

ROBERT MORTON GOES ON AND ON

by Major H. A. Sommer

The nation was still in a period of mourning over the death of our 28th president, Warren G. Harding, Calvin Coolidge had been sworn in as the 29th president by his father on 3 August 1923. The newspapers of 18 August 1923 were still eulogizing Harding; the Federal agents were hot on the trail of some Bay Area bootleggers, Literary Digest had as the main topic of the current issue "What Kind of a Man is Coolidge?"

In Sacramento, the Capital city of California, some changes were being made in one of the oldest leading movie houses. Originally built as the Alisky in 1906 and operated under that name until 1910, it became the Pantages until 1913, the Garrick through 1914 and then the T & D (Turner and Dankin circuit) through 1923. On Saturday August 18, 1923, after extensive remodeling the house reopened as the Capitol Theatre.

Weather on that August 18th was indicated as fair, the temperature near 100 degrees and a balmy breeze was coming in from the southeast. Billed as the "Most Beautiful Theatre" in Sacramento, many opening night attendees had to be turned away when even the standing room was filled to capacity. As crowds surged through the doors to the interior of the theatre they were encompassed by a glow from suffused rays of blue, red and gold, which were reflected upon walls of distinctive Moorish type, in harmony with the main auditorium. As the house lights dimmed a splendid Robert Morton pipe organ console soared into the air, enhanced by a spotlight. The organ overture was played very capably by Mr. Arthur Powers. Standing by was his relief organist, Aletha Bowman. The Paramount feature pictures were "The Silent Partner" starring Leatrice Joy, Owen Moore and Robert Edelson, also Baby Peggy in "Peg of the Movies." In addition to the usual shorts and slides, as an added attraction on the stage was a singer billed as "Hawaii's Famous Baritone", Mr. Robert K. Heen.

Records indicate a highly successful opening and tremendous admiration of the Robert Morton, which had been installed by Paul Schoenstein of San Francisco. Prices of admission were: Matinee 25¢, children (at all times) 10¢, loges nights 55¢ and loges days 50¢.

The organ was used during the ensuing years for both picture accompaniment, intermissions and solos. Aletha Bowman went on to be resident organist at the Sacramento California theatre. Currently she can be heard on pipes at the Carl Greer Inn in Sacramento. Emil Martin, another well known Sacramento organist, was also featured at the Capital, later to go across the street to Sacramento's Senator theatre. The Senator Morton organ was later installed in the International Restaurant at Walnut Creek, California briefly.

During 1938 the Capital Theatre's Robert Morton was acquired by the McClatchy interests which include the Sacramento Bee newspaper, radio station KFBK AM-FM and a TV station in Fresno. It was to the studios of radio station KFBK that the organ was moved and reinstalled by Schoenstein. Emil Martin and G. Leland Ralph were the organists most often featured on the instrument for the broadcasts. Mr. Martin today is with KFBK programming and is featured each Sunday night for a half hour radiocast on a Hammond.

He also plays a Gulbransen "Rialto" around the Bay Area. Mr. Ralph, a past dean of the local AGO chapter, has been organist at Sacramento's First Baptist Church for over twenty five years. He operates an advanced organ student studio and performs at classical concerts.

The KFBK studios were moved from the downtown location to their present quarters in 1954. With the new studios and other developments in the broadcasting business, the Robert Morton was not included as part of the new facility. As Congregation B'Nai Israel was constructing a new Synagogue, the organ was donated to them. The previous Synagogue had used an old Pilcher organ and certain ranks of pipes from this organ were installed with the Robert Morton when the latter was moved in 1954. Outside of this augmentation (indicated by asterisks on the stop list), removal of second touch stopkeys and the traps, it is in its original configuration. Although installed in a single chamber, it was still a mighty sweet sounding instrument, it's theatrical beginnings in no way disguised, concealed or diminished.

No Opus number could be located; however by removing a couple of screws and raising the horseshoe top of the console, the numbers 1 5219 was found stamped in the wood.

It seemed as though the fine old Morton had finally found a home -- but NO! The folks at the Synagogue decided they wanted a more straight organ so once more the Morton was put up for sale. Once again it fell into good fortune; this time it was purchased by a genuine theatre organ enthusiast, Don Zeller. Members of a Sacramento club, the TOES (Theatre Organ Enthusiasts of Sacramento), aided Don in the dismantling chore and once more the organ is in storage -- awaiting that permanent home it has needed for so long.



IT FOUND A HOME FOR AWHILE--The former Sacramento Capitol theatre two-decker as it appeared in the Temple B'Nai Israel. The Morton was given a transfusion of six Pilcher sets when it joined the church.

Many moons have passed since that gala opening at the Capitol and the theatre organ has waxed and waned and again waxed in use and popularity. Through the years this particular Morton has given musical pleasure to uncounted thousands -- and it's still going strong.

(Continued On Page 34)

Stop List Ex-Capital Sacramento Morton

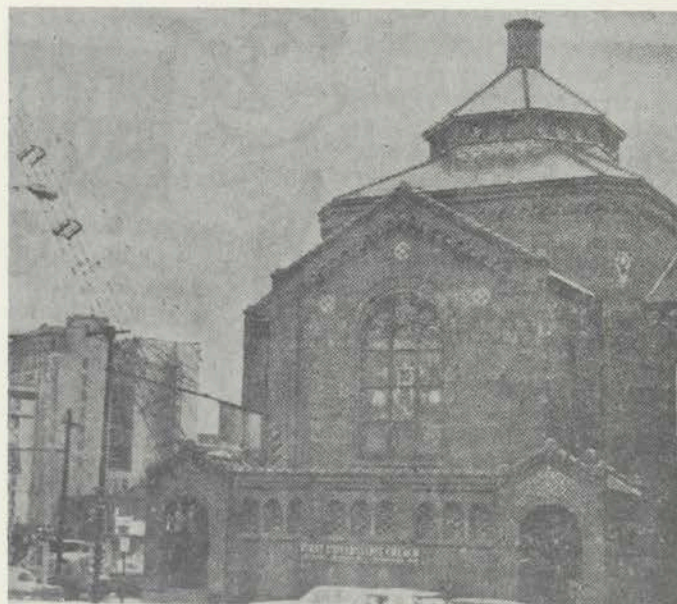
DIVISION I (Pedal)	4' Tibia
16' Bourdon Flute	4' Flute
Bass Flute	Violin
Bourdon *	2 2/3' Twelfth
8' Tuba	2' Piccolo
Tibia Clausa	1 3/5' Tierce
Concert Flute	16' Bourdon *
Flute	8' Violin *
Cello	Flute *
Clarinet	Cello *
4' Tibia	Violin Celeste *
Coupler:	4' Orch Flute *
Div. I, 8'	Chrysoglott
	Cathedral Chimes
DIVISION II (Lower Manual-Acc)	Couplers:
16' Bourdon	Div. III, 16' (Solo to Solo)
Contra Viol	Div. III, 4' (Solo to Solo)
8' Tuba	Div. II, 8' (Acc. to Solo)
Diapason	SHADES (Rocker Tabs)
Tibia Clausa	Woodwind On-Off
Concert Flute	Brasswind On-Off
Violin	INTERMANUAL COUPLERS
Viol Celeste	Rocker Tabs on manual
Kinura	cheek blocks
Clarinet	Division I to Division
Vox Humana	III On-Off each side of
Orch Oboe	Solo Manual
4' Concert Flute	Division I to Division II
Violin	On-Off each side of
Viol Celeste	Solo Manual
2 2/3' twelfth	Unison On-Off left side
2' Piccolo	of Acc. Manual
8' Diaphonic Diapason *	General On-Off
Concert Flute *	TREMULANTS
Dulciana *	Woodwind
4' Octave *	Brass Wind
Xylophone	Vox Humana
Chrysoglott	PISTONS
Cathedral Chimes	10-10
Couplers:	EXPRESSION PEDALS
Div. II, 16' (Acc. to Acc.)	Woodwind
Div. II, 4' (Acc. to Acc.)	Brass Wind
Div. III, 8' (Solo to Acc.)	Crescendo
DIVISION III (Upper Manual - Solo)	TOE STUDS
16' Ophecleide (Tuba)	11 (not connected)
Bourdon	MANUFACTURER:
Violin TC	Robert Morton
8' Tuba	Organ Company
Diapason	Factories: Berkeley
Tibia Clausa	Van Nuys, Calif.
Concert Flute	(* Pilcher transplants)
Violin	
Viol Celeste	
Kinura	
Saxophone	
Clarinet	
Vox Humana	
Orch Oboe	

HOLLYWOOD CAVALCADE is taking a breather for this issue while its director, Lyle Nash, is on vacation. Lyle will be back next issue with more news and anecdotes about silent movie personalities.

VOX POPS

SHORT SHOTS FROM EVERYWHERE

Roger W. Roszell, writing in SILENT NEWSREEL, reports that a 12 rank Barton, originally in a Galesburg, Illinois, theatre has been removed and carted 11 miles to Wataga, Ill., and reinstalled in the home of college freshman John Near by John and his brother. The three year project started with the purchase of the Barton for \$1,000. The instrument's pipework is now housed in two large attic chambers with swell shutters installed in the ceiling of the living room, where the console is located. John plans to install six more ranks, college work permitting...April 23 was the final day of operation for the Minneapolis Arena ice rink which must go to make way for a super market. What became of the 2-7 Wurlitzer which supplied music for the skaters? Reiny Delzer bought it and carted it off to add to his collection in Bismarck.



UP FOR SALE - The First Universalist Church. It shelters one of the finest examples of Hope-Jones organs.

Lloyd Klos reports that the First Universalist Church, Rochester, N.Y., which houses one of the finest examples of Hope-Jones organ, may be due to go the steel ball route. With a deficit of \$22,500, the membership voted to sell the 60-year old property rather than spend 100 grand for repairs. The shutters of the 3-deck organ (opus No. 2) are damped with lead; the sound is conducted into the auditorium through a concrete flume, a favorite H-J innovation. The church was one of the places visited during the 1964 ATOE convention... In Moorhead, Minn., a local FM radio station has approached Lance Johnson concerning the possibility of Broadcasting a live weekly organ program from Bud's Roller Rink where Lance's soon-to-be 3-7 Barton reposes, ready and waiting (it started as a 2-3). If it jells, the organ-cast will be patterned after WLW's late-lamented "Moon River" which took so many organ fans "down the valley of a thousand yesterdays" in the '30s and '40s. A story on the Barton has been promised for a future BOMBARDE...Organist Lyn Larsen was invited to present a concert at the 1966 ATOE convention but had to bow out because of his Panama Hilton contract...Famed Leonard

(Continued on Page 35)