of the organ. Of particular interest are the windchest mechanisms that originally controlled the Swell *16' Bourdon* which also played in the Pedal at 16' and 8' pitches, and the old Swell *Spitzflute* 8' which had a duplex action allowing it to also be played from the Great. Presumably, these mechanisms still exist within the windchest, even though no longer used for their original function. Had I known of this during my visit, I would have made a point of looking to find the answers to this question.

I will append a stoplist of the organ as it now exists, detailing the changes as I am able to deduce them. Part of the reason for this exercise is to determine how to put the instrument back to a condition more closely resembling the original, while keeping the best of the recent modifications.

Great

Quintatön	*16'*	1950s-60s era pipes on new unit action windchest, playing at 16' and 4' pitches. Originally, the Pedal *Bourdon 16'* would have been available on the Great as its 16' stop as well.
[First Diapason	8']	These pipes now comprise the non-original Pedal *Octave 8'* and *Choral Bass 4'*- for which they are particularly ill-suited. The new Mixture III apparently is now standing on the old Diapason toeboard.
[English] Diapason	8'	The original pipes, in use in 1988, have been replaced with new pipes (of decent tone, but of insufficient scale and body to support the organ ensemble as necessary). The new stop uses the original bass pipes, and the original pipes fortunately, are still stored within the organ.
Melodia	8'	original
Spitzflute	8'	these pipes were originally in the Swell, and played at 8' pitch on both divisions. These pipes now stand on what is most likely the toeboard for the original *Harmonic flute 4'*, the pipes of which are long gone. This stop's position on the Swell windchest is now occupied by another stop, the identity of which is unknown at this time.
Octave	4'	New pipes, post 1988. If the original pipes still exist, and I have not yet ascertained this, they should be reinstated.
Quintflöte	*4'*	an extension of the Quintatön 16', intended to replace the removed original Flute 4' This is not a successful stop, and is particularly out of place in this ensemble.
Nazat	2 2/3'	the original *Twelfth*, renamed
Flageolet	2'	the original *Fifteenth*, renamed
Mixture	*III*	new, likely pre-1988. Does not blend with the original voicing and needs to be revoiced. This stop occupies what is likely the original *First Diapason* toeboard. If the *Diapason* is to be relocated, this stop will need to be moved to another toeboard.

Swell

[Bourdon	16']	This stop is now missing, and another substituted in its place. This stop original played in the Pedal as well, at 16' and 8' pitches. It is likely that the present *Gedeckt 8'* unit is occupying this toeboard.
Diapason	8'	original
Gedeckt	8	Probably original pipes, from either of the original 16' or 8' stops. This stop plays in the Pedal at 16' and 8' pitches, as did the original 16' Swell

		Bourdon. This could be the original 16' Bourdon, now wired to play in the Swell only at 16' pitch.
Salicional	8'	original
Voix Celeste	8'	original
Principal	*4'*	not original- likely replaced the original *Violin 4'*. This stop is a useful element in the chorus, and could remain, but needs to be revoiced to blend with the original material.
Flute	4'	original
Blockflöte	*2'*	**non-original**. This stop and the next, most likely occupy the locations of the original *Gedeckt 8'* and *Spitzflute 8'*. This stop could be more successful.
Mixture	*III*	non-original. This stop is too high-pitched, and does not blend with the original material. It should be re-pitched lower, and revoiced.
English Horn	16'	original, pipes badly damaged and in need of considerable repair.
Cornopean	8'	original, pipes in need of regulation and repair. Additional Swell openings will make this stop, and the Swell chorus more effective.
Oboe	4'	original pipes, repitched. These pipes are badly damaged and in need of considerable repair. This stop is useless at 4' pitch, and should be restored to 8' pitch, requiring 12 new bass pipes to match.

Choir

Concert Flute	8'	original
Unda Maris	*II*	**likely non**-original. Contract specifies *Diapason 8'* which could be a useful addition if restored Skinner Choir *Diapasons* were quite lovely. However, this stop is useful in its own right, and could remain.
Flauto traverso	4'	original
Clarinet	8'	original

Pedal

Diapason	16'	original
Bourdon	16'	original
Echo Lieblich	16'	original, from Swell
Quintatön	*16'*	not original, from Great
Octave	8'	originally extension of 16' *Diapason*, now uses pipes from the original Great *First Diapason,* on a new chest, and which plays at 8' and 4' pitches. Not a successful stop.
Gedeckt	*8'*	not on original console, extension of Pedal *Bourdon* 16',
Still Gedeckt	8'	original, an extension of the Swell *Lieblich* 16'
Choral Bass	*4'*	not a stop in the original pedal division, and extension of the Octave 8' using original pipework, relocated to this position. Not a successful stop.
English Horn	16'	original, borrowed from Swell

My overall recommendation is this, keep pipework additions, but rework them more sympathetically into the organ scheme. In order to return the organ as closely as possible to its original condition, using all the original material, and yet to incorporate the best of the recent additions made compatible to the organ, I make the following recommendations:

- Turn the present Great chest around, so that the arrangement of the stops in the chamber reflects the original layout of the organ. Thus, the lowest pitches (presently along the back wall of the chamber, are now at the front of the chest behind the grill, and the highest pitches are at the rear of the chest, deep within the chamber. This will help restore the balance of the low pitches versus the high pitches. Presently the high pitches in the organ are too prominent, spoiling the ensemble. Bring the chest forward, and move the walkboard to a position between the chest and the back wall.

- Restore the *First Diapason 8'* to its original position on the Great. This will displace the new *Mixture III.*

- Remove the pipes of the present Great *Diapason 8'*, and restore the pipes of the original *English Diapason 8'*, (currently in storage within the organ), to their original location.

- Restore the original *Octave 4'* pipes to the Great, if they still exist. If not, rescale and revoice the new pipework of the present *Octave 4'*, to more closely match the original.

- Remove the *Quintatön 16'* from the Great entirely. Rewire the Pedal *Bourdon 16'* to play on the Great at 16' pitch, as originally intended. This will add more weight, grandeur and heft to the Great chorus.

- Relocate the *Spitzflute 8'* from its present position on the Great chest, to the now vacated *Quintatön 16'* unit chest. Then, rewire this stop to play at 8' and 4' on the Great, and retain the wiring that allows it to play in the Pedal. It would now sound there at 8'pitch.

- Relocate the Great *Mixture III,* displaced by the reinstatement of the *First Diapason,* to the toeboard now vacated by the moving of the *Spitzflute 8'* to the *Quintatön chest*, and retaining its present 17-note chest for the bass pipes. This stop should be revoiced.

- Remove whichever Swell stop is occupying the toeboard of the original *Gedeckt 8'*. Move the pipes of the present *Gedeckt 8'* to this position.

- Remove the Swell *Blockflöte 2'* from the organ entirely. This is not a successful stop.

- Relocate the Swell *Mixture III* to the remaining unused toeboard, revoice it to blend, and repitch it to begin at 2' pitch. This present stop is too-high in pitch to be successful here, particularly with the presence of a super-octave coupler. This stop should then break to 2 2/3' pitch at tenor c, and 4' pitch at middle c.

- Relocate the now displaced Great *Quintatön 16'* to the toeboard once occupied by the original Swell *Bourdon 16'*. The internal duplexing mechanism will allow this stop to play at 16' pitch on the Swell, and at 16' and 8' pitch in the pedal, in the manner of the original 16' flute stop. Put the 12 original bass pipes of the Swell 16' *Bourdon*, currently in use, into storage, and put the basses of the new stop in their place.

- Revoice the present pipes of the non-original Swell *Principal 4'* to be more compatible with the original pipework.

- Send all the reed pipes to a reed restoration service, to be carefully and meticulously restored.

- Repitch the original Swell *Oboe (Flügel Horn)* to 8' pitch, with a new 12-note bottom octave designed to match the missing originals.

- Take the new pipes of the present Great *Diapason 8'* and move them to the Pedal *Octave 8'/Choral Bass 4'* chest, formerly occupied by the original *First Diapason,* (now returned to it original position on the Great chest). These pipes, newly relocated to the Pedal, should be revoiced for maximum breadth of tone and sonority.

- Either retain the Choir *Unda Maris* as a stop of musical utility, or replace it with a copy of the original *Diapason*, also a stop of considerable utility.

- The Great *Chimes*, currently mounted on the back wall of the Great chamber, should be moved inside the Swell box, or preferably, inside the Choir if there is room.

The wiring throughout the organ needs updating, and code requires this be updated during a program of substantial updating. Only 12 volt current passes through these wires, so it is not a fire hazard per se, but could be a source of future problems as the wires break and short out.

Lastly, the console is beginning to show signs of failure, and a restoration of the console and its internal mechanisms will become increasingly of pressing concern. The organ at present, is plagued with a multitude of small problems, needing attention (for instance, none of the low C keys played on any of the manuals).

You are fortunate that the acoustics of this church are so splendid. The acoustics are the most important stop in the organ, and poor acoustics are often the cause behind an unsuccessful instrument and lack-luster congregational participation. I believe if the above changes are instituted, you will make the best use of new, non-original material, while preserving the heritage and character of the original (and now quite valuable and desirable) E.M. Skinner instrument.

REPORT FOR PARK AVENUE CONGREGATIONAL IN ARLINGTON

Scot Huntington, Organbuilder, Member Organ Advisory Committee

This church possesses the majority of an E.M. Skinner. His organs, while very well made, were period pieces that fell into disrepute as tastes changed and fads reigned over the last several decades. We are now far enough removed from the symphonic organ period, to appreciate these organs as true works of art and to appreciate Skinner for the gifted genius he really was.

The main division of this organ, the Great, has undergone some changes dictated by changing taste. In my opinion, these changes were unfortunate, but they were not so far reaching as to change the essential character of the original. The Choir and Swell divisions remain mostly intact, and the Swell division is especially fine. (I only would desire that the Swell mixture, changed over the years, could be restored to its original sound and composition so that the rather thrilling full Swell ensemble would sound exactly as Ernest intended it. This would be a subtle change, but it would improve the blend of this division to what it was intended to be.)

The most major problem at the moment, is the lack of proper maintenance for the past 15 years or so, has allowed the organ to deteriorate and the church is now faced with the result. Since the organ is of high quality, it has endured longer with fewer repairs than most instruments would have. Now it is time to face the facts and to begin a program to fix the most serious problems before they get worse and more costly, and most important, <u>to establish a program of regularly scheduled and funded maintenance.</u> This will catch small problems before they become major and costly, as well as keeping the organ in good reliable condition rather painlessly. The church should budget approximately 3/4 of 1 percent of the replacement value of the organ.

The organ is a good instrument as it stands. I would caution the church againest making any further changes that would take the organ farther away from its original condition. Changes insensitively done only detract from the original builders intent and rarely blend with the origianl material creating an instrument that is less and less of a piece. The changes that have been made to date, while relatively minor, do not blend with the older material, but stand apart from it. In my personal opinion, even though this organ is a period piece, itis a very musical organ and a testiment to the craft and artistry of Ernest Skinner. Instead of making further changes to this instrument to bring it in line with current tastes, deal with it on its own terms, learn what it can do well and exploit it. If you find yourselves with excess cash, I personally would like to see the organ restored to its original condition as intended by the builder.

Scot Huntington