

A HISTORY OF ORGAN MUSIC AT MORNINGSIDE

Though it is evident from church archives that music was a prominent part of worship at Morningside from its organization as a congregation in 1925, a pipe organ was not a resource until the completion of our current building in 1949.

Records show that as part of furnishing the new building, a six year old Moeller, Opus 7094, was acquired and installed in the rear gallery organ bay of the sanctuary in the early fall of 1949. This was the location designed by the architects to house the church organ in the original church plans.

Session Minutes from the early 1950's indicate that church leaders recognized the inadequacy of the Moeller organ early on. Financial constraints associated with completing construction of the building delayed completion of the steeple and upgrade to the pipe organ until 1955 & 1956 respectively.

In 1955, Morningside hired as its Director of Music/Organist Mr. Julian P. Edwards, a graduate of Emory University. In April of 1956, a proposal by the Wicks Organ Co., of Highland Park, IL was submitted at the request of the church for the building and installation of a new pipe organ for the sanctuary and needs of Morningside.

This new organ would incorporate the older Moeller instrument as an Antiphonal or Echo division. Just as this proposal was being finalized, approved and funded, a fire on May 18th was sparked by a welders torch being used in steeple construction. The damages that resulted included, among other things, the destruction of the organ blower and significant water damage to the organ chest and ranks of wooden pipes, full repairs at the time being estimated at almost \$7,000.

The pipe organ proposed for the church by Wicks in consultation with Mr. Edwards was to consist of five divisions; the Great, the Swell, the Choir, the Antiphonal and the Pedal. All of the divisions were to be playable from a single console with four manuals or keyboards and pedal located in the Chancel with a case designed in keeping with the architecture of the sanctuary.

- ◆ The **Great organ** is the backbone of any pipe organ. The pipes in this division are what give a pipe organ its characteristic tone, and are the most effective at leading congregational singing.
- ◆ The **Swell organ** is a division with all of its pipes set behind shades, or louvers. These shades open and close to provide changes in dynamics or volume of tone. The Swell pipes are effective at leading singing, providing beautiful solo sounds, and bringing brilliance and power to an organ.
- ◆ The **Choir organ** is like the Swell in that the pipes are behind shades, but these pipes are typically built to lead and aid in accompanying choirs, and providing beautiful solo sounds.
- ◆ An **Antiphonal organ** is not uncommon in churches with long sanctuaries. The Antiphonal division, located at the rear of the church, brings the best qualities of many other divisions into one place. There are pipes similar to pipes in the Great to aid congregational singing, soft and gentle sounds like in the Choir, and brilliant solo sounds

like in the Swell. With an Antiphonal organ, worship experiences can truly become surround sound!

- ◆ The **Pedal organ** is the final division. These are typically the largest and most powerful pipes in the organ. These pipes provide everything from gentle support to communion settings, to bold powerful sounds to support the entire organ above it. These pipes are the string basses and tubas of the orchestra.

The Wicks proposal also required additional space not included in the original church plans. Subsequently, the architects made provision for the addition of two organ bays on each side of the Chancel, utilizing access through existing windows but necessitating the loss of natural light in the Chancel. For the purchase of the Wicks organ and the addition of the two bays \$35,000 was approved by the session (\$25,000 for the organ and \$10,000 for the addition of the bays) in May of 1956, based on submitted bids.

The new Wicks organ arrived via truck transport in October of 1956. It had been designed under the guidance of Mr. Henry Willis, an Englishman, the then-current generation of a family of organ builders still at work today, and was installed under the direction of Mr. Charles Poole, the local Wicks representative who happened to live in Virginia Highland.

The organ at Morningside was piped and voiced in the English style, one of several styles that have developed over time. Pipe organs are among the oldest musical instruments, at well over 2000 years, and have developed upon strongly regional lines. Instruments built in Germany were built with a very lean and crisp sound, perfectly suited for the music of Bach, Buxtehude, and Luther. These organs were used more for solo organ works that added to the service. Organs in France were typically in very large churches where bold and brilliant sounds were necessary to bring drama and excitement to a Catholic mass. By the time pipe organs really took hold in England, there was already a very rich tradition of singing in church. Therefore, English organs were built with leading congregational singing and accompanying choirs as a primary focus. These organs have a rich, warm sound that never lacks in color or power. These organs can be wonderful solo instruments for concerts and recitals, but their real strength is in leading singing.

Since the 1970's, beyond tunings, maintenance has been sporadic rather than scheduled. An extensive reworking of the Swell division was required following the collapse of the ceiling in the organ bay due to roof failure. Age and continued water intrusion have now made the rebuilding of the organ necessary. Internal wiring and failure of older technology have rendered parts of the chancel organ unusable and the entire Antiphonal division unplayable.

In October 2006, after solicitation of three independent condition surveys and restoration proposals, Morningside Presbyterian contracted with Robert I. Coulter to rebuild and expand the divisions of our pipe organ located in the Chancel and subsequently to rebuild and expand the Antiphonal division. This long-overdue overhaul to this wonderful instrument has been made possible through the generosity of members in pledges to our "A Time of Promise" capital campaign, other specific gifts and donations from the "Night of Broadway" concerts.

Repairs and expansions are to include;

- ◆ Removal and reconstruction of the console
- ◆ Removal of all pipes for cleaning and voicing
- ◆ Removal of all chests from Great/Choir chamber
- ◆ Restoration of the Antiphonal organ
- ◆ Repair to plaster walls and ceilings in chambers
- ◆ Addition of 15 ranks (or sets) of pipes to the divisions
- ◆ Provision of all new chests for the Great/Choir chamber
- ◆ Cleaning of all remaining chests and components
- ◆ Thorough voicing and tonal finishing to ensure beautiful tone from every one of the organ's 2700+ pipes comprising ranks, accessed through stops

November 2006 marked the 50th anniversary of the installation of the organ — what better way to celebrate its long service to us than with a full and much needed restoration!