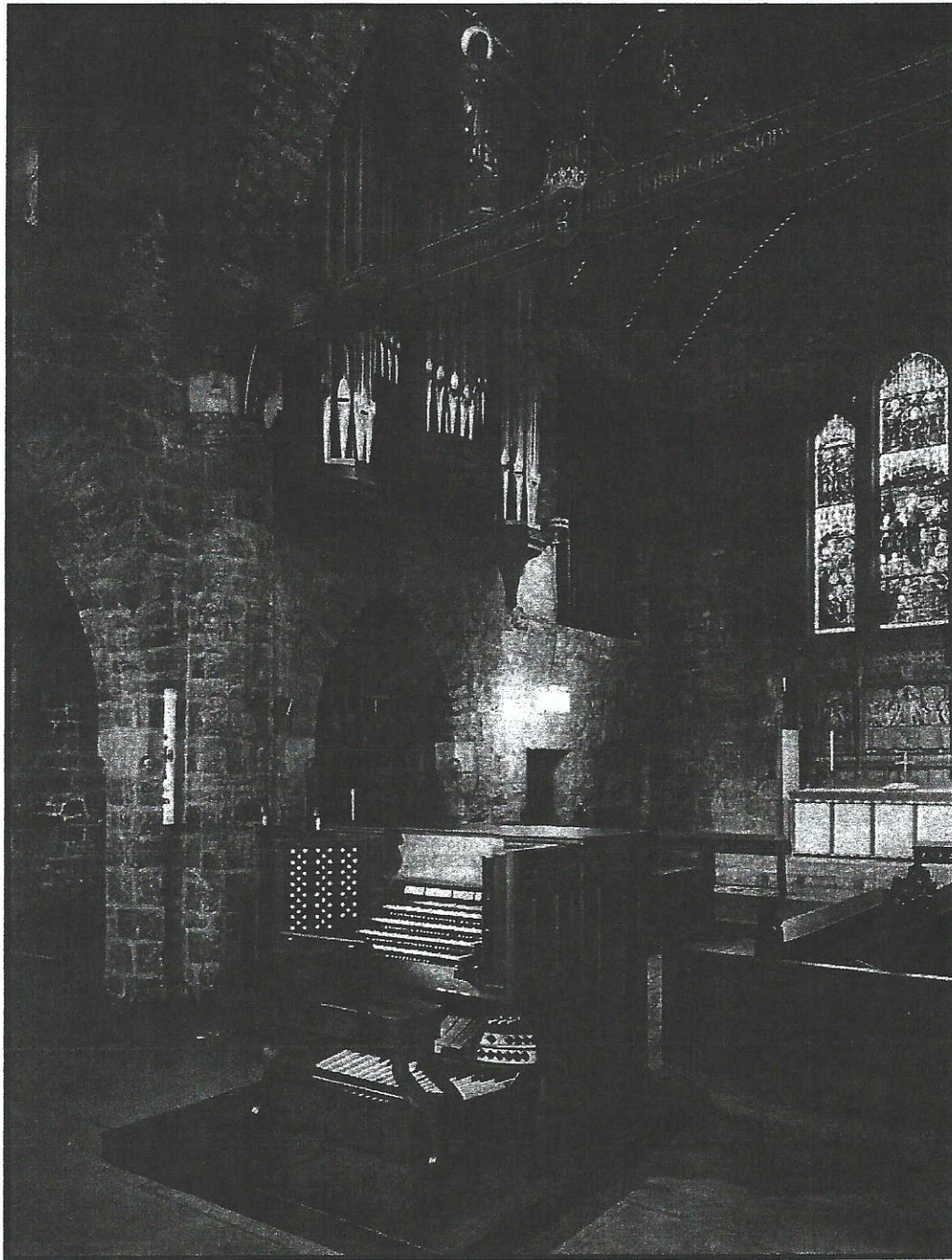


Casavant Frères

Opus 3878



Christ Church Bronxville
Bronxville, New York

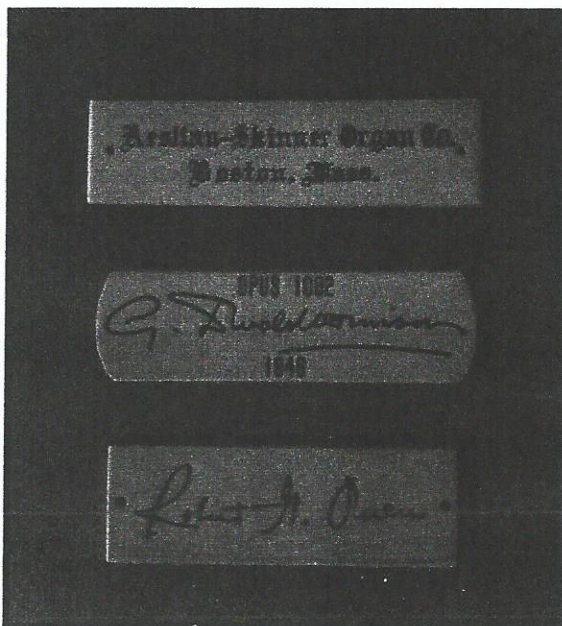
A LEGACY OF MUSIC AT CHRIST CHURCH BRONXVILLE

Over the course of a century, Christ Church, Bronxville has built a reputation for presenting music and liturgy according to the highest standards in the Anglican tradition.

Bertram Goodhue, architect of landmark churches St. Thomas Church and St. Bartholomew's Church, both in New York City, designed Christ Church. Since the 1930s the parish has engaged concepts, traditions and appointments according to the Sarum Use - the liturgical rites for the English Church which St. Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury established in the 11th century. Vestments from the Warham Guild designed to be in harmony with the directions for liturgy and the administration of the sacraments; and wrought iron fixtures from Samuel Yellin Metalworkers carry out the thoughts of Percy Dearmer and others that church furnishings should follow the English rather than Roman style.

The rough-hewn stone walls of Christ Church, combined with its slate floor provide a favorable acoustic for instrumental and vocal music. The building has served as a recording studio for The American Boychoir, The New York Virtuoso Singers and as a concert venue for many chamber choirs and solo instrumentalists.

Notable musicians Ray Francis Brown and Robert G. Owen served the parish as organists and choirmasters. Brown was a member of the faculties of Oberlin College and General



Theological Seminary. He was a guiding force in establishing Anglican Chant within the Episcopal liturgy. In his forty-five year tenure at Christ Church Owen trained choristers, produced several notable recordings and instilled a love of organ music within the congregation. Today Christ Church is home to five resident choirs comprising nearly one hundred musicians of all ages.

A first-rate music program and a high standard of liturgy require an organ that can both lead a congregation in hymn-singing and accompany choirs as well as facilitate the concert organ repertoire. Christ Church's original instrument, built by the Hall Organ Company, served the

church for twenty years before mechanical problems forced the decision to rebuild. The Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company rebuilt the organ in the 1949 and modified it again in 1956. In 1962 the Gress-Miles Organ Company revoiced the entire organ, at which point most organ scholars and historians would suggest the organ was no longer an Aeolian-Skinner. Two additional stops, including a festival trumpet, were added in the 1990s.

BUILDING THE NEW ORGAN: AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

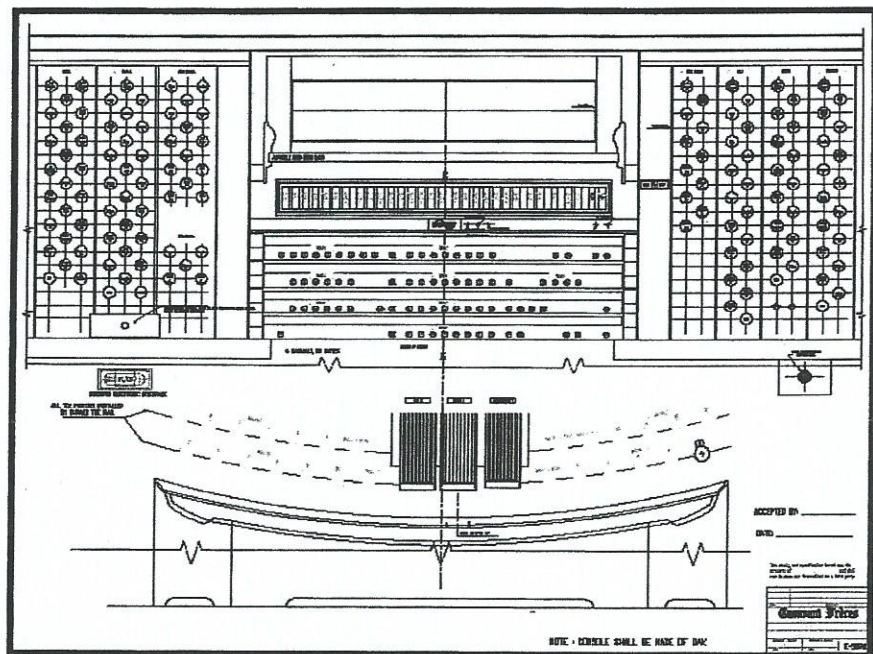
By the 1980s and 1990s, organ maintenance costs plagued the church budget. Maintenance problems began to interfere with the weekly liturgy – pipes ciphred, that is, they sounded when they weren't supposed to; portions of the instrument couldn't be played; or the instrument wouldn't function at all. By 2004 Christ Church was forced to make a decision about the organ. Organ consultant Jonathan Ambrosino evaluated the instrument and examined issues of rebuilding the ailing organ versus designing and building a completely new organ. His report raised two important issues in rebuilding. First, the church would need to decide which version of the organ to set as the rebuilding point – the original 1925 Hall, the 1949 or 1956 Aeolian-Skinner, or the 1962 Gress-Miles. Second, would a major investment in rebuilding produce an organ that would meet the tonal needs of liturgy that stretches the bounds of the Anglican aesthetic.

An analysis of the existing pipe organ and its projected cost of refurbishment revealed that for substantially the same investment, Christ Church could design and build a new instrument tailor-made to the needs and demands of the parish's growing music program. In November of 2007, impressed with the results of two recent organ installations in addition to the company's legendary reputation for mechanical reliability, Christ Church chose Casavant Frères of St. Hyacinthe, Québec to build the new organ. Parish music director Christopher Wells and Casavant Frères Tonal Director Jacquelin Rochette determined to focus on the needs and practices of Anglican liturgy – the ability to accompany choirs and lead the congregation in robust hymn-singing – as their guide in formulating the specification for the new organ.

Additionally, the new instrument would need to execute major concert organ repertoire with convincing style and musicality.

In planning the design of the new organ, the church's architecture presented an immediate obstacle. The organ chambers do not allow pipes to speak directly into the nave, and voicing them with an ideal tone might not

provide adequate sound for congregational singing. The option of moving the main organ to the rear balcony and building a smaller choir organ in the chancel was considered but ruled impossible; a large organ in the balcony would obscure the stained glass windows and eliminate a large portion of mixed-use seating. But a study of the balcony space determined that a smaller division, in this case serving as an Antiphonal organ, would fit with minimal space and aesthetic compromise.



The final design encompasses a four-manual organ in the front of the church, and a smaller Antiphonal division in the gallery, devised to complement the main organ in the support of hymn singing. The Swell and Solo divisions of the main organ are enclosed, making their



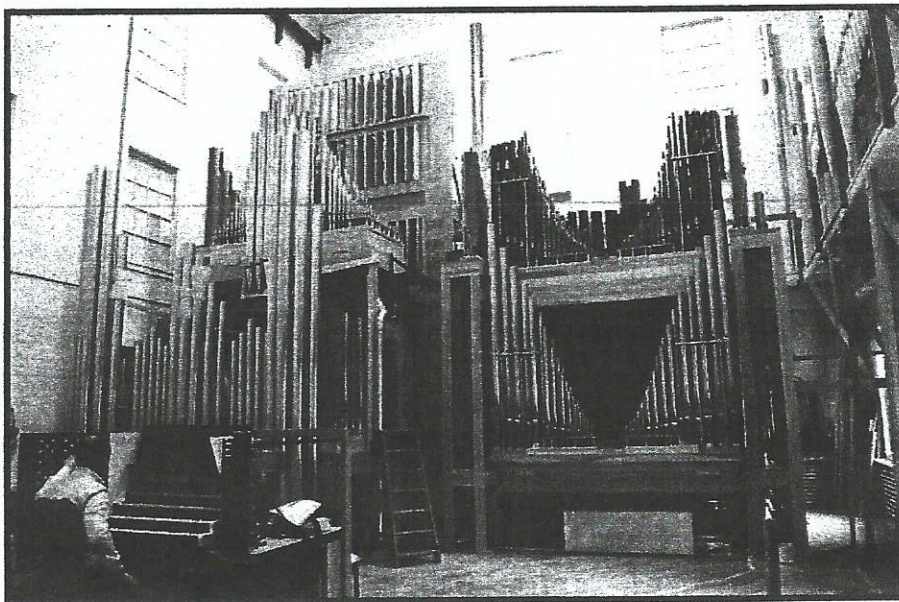
volume adjustable through the manipulation of shades in front of the pipes. It was initially hoped that the Positiv division would serve as a third enclosed division, but it was determined that doing so would not allow for the egress of sound needed from pipes located in more remote sections of the chamber.

As Casavant Frères built the organ at its shop in Québec, a process that required over two years of design, drafting, construction and testing, Christ Church addressed structural concerns in the church building: the pipe chambers needed a complete renovation before they could safely accommodate the new instrument. Years of water leaks had damaged the church's tower and underlying organ chamber walls, so scaffolding was erected around the outside of the tower in order to

secure the walls with new mortar. Inside the church, the original wood organ case was cleaned and treated with linseed oil.

The core of the instrument, the Great division, is located closely behind the main organ case so that its pipes can sing clearly into the church with beautiful and natural tone. Yet many larger and louder registers, such as the shared Solo and Great reeds, are still able to speak with a presence and clarity that defy their more remote placement within the chamber. The Swell division is a quintessential accompanying instrument – it contains every sound that one would expect to use

to accompany choral anthems and Anglican chant. The smaller chamber behind the grille is larger than needed to house the Swell division, but not quite large enough for two divisions. Casavant cleverly suggested an unusual use of the space to house three large pedal stops: the 16' Open Wood, 16' Trombone, and 32' Bassoon. This has turned out to be a solution with nearly unlimited musical advantages. In fact, all reed pipes but the Douçaine are enclosed behind remarkably



expressive shades. While the Swell chorus reeds, with conical shallots, generate a mild tone, the modified Cavaillé-Coll style Solo chorus reeds are brilliant and fiery. Two staples of the English organ sound, the Oboe and Tuba, absent from any incarnation of the former organ, are a vital and integral part of the new instrument.

When possible, efforts were made to retain pipework from the former organ. These stops were able to fit into the new tonal palette and aesthetic without compromise:

- 16' Double Open Diapason
- 16' Bourdon
- 8' Viola da Gamba and Celeste
- 8' Flute Douce and Celeste
- 32' Contra Bassoon
- 16' Trombone

One particularly fun detail honors the Rev. Michael Bird, ninth Rector of Christ Church Bronxville, for his unfailing support of this organ project and what he calls "two inseparable traditions:" music and liturgy. The "Bird" stop mimics the chirping of a Nightingale by inverting two upside-down pipes of different pitch into water. Once air passes through the pipes, the water interrupts the pipe's speech creating a gurgling effect.

Similarly, two carving details on the exterior console panels will be installed to recognize individuals who have made extraordinary donations to the organ project. A Nittany Lion honors parishioners and avid Penn State fans Arthur and Paige Nagle, and the scale of justice within a courthouse is a tribute to The Honorable Colleen McMahon Sica, parishioner and musician at Christ Church for over 20 years.

Christ Church received Casavant Frère's unassembled Opus 3878 in September 2009. With the season of Advent soon on its way, technicians and craftsmen spent the intermediate three months installing, tuning and voicing the organ. On Christmas Eve, the congregation bore witness to the successful completion of this monumental five-year project. The Right Reverend Mark Sisk, Bishop of New York, dedicated the instrument at a service of Solemn Evensong on January 31, 2010, and a dedicatory recital was given on May 7 by concert organist Ken Cowan, who lauded the organ as "truly inspiring".

Personnel involved with building the organ:

- Jacquelin Rochette, Casavant Frères Tonal Director
- Jean-Sébastien Dufour and Sébastien Kardos, Casavant Frères Voicers
- Mario Vanasse, Lead Installation Technician
- The Rev. Michael Bird, Rector
- Christopher Wells, Director of Music and Organist
- Jonathan Ambrosino, Organ Consultant
- Walter Sedovic Architects
- Brenner Builders
- American Ladder and Scaffolding