



# MARCUS AURELIUS

by Betty Heffer — photos by Fred Hohner

A funny thing happened to Lee Hohner on the way to the restoration of his pipe organ.

While searching for a suitable paint for the console, he carried an ornamented front section along for purposes of consultation. After visiting two or three paint stores, he wandered into still another shop to ask the proprietor's recommendation of a color to use as background, since the ornamentation would be gilded.

The man asked Lee if that section were part of an old piano. Lee explained that no, it had come off an old theatre organ. When the man asked from which theatre, Lee further explained that it had come from the Grand Riviera Theatre. The man

seemed surprised and asked if that were the one located at Grand River and Joy Road in Detroit. After Lee had given an affirmative reply, it was *his* turn to be surprised.

Back in the twenties, this man had worked in a store directly across the street from the Grand Riviera Theatre. He had watched the theatre being built; and it was his company which had made the ornamentation applied to the heretofore plain console in 1927, one year after the organ had been installed in 1926.

The left side of the console remained plain because that side was next to the wall of the organ pit and hidden from public view. However, the rest of the console, including the



The decorative figure on the side of the console was dubbed "Marcus Aurelius" by the restoration crew.

The console of Hohner's Robert Morton as it looks today.



music rack, is lavish with violins, scrolls, urns, florals, and cherubs; — and on the right side appears a Roman profile, dubbed Marcus Aurelius by one of the restorative crew.

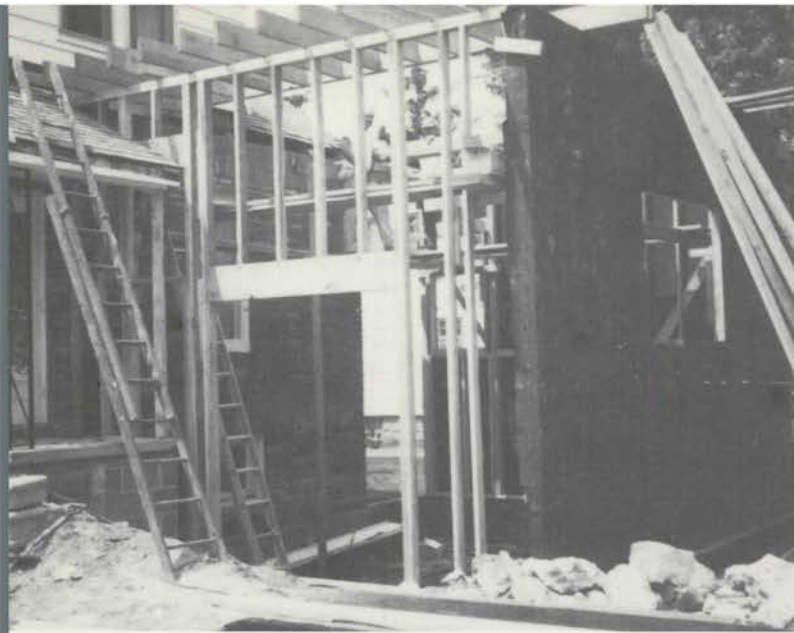
The man recommended Golden Cream for the background color, and Lee bought it.

Of course, this episode had been preceded by a few others.

Lee's initial experience with the 3/10 Robert Morton in the Detroit Riviera Theatre had been a rather disenchanting one. All the pedals ciphered in disunison. Even so, he decided to purchase the organ, and concluded the transaction with Joseph Nederlander in May of 1969.

Then followed the dismantling process, removing pipes during evenings and Sunday mornings, with Memorial Day week-end providing a big opportunity for a concerted effort. The fire escape near the pipe chamber facilitated handing large pipes to helpers waiting below, and onto the truck.

Lee's father and a friend, Rick Kuretich, spent all one night removing the console from its pit by raising it with hydraulic jacks over a bridge of



The organ chamber was constructed at the rear of the Hohner home during the summer of 1969.



Bethel Hohner outside the new organ chamber.



The pipework, still in the single, but divided chamber, at the Grand Riviera Theatre early in 1969.



The back of the Morton console.



Owner Lee Hohner started to install the pipework in January of 1970.

Fred Hohner, Chuck Heffer and Lee Hohner trucked the organ home on Memorial Day in 1969.



The real work crew that devoted so much time to the organ restoration, (l. to r.) Lee and Fred Hohner, Betty and Chuck Heffer, and Ted Andress toast the first sounds.



100 criss-crossed 4 x 4's to stage height, rolling it across the stage on a skid of 2 x 8's, and hauling it up a 7 foot ramp to street level with wood block and tackle to move it onto a snowmobile trailer hitched behind the car.

There was no way at all feasible to move the blower out and up the stairway except by taking it all apart, piece by piece.

Since Lee was living in an apartment which did not seem conducive to the installation of a theatre pipe organ, it was decided that the Robert Morton would find a new home in that of his parents.

The pipes were stored in the basement, two garages, and in his grandparents' barn, while construction of a new pipe chamber was built as an addition to the homestead. The addition is 16' by 20' with a 16' ceiling. One third of the back porch was removed to make room for the south wall of the addition; a five foot opening was cut from the back wall of the house; and the console was moved into the dining room on August 12.

That five foot opening now has a 30" by 30" by 60" wrought iron railed balcony below, and is covered by louvered doors. The swell shades are mounted 42" behind the louvers, forming a sound chamber 16' by 20' by 42", as the music bounces off a brick wall.

The winter of 1969-'70 found Lee working along with Chuck Heffer, ringing out wires and soldering.

Then in the summer of '70 Lee's mother began *her* project of stripping, sanding, and refinishing the console, ably assisted by her friend, Jeannette Grant.

August of 1970 saw the addition of the blower room behind the pipe chamber; and September heard the Morton's first ciphers in its new location. By Christmas the orchestra bells and xylophone played carols; and the marimba played backwards.

The toy counter was restored in time for the *next* Christmas ('71), and the manuals were re-bushed and re-finished in time for the Motor City Chapter's "Round Robin" in June of '73.

Marcus Aurelius must be quite pleased and proud these days as the Hohners' Grand Riviera Robert Morton plays once again, looking and sounding revitalized; and ciphering no more! □

# Theatre Organ Donated To Canadian University

by Clealan Blakely

Odeon Theatres of Canada have made a gift to Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, of the three manual 19 rank Hillgreen-Lane organ from the Odeon Carlton Theatre, Toronto, as a memorial to the late Leonard Brockington. Mr. Brockington was formerly president of Odeon Theatres of Canada, and rector of Queen's University for many years.

The gift was accepted by Queen's in late September, but an injunction halting demolition of the theatre prevented removal of the organ until the weekend of November 24, 1973. John Carey of the Kingston Whig-Standard, who spearheaded the project, was notified Nov. 23 that removal must be completed within 72 hours. These short deadlines for organ removal always create many problems; however, it is fortunate that Fred Knapton and his crew were available, and were willing to work the long hours involved. Fred is an organ builder by trade, a resident of Kingston, and was engaged by Queen's for the removal and reinstallation of the organ.

Others deeply involved in the "transplant" were Jim Courtright, Vice Principal, Planning and Development at Queen's University, Norm Hughes and Frank Platt.

Each of these gentlemen were of invaluable assistance in accomplishing the near impossible.

Two trips from Toronto to Kingston with a five-ton van, a station wagon and a half-ton truck were required to transport the organ. It has been temporarily stored in a large modern warehouse on Queen's property; it survived the move in good condition.

The University plans to install the organ in the Harty Arena at Queen's. This building is a new one, more on the lines of an auditorium than an arena. It has an inverted ceiling, seating about 2500, and has good acoustics. We feel sure that the organ will sound good. The installation will be financed by private donations only, and it is hoped that the work can proceed during 1974. A two chamber installation along one wall is planned, with adequate separation between in

order to assure good tonal results.

This organ was acknowledged to be the last one built for a theatre in 1947 at the end of the theatre organ era. It was not a Unit Orchestra in the sense of a Wurlitzer or Kimball, but the voices were fairly orchestral, and an abundance of couplers helped to offset the limited unification. Hillgreen-Lane identified the divisions as Pedal, Swell, Great and Orchestral. Percussions were Chimes, Xylophone and Orchestra Bells; there were no traps.

The Carlton was the flagship house of the Odeon Theatre chain in Canada, and the famous British organist Al Bollington was brought over to open the organ. Later, Bobby Jones and Colin Corbett played it. Corbett played interludes on Saturday nights right up to the closing of the house.

The console was a horseshoe type, finished in blonde oak, and when installed, was located in an alcove on the right of the proscenium. When the organ was playing, a section of the big contour curtain was lifted to reveal the console, which rolled out on tracks by means of hydraulic mechanism, very similar to the consoles at Radio City Music Hall in New York. However, when a cinerama screen was installed in the theatre, the console was covered, and had to be moved. At this time it was placed on a hydraulic lift in the front center of the stage and two doors in the stage floor opened to allow it to rise. The center stage position made it much easier for the organist to maintain proper balance between the Main and Solo chambers, which were in the conventional position adjacent to the proscenium opening.

The installation of a theatre organ in Eastern Ontario will be a great boost for Kingston. John Carey had worked hard to get a theatre organ for Kingston in 1973, the Tercentenary year of the city, and John and his theatre organ friends deserve much credit for their efforts. Thanks to John, the beautiful sounds of the theatre organ are heard again on radio, when he broadcasts an hour program of theatre organ recordings at 8 P.M. over CKWS-FM the last Sunday evening of each month. □