

Historic Aeolian-Skinner installed in Amarillo, Texas

Robert P. Rapp

"The largest pre-war (World War II) Aeolian-Skinner built by G. Donald Harrison remaining almost entirely as built has been acquired by St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Amarillo, Texas." Thus starts the article in *The Tracker* (Journal of the Organ Historical Society), volume 41, number 3, 1997.

In 1938, Dr. Ezra William Doty, at the age of 31, was hired to be the first dean of the College of Fine Arts at the University of Texas in Austin. At the time there was no faculty, no curriculum, no building, and a \$64,000 budget for assembling all of these. In 1940, a new Music Building was built—the only air-conditioned building on the campus—and by 1942 Dean Doty had assembled an art, music, and drama faculty that combined professional expertise with academic credentials.

The October 1, 1941 issue of *THE DIAPASON* reports that Aeolian-Skinner was awarded the contract to build a new instrument for the Music Building in the summer of that year at a price of \$35,000.¹ Their Opus 1024 quickly became the "crown jewel" of the school. Dr. Palmer Christian, professor of organ at the University of Michigan and with whom Dean Doty had studied, played the dedication on November 10, 1942.

In various issues of *The American Organist* in 1944, there are detailed accounts of the recital hall and the organ, along with much information long forgotten. Dr. Christian is quoted:

The new Aeolian-Skinner is an excellent job, one of the best yet. The clarified ensemble does not sound like a horrified ensemble—there is orchestral color. The Orchestral Oboe is excellent. The floating Positiv is a fine achievement, likewise the floating String Organ. Full organ is perfectly tempered to the size of the room—106 stops in a room seating 504—and the climaxes do not blow one out of the seats.²

Opus 1024 was described in the University of Texas campus newspaper *The Daily Texan* as being

eight organs in one: there is the Positiv, an authentic 17th-century instrument, and a Great organ which is designed in 18th-century tonal style. The usual Swell, Choir, Solo and Pedal organs are included, but these have a choice collection of orchestral solo stops. The other organs included in the one instrument are the Bombarde, which contains heavy reed stops, and a floating String division, both of which may be drawn on any of the four manuals or pedal. The console has four keyboards of 61 notes each and a pedal board with 32 notes. The round and square pipes are made of tin, lead, zinc, and wood.³

Thus began the life of this magnificent, state-of-the-art instrument, containing 6,173 pipes, 103 ranks, 106 stops and 84 voices, with 45 couplers and 70 combination pistons. It quickly became the landmark organ for Aeolian-Skinner. Organists and organ committees from afar came to play, listen, and gain insight into organ planning, construction, and choices of specifications.

As Opus 1024's fame grew, so did Aeolian-Skinner's reputation as the maker of highly esteemed organs. Opus 1024 stands out with its famous Aeolian-Skinner kin in Texas as a masterwork of American organ building. G. Donald Harrison last visited Opus 1024 on July 26, 1954. In his letter to Henry Willis (in London), he remarked that the temperature was an astounding 113 degrees!

The music library at the University of Texas verifies that 130 individual organists had performed 293 programs on Opus 1024 over the years 1942–1981. Among the famous organists presented were Catharine Crozier, Alexander Schreiner, Arthur Poister, David Craighead, Marcel Dupré, Carl Weinrich, Virgil Fox, Flor Peeters, Claire Coci,



Organ framing set up in the Schoenstein & Co. erecting room

Fernando Germani, Marilyn Mason, Jean Langlais, E. Power Biggs, Robert Noehren, Jeanne Demessieux, George Markey, Vernon de Tar, Jack Ossewarde, John Weaver, Jerald Hamilton, Robert Baker, William Teague, Heinz Wunderlich, William Whitehead, Pierre Cochereau, André Marchal, John Rose, Peter Hurford, Gillian Weir, and Michael Murray.⁴

In 1965, after countless hours of heavy use for over 23 years by students and visiting artists, it became obvious that renovation was required. Aeolian-Skinner provided a new console, a new combination action, some mechanical repairs and revoicing of reeds, and some revoicing of flues at a total cost of \$65,000.⁵

Following this, the organ was once again heard by the public. These performances were popular (and free), giving the listening public an opportunity to enjoy classical pipe organ music constantly, and continued until 1975. (Michael Murray was the last noted recitalist to perform in the series.) In 1979, Opus 1024 ceased to be used for degree performances. The churches about the campus were used instead. In 1981, the last public hearing of the organ was played by American Guild of Organists members, with Dean Doty in attendance.

In 1983 a new music building was completed (Bates Recital Hall), and a large tracker organ was installed there. The old Music Building recital hall was used for lecture space by the Architecture Department. Various music programs were given there, but the organ sat silent on stage, console locked, with façade pipes still visible.

So ends one chapter of Opus 1024; now begins the next. On February 11, 1996, an accidental fire destroyed St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Amarillo, Texas. It was at this time that it was brought to the attention of Margaret Lacy, the organist of St. Andrew's, that perhaps the UT organ could be purchased and become a part of the new sanctuary.

After many inquiries and contacts with the UT regents and staff, in 1997 Opus 1024 was rescued from its "retired" status and bought by St. Andrew's Church. The church chose Schoenstein & Co. to rebuild the organ because of the company's Aeolian-Skinner connection (Louis Schoenstein worked for E. M. Skinner, and Lawrence Schoenstein was the West Coast representative for Aeolian-Skinner).

From the very beginning of the construction of the new St. Andrew's sanctuary, acoustics and placement for the instrument were of utmost importance. Space for the organ was prepared, simi-

lar in size to the organ chamber as it existed in the recital hall in Austin, but with better tonal egress. Thanks to the joint efforts of Margaret Lacy and the church's forward-looking leaders, Jack Bethards, president and tonal director of Schoenstein & Co., Ewart "Red" Wetherill, acoustical consultant, and the Overland Partners, architects, of San Antonio, Texas, Opus 1024 was on its way to having a truly favorable environment to enhance its American Classic tones, which G. Donald Harrison had labored so hard to achieve.

In its Austin home, the only drawback the organ had was that the hall was without reverberation (planned that way by "experts"), so that G. Donald Harrison was never pleased with its placement. In fact, a news article in *The Daily Texan* of November 11, 1942 quotes a comment gleaned from audience criticism: "the auditorium is too completely lacking in echo." Now, in Amarillo, it would have the luxury of 3–4 seconds of reverberation, thus giving all the qualities of sound that its original designer had hoped for.

Schoenstein & Co. meticulously made sure that the 1942 Harrison installation was true to the maker's original tonal ideas. Any changes made in configuration were to the betterment of the pipe locations, with correct speech being maintained. These were as follows:

1) The huge pipes of the 32' Contra Bourdon were put on the third level above the enclosed boxes for the Choir, Swell, String and Solo divisions, thereby giving them direct speech into the nave rather than being placed in a far left alcove as in Austin;

2) The 32' Kontra Posaune pipes were likewise placed directly in front of the exposed chests (Pedal, Great, and Positiv divisions), giving them a similar clarity rather than being muffled as in the original layout;

3) The Solo Tuba 8' did not fit properly on the Solo chest, and was placed unenclosed also in front of the exposed chests described above, thereby giving it direct egress (Research in Aeolian-Skinner records fails to reveal why the Tuba had been placed on a toe board that was too small. It may have been a last minute change, an error, or one of the 1964 changes.);

4) On the Solo chest in the Tuba position Schoenstein added their beautiful Symphonic Flute 8', thus providing an open solo flute to complement the stopped one;

5) There were two complete changes. The Great mixture, Fourniture III–V, was of extremely large scale in the trebles and at full volume would have been



View of Great, Positiv and Pedal ranks



The 32' Contra Bourdon installed on shelf above organ

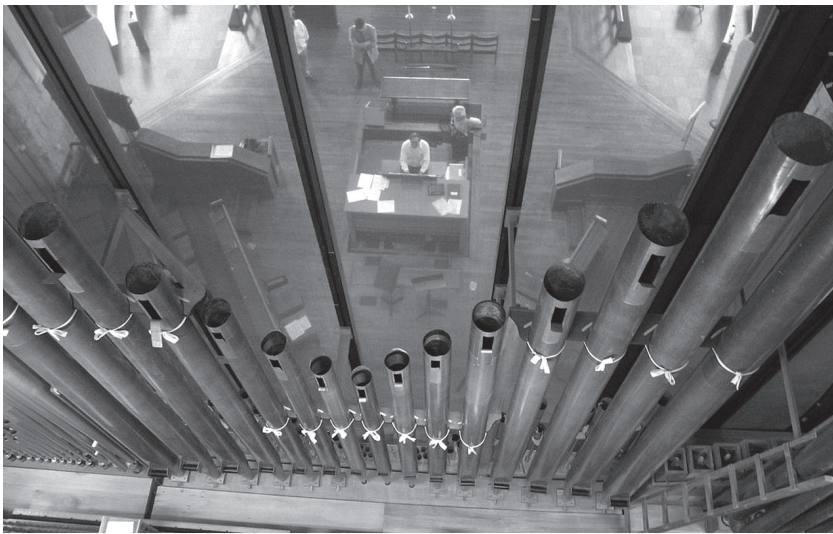
too loud for its new home. Therefore 285 new pipes were made and the original pipes were carefully wrapped and boxed and are in the storage area of the new sanctuary. The same was true of the treble pipes of the Great Quint, which were replaced.

The organ has two additions other than the Symphonic Flute: a Cymbelstern and a medium-volume, medium-scale Pedal 16' Bourdon. The original stopped Subbass of huge scale was too large in the responsive acoustics of the church and could be used only in large combinations. Its name was changed to Major Bass.

All this makes the organ absolutely complete, lacking nothing for any organist or literature being played. There should be no complaints from any source as to these enhancing changes to an instrument so well respected.

In August 2002, the new sanctuary was completed, and in September 2004 the installation of Opus 1024 began. The huge van arrived containing the vast cargo of the instrument. This included all eleven chests, along with the Vibracord mechanism, the 62-year-old sugar pine wood for the structure and expression boxes (Choir, Swell, Solo, String, and Bombarde divisions), the reservoirs, tremulants, expression motors, and other parts that had been completely restored to their original pristine condition by Schoenstein over the prior three years.

Work was under the direction of vice president and plant superintendent, Louis Patterson. Tonal finishing was by Jack Bethards with Mark Hotzenpiller and Stuart Goodwin with Wendell Bolltyme. Other key Schoenstein personnel were David Beck, Peter Botto, Chris Hansford, Oliver Jaggi, Joe Lamberana, George Morten, Robert R. Rhoads and Chet Spencer. To provide mobility and multiple memories, the console was equipped with a Peterson ICS control system (replacing the original combination action and relay) and Harris stop knob actions.



Thomas Murray rehearsing for the dedication recital

Over the next several months, the people of St. Andrew's marveled at the installation process, and eagerly awaited the day that they could hear Opus 1024. That day came in November 2004, when 25 ranks of the Swell and Choir were playing. Margaret Lacy played it for the first time and was just amazed. She said, "It was a glorious sound, and with over three seconds of reverberation time. Opus 1024 had been given a vibrant and thrilling new voice." (Seventy-eight ranks were yet to be heard!) In February 2005 the installation was completed. All 103 ranks were in and playing. The Aeolian-Skinner was brought back to life.

The *Amarillo Globe-News* reported the event of the organ's arrival as "An Unusual Organ Transplant."⁶ There can never be a happier group than those people living in the city of Amarillo who weekly (and quite often daily) get to enjoy the tones of one of the most spectacular organs ever produced by the Aeolian-Skinner company.

The list of organists who have played Opus 1024 in its new home keeps growing, with each performer declaring what a thrill it is to play. The transition from Austin to Amarillo made all the difference and extended the playing life of Opus 1024.

The exciting inaugural event occurred in June 2005 with Thomas Murray performing solo and in conjunction with the Amarillo Symphony Orchestra (playing Handel's *Concerto in F* and Poulenc's *Concerto in G*). The future of the organ is nothing but exciting as Margaret Lacy continues to bring the brightest and best musicians to come and enjoy the renovated and renewed powerful and beautiful tones of Opus 1024, first heard 63 years ago.

Thus the organ has reached its final destination and fulfilled the dreams of not only its designer, but the dreams of a vast number of organists and non-organists in the west Texas city of Amarillo. It is waiting for any and all who desire to hear what a "vintage" Aeolian-Skinner can sound like in the electronic age. Nothing can compare to what you will experience when you sit in St. Andrew's Episcopal Church on South Georgia Street. ■

Notes

1. THE DIAPASON, vol. 32, no. 11, October 1941.
2. *The American Organist*, March and April 1944.
3. *The Daily Texan*, June 11, 1948.
4. UT Music Library archive LD 5331.8 and T 4255.
5. E. M. Skinner/Aeolian-Skinner Opus List 1992.
6. "An Unusual Organ Transplant," *Amarillo Globe-News*, June 16, 1998.

Robert P. Rapp has combined careers in medicine and music, earning his M.D. degree from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston in 1956. After serving in the U.S. Air Force, he went into private practice in Austin, Texas. Dr. Rapp has been active in the American Guild of Organists since age 14, serving as dean of the Austin chapter 1979-81.

He studied organ in Galveston 1937-46 with Norman Niles and Georgia Anne Rahe, with Lee Norrell in San Antonio (1946-47), Anthony Rahe in Houston (1949-50), Walter Haacke in Wiesbaden, Germany (1958-60), and Jerold Hamilton at the University of Texas (1961-62). He has held church organist

positions at St. Mary's Cathedral, Galveston; St. Joseph's German Church, Galveston; the Shrine of the Little Flower, San Antonio; First Baptist Church, Galveston; St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Austin; and Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, Austin.

Dr. Rapp acted on behalf of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Amarillo, Texas, beginning in 1996, to purchase the Aeolian-Skinner organ from the University of Texas, and worked closely with the UT Dean of Fine Arts, Dr. David Deming.

Photo credit: Louis Patterson

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church Amarillo, Texas Aeolian-Skinner Organ Co., Opus 1024 84 voices, 103 ranks

GREAT (3" wp)

- 16' Double Open Diapason*
- 16' Quintaten
- 8' Diapason
- 8' Principal
- 8' Bourdon
- 4' Octave
- 4' Rohrflöte
- 2 2/3' Quint
- 2' Super Octave
- 1 1/2' Tierce
- III-V Fourmiture
- III Cymbel
- Vibra-Harp (Choir)
- Harp (Choir)
- Chimes (Solo)
- Harp-Celesta (Choir)
- Bombarde on Great
- String on Great

* Rank to be added when casework is completed.

SWELL (3 3/4" wp)

- 16' Rohrgedeckt
- 16' Contra Salicional
- 8' Geigen Prinzipal
- 8' Stopped Flute
- 8' Flauto Dolce
- 8' Flute Celeste
- 8' Salicional
- 8' Voix Céleste
- 4' Oktave Geigen
- 4' Flauto Traverso
- 2 2/3' Nazard
- 2' Flautina
- 1 1/2' Tierce
- IV Plein-Jeu
- 16' Fagotto
- 8' Trompette
- 8' Oboe
- 8' Vox Humana
- 4' Clarion
- Vibra-Harp (Choir)
- Harp (Choir)
- Harp-Celesta (Choir)
- Tremulant
- Bombarde on Swell
- String on Swell
- Swell 16'
- Swell Unison Off
- Swell 4'

CHOIR (3 3/4" wp)

- 16' Contra Viola
- 8' English Diapason
- 8' Concert Flute
- 8' Viola
- 8' Viole Sourdine
- 8' Viole Celeste
- 8' Dulciana
- 8' Unda-Maris
- 4' Fugara
- 4' Harmonic Flute
- 2' Zauberflöte
- 16' Bassoon
- 8' Clarinet
- 8' Cor Anglais
- Vibra-Harp
- Harp
- Chimes (Solo)

- Harp-Celesta (Toe lever with indicator for dampers)
- Tremulant
- Bombarde on Choir
- String on Choir
- Choir 16'
- Choir Unison Off
- Choir 4'

BOMBARDE (7" wp)

- 16' Bombarde
- 8' Trompette Harmonique
- 4' Clarion Harmonique
- IV-VI Grand Choeur

SOLO (10" wp)

- 8' Symphonic Flute
- 8' Doppelflöte
- 8' Violoncello
- 8' Violoncello Céleste
- 4' Concert Flute
- 8' French Horn
- 8' Orchestral Oboe
- Chimes
- Tremulant
- 8' Tuba (Unenclosed)
- Bombarde on Solo
- String on Solo
- Solo 16'
- Solo Unison Off
- Solo 4'

POSITIV (2 1/2" wp)

- 8' Nachthorn
- 4' Koppelflöte
- 2 2/3' Nasat
- 2' Prinzipal
- 1 1/2' Terz
- 1' Siffelöte
- III Zimbel
- Cymbelstern

STRING (10" wp)

- 16' Contre Viole
- 8' Viole de Gambe
- 8' Gambe Celeste
- 8' Viole d'Orchestre
- 8' Viole Celeste
- 8' Gemshorn
- 8' Gemshorn Celeste
- 4' Viola

PEDAL (5" wp)

- 32' Contra Bourdon (ext. Major Bass)
- 16' Principal
- 16' Major Bass
- 16' Sub Bass
- 16' Contra Salicional (Swell)
- 16' Contre Viole (String)
- 16' Lieblich Gedeckt (Swell)
- 8' Principal
- 8' Gedeckt Pommer
- 8' Still Gedeckt (Swell)
- 8' Salicional (Swell)
- 5 1/2' Quint
- 4' Super Octave
- 4' Nachthorn
- 2' Spitzflöte
- V Mixture
- 32' Kontra Posaune
- 16' Posaune
- 16' Bombarde (Bombarde)
- 16' Bassoon (Choir)
- 8' Trumpet
- 4' Clarion
- 2' Rohrschalmei
- Chimes (Solo)
- Bombarde on Pedal
- String on Pedal

Couplers

- Great to Pedal 8'
- Swell to Pedal 8'
- Swell to Pedal 4'
- Choir to Pedal 8'
- Choir to Pedal 4'
- Solo to Pedal 8'
- Solo to Pedal 4'
- Positiv to Pedal 8'

- Swell to Great 16'
- Swell to Great 8'
- Swell to Great 4'
- Choir to Great 16'
- Choir to Great 8'
- Choir to Great 4'
- Solo to Great 16'
- Solo to Great 8'
- Solo to Great 4'
- Positiv to Great 8'

- Swell to Choir 16'
- Swell to Choir 8'
- Swell to Choir 4'
- Solo to Choir 8'
- Positiv to Choir 8'
- Pedal to Choir 8'

- Great to Solo 8'
- Swell to Solo 8'

Great/Choir Transfer

Console

Peterson ICS-4000, capture combination action: 100 memories and lock
16 General pistons (13 duplicated by toe studs)
10 Great pistons
10 Swell pistons
10 Choir pistons
10 Solo pistons
10 Pedal pistons
4 Coupler pistons
1 Set piston
1 General Cancel piston
Programmable piston range for each memory

Swell to Great reversible piston and toe stud
Positiv to Great reversible piston
Choir to Great reversible piston
Solo to Great reversible piston
Swell to Choir reversible piston
Positiv to Choir reversible piston
Solo to Choir reversible piston
Great to Solo reversible piston
Swell to Solo reversible piston
Great to Pedal reversible piston and toe stud
Swell to Pedal reversible piston and toe stud
Choir to Pedal reversible piston and toe stud
Positiv to Pedal reversible piston
Solo to Pedal reversible piston and toe stud
32' Posaune reversible toe stud
32' Bourdon reversible toe stud
All Swells to Swell reversible piston and toe lever with indicator
Manual 16s and Pedal 32s Off reversible piston and toe lever with indicator
Mixtures Off reversible piston and toe lever with indicator
Reeds Off reversible piston and toe lever with indicator
Cymbelstern reversible toe lever
Full Organ reversible piston and toe lever with indicator

Three balanced expression pedals
Crescendo pedal with indicator
Pedal on Solo combinations
Pedal on Swell combinations
Pedal on Great combinations
Pedal on Choir combinations

Peterson ICS-4000 relay system

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