

Closing Chord

Frank Reddie, originally from Brazil, Indiana, an ATOS member, and long-time organist, died in March in Dayton, Ohio.

He worked in theatres and on radio in the Indiana area until 1946, when he toured with a Hammond and piano. For many years featured in hotels, he toured for the Pick, Schroeder and Hilton chains. Another spot was Martinetti's Restaurant in Crystal Lake, Ill., where he played the 2/8 Wicks. Recently, he was teaching for the Allen dealer in Dayton, and playing at Wright Air Force Base nearby.

He is survived by a wife and daughter.

John A. Phillips, Long Beach, California, passed away suddenly at home in February of a heart attack. He had been a member of ATOS for many years.

Mr. Phillips was the second president of the Los Angeles Professional Organists Breakfast Club organization, he served for two years. He played mostly electronic instruments as an entertainer in hotels and restaurants in this city.

In his past years, he played for three churches in Long Beach: Holy Innocents Catholic Church, St. Matthews Catholic Church and Moore Memorial Methodist Church, on pipe organs. This in addition to being partner in the Gregory Organ Service, actively engaged in the maintenance, repair, tuning and restoration of pipe organs throughout southern California.

Pearl White, noted Chicago theatre organist, died in Chicago on May 11, 1978. Born Pearl Eleanor Weiss on October 26, 1910, she took her early piano training from Florence LeClaire and Dr. Rudolph Ganz. Instruction in organ came from Edward Benedict and Dean Fossler. Pearl's first theatre job was at age 13. She worked as a substitute during her teen years at the Uptown, Tivoli, Granada, Belmont and Embassy theatres. She was featured at

the North Center Theatre from 1928 to 1932, during which time she also did six weeks at the Chicago Theatre.

Al Carney, another Chicago organist, recommended Pearl for a job cutting piano rolls. From 1925 until 1932 she cut over one thousand rolls which appeared on the Capitol, Imperial, Supertone, Columbia and American labels.

During the 1930's and 40's Pearl White played over radio stations WCFL, WIND and WBBM.



Pearl White.

In recent years Pearl was discovered by ATOS and played numerous programs for CATOE, of which she was an Honorary Life Member. Playing for ATOS national conventions in 1964, 1965 and 1969, she is remembered for her show stopping performance at Shea's Buffalo during the 1964 convention. It was here that she demonstrated her "double stuff" for a national audience. This technique of her jazz style featured interlocking chords alternating between right and left hands. This device, applied to a twenties medley including "I Want To Be Happy," brought the audience to its feet and resulted in a twenty-minute ovation. Pearl cut one album featuring the Patio Theatre 3/17 Barton about 1968. In recent years she had played

at the Prime House Restaurant in Chicago.

Pearl White was the widow of the late Howard Erickson and is survived by a daughter, four grandchildren, a brother and a sister. She was buried at Rosehill Cemetery, Chicago on May 15.

Richard J. Sklenar

Jeff B. Seale, owner of the Seale Studio Morton, died in Laurel, Mississippi, on April 20, 1978. He was sixty-three.

Jeff's interest in pipe organs flowered at an early age, and when he was sixteen years old, his picture appeared in the local press with an accompanying article describing how he had built a large two-manual reed organ by combining parts from two old family melodeons. By 1940, Seale had installed a three-manual, six-rank Wurlitzer in his home in Laurel, Mississippi.

In the early 1950's, Jeff acquired a two-manual, seven-rank Robert Morton which had originally been installed in a theatre in West Virginia. Over the last twenty years he enlarged the organ into a three-manual thirteen-rank instrument (including Posthorn) and had recently built a large studio addition to his home so that both recording and concert performances could be accommodated.

The Seale studio has been the site of many exciting performances, including an impromptu performance



Jeff B. Seale.

by Dennis and Heidi James. Jeff always welcomed any organ enthusiast to his studio and has done more to promote the theatre organ hobby than many organ clubs.

The organ has been left by his will to C.G. Soley, Seale's assistant, both in business and in the organ hobby.

Ken Wright, an organist who entertained in the theatre, on radio and television, and in person for over 50 years, died March 13, 1978, in Oklahoma City at age 70 after an extended illness.

Ken was born in Hutchinson, Kansas. His early musical training and skill development followed a legendary pattern. It is told that his mother began giving him piano lessons when he showed his readiness by scratching his initials on the bench. As a young boy he often spent afternoons at Hutchinson's Midland Theatre leaning over the pit railing watching the organist play the Austin organ. Ken many times related how he almost tore the railing down getting over it when he was first invited to sit on the organ bench. He later traded organ playing at the Midland for lessons. There developed a demand for his musical talents at many local events in a wide area surrounding Hutchinson.

After answering an advertisement in *Billboard* and communicating by telegram Ken was hired in 1927 to play the Barton organ at the new Lloyd's Theatre in Menominee, Michigan. Talking pictures arrived there the following year but Ken stayed on until 1931. There were brief stints in the meantime at theatres in Rhinelander and Green Bay, Wisconsin.

Ken then moved to KMOX radio in St. Louis, Missouri, where he played the studio Kilgen organ. While still in Michigan and Wisconsin he had often listened to the radio broadcasts of organist Eddie Dunstedter from Minneapolis. Dunstedter had moved on to St. Louis also and it was there that the two organists established a life-long friendship.

After three years at KMOX Ken joined WLS radio in Chicago where he played the accordion and wrote combo arrangements for NBC's coast-to-coast broadcasts of *The National Barn Dance*.

**WE HAVE JUST LEARNED
OF THE DEATH OF
FRED FEIBEL
THE CLOSING CHORD
WILL APPEAR IN THE
NEXT ISSUE**

In the early '30s Oklahoma City oil man and hotel owner W.B. Skirvin was planning a new hotel in the city. Simultaneously, E.K. Gaylord, president of the Oklahoma Publishing Company, was planning modern studios for the company's then-newly-acquired subsidiary, WKY radio. An entire floor of the new hotel was specially designed and built to house the studios. One of the most outstanding features of this layout was the 4/14 Kilgen pipe organ in Studio A. The opening of the studios was accompanied by a week-long celebration to which the public was invited. Skirvin's daughter, Perle Mesta, who was later to gain fame as a Washington party giver and minister to Luxembourg, entertained local and visiting dignitaries. Playing the organ for studio visitors during the week was none other than Jesse Crawford. The following week, on April 20, 1936, Ken Wright went "on the air" as staff organist. This was the beginning of a 36-year association with the broadcasting company. Almost instantly an admiring public was created throughout the broadcast area which covered most of Oklahoma and parts of several surrounding states. More than 40 years later there remain many Ken Wright devotees in the area.

It is an interesting irony that Ken happened to visit the Kilgen factory in St. Louis the same day the first boards were cut for the console of the WKY organ, although he did not know at the time that he would preside over it for 15 years (except for 27 months when he served as a military flight instructor during World War II).

During the heyday of WKY radio Ken was busy there at least six days a week. Each day started with finger

exercises at the piano. Throughout the day and night Ken was heard not only in frequent solo performances at the organ but he also provided a variety of theme and background music for many shows.

WKY-TV made its debut in 1949. Right there among the first local performers was Ken Wright at the Hammond organ. Again there were solo performances and the accompaniment of musical groups and vocalists. In this way Ken helped to launch the careers of a number of performers. One of the better known of these is Anita Bryant.

At one time or another Ken has made a personal appearance with his traveling organ in virtually every town in Oklahoma. His first traveling companion was a Hammond and then later a Conn because the latter sounded, as he said, "more pipe organish." Although Ken preferred the pipe organ he was never apologetic about performing at a "plug in" for it didn't seem to matter to his admirers.

In 1951 WKY-TV moved to newly constructed studios. There began a new phase in Ken's career. Added to playing the organ on a daily local mid-day show were the behind-the-scenes jobs of writing, producing and directing. It was not infrequent that Ken was called upon at the last minute to host the daily show and to do live commercials. In the early '50s he was even a radio disc jockey on an early morning radio show. And somehow personal appearances could still be worked in!

Company policy dictated that Ken retire in 1972 from WKY-TV (now KTVY due to change of ownership). This, however, provided the opportunity and stimulus to embark on new ventures, selling Conn organs and doing creative writing. Ken had never thought of himself as cut out for selling but he was a success right away, even to the extent that he soon earned a sales prize of a trip to Paris for he and his wife. (This provided an opportunity for him to apply first hand his ability to speak French.) In his final illness Ken was even closing organ sales deals from his hospital bed.

The WKY Kilgen was sold for \$1,000 in 1951 and moved to Oklahoma City's Civic Center Music Hall where it languished until 1977 when it was superbly restored by Paul

Haggard, the same man responsible for its original 1936 installation and subsequent maintenance. The organ is the centerpiece for the newly-established OK City Chapter of ATOS (See TO, Dec. '77/Jan. '78). One of the chapter's first acts was to designate Ken Wright as an Honorary Member. Ken was among the enthusiastic crowd of almost 3,000 who attended Hector Olivera's rededication concert for the organ on September 11, 1977. It was a busy day for Ken because that morning he had taken his Conn to entertain at a convention breakfast.

During the KMOX days Ken devised his own theme tune because he "wanted something different." It was dedicated to his mother. This piece was heard often over the years by his Oklahoma listeners and it would surely evoke a "Why, that's Ken Wright!" response from many today. This musical trademark was never formally put on paper and so it remained Ken's very own property.

If one were to briefly try to characterize Ken Wright it might be to say that he was a man of diversity and detail. In addition to the talents already mentioned Ken has been known to give his special attention to cooking certain dishes, model railroading, flying, teaching flying and meticulous automobile maintenance. Curiously enough Ken never believed he had the knack for teaching music. Perhaps this speaks to a deep intuitive notion of what music and organ playing should be and his desire to approach perfection in playing. His father once affectionately remarked, "What Ken needs is to miss a note once in a while."

On the day following his death the mid-day TV show on which he played an important part for so long paid a special visual and aural tribute to Ken.

Ken Wright is survived by his wife, Mauna, and his daughter, Margo.

Gary Tuck

Henry Grady Pope came to California by motorcycle in the '20s to escape the harsh winters of Michigan, where he had worked in the auto factories. The son (one of nine children) of a Georgia sharecropper, the death of his father when Henry



Henry Pope circa 1957, servicing a Hammond at NBC Hollywood.

was 17 left him and his brother, Dan, the sole support of the family. The auto factories held promise — but the winter was too much for a southern lad. Henry had shown a disposition toward music when he played country fiddle as a youth for square dances near his Georgia home.

Henry arrived in California with the idea of becoming a seaman, but he met organbuilder Joe Klein and agreed to help Joe with an installation for a couple of weeks. Henry was fascinated by the pipe organ. Largely uneducated, Henry filled the voids by studying in night school while working for the Robert Morton Organ Co. in Van Nuys, Calif. Then he went with the Maas Organ Co., which later specialized in organ percussions. Henry envisioned being his own boss and in the '30s set up his own organ installation and maintenance service.

He serviced organs in clubs, churches, residences, mortuaries, civic auditoriums, rinks and theatres from San Diego to Santa Barbara, Calif. One special installation he worked on was the 3/15 Welte in Scotty's Castle, Death Valley. One of his specialties was radio studio organs. He installed the organ (Welte & Wurlitzer) in the old NBC Hollywood studios, the one used for *One Man's Family* and *I Love a Mystery*. He serviced the organs in Hollywood studios through the '30s and '40s. He

was so devoted to work that he would sometimes drop from exhaustion. After a few of these experiences Henry accepted an offer from NBC Hollywood to keep their studio instruments in top shape, including the many Hammonds and pianos which dotted the studios. He was with NBC for 18 years, and it was at NBC that he met and married a girl named Rae.

During his active years Henry Pope serviced organs in southern California radio stations KGER, KFOX, KFI, the Lorin Whitney Studio Wurlimorton in Glendale, the 20th Century Fox Studio Wurlitzer, the Kimball in Angelus Temple, and the L.A. Shrine Auditorium Moller. He did much of the tonal work on Buddy Cole's Wurlimorton in North Hollywood and also made special tonal adjustments on the Simonton Wurlitzer requested by Jesse Crawford for the two recordings he made on it. Henry was well acquainted with the Warner Bros studio Wurlitzer. He removed it to storage when CBS purchased it and was there several years later to activate it in the house actor Joe Kearns built for it.

In 1967 Henry was called to New York as consultant for the renovation of the Radio City Music Hall Wurlitzer. The following year he spent a month working on the RCMH organ. The exertion landed him in the hospital and he resolved to retire. Henry and his wife Rae moved to Hemet, California. Even in retirement, he kept a hand in the organ hobby. He had elaborate plans to make the Wurlitzer in Dr. Orrin Hostetter's Pasadena home a showpiece, but declining health didn't permit it. He was hospitalized six-teen times since 1966.

After their marriage, Rae helped Henry on his service route. She learned how to replace worn leather and held keys while he tuned.

She recalls, "He could hear things I certainly couldn't. He preferred to do most work himself, rather than delegate tasks. For this, he was known in the service business as a 'loner'."

Henry pope died on March 19, 1978, after a lifetime of service to the King of Instruments. He served with distinction. Burial was in Forest Lawn cemetery, Glendale.

Stu Green