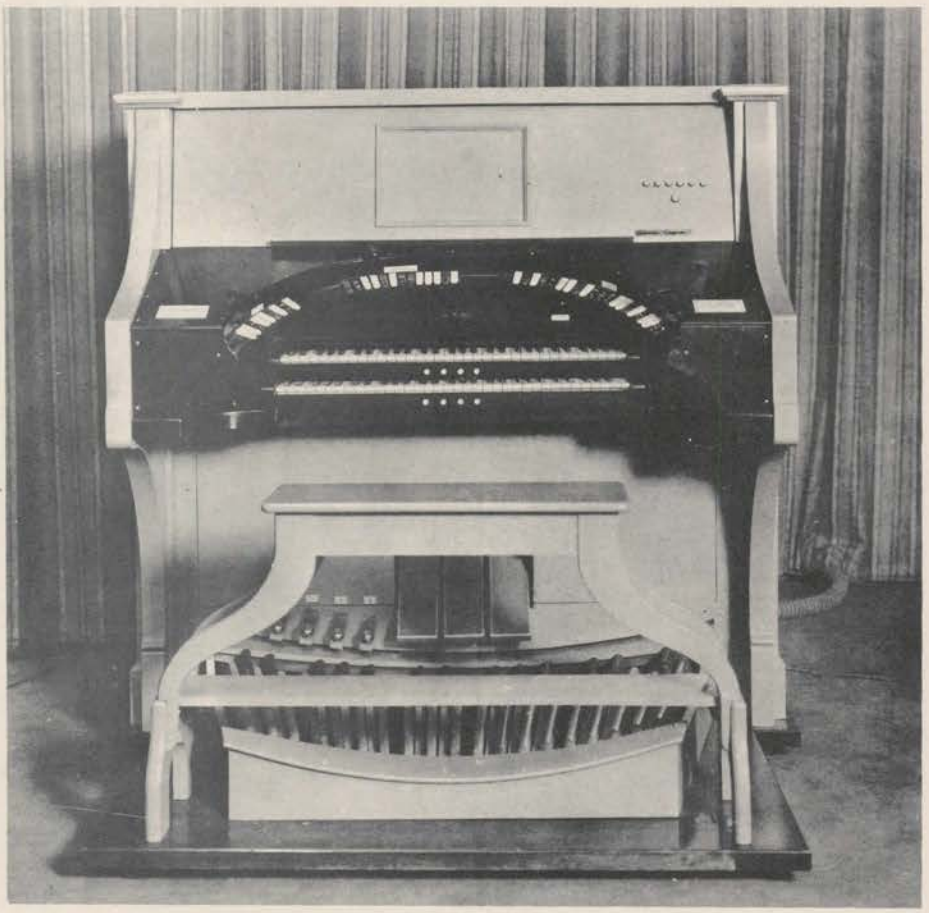
The Reuter Theatre Organ



2m/7r Reuter organ (with player), Opus 270, Radio Station KMA, Shenandoah, Iowa.

Story by JACK L. SIEVERT

If one's travels did not carry him through the central United States during the late 1920's, and more specifically within listening range of a Dent-managed theatre in Texas, then he very possibly has not seen or heard a theatre organ bearing the nameplate "The Reuter Organ Co., Lawrence, Kansas". Of the forty-seven opus numbers assigned to orchestral type instruments, thirty were credited to Texas, six to Kansas, three to California, two to Illinois, and one each to Arkansas, Missouri, Minnesota, Iowa, New Mexico, and Idaho. Thirty-eight of these forty-seven numbers represent complete instruments, the remainder being horseshoe consoles and/or additions to church organs adapted for theatre use except for two opus numbers assigned to organs for theatres which were never built. Actually during no period did production of theatre organs exceed 25% of the total Reuter output, this firm having been (and still is) primarily a builder of church and recital organs.

It is also possible that a few theatre organ devotees with photographic memories recall another similar name when "Reuter" is mentioned—that of Reuter-Schwarz. The latter is actually the name under which the present company was founded in Trenton, Illinois, during the year 1917. Of the first fifty or so instruments built under this banner, only two found their way to theatres, the first being that in the Hippodrome Theatre, Murphysboro, Illinois (Opus 26 installed in 1919), and actually the last organ built in the Reuter-Schwarz, Trenton, Illinois plant prior to their move to Lawrence, Kansas, the present home of the Company. The Hippodrome organ was a "straight" two manual with couplers encompassing fourteen ranks, and, other than minor nomenclature changes, bore far more resemblance to its church brethren than to the already distinctive theatre instruments of various other builders.

The second theatre installation, and the only other theatre organ built under the name of Reuter-Schwarz, was also a two manual of fifteen ranks and design similar to the Hippodrome organ, this being for the Royal Theatre, Little Rock, Arkansas.

The third venture into the "entertainment" world, and the first of a series of Texas installations, involved the addition of an echo division to an existing Smith-Seeburg Organ in Wichita Falls. All went well--until the organ became lost enroute during rail shipment. Fortunately, this temporary delay did not dampen the interest of the Dent Theatres Inc. in the future purchase of the Reuter product.

Following this episode were several opus numbers assigned to replacement consoles for other makes of organ, and it was actually not until 1925 that the first indications of a truly orchestral instrument began to emerge from this firm, a two manual, five rank unit organ for the Iris Theatre, Houston, Texas. During this year some five additional small unit organs were sent to Texas theatres, each blossoming a little further until Opus 199 was reached when a two manual, eight rank unit, with a fairly complete supply of traps and percussions, was contracted for by the Orpheum Theatre, Topeka, Kansas. Actually the installation of this organ was never completed in this theatre with the organ being removed, resold, and reinstalled in the Columbia Theatre, Junction City, Kansas.

Close on its heels was Opus 204 for the Varsity Theatre of Lawrence, Kansas, home ground for the Reuter factory. Obviously this three manual eight rank unit equipped with ample accessories was to be the show organ for the Reuter Company, which now was seeking to make itself known in the theatre organ world. This installation was completed in 1926 and was expected to be the foundation for greater inroads in the field of orchestral instruments. Unknown to the builder, however, less than two and one half years remained before the last theatre organ was to be built by the firm.

The prime cause for the purchase of the Varsity instrument was the renovation of the parent building including an ample stage for vaudeville plus enlarging the seating capacity to 1200. Installation of the organ was looked forward to with exceptional interest since it was to be the first in a Lawrence theatre. Excerpts from the review of the opening recital indicated that not all the effects were found to be in the organ. "An amber-colored spot light was turned on the ivory and black console of the organ and the whole theatre was beautiful in the blue and purple light effects." This concert was performed by Harold Loring, specialist in "American Indian Music", and Miss Elsie Arbuthnot, contralto. Note was also made concerning a vocal encore, "a Spanish waltz song, Carmena. In the accompaniment of this song the

tambourine and castanets were used as part of the organ accompaniment, with almost startling effect."

Its actual cost was approximately $12,600.00, although it was highly publicized as a $25,000.00 instrument. The organ was divided in the usual two chambers with the Solo and Percussion on the right and the "Main" on the left. Complete specifications are found elsewhere in this article.

The largest orchestral type instrument created by the Reuter Company, was a four manual fourteen rank organ for the Arcadia Theatre, Dallas, Texas, in 1927. A quotation from "The Dallas Journal" of September 20, 1927, indicated that "the Arcadia Reuter . . . will be the largest theatre organ in Dallas; . . . the organ will have more pipes, more degrees of unification, more stopkeys, will cover more space and will weigh more than any theatre organ ever installed in Dallas." Even with this buildup of the "largest" and "more", it proved to be the only four manual orchestral unit built by the Reuter Company.

It is interesting to note that although over 60% of the Reuter Theatre Organs were sold in Texas, few of these contained any traps or percussions and rarely were they on greater than 5" to 7" pressure. These were nearly all designed by W. G. Redmond, the then Reuter representative in Dallas, which perhaps gives some clue to their variant from the remainder of the "family". On the other hand, nearly all the Kansas, Missouri, Minnesota, and other central states organs were on 8" to 10" pressure, the latter proving to be the highest pressure utilized by this firm.

None of these organs is known to still exist in original condition and in their original habitat. Several were moved to churches, and in that position, some remain in use without major modification. Fire, water, and the price of scrap tin, however, have taken a severe toll of the majority of these instruments as with those of many other builders.

Perhaps partly due to a relatively

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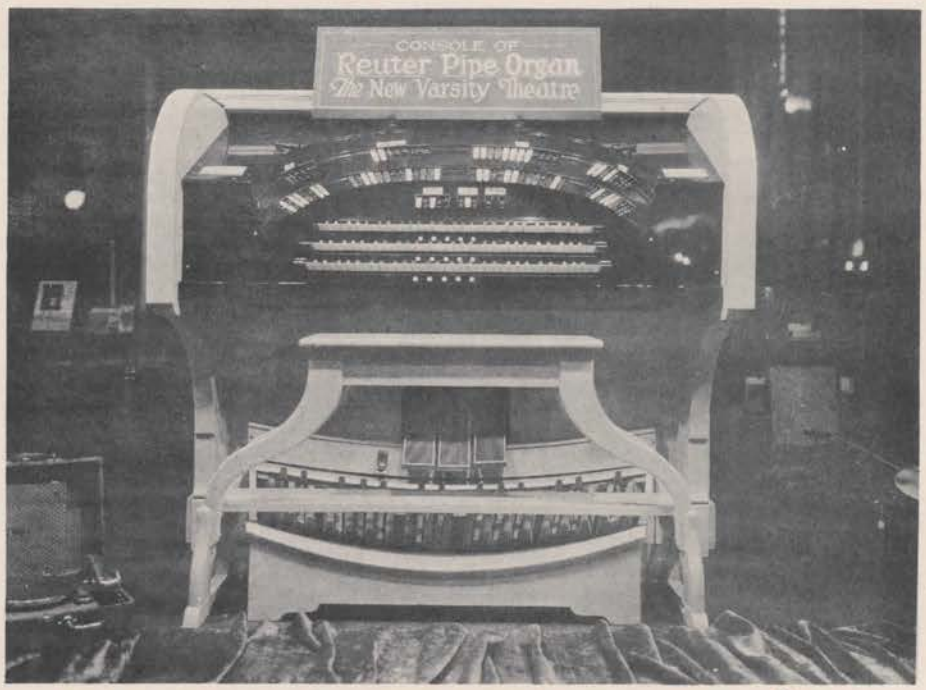

3m/8r Reuter organ, Opus 204, Varsity Theatre, Lawrence, Kansas

SPECIFICATIONS OF THE REUTER ORCHESTRAL ORGAN, VARSITY THEATRE, LAWRENCE, KANSAS

SOLO CHAMBER - 10"	Compass	Pipes	Pedal	Accomp.	Acc. 2nd	Great	Gt. 2nd	Solo
Tuba	16'-8'.	73	16-8	8	8	16-8	16	16-8
Tibia Clausa	16'-4'	85	16-8	8	16	16-8-4	8	16-8-4
Vox Humana	8'-4'	73		8		16-8		8-4
Chimes		13				x		x
Xylophone		37			x	x		x
Orchestral Bells		37				x		x
Glockenspiel		--		x		x		
Bass Drum			x					
Snare Drum (Roll)				x				
Snare Drum (Tap)			x					
Tympani			x					
MAIN CHAMBER - 10"								
Open Diapason	8'-4'	73	8-4	8	8	16-8-4		8-4
Concert Flute	8'-1-3/5'	89	8	8-4-2-2/3-2		8-4-2-2/3-2-1-3/5		2
Violoncello	8'-4'	73	8	16-8-4		8-4		8
Viole Celeste	8'-4'	61		8-4		8-4		
Clarinet	8'	61	8	8		8	8	8
Saxophone	8'	Syn.				8		
Orchestral Oboe	8'	Syn.		8		8		8
MISCELLANEOUS PERCUSSIONS								
Cymbal			x					
Triangle			x		x			
Castanets				x				
Tom-Tom				x				
Tambourine				x				
Chinese Block				x				
Door Bell (Piston)								
Siren (Piston)								
Auto Horn (Piston)								
Bird Call (Piston)								
Crash Cymbal (Toe Piston)								
Buzzer (Piston)								
Couplers			Ac-Pd 8					Ac-So 8
Pistons				5 & Ped		5 & Ped		5 & Ped

GENERAL

Tremolo, Main	Expression, Main	Balanced Crescendo Pedal
Tremolo, Solo	Expression, Solo	Crescendo Indicator Light

low dependence on theatre business, the Reuter Company was not severely harmed by the advent of talking pictures. This, coupled with conservative fiscal management, permitted the firm to continue operation throughout the depression, reopen after World War II, and with progressive second generation leadership, develop a healthy backlog of orders during the current period.

The following is believed to be a complete factory listing of Reuter Theatre Organs.

OPUS	CONTRACTED FOR	REMOVAL OR DISPOSITION	MANUAL OR RANKS	PRESSURE	INSTALLED
26	Hippodrome Theatre Murphysboro, Ill. (Reuter-Schwarz)		2 / 14 (straight)		Dec. 1919
33	Royal Theatre Little Rock, Ark. (Reuter-Schwarz)	Removed 1933	2 / 15 (straight)		Apr. 1920
113	Strand Theatre Wichita Falls, Tex.	(See Opus 176)	3 rk, Echo added to Smith-Seeburg	4"	Apr. 1924
129	Palace Theatre El Paso, Tex.	Reported to be in Montebello, Calif. in 1954	3 / 12 (straight)	5" & 4"	Oct. 1924
130	Queen Theatre Bryan, Tex.		2 manual console for 4 ranks		Apr. 1924
134	Ideal Theatre Corsicana, Tex.		2 manual console for 10 ranks		Oct. 1924
135	Palace Theatre Corsicana, Tex.		2 manual console plus 1 set pipes		Oct. 1924
137	Iris Theatre Houston, Tex.		2 / 5	5"	Mar. 1925
140	W. G. Redmond Residence Dallas, Tex.	Console removed and attached to Hilgreen-Lane Organ, Parkway Theatre, Dallas, Tex.	2 / 4	5"	Mar. 1925
140	W. G. Redmond Residence Dallas, Tex.	Enlarged from above. Sold in early '30s.	3 / 9 & perc.		1927
145	Arcadia Theatre Tyler, Tex.	Moved to Catholic Church, Tyler; removed about 1956.	2 / 5	5"	Jun. 1925
149	Auditorium Theatre Crockett, Tex.	To Methodist Church, Henderson, Tex.	2 / 5	5"	May 1925
158	Broadway Theatre Cisco, Tex.	To Methodist Church, Sterling City, Tex.	2 / 5		Oct. 1925
160	Capital Theatre New Braunfels, Tex.		2 / 6 & Xylophone	5"	Sep. 1925
172	Queen Theatre Abilene, Tex.		2 / 6		Dec. 1925
176	Strand Theatre Wichita Falls, Tex.	(See Opus 113)	2 manual console plus 2 ranks	6"	Jan. 1926
177	Olympia Theatre Wichita Falls, Tex.		3 manual console plus 1 rank	7"	Jan. 1926
188	Mayflower Theatre Florence, Kan.	In First Presbyterian, Conway Springs, Kan. - 1940	2 manual console renovation 11 stop Estey		Mar. 1926
194	Plaza Theatre Paris, Tex.	In First Christian Church, Commerce, Tex. - 1936	2 / 5		May 1926
195	Hotel Orndorff El Paso, Tex.	To Asbury Methodist, El Paso - 1928, still there in 1951	2 / 6		Aug. 1926
199	Orpheum Theatre Topeka, Kan. Resold to: Columbia Theatre Junction City, Kan.	Installation not completed	2 / 8 w/traps & perc.		
204	Varsity Theatre Lawrence, Kan.	To Dickinson Theatre, Lawrence - 1930's, removed and destroyed around 1940	3 / 8 w/traps & perc.	10"	Sep. 1926
214	Palace Theatre Corpus Christi, Tex.	To Church of the Good Shepherd - 1939 (since renamed All Saints Episcopal), traded in on electronic to Oneal Piano Co. - early 1950s.	3 / 8 & Xylophone	7"	Oct. 1926
216	Majestic Theatre Wichita Falls, Tex.	Believed moved to residence, Wichita Falls - 1941	2 / 7		Oct. 1926
218	Mission Theatre Amarillo, Tex.	To Center St. Methodist Church Tucumcari, N. M. - 1937	2 / 5	5"	Dec. 1926
224	Booth Theatre Independence, Kan.	To Baptist Church, Nevada, Mo. - replaced in early 1950s	2 / 7 w/traps & perc.	10"	Jan. 1927
225	Vernon Theatre Vernon, Tex.		2 / 5	5"	Feb. 1927
228	Ellanay Theatre El Paso, Tex.	To Paramount Theater, Amarillo, Tex. - 1931	3 / 8 plus perc. - no traps	7"	Mar. 1927
236	Florence Theatre Los Angeles, Calif.		2 / 3	5"	Apr. 1927
246	Ward Theatre Pismo Beach, Calif.	Removed in 1929, resold to Eagle Rock Baptist, Los Angeles - 1929	2 / 4	7"	Jul. 1927
250	Arcadia Theatre Dallas, Tex.	To Baylor University, Waco, Tex. - 1938	4 / 14 w/traps & perc.	Main 10" Echo 7"	Sep. 1927
251	Florencita Theatre Los Angeles, Calif.	To our Savior's Lutheran, Long Beach, Calif. - 1930	2 / 3	5"	Jul. 1927
256	Colonial Theatre Kansas City, Mo.	Destroyed by fire	2 / 5 w/traps & perc.	10" Vox 6"	Sep. 1927
261	Lyric Theatre New Ulm, Minn.	To Zion Lutheran, Ocheyedan, Iowa - 1941; still there in 1959	2 / 5 plus traps	10"	Dec. 1927
262	Harlandale Theatre San Antonio, Tex.	To Christian Church, Alexandria, La. - still there in 1951	2 / 5	5"	Nov. 1927
263	Beacon Hill Theatre San Antonio, Tex.	Moved and rebuilt, First Baptist, Ft. Scott, Kan. - early 1940's	3 / 9	10"	Dec. 1927
264	Highland Park Theatre San Antonio, Tex.	Ruined by water, sold as parts - 1935	2 / 5	5"	Dec. 1927
265	Alamo Heights Theatre San Antonio, Tex.	Planned for theater which was never built	2 / 5	5"	

(continued on next page)

Questions and Answers

Q Having just purchased a six rank WurliTzer, I am about to start its removal from the theatre. What is the best way to disconnect the cables that go to the relay room from the chests and the console?

A The cables are made up of many small wires. These branch off to the various sets of bussing, and except in rare instances, are "tied off" with serving twine at each place a wire branches off. This served section is known as a "tree". The trees are wrapped onto the wooden spreaders, usually by one extra turn of wire through the small hole bored in line with each buss strip.

There are two ways of removing these trees. (1) Remove the screws from the spreader strip. Insert a screw driver under the tip end of the spreader, and with this pressure applied, start unsoldering the connections on the bussing. This is slow going, and care must be used not to break the wooden spreader by too much applied pressure. Also, be careful of solder splattering as the individual wires pop loose from the buss. (2) A faster way of disconnecting is by cutting the wires at the point where they are wrapped around the connection pin on the spreader itself. The individual wire passes through the small hole and is brought back around the entire tree and down through the hole again. It is then twisted around the connection pin. Using a sharp knife, start at either end, and carefully cut the wires by drawing the knife along the spreader between the connection wire pins and the wrap lip of the spreader. Then, using a sharp awl or toothpick, insert the tip under the loops on the wrap lip of the spreader. This will pull free the first wrap of the wires. Then lift the tree off the spreader starting at the butt end.

CAUTION: Be sure that the trees are served before starting, and that the serving is in good condition. Otherwise you might well have a big job ahead of you buzzing out each individual wire. The second method is by far the fastest although it takes a little more time to re-connect. However, unsoldered spreaders can be difficult to re-solder in the vertical position.

Q I have built a small coil winding jig to re-wind WurliTzer black cap magnets. What are the coil specifications?

A Each coil is random wound with approximately 1500 turns of Number 37 enamelled wire. Since there is a possibility of some slight differences in wire resistance, it would be wise to measure the resistance of a few of the coils first wound. They should read 90 ohms

PER COIL for a total per magnet of 180 ohms. Black cap magnets, however, vary from 150 ohms to 190 ohms, so it would be well to check a good one in your organ to determine the original readings, as they seem to run in batches with varying resistance.

Q Being a Ham Operator as well as a theatre organ enthusiast, I am familiar with the principles of operation of electrical devices. Rather than undertake a complete releathering job on my newly acquired Robert Morton theatre organ which was damaged by water, I have been considering installing direct electric action valves in place of the pneumatic action. Is this advisable?

A Direct electric action has had a long history in organ building, primarily in the United States. Former objections to the action system have been overcome with improved components, and this type of action has been adopted by more and more builders. Therefore, your suggestion has real merit so far as the action system is concerned. The action is very fast, reliable and cypher free. Servicing problems are different, however, and a competent technician familiar with servicing direct electric action should be consulted before starting. Direct electric actions have been literally ruined by improper servicing by persons who, though possibly experienced in organ electro-pneumatic systems, were otherwise untrained!

However, careful analysis should be made of the costs involved in the replacement units. It might well be advisable to re-leather unless you are planning on making the entire organ direct electric as voltage requirements of the two systems may differ. Some direct electric systems operate on 14 volts, although they draw less current than an ordinary organ magnet, and a new higher voltage DC supply would be necessary.

The Wicks Organ Company has had the most experience in this field, and are without a doubt the largest builders and the most successful users of these components. Reisner and Klann also build these units, and most organ parts concerns carry these products. Wicks units may only be purchased through local factory representatives, however.

Q I am building a grill to cover the swell shades of my home installed theatre organ. Will it impair the sound of the organ?

A Organ swell shade area should at least equal the combined area of the topes of all the chests in the organ chamber, manual as well as offset. Of this swell shade area, a minimum of 80% opening should be maintained to avoid serious loss of sound quality and volume in an auditorium. However, in a home installation, the grill might well be used to help control too much volume and this problem would have to be treated individually to suit your taste (as well as that of your immediate neighbors, probably). Some home installations have been greatly enhanced by leaving a mixing chamber between the swell shades and the actual grille openings to the room. This is a good place to install your piano and/or Chrysoglott.

Q In considering the purchase of a theatre organ for installation in my home, I am trying to consider all possible complaints and resolve them ahead of time. What are the most commonly stated complaints to home installation?

A Wives, money, wives, space, wives, time, wives, neighbors, wives, and so on far into the night! If you win the first one, you've got it made.

Q I have a Smith Theatre Organ. I am troubled by what seems to be a slight leak past the valve under some some of the pipes, causing some of them to speak softly. The valves seem to be in good shape, and the pneumatic system is working properly and no other leaks are apparent. Boring a small hole in the foot of the pipe seems to stop the trouble. What is basically wrong?

A Smith chests are bored with windways in the side and top to the pipe seat. The valve and its operating pneumatic are the Roosevelt type, located

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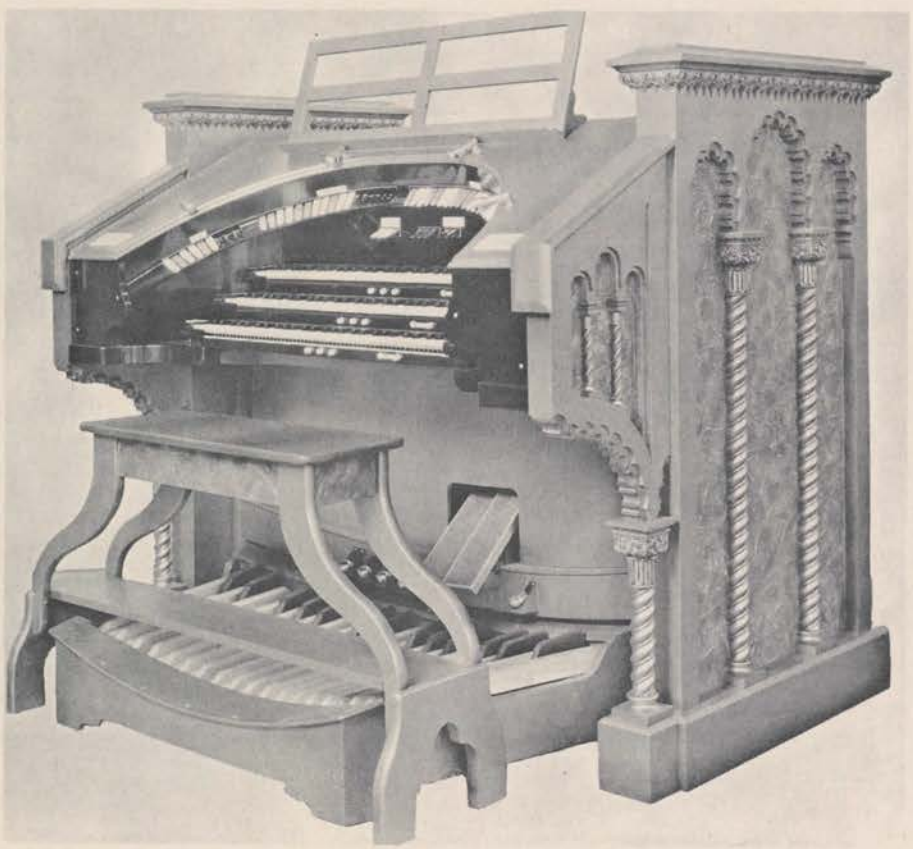
CONCLUSION OF REUTER THEATRE ORGAN LIST

266	Main Avenue Theatre San Antonio, Tex.	Planned for theater which was never built	2/5	5"	
270	Radio Station KMA Shenondoah, Iowa		2/7 w/auto. player	7"	Dec. 1927
275	Arcadia Theatre Harlingen, Tex.	To Walla Walla College, College Place, Wash. - believed rebuilt late 1940's	2/7	7" Tibia 8"	Mar. 1928
280	Reuter Studio Chicago, Ill.	To Trinity Ev. United Brethren, Kansas City, Mo. - 1931; still in existence	3/5	6"	Feb. 1928
282	Arcadia Theatre Ranger, Tex.	Known to have been for sale in late 1930's	2/6	7" & 10"	Apr. 1928
285	Uptown Theatre Wichita, Kan.	Removed late 1930's or early 1940's	3/5 plus traps	10"	May 1928
290	Arcadia Theatre Temple, Tex.	To church in Breckenridge, Tex. - 1939	2/7	7"	Jun. 1928
293	El Morrow Gallup, N. M.		2/5 plus traps	10"	Jul. 1928
310	Uptown Theatre Junction City, Kan.	To Catholic Church, Junction City - 1939; moved to All Angels Episcopal, Denver - 1953; Still in existence	2/5	8"	Sep. 1928
329	Strand Theatre Pocatello, Idaho		2/5	5"	Mar. 1929



3m/5r Reuter organ; Opus 285, Uptown Theatre, Wichita, Kansas