

Requiem for a Barton

by Lorena McKee

Now that two of Dallas' pizza parlors have closed their doors, it is a sad plight for theatre organ aficionados of the North Texas area who have, with loyal regularity, beaten a path to these establishments to enjoy the lush sounds of the king of instruments. In one of these fine installations a Wurlitzer remains silent behind locked doors, and with the demise of the Dallas Landmark Pizza and Pipes in late March, the 3/10 Barton is once again silent and homeless. It was originally installed in the Paramount Theatre in Waterloo, Iowa, in 1927, where it remained until 1960 when Mark Kenning, a well-known professional organist and teacher in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, bought it and installed it in his home in Richardson, a Dallas suburb. As all pipes were originally mitered at the factory to fit under a 13-foot ceiling, it was

ideal for home installation, and it soon was a beautiful and worthy complement to the 9-foot ebony Bosendorfer concert grand piano settled nearby. Mark and Nola Kenning often held ATOS meetings in their home, sharing the Barton's thrilling tones with local ATOS members and visitors from other chapters from across America and Canada, as well as countless artists passing through "Big D."

In 1974 the Barton was leased to the Landmark Pizza and Pipes, the first such of its kind in the Metroplex area, and it was played continuously until Landmark closed its doors to make room for a video game parlor anxiously waiting to move in. This urgency caused Mark to be notified that removal of the organ must be started immediately. Mark, a staunch member of the North Texas Chapter al-

most from its beginning, called Dick Cooper and Fred Garrett who head up the chapter's rebuild committee, and they showed up early the morning of March 23 to commence the "heart-break" job that had to be accomplished without delay.

Before the toolboxes were unloaded, Mark slipped up on the bench, played and recorded a farewell concert bringing forth magical music showing off the Diapason, Flute, Tibia, Oboe, Vox, Clarinet, Kinura, Tuba, Viol d'Orchestre and Viol Celeste, making sure to bring out the percussion stops, Chrysoglott, Chimes, Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Snare and Bass Drum, Cymbal, Kettle Drum and Thunder, and spicing the last tunes with the use of the toy counter Tambourine, Castanets, Chinese Block, Tom-Tom, Auto Horn, Steamboat Whistle, Bird Call, Siren and Fire Gong! When the last tones of mellow voices fell away, Mark turned to his audience of two and said, "I love this organ" — after that rousing concert it certainly was evident — and then reluctantly turned off the blower and dismantling began.

Many famous organists have performed on the Barton while at the Landmark, among them Don Baker. In the early days of the Landmark, many ATOS meetings were held on Sunday afternoons when open console was offered and many NTC members were treated to a rare chance to play a theatre organ. At that time there was no other public theatre organ installed in Dallas, so it was an immense boost locally to reviving theatre organ enthusiasm. The removal of the organ that had briefly given many hours of listening pleasure for many patrons, now, once again, leaves the Dallas-Fort Worth area bereft of public theatre organ music.

As of April 20, the last of the Barton's components were neatly packed, boxed and crated ready to be loaded on a huge truck which would transport the quieted instrument to its storage space in Richardson. It so happens that Mark already has a 4/19 Robert-Morton (originally in the Ritz Theatre in Tulsa) installed in his Richardson home, but he still has a great affection for the Barton and hopes that it will soon find a home similar to his Robert-Morton. North Texas Chapter hopes it will soon grace some public place in Dallas where all can enjoy its thrilling sound again. □

Mark Kenning at the 3/10 Barton.

