

Notes re St. John's Organ.
By Lester Settle, Organist Feb 1979 --

The earliest reference to the purchase of the first Pipe organ for St. John's Church appears in the Vestry Minutes of November 15, 1880 when an offer was made by the Parish of Londonderry to purchase the organ presently in use in the old church for \$100, and pay the expense of moving it. A new organ was offered by a Mr. Leader for \$641, and the decision was left to an organ committee to "do as they think best for the interest of the church".

On December 9th, 1880 the Vestry met to discuss the proposal of an organ for the new church from S.R. Warren Co. of Toronto, they having sent a Mr. Smith as their agent to negotiate the sale of an organ for St Johns. Smith stated that a new organ suitable for the new church would cost \$2000, having three manual and 20 stops. The firm also had a second hand organ that they would sell for \$1300, but he was doubtful that it would fit the organ chamber. Measurements were made and the next day the Vestry learned that the organ chamber was not large enough for the used organ. It was moved that the organ committee be relieved of the responsibility of the decision for the organ, and the Vestry assume this duty. \$300 was on hand, the Vestry considered it "imprudent under existing circumstances to incur any further direct liability for this purpose, but.... if any private individuals will assume the liability for such a purpose, the Vestry will contribute the \$300 on hand. Mr.'s Clish and Muir, of the Vestry committed the balance of the purchase and the organ was ordered. January 24, 1881 it was reported that "the new organ will shortly be here".

The new church was opened for use March 15, 1881 and it is presumed the organ was in use for the opening. December 7, 1881 the Vestry tendered a vote of thanks to Mr. Buckland, the organist for "the unwearied pains he has taken in regards to the choir and the organ".

A word needs to be said about Mr. Samuel Russell Warren the builder of the first organ, of which major sections are still present and working in this year of 2005; the Pipes of the Great Organ manufactured by Warren in the recent cleaning and repairs were found to be in excellent condition, 7 ranks in total.

The Canadian Encyclopedia of Music gives quite a bit of space to Mr. Warren and his craft of organ building in Canada, naming him as "the outstanding figure in Canadian organ building during the 19th century. He was born in 1809 in Rhode Island, USA, the son of a carpenter, who sailed to North America on the Mayflower in 1620.

His uncle was the Rhode Island architect Russell Warren, considered to be one of the principal builders in New England from 1828 to 1860, designing churches, banks and public buildings. S R received his training as an organ builder from Thomas Appleton of Boston in the early 1830's, building three organs in the USA before emigrating to Montreal in 1836 where he established himself as an organ builder. By his death in 1882 (a year after the Installation at St John's) he had produced more than 350 pipe organs for use in Canada and the USA.

Notable among his achievements was the introduction into Canada of harmonic flutes, free reeds, and orchestral stops. He was the first to adopt the Barker lever in Canada ca. 1851 and the first to use hydraulic bellows in 1860-1 at the Wesleyan Chapel in Montreal. He patented several of his inventions for 'An Improved Miniature Organ', an Improved Organ Windchest Slide, S and a 'Pneumatic Touch Lightener.' He even built some of his own pipework, assisted by his brothers, although he did import some pipework from suppliers in France and Germany as well. His son, Charles Summer joined his father's firm and the Co. Name was changed to S.R Warren and Son in 1876. In 1878 the business was moved to Toronto. S. R. died of heart disease in August 1882. Organs that he built in Atlantic Canada included St Andrews Presbyterian, Truro (1917), Dorchester, NB, Tignish PEI and St. David's Halifax (where restoration and rebuilding took place last year.)

Keep in mind that the first organ was built and installed in St. John's before the days of electricity. The organ was what was then called a "tracker" organ, where all the parts had to be physically moved by a series of rods called trackers, and wooden pallets and sliders that cut off the supply of air to the pipes. Another wooden rod went from the tracker and "backfall" to a "sticker" which was connected to a key of the keyboard, thus allowing the organist to sound or restrain certain pipes in order to produce the desired music.

The wind to play the pipes was supplied by a box called a 'Bellows' and was operated by a separate person than the organist, called "the organ blower" who turned by hand a crank type fan to fill the bellows with air and maintain a steady pressure, somewhat like the windbag of the bag pipe.

If you look at the early financial reports of the parish you will see each month and year an expenditure beside the organist's salary for "organ blower". E.g. in 1896 when Dr. Vincent was organist and paid a salary of \$372, there is an item for the "organ Blower" for \$3.45 (probably a youth of the parish - pocket money!!) In 1897 a "water motor" was purchased for \$125 and used to blow the organ! (Paid for through organ recitals that Dr.

Vincent gave!!) The Town of Truro discovered that St John's was using their water to power the Motor and sent a bill in 1905 of \$40 for all the back years. (Before water meters, no doubt!!) It wasn't until 1911 that a new electric-hydraulic motor was installed, electric lights were installed around 1920.

S.R.'s son Charles sold the company to D.W. Karn of Woodstock, Ontario in 1896, which eventually became Woodstock Pipe Organ Builders. Woodstock was still in business in 1930 when a meeting of the whole St. John's Parish decided to raise the funds for the purchase a new and more efficient organ. It was The Woodstock Pipe Organ Builders of Ontario who were given the contract and was to be installed in May of 1931, "replacing the old organ which had done service for so many years", with the added comment: "St. Johns is now one of the best equipped parish in the Diocese" so far as Organ is concerned. The new organ was to cost \$8300 of which \$4500 was raised in cash and the balance in pledges.

This new organ was a step above the former tracker organ of pneumatic (air pressure) action, powered by a huge electric motor, the one still in use, I suspect. The Vestry minutes of 1931 state: "Organists from different parts of the Province praised the new organ highly and we are convinced that we have secured a good instrument!!" It wasn't until 1938 the full cost was paid, financed again by personal notes of church members.

Bear in mind, that the organ console was still located in the chancel and the organist's back to the choir. This was to change following December 1956 when it was reported "the organ needs immediate repairs and replacement of parts. It was suggested that probably the organist would be more effective if the organ console were relocated in the church so that a good view of the choir could be had during the church service". Steps were taken to investigate these improvements.

Casavant Brothers Ltd. of St. Hyacinthe, PQ, after 1879, had now taken a lead as Pipe Organ builders in Canada. By 1914 Casavant Brothers had completed their 600th organ and by 1929 their 1335th. From 1898 to 1924 pneumatic action replaced the tracker action, and later combination of electric-pneumatic action. Casavant Brothers were to be the third important Organ Builders contributing to St. John's present Organ.

A suitable console could modify the organ at St. John's and be placed on the main floor of the church with the organist able to see the choir, for a cost of \$6500.00. It would take six months to make the installation. The Vestry, November 1957 placed the order for the new console, the one still in use

today (2005). July 3, 1958 the treasurer reported the new console was fully paid for in the amount of \$5,770 plus sales tax of \$530.00.

The 1958 upgrading lasted over 35 years, with only minor repairs, cleaning and tuning. In September 2003 the tuner Michael Prescesky discovered major damage done to the Swell section of the organ by water from the leaking roof over the Swell chamber. Francois Gendron of Peninsula Pipe Organ Enrg. Miscou NB evaluated the organ and recommended a complete overhaul, cleaning and repairs to chests, damaged by water, also renewal of the Great Bellows. This work was started before Christmas 2004 after the roof had been repaired, carried out in stages, so that at least one section of the organ would operate, and was completed before Easter 2005 at a cost of \$50,000.

Mr. Gendron in his evaluation report stated: "You have a beautiful instrument and a good sonority which deserves to be maintained for a long time and it will bring happiness and pride to your choir and community." "The value of your organ today is approximately 340 thousand dollars." So, from the initial \$2000 investment, and the additions of \$8300 and \$6500 and the recent \$50,000 restoring - a total of \$67,000 over 125 years the organ has increased in value by over 500%!! Wouldn't it be great if our automobiles would do the same?!

Organists who have served St John's Church:

December 1881 - Mr. Buckland

Easter 1887 - Mr. George B. Faulkner (Annual Salary \$225.00)

1896 - Dr. W. Karl Vincent (Salary \$ 372.00)

1898 - Miss Florence Nelson (Salary \$150.00)

1914 - Mr. Mills (Salary \$483.31)

- Choir Master hired also for \$100.00

1920 - Mrs. Wellard.

- Mr. Wellard filled in until new Organist found.

1927 - Mr. Pengell (resigned due to move from Truro)

1927 - 1954-Mr. James A. Fullerton (Salary \$600.00) Formed a male choir.

1958 - 1965-Miss Bertha Dunn (Salary \$840.00)

Miss Jennie Leben as assistant organist.

(?) David Stine

1979 - Doc Livingstone

1979 - to present - Rev. Lester Settle.

A Bequest in memory of her husband J. Percy Bentley was established in 1977 by Jennie Bentley for the Maintenance of the Organ and Chimes.