

# AIO CONVENTION

by Lance Johnson and Sonia Carlson  
photos by Erik Swee

The 1978 National Convention of the American Institute of Organbuilders, which includes church and theatre organ builders, convened in Moorhead, Minn., October 8th to 11th. The national chairman for the event was Lance Johnson. With 95 in attendance, it was the second largest turnout in the history of the A.I.O. Along with builders from America, there were three from Europe and one from England.

The convention opened Sunday with a bus trip to Gethsemane Episcopal Cathedral, Fargo, N.D., to see and hear the new 3/43 Zimmer organ, which was demonstrated by Dr. Andrew Smith. A lecture followed by Franz Zimmer, the builder.

Monday the builders heard a lecture by Dirk Flentrop of Zandaam, Holland, on the subject of the organ building movement in Europe, with respect to the restoration of historic Dutch organs. The restoration process is done according to a strict set of rules, 90% of the cost paid by the Dutch Government through its Historic Monuments Department.

At noon Monday the organbuilders were bused to the Fargo Theatre, where they picked up a lunch in the lobby and sat down to hear a brief concert on the recently restored 2/8 Style E Wurlitzer. Lance Johnson and Bob Arndt, of Arndt Organ Supply, provided the music. Ted Larson, instructor of the film studies at Moorhead State University, gave a lecture demonstration of the theatre lighting system and stage. Lance Johnson followed with the history of the theatre and the restoration process of the organ, which has been done in a strictly historical manner.

Dr. John Ferguson lecture recital at Trinity Lutheran, Moorhead, Minnesota.





Dirk Flentrop, Flentrop Orgelblau, Holland, lectures on historic Dutch organ restorations.

The builders then took a bus tour of Fargo-Moorhead to inspect a number of newer church organs, represented by Austin, Casavant and Holtkamp. One of the most interesting facets of the tour was an electronic recording device wired into the 3/32 Casavant (Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Moorhead). Once recorded, the organ itself played back the music. This device was just designed by Peterson Electronics of Worth, Ill.

During the course of the convention there were lecture demonstrations on problems in the organ maintenance industry, accounting methods for organbuilders, performance bonds and insurance for organbuilders, techniques in drafting organ cases and chest layouts, and also a lecture by Hans Knaths,

a West German pipe manufacturer, on reed shallots. Eight manufacturers of organ-related equipment maintained display booths at the Ramada Inn, convention headquarters, which proved to be a very popular spot.

On Tuesday the group rode the buses to Grand Forks, N.D., to see and hear a Casavant tracker and a Skinner organ with electric slider chests and then to Hillsboro, N.D., to hear a Johnson organ.

Tuesday evening the organbuilders were treated to an unforgettable lecture-concert by Dr. John Ferguson (Minister of Music at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis) at the 1957 3/34 Holtkamp organ at Trinity Lutheran, Moorhead. His lecture stressed the problems encountered in preparing the church for this organ and the philosophy behind the tonal design, as built by Walter Holtkamp, Sr.

Wednesday there were more lectures which included another by Dirk Flentrop on the restoration of cathedral organs in Mexico City, which required three years. The convention came to a close that evening with a gala banquet, at which Mr. Flentrop spoke on the fiasco concerning the large tracker organ designed and built by his firm for Carnegie Hall in New York City, but never installed. Another interesting part of his talk was the problem he encountered when shipping his first tracker organ in 1956 to New York



Red River Chapter member Ted Larson addresses convention at the Fargo Theatre.

State, only to find that the construction unions would not allow him to assemble the organ. The unions then assigned to him two steel workers to assemble the frame of the organ, two carpenters to assemble the case and two plumbers to install the pipes!

In conclusion, the convention was termed an unqualified success. It was the first time in the history of the A.I.O. that a theatre organ was included on the organ crawl inspection of organs. Quite a number of builders who have a history of having little use for the theatre organ, were the most vocal about the organ program at the Fargo Theatre. Also, Dirk Flentrop was heard to remark that the Wurlitzer had integrity, was designed to suit the building and had a thrilling sound. □

Lynn Dobson, tracker builder, displays his ink drawings of organ facades.



Organbuilders inspect Peterson solid-state recording device for live playback.

