

# SALUTE TO SOONER STATE AND MID-AMERICA

## The Cooperative Ones

SOONER STATE CHAPTER – OKLAHOMA  
MID-AMERICA CHAPTER – WICHITA, KANSAS

When two chapters pool their resources in theatre organ activities, a gold mine of enthusiasm is uncovered. Ron Willfong, chairman of Sooner State, realized this in 1970. Ron and member workers planned the highly successful Southwest Regional in the spring of that year. A number of Mid-America chapter members became actively involved, including the talented Bob Foley of Wichita, their help greatly contributing to the success of the Regional.

The cooperation between the two groups in a continuing procedure, as the recent tour of the Wichita area by Sooner State members, described below, points out.

Sooner State members arrived in Wichita by chartered bus about noon on March 18th and welcomed Mid-America members aboard for a whirlwind wee-convention.

After lunch, David Dillon, Mid-America chairman, previewed the activities to come. Honored guests were Mary Jean Millen and husband Col. Sam Arder from Kansas City.

The first stop was at the home of Wayne and Aline Parker and their 109 Wurlitzer, a 2/3 instrument originally in the Strand Theatre, Salina, Kansas. The organ has Flute, Vox Humana, String and full percussions. Our next stop was at the home of Tom and Marie Cusick. This 2/7 Hinners was originally installed as a tracker organ in Mt. Carmel Academy and later updated with new primary actions and electric keys. Tom removed the organ just as the wrecking ball began demolishing the opposite end of the building.

The third home was that of Ralph and Dorothy Higgins where Bob Foley gave a hilarious travelogue of this 3/5 Robert Morton. The organ reputedly began its career in the Gaiety Burlesque House in Kansas City, Mo., then to a church in Kansas City, to a residence in Hutchison, Kansas, to Bob Foley's family residence, to a Wichita family who never installed it, then to the home of the Higgins where it is now installed almost as it was originally.

Halstead, Kansas and the studio installation of Doctors Bill Dreese and Dean Burnett was the next stop. This 3/10 Kimball from the Main Street Theatre in Kansas City, Mo. is unique in that it had six reeds and four flutes but has been enlarged to fourteen ranks. It probably exceeds any new factory installation, now that the refurbishing is completed.

Just two blocks away we heard the beautiful 2/12 Hillgreen Lane in the home of Dr. and Mrs. McDowell. This meticulously installed instrument is located in a roomy basement with the sound rising through beautifully cabined tone chutes to the living room.

"Rork's Roxy" was previewed Sunday morning in the home of Victor and Dorothy Rork. When completed, this instrument will be a 2/10 with percussions and toy counter assembled from several organs.

A 2/8 Reuter in the teaching studio of Professor Robert Town at Wichita State University was the next stop, then on to Grace Memorial Chapel on campus to see and play the 2/18 Casavant. Nearby is the Church of the Magdalen where Evelyn Dunn gave a



Sooner State and Mid-America members gather in Wichita.



Mary Jean Miller and David Dillon watch as Bob Foley tries the Grace Memorial Chapel 2/18 Casavant.



Mary Jean Miller at the 4/24 Barton/Wurlitzer as her husband Col. Sam Ader lends support.



Dr. Bill Dreese explains his method of cleaning pipes in the Dreese/Burnett Studio installation.

Bob Foley gives the hilarious travelogue of the Higgin's 3/5 Robert Morton.

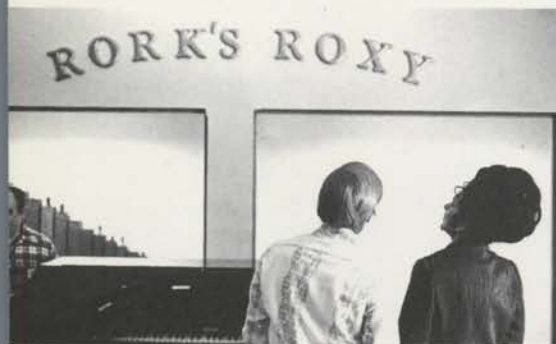




Mary Jean plays the Parker Wurlitzer as Wayne Parker and Mrs. Charles Puckette give their approval.



Robert Town of Wichita State University demonstrates his 2/8 Reuter teaching studio organ.



Ron Willfong and Evelyn Sanders admire the newly placed insignia in the organ studio of Victor and Dorothy Rork.



David Dillon puts the St. Stephen's 2/18 Reuter/Estey through it's paces.

Grace Memorial Chapel on the W.S.U. Campus.



resume on all facts of the church, then Bob Town played the 3/45 Casavant. Beautiful organ, church and music!

Bob Foley and David Dillon donated a 2/18 Reuter-Estey organ to St. Stephens Episcopal Church. Estey Organ Company installed the organ in the early 1900's in the old Plymouth Congregational Church, was then rebuilt and enlarged by Reuter Organ Company in 1922. Bob and David acquired the organ in 1968, gave it to St. Stephens with church members and ATOSers doing the installing. David, organist at the church, gave a brief concert demonstrating the versatility of the organ and acoustics in the building.

The final stop of this Wee-Convention was at the studio home of Bob Foley and David Dillon with lots of food, plus music from the 4/24 Barton-Wurlitzer and twin Steinway pianos. Bob Foley gave a bang-up performance at the console and Ron Willfong presented him with a 1972 Honorary Membership in the Sooner State Chapter in appreciation for his generous gifts of time, talent and support to Sooner State over the years. Ray Elmore and Lyle Thurman, at the Steinways, joined Bob in a wild and wonderful jam session. The evening's finale was lovely music by Mary Jean Miller, formerly N.B.C. organist.

The organ is basically Barton and Wurlitzer, The console and relays from the Dallas Fair Park Auditorium were purchased by Raymond Shelley and installed at his home in 1949 with the addition of the 11 rank Wurlitzer organ from the Criterion Theatre in Oklahoma City in 1951. The building of a slave console was completed in 1963. The balance of the pipe work and chests came from 3 rank organs in the area.

The organ was moved in the winter of 1965-66 after Raymond Shelley's death and stored until it's present Special Studio could be built.

And so, the "Wee-Convention" drew to a close, with some 70 members of ATOS bidding farewell to one another. Have you had a weekend conclave with one of your sister chapters? If you haven't done so, we urge you to do so as soon as possible. It's a great way to meet some wonderful people and to enjoy the greatest instrument in the world — the pipe organ!

Dave Dillon, Chairman of Mid-America, arranged the tour with help of chapter members.

#### HOME INSTALLATION HIGHLIGHTS FROM SOONER STATE

One of the outstanding home organ installations in Tulsa is that of John Devine. John is the proud owner of the former Memphis, Tennessee, Loew's Palace Theatre, 3/11, 235 Wurlitzer-Opus 1324.

The organ was placed in the Palace on April 23, 1926 and used frequently until the advent of wide-screen films, then the cable was cut and the console stored in the basement to make room for the new screen.

John purchased the organ in 1964 and after many weekend trips to Memphis, had it all moved to Tulsa (we like to hear John tell of the trip he made on one weekend in particular, when he brought one lonely pipe back in his large rented vehicle.). He stored the organ for one year while overhauling it from top to bottom, complete with a refinishing of the console. Meanwhile John built a special house for the organ, trimmed in a theatre motif.

It now speaks with that glorious Wurlitzer voice we all love to hear. The Tuba and Tibia are on 15" wind, the Vox on 7" and the rest of the organ is on 10" wind.

The first chapter installation was finished in time for the 1970 Southwest Regional. A 2/4 Wurlitzer, originally installed in the First Methodist Church in Perry, Oklahoma and now speaking in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hayden E. Weaver of Tulsa.

Next is a 3/7 Wicks, originally installed in the Parsons Theatre in Parsons, Kansas, removed in the early 50's and installed in a Catholic church in Ft. Smith, Arkansas. It was removed from the church in 1961 by Oklahoma City organ man, Roy Gimpel and in the same year ATOS'er Phil Judkins, bought the console and transformed it into an Artisan electronic organ. Following the Regional, Phil called Roy, to see if by chance he might still have any of the other parts of the organ — and would you believe, after 9 years, he still had everything with the exception of some pipe work. And so now, after years of silence and separation, it is once again whole. It has been completely restored and installed in the Judkins home, where it is always open console time.

The organ is voiced on 8" wind pressure and consists of Vox, Solo



Walls down and rubble all around the 2/11 Bennett of Walter and Edna Green.

String, Concert Flute, Tibia, Diapason, Kinura and Trumpet along with Glockenspiel. Yet to be installed is the toy counter which will complete the organ as it was originally installed.

Most treasured from a historical standpoint is the 2/11 Bennett Organ, being readied for installation in the country home of Walter and Edna Green. Reputedly the first pipe organ placed in Tulsa, the instrument was originally installed in Tulsa's First Baptist Church, with one-half of the purchase price donated by Andrew Carnegie and the other half, raised by the ladies of the church.

In the early 50's the organ was removed from the sanctuary, completely refurbished, given a new console and placed in the then newly constructed chapel. Due to the increased need for a more flexible use of the chapel in 1969, it was decided to completely gut the room and redesign it in a more functional manner eliminating the organ chambers. Thanks to the last minute thinking of the contractor, who made a call to ATOS member, George Dixon, asking if he knew anyone who wanted a pipe organ, we were able to marshal forces and save the instrument.

We arrived just in the nick of time too, as the wrecking crew had already smashed in the red tile walls around the chambers. There sat the two divisions, completely exposed and surrounded by the rubble of the walls, everything below the chests was buried in debris. It being Thursday, the contractor said he would suspend work until Monday morning – anything left after that would be junked. We worked all day Friday, part of Friday evening and all Saturday morning – carrying the last pieces out the door at 1:00 p.m. as the custodian locked

up the building for the day. In less than 48 hours we had saved it!

And so, Walter and Edna Green possess a priceless part of Tulsa's heritage.

Next to acquire an organ were fellow ATOS'ers Bill and Lois Roberts. In May of 1970, they purchased the 2/6 Kilgen, installed in the former Radio Station KFPW Studios in the ballroom of the Goldman Hotel in Ft. Smith, Arkansas in 1936.

Dorothy Gibson was organist for KFPW, playing the organ daily until the station moved to new quarters. The organ was used to entertain diners for years after and was still in playing condition when removed.

The organ is on 8" of wind, has a large set of Liberty Chimes, and a large scale Violin at 16', 8', 4', V.D.O., Flute, Tibia, Vox and Tuba. True to Kilgen quality is the more than adequate size blower for this organ. (Bill says he thinks that it's a Sherman Tank in disguise.) The big grey beauty had to ride around Tulsa in the back of an open pickup truck for 2 days until Bill could get someone with a winch to lift it out. Ahh, the joys of having your own theatre organ!

Very interesting, is the installation under way at the home of Bob and Betty Weddle. They discovered a 2/4 Robert Morton, lying sadly neglected and more than slightly moisture laden in a warehouse in Claremore, Oklahoma and just couldn't resist the urge to buy it.

Checking on it's history, Bob and Betty discovered that their purchase was originally installed in the Lyric Theatre in Booneville, Missouri. It was later removed, brought to Tulsa and installed in the Bethel Temple at which time it's three phase blower was exchanged for the single phase one on it's sister organ in the Masonic Temple. Three phase wasn't available at Bethel but, was at the Masonic Temple and since both organs were identical in all specifications as to size and wind pressure, an amicable trade was worked out. Then in the late 50's it was moved to Claremore where it's installation was prevented by the owner's death.

The Weddle's (lucky souls with that single phase blower) are restoring it and hopefully will have it playing in the summer of this year.

And last, but not least, Sooner State Chairman Ron Willfong and Christian Crusade Organist, Ray El-



John Devine's 3/11 Wurlitzer style 235 opus 1324.



Phil and Laura Judkin's 3/7 Wicks.



Bill and Lois Robert's 1936 2/6 Kilgen.

Bob and Betty Weddle's 2/4 Robert Morton.



more bought the 2/6 Barton from the Palace Theatre in Fayetteville, Arkansas. The organ is in mint condition, having been under lock and key in tightly sealed chambers. This organ has the distinction of being under the continuous ownership of the same people who purchased it up until it's sale to Ray and Ron. The organ was played by Gladys Sonneman daily for silent films and when talkies came in it was featured on noonday Radio broadcasts by a local Fayetteville station. Mrs. Sonneman is still actively engaged in playing, as organist for the First Baptist Church in Fayetteville, as well as playing on Sunday's in the dining room of the local Holiday Inn.

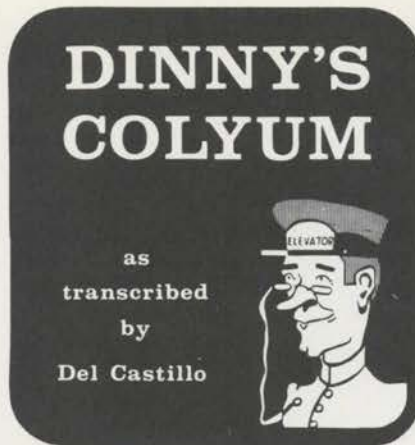
The organ is on 10' of wind and has Xylophone, Chimes, Chrysoglott and Toy-Counter in addition to Tibia, Trumpet, Flute, String, Vox and Diapason.

Fun for all in 1971 was the beginning of a series of seminars on just what a theatre organ really is and how it works. What started out to be an informal get-together on the subject, has blossomed into an event which nearly all of the members participate in.

Under the patient guidance of Phil Judkins and with the assistance of Bill Roberts, the seminars have turned into one of the most interesting and looked forward to activities of our chapter.

Exciting too, was our spring concert, featuring Wichita organist, Bob Foley in concert and accompanying a silent film for us at the Christian Crusade 3/10 Robert Morton.

Biggest thrill for we Sooners in '71 was the appearance of EDDIE HORTON at the WONDER MORTON. Eddie is the gentleman who made such a fantastic hit at the Crusade Jam Session during the Southwest Regional. He played a beautiful concert and accompanied Charlie Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*. With the audience asking for more! More! More!, Eddie closed the show with reminiscences of his early days in show business, which had the people on the edges of their seats wanting to know more about this man who has personally known Sigmund Romberg, Fritz Kreisler and many, many more. Friday evening, November 19, 1971 was certainly our RED LETTER DAY, as we listened to one of the last living theatre organ greats in live performance! □



You notice the way the Travel ads always blossom out with a lot of stuff about Festivals and things like that there? Well, that's the way with Organ Conventions this time of year. First we had the big bash out in Los Angeles where the ATOS got a lot of people out to open the San Gabriel Auditorium with a lot of star organ players like Gaylord Carter and Lyn Larsen and Bill Thomson. And then they was one in Noo York State around the place where the big Wurlitzers was made, with some concerts at the Riviera Theayter in Tonawanda, and some others at the Hollywood Theayter in Gowanda, hey, there's a combination. And then the Perfessional Organ Clubs they had a Convention down at Long Beach, where all the perfessional organ players from Los Angeles and San Francisco and Long Beach and San Diego and Orange County all got together and had concerts and chewed over their problems.

And then we got comin up the big Nashional Convention of the American Theayter Organ Society in July in Washington, D.C., run by the Potomack Valley Chapter of the ATOS. That's a-go-in to be some whing-ding and I wisht I could be there, but it's too fur away to fit in with some other plans I had to make. They got some of them big four-keyboard Wurlitzers around with guys like Eddie Weaver and Lee Erwin and Don Thompson and Tiny James and Dick Smith and a lot of other fine organ players to show them off. Not forgettin the gals like Rosa Rio and that little teen-age doll around Los Angeles name of Donna Parker who is loaded with talent and was just made the offshial organ player for the L.A. Dodgers.

And then they got a Wurlitzer run by a computer invented by a guy name of Marvin Lautzenheiser that

he calls the Gen-e-eye, like the magic guy that comes out of the bottle. Heck, I knowed a lot of organ players that played the organ when it come out of a bottle. Anyways, instead of Gen-e-eye, only he spells it Genii, I wisht he had named it the Lautzenheiser-wurlitzer. But I guess maybe thats too long a name like that Welch town where the name takes up the whole side of the station.

And besides I worry about these organs that can be played without any organ player. Maybe I worry too much. But you notice how the elektronick organs they keep addin gimmicks so you dont scarcely have to play anything your own self? Things like the Automack Cords, and the Glissandos and the Arpedgios and the Tape Cassetts and the Rithm Masters and all like that there? Go-in to put the organ teachers out of business, that's what theyre a-go-in to do.

Of course Im only kiddin about this Genii, which is a Rube Goldberg to end all Rube Goldbergs, if you know what I mean. Still and all I dunno. The blurb about it says that it will never replace the live organist, but it would take eighty fingers to match it. So maybe I should ought to worry at that. Or I would if I was a organ teacher. As near as I can figger it's like one of these here computers where you feed all the music into it and it comes out here as the old song goes. The blurb says it can do eighty things at once, so that is why it says it can do the work of eight organ players, each of them with ten fingers. Pervided they aint all thumbs, like some organ players I heard.

Well, all I can say is you better go see it. I wisht I could. Sounds like quite a party. □

# SUMMER FUN



AT THE ATOS  
NATIONAL CONVENTION  
JULY 10 thru 14, 1972

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WASHINGTON, D. C.