

**THE**  
**TRENTON**  
**WAR**  
**MEMORIAL**  
**MOLLER**

Pinch me, I must be dreaming!!

If you were to ask any ATOS Chapter "what wish would you like to come true?" it would probably be something as follows:

1. obtaining a big theatre organ
2. finding a beautiful well maintained and permanent place to house it
3. having assistance of special men and equipment to move the organ
4. working in easy accessible pipe chambers
5. receiving special grants and donations to maintain the organ and to give special free concerts.

Believe it or not, *this dream is a reality* at the Trenton War Memorial in Trenton, New Jersey.

Can you visualize a small group of theatre organ devotees, dressed in formal clothes ascending a beautiful marble staircase walking thru an open door into a pipe chamber? What a pipe chamber? Yes, a sparkling clean chamber filled with ranks of a newly installed Moller theatre pipe organ. All of us have

experienced dark, grimy back stages and chambers with steep ladders designed for only the brave, nimble and thin technicians. This beautiful spanking clean building must be a dream — just too good to be true! But now, here's the whole wonderful story about the merger of an organ and auditorium.

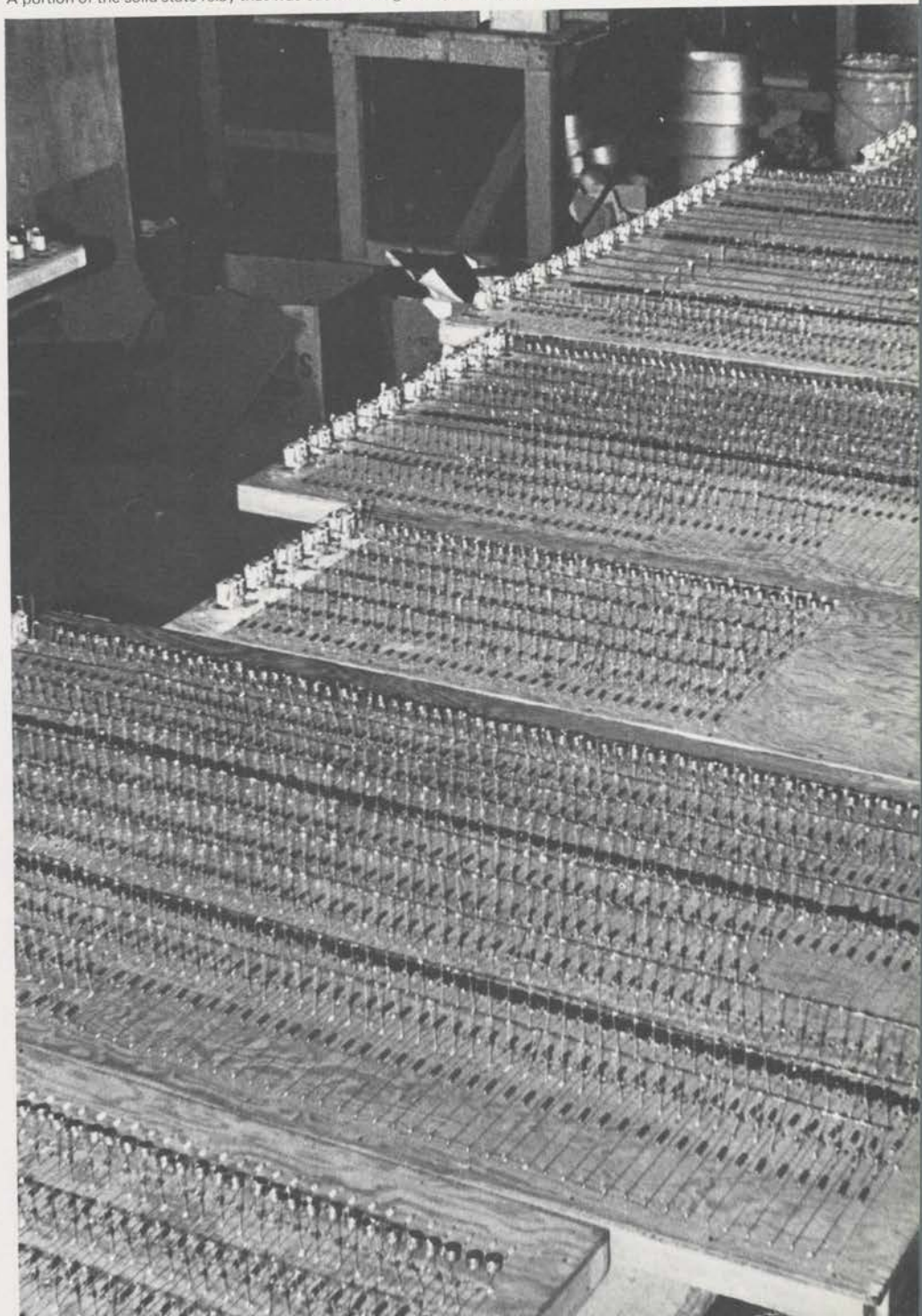
*History of Trenton Soldiers & Sailors War Memorial.*

The people of Trenton and Mercer County desired to build a memorial to their citizens who served during

the first World War. However, they did not want to erect a soon-to-be forgotten function-less statue. In 1928, a commission was formed to build a civic auditorium as a lasting memorial. Work started and the corner stone was laid in 1930. In January 1932 the Soldiers and Sailors War Memorial was dedicated. This unusual building contains a 2,000 seat auditorium with a fully operational stage, projection facility, orchestra and organ elevators. Also included is a large ballroom with complete kitchen facilities. The

A portion of the solid state relay that was custom designed by Bill Mc Kissock.

(Wayne Zimmerman Photo)



original plans for this building also called for a pipe organ. Funds were short in these hard times and this phase of the building was left incomplete.

#### *Organ History*

During the same time, only a few blocks away, the Lincoln Theatre was built in downtown Trenton. The theatre opened in 1928 featuring Stanley Rhodes at an impressive 3 manual 16 rank Moller. "From Lincoln's opening in 1928 until radio broadcasts of organ music ended with the closing of the theatre in 1969, the Moller Organ was an important part of Trenton's musical and theatrical history" states *Bolton Holmes* — featured organist at the Lincoln for many years.

In 1973, the Lincoln theatre and all its contents was purchased by the National State Bank, whose Chairman, *Mary P. Roebing*, has developed more than a passing interest in theatre organ. In the spring of 1974, *Walter Froehlich* and Garden State Chairman *Bob Balfour* helped to arrange the donation of the organ from the National Bank to the Trenton War Memorial. At the same time an agreement was reached between the War Memorial Commission under the leadership of Chairman *John E. Curry* and *Bill McKissock* representing Garden State Theatre Organ Society, in which *Bill McKissock* would design and direct the rebuilding and reinstallation.

On Memorial Day weekend in

1974, approximately 15 members of GSTOS from all over the state came to Trenton to help dismantle the organ and prepare it for the move. This in itself is no small task considering there are over 1,200 pipes, Xylophone, Marimba, Celeste Harp, Bells, Chimes and toy counter, along with the required motorblower reservoirs and chests. The following Tuesday approximately 20 employees of the Mercer County Highway Department Shade Tree Division arrived on the scene with several trucks and made the move to the War Memorial building.

Rebuilding began immediately. Each component was taken apart, cleaned and rebuilt. The large 10 horsepower blower was first. The electrical hook-up required for this unit was done by county electricians. All leather was replaced, many with new synthetic material designed to last longer. The original electro-pneumatic relay system was water damaged and *Bill McKissock* designed a solid state diode switching unit built by members of GSTOS and War Memorial Building staff. The console required a complete overhaul. A new solid state (computer-type) capture combination system was installed to assist the organist in playing the instrument.

At this present point, which is an unbelievably short time, (16 months to be exact), we find the console on the elevator with one-third of the pipes playing. Especially exciting is a new rank, a Post Horn, purchased from Moller to replace the ones that

were stolen.

Now the GSTOS-War Memorial dream is realized, but it did not come easy. All the credit is given to our dynamic crew chief *Bill McKissock* for his countless hours of meetings, plannings, arrangements and plain hard work that made this project so successful. His enthusiasm and magnetic drive attracted an outstanding crew who gave their all, averaging a 48 hour work week. Number one assistant is *Marianne McKissock*, Bill's very attractive and capable wife. Other crew members are *Jay Taylor*, *Rowe Beale*, *Harry* and *Thyra Ray*, *Bob Harris*, *Fred LeCompt*, *Bill Hartig*, *Judy Ginder* and *Gilbert Milbrand*.

One of the stated goals of ATOS is to perpetuate theatre organ use in public showplaces, and this is uppermost in the mind of *Bill McKissock* and crew. They are determined to insure, once the organ is completed, that it become an active part of the local community. To this end, they have sought sponsors for and have planned a series of free inaugural concerts.

The dedicatory program is planned for Sunday afternoon, February 29, 1976 with *Ashley Miller* the artist and sponsored by *Mary G. Robling* and National State Bank. The second concert is scheduled for Sunday, April 4, 1976 and will feature Trenton Festival Orchestra, Mercer County Chorus with *Ashley Miller* at the organ.

Here's to many more pleasant dreams! □

Crew chief Bill Mc Kissock at the console.

(Robert B. Little Photo)



The Trenton work crew: (L to R) Bill Hartig, Bill McKissock, Marianne McKissock, Thyra Ray and Bob Harris. Second row: Harry Ray and Jay Taylor.

