

This year's convention was hosted by Atlanta organbuilder Phil Parkey at the Sheraton Colony Square Hotel, conveniently located in downtown Atlanta.

Sunday, October 5

Our first convention event was to have been a demonstration of E.M. Skinner Opus 552 at Sandy Springs United Methodist, but due to some last minute changes, we were instead directed to St. Mark's United Methodist Church for a recital with Todd Wilson.

The organ at St. Mark's is an Aeolian –Skinner from 1970 that has had additions, revoicing and tonal finishing work only recently completed by the Parkey firm. Todd Wilson showcased the organ brilliantly, often taking time between pieces to discuss their musical and historical context as we went through the program.

As has been our custom, Sunday night was exhibitors' night, with a wine and cheese reception just outside the Exhibit Hall. Dinner was served upstairs in the banquet space on the 26th floor of the hotel. Called the "Crown Room" diners enjoyed commanding views of the surrounding midtown skyline, as well as nearby Buckhead and Downtown.

Monday, October 5

The convention officially kicked off with the opening of the business meeting just after 8am. We heard opening remarks from outgoing President Richard Houghten and followed through the agenda, dealing with nominations and hearing reports from AIO officers and Standing and Special Committees. Of note was the final Treasurer's report from Jim Miller, who resigned his position this year. Jim was thanked by Richard on behalf of the membership for the superb work he has done for our organization over the years. Our newly appointed Treasurer is Tom Wood of Goulding and Wood.

Following a break we then heard Lecturer Eugene Bjorn Thordahl on the subject of hide glues. Mr. Thordahl spoke from years of experience as a lab technician for Peter Cooper Industries, where he was involved in the testing of hide glues and other adhesives. Some general history in hide glue production and applications was discussed, as well as some valuable information about hide glue grade selection, dry mix ratios and glue density/viscosity.

Next was a panel discussion on consoles and controls, led with an opening speech by Fred Bahr. In order to put us in context, Fred began by examining the philosophical questions and the nature of the pipe organ as it has evolved into the consoles we know today. Panel members Louis Patterson, Edward Odell, Duane Prill and [name?! Shantz guy] then took questions from the floor. Issues relating to standard dimensions, components and control systems were brought up; it is planned to follow up on these, starting with a panel planned for next year's convention that will focus on components and control systems.

After lunch was William Czelusniak's lecture on primary actions. Bill's discussion was linear, analytical and clear, assessing the balancing act of valve size, windways, and leather thicknesses. He explored the critical differentials between action pressure, atmosphere and springing. A history of various sorts of primary actions, including Estey, Skinner, Möller, Aeolian-Skinner and Austin were worked into the demonstration, including the little known and infrequently encountered Austin "round-nose" standalone primary action. The pitfalls and difficulties associated with the Estey primary action were mentioned, with a few appreciable groans of recognition from the audience. Bill stressed attention to detail, fastidiousness and thoroughness in consistency of pouches and valve assemblies being critical to successful primary restoration.

Our last lecture of the day was from Patrick Murphy. Titled "Minding Your Own Business", Patrick opened with a discussion on staffing in the small shop and how in his experience he has found it ideal to have persons each with a major and minor skill on his staff, so as to be able to switch them from task to task as work varies when projects move through the shop. Patrick then dove into the heart of the matter, discussing in detail the system he has developed for estimating and job costing, contrasting this with "gut" estimations that often prove to be not far from the mark. Through his own example, Patrick's lecture emphasized that for those of us who were musicians and craftsmen before we became businessmen, we must find ways to be as accurate as we can in our accounting, lest we, in his own words, find ourselves "out of business before you can say Midmer-Losh."

Following this last lecture, conventioners walked to the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer to hear the recently installed III/73 LeTourneau, demonstrated by Sarah Hawbecker. This demonstration would touch on topics discussed in Dawn Schuette's later lecture on acoustics, as the placement of the organ and the sanctuary at this church held several challenges both for the organbuilder and acoustical consultant. This demonstration was followed by a return to St. Mark's United Methodist, for a more informal program than what was heard on Sunday.

Tuesday, October 7

Our day began with a presentation from Dawn Schuette of the acoustical consulting firm Kirkegaard Associates. Dawn's lecture focused on acoustics in new and existing buildings, and the factors that contribute to the acoustic properties that organbuilders find desirable. Going far beyond the presence of seat cushions and carpeting, (which we learned is perhaps much less the ogre we think it to be) the importance of structural shapes and building materials in worship spaces was discussed.

After a break, John Nolte gave his lecture "The Mystery of Hollowed Wood". John opened with a description of the all-wood-pipe organ he is building for his own church. He continued on to discuss pipe repairs, including making new stoppers to replace the old, and the benefits of packing exclusively with compressed cork for pipes larger than 64mm. John explained how cork, a wood product, moves with the wood and thus maintains a better seal.

John's demonstration included wood pipes in various forms, showing all the possibilities in wood pipe construction. He had brought with him a dozen sample pipes, including open principals and strings, stopped flutes, tapered stopped flutes, overblowing flutes, doubleoverblowing flutes, a vox humana, krummhorn, and trumpet. Featured also was a new product he has developed; a wood pipe with an interchangeable, variable cut-up insert. He further discussed some technical scaling and cut-up information, including the influence of precise cut-ups for consistency of tones and the ratio of the area of a pipe toe to the area of the pipe flue.

After this lecture, we boarded the buses for the campus of Clayton College for our "Bach's Lunch" and a lecture and demonstration featuring the III/79 Ruffatti organ at Spivey Hall. Spivey Hall and the Albert Schweitzer Memorial Pipe Organ were the gifts of Walter and Emilie Spivey. Locally celebrated organist Emilie Spivey was known for her association with Ruffatti, whom she commissioned to build new organ some years ago at North Avenue Presbyterian Church, as well as contributing the construction of her residence instrument. Regrettably Mrs. Spivey did not live to see her dream realized; the installation of the Ruffatti was completed in 1992, just 4 years after her death. The Schweitzer Memorial Pipe Organ is placed behind a Greek-revival case with a faux marble treatment.

Continuing on the theme from our first lecture of the day, we first heard remarks from Rein Pern (formerly of Acentech, Inc.) on dealing with acoustics in new buildings. Mr. Pern touched on some of the points made in Dawn Schuette's earlier lecture, and went on to make several of his own. He pointed out how, in the case of Spivey Hall (an exception in that it is a room designed specifically for a pipe organ) it was possible to create a more reverberant space by increasing the ratio of cubic volume per seat. He noted that another key to the success at Spivey was the involvement of the acoustician at the very beginning of the design process. Mr. Pern went on to explain how the performance space in Spivey Hall is one designed specifically for music instead of the spoken word. Indeed, this was obvious, since as he began speaking the motorized acoustical curtains that covered the upper levels of the walls began closing, and as they closed one could notice change in the acoustics of the room. Once the acoustical curtains had closed there were fewer reflections and slightly less reverberation; it became much easier to hear Mr. Pern's address.

The acoustical curtains were reopened for Richard Morris' demonstration of the Ruffatti, which began with Bach's Prelude and Fugue in D Major, which followed just a bit through the alla breve; then with the Charles Callahan Aria as a demonstration of the celestes (which Richard referred to as called the 'slurpy' sounds); then a trumpet flourish, finishing up with about the first forty bars of the Tournemire *Victimæ Paschali*.

We were next scheduled to hear the 1966 IV/54 Shantz at Central Presbyterian Church, but owing to some unexpected water damage, the organ was not able to be played. We were able to stop in and view the organ (which can also be seen on the cover of the

Convention Handbook) and then walk a few short blocks down to Trinity United Methodist Church to hear Jeff Harbin let loose on Austin Opus 362.

From there we boarded busses for a lecture and demonstration of the new Shoenstein organ at Holy Innocents Episcopal Church. Organist and Choir Director David Breisinger played very well, demonstrating as Jack Bethards discussed and explained the choices that were made in designing an organ for a worship space that posed several challenges. The sanctuary at Holy Innocents is in the “1960’s institutional contemporary” style; acoustically, this space spoke to many of the “don’ts” mentioned by our lecturers earlier in the day.

An additional challenge was the extremely limited space for the main part of the organ, which is located in a gallery over main the entrance to the sanctuary. In part to resolve these issues Jack explained how his solution involved the use of an “Antiphonal” organ (in this case termed Chancel) located at the front of the church behind the altar, to draw the sound of the Gallery organ out when leading congregational singing. With selective borrowing and unification, and the characteristic abundance of 8’ pitch in the manuals the effect seemed much greater than the reported 38 ranks.

It was nearly 7 pm by the time we returned to the hotel for an opportunity to explore downtown Atlanta in the evening. Other conventioners attended a dinner and hymn festival with Paul Oakley on the Skinner/Parkey organ at Sandy Springs United Methodist, sponsored by the Atlanta Chapter AGO.

Wednesday, October 8

Our final official convention day began with our second session of the business meeting. Robert Ebert presented his report from the most recent economic survey. Most notable was the apparent increase in new organs for Catholic churches, which in recent years has ranked among the last of the “main line” traditional denominations. This is an interesting turn of events considering the current political turmoil with the Catholic church, which, as Mr. Ebert reported, has in the past advised parishes not to purchase pipe organs!

Orders for new organs are still down from the recent peak in 2000, but rebuilds and backlogs showed a marked increase. Mr. Ebert stressed the need for more members to participate in the economic survey, as it would lead to more accurate reporting that would be for the benefit of all the membership.

The Election results were reported: Charles Kegg was elected President, William Czleusniak was elected Vice President, and David Wigton was re-elected to the Examinations Committee.

Following the business meeting, our next lecture was given by John Boody, titled “Making the Most of Wood Resources: A strategy for the 21st Century”. John focused on his personal solution for obtaining quality lumber, which is centered on the use of his own milling operation. Many of us are familiar with the difficulties presented to us

when purchasing rough and finished lumber from local hardwood suppliers; by building relationships with local logging companies (and the occasional arborist), John explained how he is able to avail himself of material that would otherwise go straight to production sawmills. This gives him the freedom to mill and dry his lumber in a manner that is optimized for our trade. With his own mill at his disposal he is free to enjoy the luxury of quarter-sawn poplar, something most of us will never see from a production sawmill.

John emphasized the importance of proper stacking and seasoning, even after components are rough cut prior to assembly in the shop. Time was also given to explain the importance of taking readings of atmospheric moisture (with a wet bulb thermometer) so as to avoid too much of a differential with the moisture content of lumber to be milled. In all, a superb and informative lecture.

Dr. Lee Orr, George State University

Bal Jorin, local Sales and Technical Representative for Sherwin-Williams gave our last lecture at the hotel. An experienced finisher himself, Bal discussed techniques and formulas for new wood finishing, relatively new (to our trade) finish products such as pre-catalyzed lacquers and varnishes, tinting and staining, and spray equipment. During the question and answer period he also touched on some techniques for matching old finishes.

After lunch, we boarded busses to Mercer University to hear Noack Opus 138. Fritz Noack had been scheduled to speak for this demonstration, but was unavailable. Instead, his remarks were read by Matthew Bellochio (whose impression of Fritz, was, I admit, passable) while Dr. Robert Parris, University Organist, demonstrated the organ. Again dealing with the subject of acoustics, Fritz's address dealt with the choices he made in designing for this space. Cushioned chairs laid out in a terraced, semi-circular pattern, low walls, carpeting, a low domed ceiling; the room at Mercer was ideal for spoken word, but to say that it was hostile to an organ would be putting it mildly. Fritz's solution lay, in part, in patterning the specification after 18th Century English Chamber organs.

Our final demonstration was at Peachtree Road United Methodist, to see the new IV/92 Mander, just completed last year for their new Sanctuary, which adjoins the original building. The previous sanctuary, which houses a 3 manual Shantz, has been converted to their "chapel."

Curator John Widener made a brief introduction, and we were shown a video describing the organ project, after which Michael Shake demonstrated the organ. The Mander was truly impressive; in a situation where most other builders would have ruled out the possibility of using mechanical action (the organ is divided and the console is detached) Mander appears to have fearlessly plunged forward. Only portions of the Pedal and Solo had electro-pneumatic action. Despite tracker runs easily exceeded 50 feet in some places, the key action is characteristically light. The asymmetrical cases were made from native cherry, actually shipped to Mander's from the U.S. prior to construction.

After some free time at the hotel, we went on to closing ceremonies at the Banquet. Incoming President Charles Kegg once again served as Master of Ceremonies. Jim Miller was recognized for his years of service to the AIO as treasurer, and among the items given out was the “Magic Voicing Wand” to Mark Hotsinpeiler, his to hold for the coming year until it is transferred at next year’s banquet. One hopes Mark will use the powers bestowed upon him for good, rather than evil!

Our banquet speaker was [name], who spoke of his experiences caring for the Fox Theater’s IV/42 “Mighty Mo” Moller Theater Organ, showing slides and sharing anecdotes.