



Chicago, Chicago

that toddlin' town . . .

by Grace McGinnis





Mildred Berry and Jan Challender "manned" the hospitality desk. (Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)



Barbara Sellers with her famous mother, Edna Sellers. (Claude Neuffer photo)



The registration desks on the mezzanine were busy on Saturday morning.



(Claude Neuffer photos)



Conventioners waiting for the first evening program at Downers Grove.

(Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)

Rob Calcaterra and Bill Lamb

(Bill Lamb photo)

Most of the ATOS members from overseas who attended the 30th Anniversary Convention. (Claude Neuffer photo)



"Chicago, Chicago, that toddlin' town"

Chicago may have "toddled" when Fred Fisher wrote those lyrics in 1922, but for 840 ATOSers it certainly didn't in 1985. After six days and nights crammed full of music, merriment, meetings and magical moments, there could be no doubt in anyone's mind that the thirtieth annual conclave of theatre organ lovers left an impression of Chicago that was anything but "toddlin'".

"Chicago, Chicago, I'll show you around."

Our hosts did just that! They showed us pipe organs in sites that took us to Joliet, Waukegan, Hinsdale, Rockford and Lansing as well as to all corners of the city and its suburbs. Add to this three "extra" concerts, a brunch at the Bismarck Pavilion, three cocktail parties and a banquet in the Palmer House, seminars and socializing, and you have all the ingredients for Fisher's next line, "I love it!"

"Bet your bottom dollar you lose the blues in Chicago."

There was no time for "blues" in Chicago! Even waiting in the registration line on Saturday morning was a pleasure as friends met once again and began catching up on the past year's happenings. As the elegant lobby in the grand old Palmer House filled with conventioners, music from a Hammond organ blended with the happy sounds of eager ATOSers waiting for the first busses to load for the special pre-glow events. One group went to hear Barbara Sellers at the WGN studio, while another went to Maine North High School to hear Jack Olander. A cocktail party in the late afternoon provided another opportunity to meet and greet old friends, some from as far away as England and Australia.

A mellow mood prevailed as we gathered outside the hotel at 6:30 for the trip to the high school in Downers Grove. Here we heard a cameo performance by young Phil Silberhorn at the 3/10 Wurlitzer before the evening's concert by Tom Gnaster. Following Tom's welcoming music, National Secretary Dave Barnett narrated a slide presentation of the Richmond chapter's plans for the 1986 Convention. The return trip to Chicago seemed a time for anticipation of both the activities in the coming week and those of next year's convention.

"Chicago, the town that Billy Sunday could not shut down."

Even Billy Sunday would have been impressed had he been in Chicago on a Sunday morning when a caravan of 18 busses carrying more than 800 conventioners roared through the city streets to the Civic Opera House to hear Hector Olivera. After Hector had thoroughly awakened the early morning enthusiasts, we were bussed to the Bismarck Pavilion for a delicious brunch and the annual Membership Meeting. As soon as the meeting was adjourned we headed for the Chicago Stadium to hear the huge 6/62 Barton.

Eight hundred people could almost be lost in that stadium, which holds thousands, but the organ lovers seemed to know just where to gather to best hear this immense instrument. Before the program began, we were pleased to welcome the widow of Dan Barton, the builder of the organ, to our group. This concert included a surprise artist in addition to the two who were scheduled to play. Nancy Faust and cameo artist Don Springer each presented a few numbers and then Tom Hazleton took the bench, flanked by Dave Junchen and Clark Wilson who helped set stops for him. The sounds which Tom evoked from that great Barton were exceptionally stirring, and we were all affected by the intensity of the music — it was a moving experience.



Hector Olivera at the 3/50 Skinner organ in the Civic Opera House. Special scenery was set up on stage for our concert. (Claude Neuffer photo)



ATOSers entering the Chicago Civic Opera House. (Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)



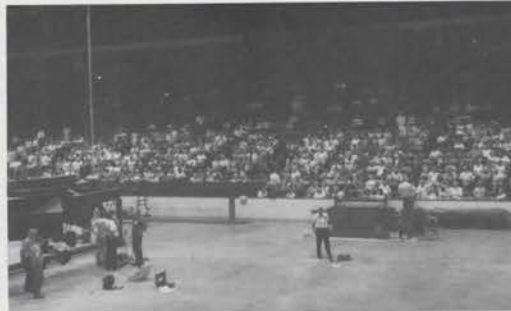
ATOS members finding seats for the Olivera concert at the Civic Opera House. (Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)



Bismarck Hotel theatre lobby. (Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)



Waiting for busses to ride to the Chicago Stadium after brunch and the Annual Meeting at the Bismarck. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Part of the audience in the Chicago Stadium awaiting the concert, while recording gear is set up on the floor. The structure on the floor to the left is the public address speaker system, which was not working for our visit. (Claude Neuffer photo)



The Barton organ console on its elevated platform in the Chicago Stadium. (Claude Neuffer photo)

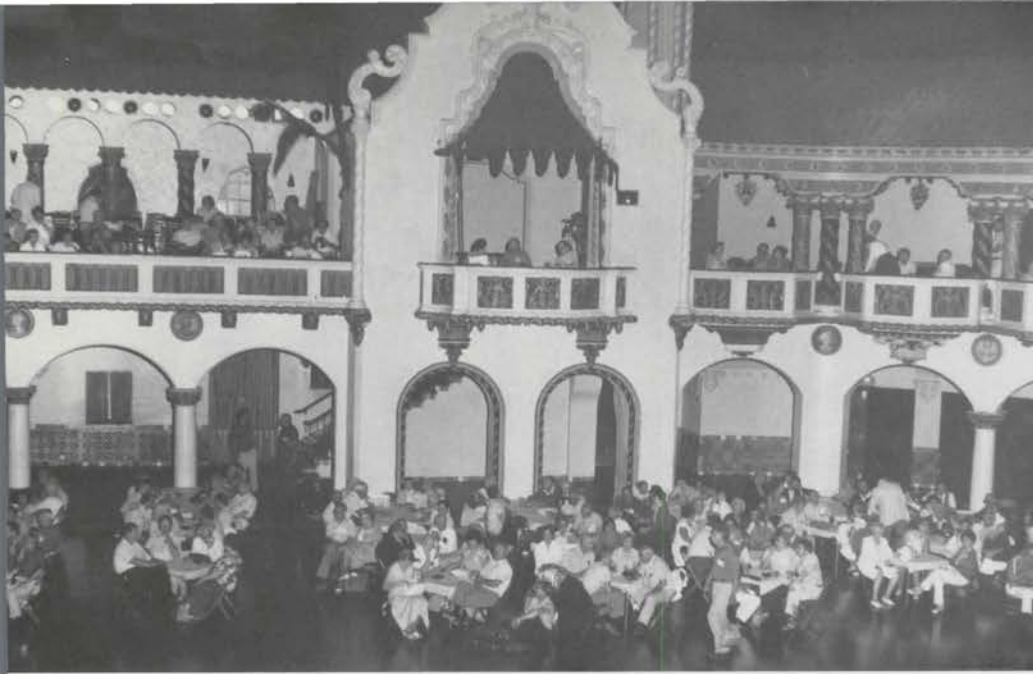
Brunch at the Bismarck.

(Claude Neuffer photo)

Rex Koury conducts the Annual Meeting following brunch.

(Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)





The Aragon Ballroom. (Claude Neuffer photo)

Still buzzing from what we had just heard, we traveled to the famous Aragon Ballroom, and, for those of us who had never seen it, the room itself was amazing. It resembled a Spanish courtyard complete with balconies and arched doorways, and the giant rotating mirror ball reflected light-stars on its midnight ceiling. Here we heard Hal Pearl's music in a setting where anyone over 40 could easily recall the halcyon days of his youth.

Another shift in mood occurred at the fourth Sunday event which was in the beautifully paneled auditorium of the Temple Shalom where we were privileged to hear Devon Hollingsworth on the concert Wurlitzer.

From an opera house to a stadium to a ballroom to a synagogue, we experienced such a variety of venues that day that we were quite ready to just sit and relax before the pre-banquet cocktail hour.



Dancers Xiomara Roldan and Lou Brock at the Aragon Ballroom. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Strolling violinists entertained before the banquet got underway. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Donna Van Riper receives the charter from President Rex Koury for the River City Chapter. (Claude Neuffer photo)



The Sequoia Chapter charter is received by Dave Moreno. (Claude Neuffer photo)

Mountain State Chapter, represented by Betty Walls, receives its charter. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Larry Donaldson happily receives the charter for the Chattanooga Chapter. (Claude Neuffer photo)

Allen Mills receives the charter for the Hudson-Mohawk Valley Chapter. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Tim Johnson receives the Foothills Chapter charter from President Rex Koury. (Claude Neuffer photo)

The charter for the Virginia Chapter, one of the two newest groups, was received by Davis Heatwole. (Claude Neuffer photo)



The banquet was served in the elegantly appointed State Ballroom of the Palmer House, and Chicago's Tom Balinski is to be commended for arranging and managing this event. Tom was also MC for the after-dinner program which he turned over to President Rex Koury who presented charters to seven new chapters. Rex then introduced Lowell Ayars who announced that the Organist of the Year is Dennis James, the Hall of Fame selections are Irma Glen and Kay McAbee and the Honorary Member of 1985 is Preston "Sandy" Fleet. Allen Miller announced that Dennis Hedberg had been chosen for the Technical Achievement Award. Rex then introduced Martin Ellis, winner of the first Young Organist Competition, and presented him with a check for \$1000. As his final official act, Rex introduced the new ATOS President, Jack Moelmann, and presented him with the mounted Tibia of Office.

President Moelmann, who was smartly attired in his Air Force dress whites, noted



Newly-elected President Jack Moelmann receives the emblem of office from retiring President Rex Koury.

(Claude Neuffer photo)

that his uniform had already caused him to be mistaken for a headwaiter, a bartender and an elevator operator and had brought him a job offer from Dairy Queen. On that pleasant note, he began his term of office for a year that holds much promise for the ATOS.

During the banquet, music was provided by Sally Daley and Ralph Cox at Baldwin pianos and Dennis Wolkowicz playing



Sally Daley at the piano, Dennis Wolkowicz at the organ, and Ralph Cox (head showing between the flowers and the organ music rack) at another piano provided music during the banquet.

(Claude Neuffer photo)

a Baldwin organ. The artists and the organ were provided for our enjoyment through the courtesy of Frank Seta of the Baldwin Piano and Organ Company. Two strolling violinists also entertained while we were dining and even managed to play "Happy Birthday" at several tables. Sunday had been a full day, but we still had much to anticipate, and we were glad that Chicago had not been "shut down."

The banquet in the State Ballroom at the Palmer House.

(Claude Neuffer photos)





Two-manual Wurlitzer console and left chamber in the Gateway Theatre.
(Claude Neuffer photo)



Two consoles in the Hinsdale Theatre. The five-manual is not yet working.
(Bill Lamb photo)



The beautiful chandelier in the main lobby of the Rialto Square Theatre.
(Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)

Chuck Wlodarczyk narrates the story of Riverview Park.
(Bill Lamb photo)



Three-manual Kimball console and right chamber in the Gateway Theatre.
(Bill Lamb photo)



Leon and Mildred Berry
(Bill Lamb photo)



Bill Kuczek plays for ATOS at the Elm Rink. Pipes and percussions in the open above the seating area. Two chambers with swell shutters hang from the roof over the skating floor.
(Claude Neuffer photo)

View in the lobby of the Rialto Square Theatre in Joliet.
(Claude Neuffer photo)



**“On State Street, that great street,
I just want to say . . .”**

State Street’s regular users may not recover quickly from the sight and sound of the ATOS 800 boarding their caravan of busses at eight o’clock in the morning on a work day. Even for a city the size of Chicago, we were a formidable crowd at that time of day as we took off for our first concert at the Gateway Theatre in the Copernicus Cultural Center. Dennis Wolkowicz and Sally Daley, banquet artists of the night before, had also managed to come alive in time to perform for us on the Kimball and Wurlitzer consoles in a charming theatre which is part of a project being developed by the Polish-American community to honor their heritage.

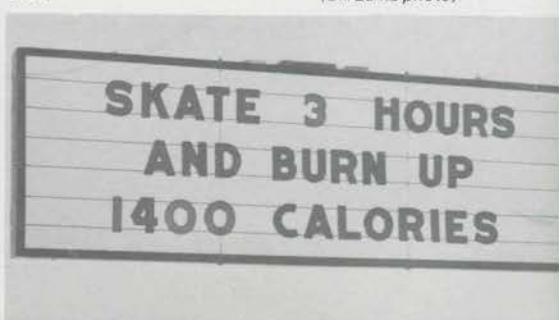
Our second stop was the Patio Theatre for a heart-warming concert by Leon Berry, a popular Chicago organist. (Leon’s wife, Mildred, was one of our bus captains and proved to be a most interesting “tour guide.”) Here we also saw some fascinating movies, taken and narrated by Chuck Wlodarczyk, of Chicago’s famous Riverview Amusement Park which has been closed since 1967.

As we left the theatre we were given boxed lunches to be eaten on the way to either Hinsdale or the Elm Rink. Our group went to the Hinsdale Theatre first and heard a delightful program by Jim Riggs at the Kimball console of the 3/32 hybrid. From there we rode to the Elm Rink and imagined ourselves cruising around the floor to the music of resident organist Bill Kuczek at the Geneva console. One charming couple could not resist the urge to dance to the melodies coming from the overhead pipes.

By five o’clock we were back at the hotel for a dinner break before boarding again for the trip to Joliet and a program by Rosemary Bailey, with a cameo by Don Walker. The Joliet Area chapter sponsored this event in the Rialto Theatre, a meticulously restored movie palace which reflects the loving concern of many citizens who have worked diligently to bring new life to this gorgeous old building. The lobby of the Rialto is dominated by a strikingly beautiful crystal chandelier and the authentic decor of the entire theatre is unforgettable.

A quiet mood prevailed on the ride back to Chicago as we had five concerts to assimilate, and we knew that another round of activities was scheduled to start at eight the next morning.

The Elm Roller Rink offers advice which applies to many of us.
(Bill Lamb photo)



“They do things they don’t do on Broadway.”

Broadway would still have been asleep when the amazing ATOSers, some of whom were probably sleepwalking, climbed back onto the busses for a trip to the whimsical little Pickwick Theatre where Tom Wibbels managed to rouse us to consciousness with his cheerful demeanor and sprightly music on the 3/11 Wurlitzer.

When we returned to the Palmer House there was, at last, time for a leisurely lunch, for browsing in the record shop or for visiting the electronic display rooms before the afternoon seminars. At one point, a small crowd formed in the Hammond Room because young Melissa Ambrose from Detroit was giving an impromptu jazz performance that was close to professional. Again, some of us were reminded that theatre organ will thrive as long as new talent, such as Melissa’s, is encouraged by caring audiences.

The two seminars drew full houses as both offered information dear to the hearts of theatre organ lovers. Chuck

Schaden’s topic was “Theatre Organ on Old Time Radio,” and he shared tapes and anecdotes from his 15 years of broadcasting experience. Lance Johnson’s seminars are always well-attended, and this year his topic covered the releathering of reservoirs and tremolos.



Three ATOS presidents — Rex Koury, Lois Segur and Jack Moelmann. (Bill Lamb photo)



Proscenium and mural drop of the Pickwick Theatre. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Lance Johnson leads his seminar on organ restoration. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Chuck Schaden addresses his audience on the topic of theatre organ on old time radio programs. (Claude Neuffer photo)



The ATOS Record Shop was well-stocked with a large selection of LPs, cassettes, books and souvenirs. (Chuck Włodarczyk photo)



Peterson Electro-Musical Products displayed their lines of tuners, tone generators, keyboard assemblies and tubular chimes. (Claude Neuffer photo)



A couple of ATOS members receive a demonstration of a Conn organ. (Claude Neuffer photo)



John Olsen demonstrates his playing technique on the Hammond to Lorena McKee. (Claude Neuffer photo)

David Awe played a Technics organ to entertain the crowd at the cocktail party prior to the banquet. (Claude Neuffer photo)





ATOS crowd at the Coronado Theatre in Rockford.

(Bill Lamb photo)

All too soon it was time to leave for Rockford, and as our caravan melded into the rush hour traffic heading north out of Chicago we marveled at the competence of those stalwart bus drivers who managed to maneuver us safely through what seemed to be an impossible mass of moving vehicles. We arrived in Rockford with enough time before the concert to explore and appreciate the Coronado Theatre's beautiful lobby (another brilliant crystal chandelier here, too) and its original atmospheric auditorium complete with a star-studded "sky," a setting so typical of the era of fantasy and escapism that spawned these great old movie houses. Rob Calcaterra was the artist for this occasion, which was arranged by the Land of Lincoln Chapter. Rob's appearance at the 4/17 Barton was also consistent with what many of us recall as the theatre world's "Age of Elegance."

It was after midnight when we arrived back at the Palmer House, but some of us had napped on the busses and were ready for more socializing, one of our favorite convention pastimes. Mother Nature got into the act, too, by producing an astonishing light show with heavy bass accompaniment which held the attention of those who were not from the area and not accustomed to these displays.

**"They have the time,
the time of their life."**

And so did we! Wednesday began with two optional concerts for the insatiable. The first group left at eight for the Music Box Theatre and a program by Dwight Beacham on an Allen organ. Fifteen minutes later a group of 100 left for the Wheaton home of Paul Van der Molens to hear Clark Wilson on their 3/8 Robert-Morton. Because this group had to be back at the hotel by noon, Clark's program was limited to about 30 minutes, so the old "always leaving them wanting more" certainly applied in this case.

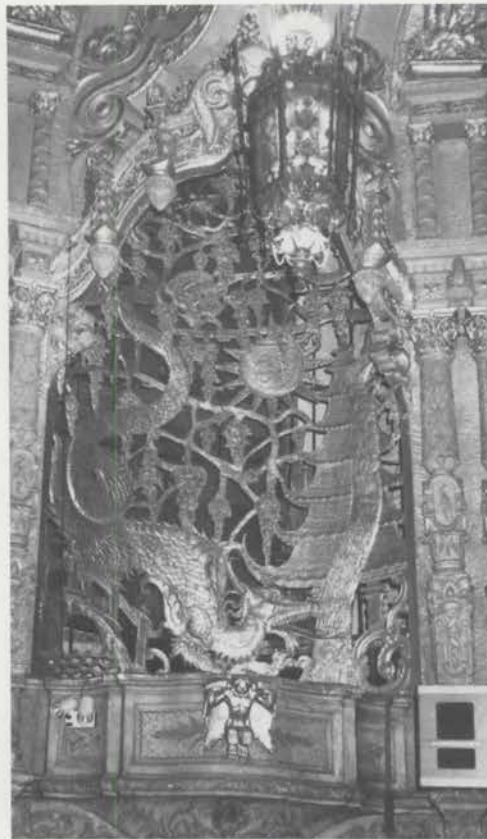
The first afternoon concert on Wednesday took us to the Genesee Theatre in Waukegan. Their 3/10 Barton is an original installation which the Chicago chapter has restored and now maintains. Jeff Weiler is a popular young organist who is the resident silent film accompanist for the Music Box Theatre in Chicago. The second concert that afternoon was in the chapel of St. Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein where Lew Williams dazzled us on the 4/24 Wurlitzer/Gottfried. We also heard 15-year-old Reid Spears in a cameo.

After our return to the Palmer House and time-out for dinner, we walked four blocks north to the legendary Chicago Theatre for the final convention concert. Rex Koury was the artist and Martin Ellis, winner of the Young Organist Competition, was the cameo performer. We were also honored with a visit by Chicago's Mayor Washington and representatives



Console and left chamber at St. Mary of the Lake Seminary, Mundelein. (Claude Neuffer photo)

Rob Calcaterra provided piano music for the conventioners as they entered and left the Chicago Theatre. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Very ornate left chamber grille in the Coronado Theatre. (Claude Neuffer photo)

Vandalism of the seats in the Chicago Theatre. (Claude Neuffer photo)



from local groups who are working to restore this landmark old theatre to its original splendor.

A closing cocktail party at the Palmer House marked the formal conclusion of the convention, but few were ready to leave and Thursday's Curtain Call promised more fun and music. Our conventioners were having "the time of their life."

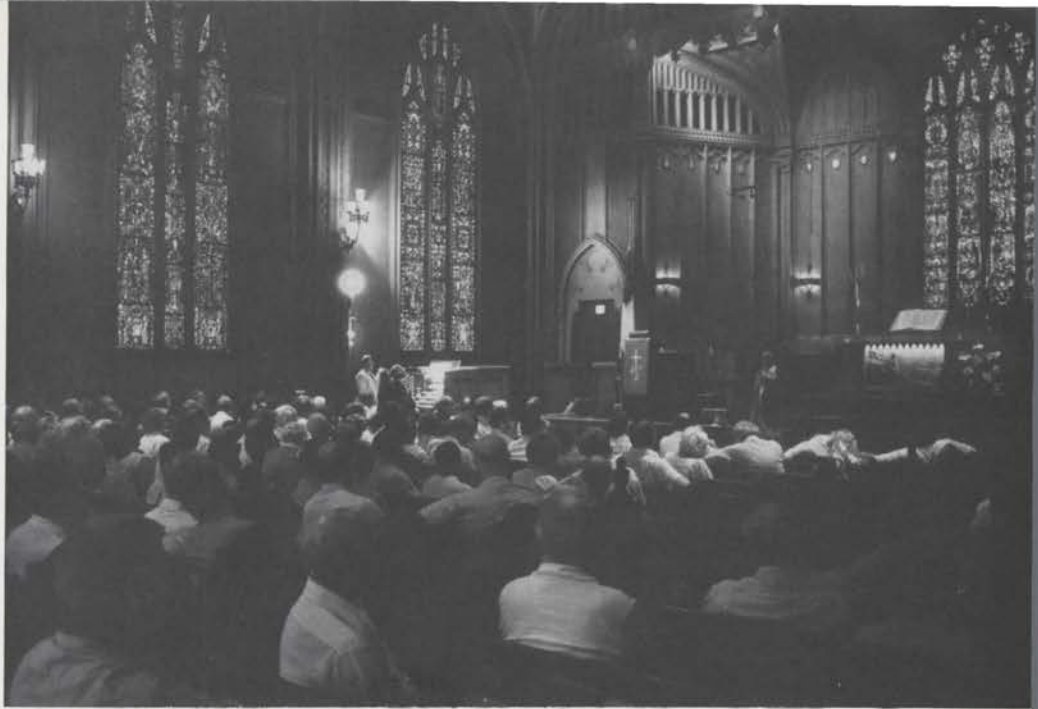
"I saw a man — he danced with his wife."

And we *had* seen that at the Elm Rink! Curtain Call, however, began with a "tourist" activity, a trip to the Adler Planetarium and a look at what must have been the model for the atmospheric theatres.

From there the avid ATOSers rode to Lansing and the only pizza parlor with a pipe organ in the Chicago area. Dave Wickerham, a personable young man with an obvious love for the instrument, provided entertainment for the lunch hour.

Returning to Chicago, the next stop was the Chicago Temple, a church with a spire 43 stories above the busy downtown streets. Inside the building was a cool, quiet sanctuary with a Wicks/Skinner organ which was brought to life for us by organist Gary Plantinga. Mr. Plantinga's lively program opened with the "Marche Militaire" and closed with "The Stars and Stripes Forever," and included both "Pomp and Circumstance" and the theme from *Masterpiece Theatre*.

The Curtain Call's last event took us back to the Hinsdale Theatre to hear George Wright. George's music is such that each listener experiences it at his or her own level of appreciation, and this brought the last day to a memorable close, thus ending our six-day love affair with Chicago.



Interior of the Chicago Temple Methodist Church, with Gary Plantinga at the console. (Claude Neuffer photo)

Thank you . . .

Claude Neuffer, for your untiring help in photographing the last four conventions for THEATRE ORGAN;

Bill Lamb, for returning to help with the '85 Convention; and Chuck Włodarczyk, for your contributions to the coverage of the '85 Convention.

We are also very grateful for the help of Rudy Frey, Gene Ward, Bill Vogel and Bob Lodder in providing photographic coverage of previous conventions.

Bob Gilbert, Editor



George Wright addresses the audience during his program at the Hinsdale Theatre. (Claude Neuffer photo)



Sandy Fleet and Ashley Miller enjoying the final cocktail party. (Bill Lamb photo)

Low Williams entertained at the Rodgers for the Grande Finale cocktail party in the Palmer House.

(Claude Neuffer photo)



Newly-elected President Jack Moelmann with Donna Van Riper of Omaha. (Bill Lamb photo)



The Board of Directors met on the mezzanine of the Chicago Theatre to adjourn its National Convention session. (Claude Neuffer photo)

The Grande Finale cocktail party.

(Claude Neuffer photo)





Offering a few remarks: L to R, M.C. Charles Cooney, M.C. Cary D'Amico, CATOE Chairman Jim Shaffer and Convention Chairman Barbara Meisner. (Bill Lamb photos)



Some of the "Pipes Alive in '85" workers after the Chicago Theatre Grande Finale. (Chuck Wlodarczyk photo)

Full-color photographic postcards of the consoles at the PIPES ALIVE IN '85 Convention are available for 25¢ each.

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"Chicago, Chicago, my home town."

Chicago Area, Joliet Area and Land of Lincoln chapters all helped us feel that this was, for one week, our "home town" too. Convention Chairman Barbara Meisner deserves a bouquet of roses for the outstanding effort which she and her committees put forth on our behalf. Concert MCs Charles Cooney, Cary D'Amico and Doug Christenson were most gracious hosts, and Jim Shaffer's bus captains were nothing short of astonishing. Those of us who came from towns smaller than Chicago stood in awe as petite Patty Patterson "explained" to the burly taxi drivers in front of the hotel that her bus *did* have the right-of-way. Faces and places, more than can be recalled at any one time, all blend into a memorable mental movie, and we can only state our belief that Chicago was all and more than we had dreamed when we made our plans to go there. Our thanks go to everyone who had a part in bringing the Pipes Alive in '85. □

1985 Young Organists Competition Entrants

Martin Ellis, first place winner in the Young Organist Competition. (Bill Lamb photo)



Martin Ellis — First Place
Central Indiana Chapter

Melissa Ambrose — Second Place
Motor City Chapter

Rebecca Rieker — Third Place
San Diego Chapter

John J. Cook
Eastern Massachusetts Chapter

Lois Friedrich
Buffalo Area Chapter

Neil H. Johnston II
Southwest Michigan Chapter

Frank E. Perko III
Pikes Peak Chapter

Jason Poteet
Sierra Chapter

Reid Spears
Chicago Area Chapter (CATOE)

Don Walker
Joliet Area Chapter (JATOE) □

Melissa Ambrose, second place winner in the Young Organist Competition. (Claude Neuffer photo)

