

The Story of Robert Hope-Jones

(Continued)

The Hope-Jones Organ Company was established in February, 1907, and has already proved a great success. Though it scarcely advertises, and employs neither salesmen or agents, it has been called upon to place organs in California, Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Indiana, Tennessee and other states. One of its greatest works is the organ in the Ocean Grove Auditorium. This instrument is creating a sensation in the organ world.

Robert Hope-Jones is a member of the British Institute of Electrical Engineers, of the Royal College of Organists, London; of the American Guild of Organists, and of other bodies.

In 1893, he married Cecil Laurence, a musical member of one of the leading families of Maidstone, England. This lady mastered the intricacies of her husband's inventions, and to her help and encouragement in times of difficulty, he attributes his success.

We suppose that the reason "history repeats itself" is to be found in the fact that human does not vary, but is much the same from generation to generation. From the Bible, we learn that one Demetrius, a silversmith of Ephesus, became alarmed at the falling off in demand for silver shrines to Diana, caused by the preaching of the Apostle Paul, and called his fellow craftsmen together with the cry of "Our craft is in danger" and set the whole city in an uproar. (Acts XIX-24)

In the year 1682, a new organ was wanted for the Temple Church in London, and "Father" Smith and Renatus Harris, the organ builders of that day, each brought such powerful influence to bear upon the Benchers that they authorized both builders to erect organs in the church, one at each end, which were alternately played upon certain days, Smith's organ by Purcell and Dr. Blow, and Harris' organ by Baptist Draghi, organist to Queen Catherine. An attempt by the Benchers of the Middle Temple to decide in favor of Smith stirred up violent opposition on the part of the Benchers of the Inner Temple, who favored Harris, and the controversy raged bitterly for nearly five years, when Smith's organ was paid for and Harris' taken away. This is known in history as "The Battle of the Organs." In the thick of the fight, one of Harris' partisans, who had more zeal than discretion, made his way inside Smith's organ and cut the bellows in pieces.

In 1875-76, the organ in Chester Cathedral was being rebuilt by the local firm of J. & C. H. Whiteley. The London silversmiths took alarm at the Cathedral job going to a little country builder, and got together, with the result that, one by one, Whiteley's men left their employ, tempted by the offer of work at better wages in London, and had there not been four brothers in the firm, all practical men, they would have been unable to fulfil their contract. The worry was partly responsible for the death of the head of the firm soon after.

All this sounds like a chapter from the dark ages of long, long ago, and we do not deem such things possible now.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Following is a continuation of the text relative to Robert Hope-Jones, "The Father of the Theatre Organ" as it appears in a book, "The Recent Revolution in Organ Building," written by George L. Miller in 1909 for the annual convention of the National Association of Organists. Mrs. David Marr loaned the book to ATOE Member Lloyd E. Klos while he was doing research on the history of the Marr & Colton Company.

But listen! In the year 1895, what was practically the first Hope-Jones electric organ sold was set up in St. George's Church, Hanover Square in London, England.

The furor it created was cut short by a fire which destroyed the organ and damaged the tower of the church. With curious promptitude, attention was directed to the danger of allowing amateurs to make crude efforts at organ-building in valuable and historic churches, and to the great risk of electric actions. Incendiarism being more than suspected, the authorities of the church ordered from Hope-Jones a similar organ to take the place of the one destroyed.

Almost at the same time, a gimlet was forced through the electric cable of a Hope-Jones organ at Hendon Parish Church, London, England. Shortly afterwards, the cable connecting the console with the Hope-Jones organ at Ormskirk Parish Church, Lancashire, England, was cut through. At Burton-on-Trent Parish Church, sample pipes from each of his special stops were stolen.

At the Auditorium, Ocean Grove, New Jersey, an effort to cripple the new Hope-Jones organ shortly before one of the opening recitals in 1908 was made.

And in the same year, on the Sunday previous to Edwin Lemare's recital on the Hope-Jones organ in the First Universalist Church in Rochester, N.Y., serious damage was done to some of the pipes in almost every stop in the organ.

James Ingall Wedgwood, in writing his excellent "Dictionary of Organ Stops", felt it incumbent upon him to offer an apology, or rather justification for introducing the name of Hope-Jones so frequently.

The author of this present volume feels the same embarrassment. He, however, does not see how it would be possible for him, or for any future writer, who values truth, to avoid reiteration of this man's name and work when writing about the modern organ.

HOPE-JONES' CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MODERN ORGAN

There have been four great landmarks in organ construction, viz:

1. The invention of the swell box by Jordan in 1712.
2. The invention of the horizontal bellows by Samuel Green in 1789.
3. The invention of the pneumatic lever by Barker in 1832.
4. The marvelous improvement of the electro-pneumatic action by Robert Hope-Jones in 1886.

It is safe to say that the art of organ-building has advanced more during the last 50 years than in any previous three centuries. We are literally correct in saying that a veritable revolution has already been effected. As leaders in this revolutionary movement, three names stand forward with startling prominence. They are Henry Willis, Charles Barker (Alias Aristide Cavaille-Coll) and Robert Hope-Jones.

ELECTRO-PNEUMATIC ACTION

Various builders in many countries have made scores of improvements or variations in form, and have taken out patents to cover the points of difference, but none of these has done any work of special importance. Not one of the early electric actions proved either quick or reliable, and all were costly to install and maintain.

Sir John Stainer, in the 1889 edition of his "Dictionary of Musical Terms," dismisses the electric action in a paragraph of four lines as of no practical importance. In that same year, the writer asked Mr. W. T. Best to come over and look at the organ in St. John's Church, Birkenhead, which was then beginning to be talked about, and he laughed at the idea that any good could come out of an electric action. He was a man of wide experience who gave recitals all over the country, and was thoroughly acquainted with the attempts that had been made up to that time. He did not want to see any more electric organs.

This form of mechanism therefore earned a bad name, and was making little advance, if not actually being abandoned, when the skilled electrician, Robert Hope-Jones entered the field about 1886.

Knowing little of organs and nothing of previous attempts to utilize electricity for this service, he made with his own hands, and some unskilled assistance furnished by members of his voluntary choir, the first movable console, stop keys, double touch, suitable bass, etc., and an electric action that created a sensation throughout the organ world. In this action, the "pneumatic blow" was for the first time attained, and an attack and repetition secured for in advance of anything thought possible at that time, either in connection with the organ or the pianoforte.

Hope-Jones introduced the round wire contact which secures the ideally perfect "rubbing points" and he makes these wires of dissimilar non-corrosive metals (gold and platinum). He replaced previous rule-of-thumb methods by scientific circulation, recognized the value of low voltage, good insulation and the avoidance of self-induction with the result that the electro-pneumatic action has become (when properly made) as reliable as the tracker or pneumatic lever mechanism.

The electric action consists substantially of a small bellows like the pneumatic lever, but instead of the valve admitting the wind to operate it being moved by a tracker leading from the key, it is opened by an electromagnet, energized by a contact in the keyboard and connected therewith by a wire which, of course, may be of any desired length.

The use of this action renders it possible for the console to be entirely detached from the organ, moved to a distance and connected with the organ by a cable fifty feet, one hundred feet, or as many miles long. This arrangement may be seen, for example, in the College of the City of New York, where the

theatre organ

console is carried to the middle of the platform when a recital is to be given, and removed out of the way when the platform is wanted for other purposes.

As all the old mechanism—the backfalls, roller-boards and trackers—is now swept away, it is possible by placing the bellows in the cellar to utilize the inside of the organ for a choir-vestry, as was indeed done with the pioneer Hope-Jones organ at St. John's Church, Birkenhead.

The perfecting of tubular pneumatic and especially of electro-pneumatic action has lent wonderful flexibility to the organ and has allowed of instruments being introduced in buildings where it would otherwise have been impossible to locate an organ. Almost all leading builders have done work of this kind, but the Aeolian Company has been quickest to seize the advantage of division in adapting the pipe organ for use in private residences.

SOUND REFLECTORS

Sound reflectors have recently been introduced, and it seems likely that these will play an important part in organ construction in the future. So far, they appear to be employed only by Hope-Jones and the firms with which he was associated. It has been

discovered that sound waves may be collected, focussed or directed, much in the same way that light waves can. In the case of the Hope-Jones organ at Ocean Grove, New Jersey, the greatest part of the instrument has been placed in a basement constructed outside the original auditorium. The sound waves are thrown upward and are directed into the auditorium by means of parabolic reflectors constructed of cement, lined with wood. The effect is entirely satisfactory. In Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland, Ohio, Hope-Jones arranged for the Tuba to stand in the basement at the distant end of the nave. Its tone is projected through a metal grid set in the floor, till, striking the roof of the nave, it is spread and fills the entire building with tone. In St. Luke's Church, Montclair, N.J., he adopted a somewhat similar plan in connection with the open 32-foot pedal pipes which are laid horizontally in the basement. We believe that the first time this principle was employed was in the case of the organ rebuilt by Hope-Jones in 1892 at the residence of J. Martin White, Balruddery, Dundee, Scotland.

COUPLERS

In the days of mechanical action, couplers of any kind provided a source of trouble, and

added greatly to the weight of the touch. The natural result was that anything further than unison coupling was seldom attempted. In some organs, hardly any couplers at all were present.

In the pioneer organ built by Hope-Jones in Birkenhead about 1887, a sudden advance was made. That organ contains no less than 19 couplers. Not only did he provide sub-octave and super-octave couplers freely, but he even added a Swell Sub-quint to Great coupler.

Hope-Jones appears to have led in adding extra pipes to the wind chest, which were acted upon by the top octave of the octave couplers, thus giving the organist a complete scale to the full extent of the key-boards. He made the practice common in England, and the Austin Company adopted it up on his joining them in this country.

STOP KEYS

We believe that the idea of employing keys to bring the stops in and out of action, instead of the draw-stop knobs, originated with Horatio Clark of Reading, Mass. He applied for a patent covering the invention in the year 1877. Hope-Jones, however, is generally credited with introducing the first practical stop keys. He invented the forms most largely used today, and led their adoption in England, in this country, and indeed throughout the world.

On a modern Hope-Jones console, the stop keys are arranged in an inclined semi-circle overhanging, and just above the keyboards.

There is much controversy as to whether stop keys will eventually displace the older fashioned draw knobs. A few organists are strongly opposed to the new method of control, but the majority, especially the rising generation of organists, warmly welcome the change. It is significant that whereas Hope-Jones was for years the only advocate of the system, 4 or 5 of the builders in this country, and a dozen foreign organ-builders, are now supplying stop keys either exclusively or for a considerable number of their organs.

PEDAL BOARDS

In most American organs built 20 years ago, the compass of the pedal board was only two octaves and two notes, from CCC to D. Sometimes, two octaves only. Later, it was extended to F, 30 notes, which is the compass generally found in England. Following Hope-Jones' lead, all the best builders have now extended their boards to G, 32 notes, this range being called for by some of Bach's organ music and certain pieces of the French school where a melody is played by the right foot and the bass by the left. The chief reason is that G is the top note of the string bass, and is called for in orchestral transcriptions.

PEDAL STOP CONTROL (Suitable Bass)

For a long time, no means whatever of controlling the Pedal stops and couplers was provided, but in course of time, it became the fashion to cause the combination pedals or pistons on the Great organ (and subsequently on the other departments also)

*Please turn to page 26

The New World Revisited

(Concluded)

lent condition, as in our experience was so often the case -- only the organ having really been neglected.

Again, this was an early-hours-of-the-morning visit, but we were still fit enough to visit Mr. and Mrs. Reg Watson in Manhasset the following evening for another session on their lovely WurliTzer.

Our second "return visit" of the holiday was to the fantastic Radio City Music Hall, this time to see the whole show from the third mezzanine. With a lavish stage spectacle, full length feature film, fifty piece symphony orchestra, Jack Ward at the Grand Organ, no advertisements, no sales interval and no records -- what more could you want? There are still three organists on the Music Hall staff, Dick Leibert, Raymond Bohr, and Jack Ward, with John Detroty as deputy.


On our last day, Friday the 31st of May, we paid a visit to a theatre which Jeff and I had twice visited on our previous holiday. This was the stately Loew's Kings Theatre in Brooklyn, with its magnificent 4/26 "Wonder Morton," still in pretty good order, though seldom used. The ATOE actually had had a meeting here only a month before our visit. On the last day of our 1962 holiday, Jeff opened the show in public and, in fact, he can now rightly say that, in a period of twelve months, he has played

theatre pipe organs in America, in public, on three occasions!

And so a truly memorable holiday came to an end. Peter Schaeble drove us to Idlewild Airport, but not until he had treated us to a meal on the way. Jeff was presented with the most enormous ice-cream any of us had ever seen -- surely enough for a dozen people, but then he had displayed a liking, and gained a reputation, for the stuff quite early in the holiday, and I suppose it just served him right!

I would like to express on behalf of my colleagues and myself our appreciation to everyone we met over there for making us so welcome and, by their untiring efforts, ensuring that we had a really wonderful time. It is impossible to put into cold print just how we feel, but the feeling is there just the same. Thank you all.

As a postscript, I would like to add that, during the few days Raymond Shelley and Bob Foley were in England, they were able to play quite a few organs in the London area. On the 12th of June, when they visited Manchester, we were able to arrange for them to play the Publix No. 1, 4/20 WurliTzer at the Odeon (Paramount) Theatre, the 4/14 WurliTzer at the Gaumont Theatre, the 3c/9 Christie at the Carlton, Salford, and, two days later, the 3/19 WurliTzer at the Odeon (Paramount) Theatre, Leeds.



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Robert Hope-Jones

(Continued)

to move the Pedal stops and couplers so as to provide a bass suited to the particular combination of stops in use on the manual. This was a crude arrangement, and often proved more of a hindrance than of a help to the player.

The Hope-Jones plan, patented in 1889, of providing the combination pedals or pistons with a double touch, was a distinct step in advance, for it enabled the organist by means of a light touch to move only the manual registers, and by means of a very much heavier touch on the combination pedal or piston, to operate also his Pedal stops and couplers.

But the simplest and best means of helping the organist to control his Pedal department is the automatic "Suitable Bass" arrangement patented by Hope-Jones in 1891 and subsequently. According to his plan, a Suitable Bass tablet is provided just above the rear end of the black keys on each manual.

Each of these tablets has a double touch. On pressing it with ordinary force, it moves the Pedal stop keys and couplers, so as to provide an appropriate bass to the combination of stops in use on that manual at the moment. On pressing it with much greater force, it becomes locked down and remains in that position until released by the depression of the Suitable Bass tablet belonging to another manual, or by means of a special release key placed contiguous to the Pedal stop knobs or stop keys.

When the suitable bass tablet belonging to any manual is thus locked down, the stops and couplers of the pedal department will automatically move so as to provide at all times a bass that is suitable to the combination of stops and couplers in use upon that particular manual.

On touching the Suitable Bass tablet belonging to any other manual with extra pressure, the tablet formerly touched will be released, and the latter will become locked down. The Pedal stops and couplers will now group themselves so as to provide a suitable bass to the stops in use on the latter named manual, and will continue to do so until this Suitable Bass tablet is in turn released.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Hope-Jones story will be continued in the next issue of THEATRE ORGAN. Watch for it.