

*Special Edition
July 2015*

THE CHRONICLE

Bruton Parish Episcopal Church

Williamsburg, Virginia

Campaign for the Fourth Century

INTRODUCTION

Since 1756, music of the pipe organ has been an exceptional part of Bruton Parish Church. Over the past two years, as the parish was invited to discern present and future needs and opportunities, the condition of today's organ emerged as a real issue. Fortunately work and study for the past seven years have resulted in a design for a new organ — smaller and properly situated in the church.

This summer, in conjunction with the Campaign for the Fourth Century, we have renewed discussion with the chosen builder. The Vestry has affirmed its support. Now Campaign leadership is seeking the financial resources required to move forward. We hope this newsletter is a tool for greater understanding. Thank you for reading this Special Edition of the Chronicle.

HISTORY

Our present organ is the fourth in the building. It was built in 1937 by the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company, which faced the task of placing extensive modern pipework in ways that would keep the interior as close as possible to what was believed to be the original appearance. This challenge remained the overriding objective in the six enlargements and exchanges of pipes that took place over the next 40 years. The largest expansion and rebuild was in 1955, a generous gift from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. dedicated to parishioner Vernon Geddy, his friend and colleague in the Restoration. Our present organ has 105 ranks and 5,686 pipes.

The last major work on the organ occurred in 1995. Performance failures and other malfunctions in console and mechanism began to occur more frequently in the 2000s. The rector appointed a committee to assess the organ. Their tasks included engaging two independent consultants and studying the resulting reports.

FINDINGS

On September 15, 2008, The Organ Assessment Committee reported to the vestry: The Organ Assessment Committee has inspected our organ from top to bottom; has listened to its flaws; and has traveled to other churches to hear their organs. We are unanimously of the opinion that the parish would be better served by using its resources to replace the organ than by spending excessive monies to repair it.

In October 2008, an expanded committee began research into builders and design possibilities. Months later, they reached the unanimous conclusion that Dobson Pipe Organ Builders, Ltd. of Lake City, Iowa would be the best choice. The amount of \$30,000 was secured from the Bruton Parish Church Endowment Fund to obtain an organ design.

Mr. Lynn A. Dobson, company founder and president, and his associate came to visit Bruton Parish in May 2009. They considered any structural issues that might impact the organ design. They conferred with Colonial Williamsburg's architectural historians as to the proposed organ's appearance. The architectural historians approved the design and deemed it a finely-balanced compromise between our historic past and present needs. The organ design was received in November and presented to the Vestry in December 2009.

The pipe organ is a musical instrument that produces sound by driving pressurized air through pipes selected via a keyboard. Pipes are grouped into sets called ranks, one pipe for each note, producing the same timbre.

When a different timbre is desired, it is necessary to have a second rank of pipes that differs from the first: In diameter, in shape, or perhaps with a vibrating reed inside. Most organs have multiple ranks of pipes, increasing the number of sounds available.

Keyboards played by the hands are known as manuals. A pedalboard is played by the feet. Each keyboard has its own group of stops. Stops allow the organist to control which ranks sound at a given time. The organist operates the keyboards and stops from the console.

Sound is produced when air under low pressure (wind) is blown into the bottom (foot) of a pipe from the box-like chamber called the windchest. The wind comes from a blower driven by an electric motor (modern version of bellows, which used to be hand pumped). Leather valves control the flow of air into the individual note channels.

Bruton may be a fine old building, but it is just as surely a thriving modern congregation.

Jonathan Ambrosino

THE ORGAN DESIGN

Our desire is for a 3-manual organ of logical visual and physical design, which will not overpower the space, but will project a clear and direct sound from the case positioned at the front. This organ will not be subject to the temperature fluctuations we face now, thanks to correct placement of pipes.

In September 2008, one of the two consultants, Jonathan Ambrosino, listed the desired attributes for a new organ. The Organ Assessment Committee also took them as goals in its research:

- ❑ An organ placed within the room, for line-of-sight tone communication to congregation and choir;
- ❑ A handsome visual design, echoing and enhancing the building's interior;
- ❑ An organ in scale with the building and its heritage — about half the size of the present one, cheaper to maintain and rebuild;
- ❑ An instrument with strong, rich tone that concentrates on fundamental warmth over brash brilliance;
- ❑ A variety of tone to reflect the broad range of music performed here annually.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ... AND ANSWERS

How can the organ be played every Sunday yet be in such poor condition?

The musicians constantly make adjustments to compensate for the organ's difficulties. Servicing is keeping it going, but it is not cost efficient to maintain failing parts. It is hard to predict when it may totally fail, but that is a real possibility. Dead notes and other issues are increasingly difficult to disguise. Worn manuals and pedals make playing the instrument increasingly frustrating.

Wouldn't it be less expensive to repair the organ we have now?

Michael Foley of Foley-Baker, the reputable firm specializing in recondition of organs, spent three days here assessing our instrument. He reached the conclusion (and the Organ Assessment Committee concurred) that long-term operating, tuning and repair costs of a new, smaller organ would indeed be less than those of the current organ, even after a complete overhaul and re-installation.

Diligent and professional attention has always been given to the organ. However, providing constant repairs to an organ that is, in many ways, beyond repair, is not good stewardship. Investing in a new organ will be a better use of resources, as it will serve our congregation well into the future.

Is this the right firm to build our organ? Do they understand a colonial church?

Yes. We have investigated recent installations at area churches and concluded that Dobson is superior to other organ builders in quality and reliability. Unlike other builders, they manufacture, assemble, test and install their instruments—a start to finish approach. Founded in 1974, the firm of 20 artisans is known for these guiding principles in production and business:

- ❑ Quality of materials, high level of craftsmanship and durability of work;
- ❑ Careful voicing both in the shop and in the space, giving distinct character to the instrument;
- ❑ Longevity of the team, with skilled members from across the disciplines which comprise organ building;
- ❑ Sound business practices.

voicing

Adjustment made by the builder to produce the desired tone and volume.

Supporting vibrant church music has always been a priority for the firm. In 2013, Dobson built an organ for the 13th century chapel of Merton College, University of Oxford, England. Their latest project, Opus 94, is now in progress for St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Carmel Valley, California.

In his report of January 2008, consultant Michael Foley of Foley-Baker wrote: We are in a wonderful time of organ building in America. There are artisans out there who will create a masterpiece that will perfectly fit Bruton Parish's architecture and musical challenges. One that comes to mind is Lynn Dobson.

What will the new organ look like?

A new electric action console will be placed in the same location in the chancel where the console currently sits. The pipes and case will be centered over the altar in the east gallery, and a new railing will be installed eliminating the side wings. Visual aspects of the design will satisfy the concerns for appearance in keeping with architectural traditions of 18th century Williamsburg. For instance, the visual design of the pipe shades (hand-carved embellishments hiding the tops and feet of display pipes) will be finalized later in the process.

How much will it cost?

Below is the price update provided June 14, 2015:

The estimated price for Specification I (39 registers, 41 stops, 45 ranks) is \$1,885,000 installed, which includes painted poplar case with appropriate gilding, carved pipe shades, facade pipes of burnished tin with gilded mouths, and electric key action and stop actions.

This is more than the other churches in Williamsburg have paid.

A fine organ is built by hand, custom-designed to respect the musical, architectural, acoustical, and physical requirements of the location. The instrument will be configured exactly for our building, located on the central axis to properly distribute the sound. The cost reflects a unique work in form and function from a master organ builder. No two organs are alike.

How much money is required for the work to commence?

An initial payment of 20 % is payable upon execution of the contract. Approximately 70 % is remitted in regular progress payments, and the remaining 10% is paid upon final acceptance of the organ.

Maybe we don't need a pipe organ at all.

The sound produced by wind-blown pipes cannot be matched. No instrument is better for supporting the singing of a congregation and choir. Today the craft of organ building is at its height: the result will be an instrument engineered to produce the desired tone quality for our space. It will lend even greater distinction to our music program, which reaches visitors and residents through offerings such as Choral Evensongs and Candlelight Concerts. The unique position of Bruton Parish in our city affords us the privilege of welcoming and inspiring people through music offered to the glory of God.

register

Rank(s) of pipes controlled by a single stop.

An organ contains two actions, or systems of moving parts. When a key is depressed, the key action admits wind into a pipe. An electrical current runs between the keys and pedals, controlling the valves that allow the pipes to sound.

The stop action allows the organist to control which ranks of pipes are engaged. Electrical stop action allows the organist to set combinations of sounds that can then be saved and recalled with the push of a piston.

The Organ
Assessment
Committee

Rebecca Davy

JanEl Will

Dan Hawks

Roger Jones

Helen Phillips

Merl Renne

The Organ
Committee

Merl Renne, Chair

Helen Phillips,
Vice Chair

Vernon Geddy

Dan Hawks

Ron Hurst

Roger Jones

Rick Boye

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Rebecca Davy

Campaign for
the Fourth
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Isabel Burch

Margaret Driscoll

Marty Easton, Chair

The Rev'd Chris
Epperson, Rector

Stephanie King

Alison Lennarz

Al Louer, Senior
Warden

Garry Sloan

What is the life-span of an organ built today?

The wood and metal parts used for the frame, chests and pipes will last for centuries. The leather parts need to be replaced approximately every 60 years.

How do we know what the people of Bruton Parish will want in 100 years?

Centuries of history distinguish the pipe organ. Over time it has provided musical structure to worship worldwide. New music continues to be written for the pipe organ, as it is a source of inspiration for composers. It is an investment in worship support, music excellence, and visual beauty that will complement the architecture of Bruton Parish indefinitely.

How long will it take to have the new organ built?

On average, three years. This undertaking will require great care in design, construction and installation. Every part is made in the Dobson shop, and every pipe is regulated to sound well.

When can we expect the new organ to be completed?

As of this writing, delivery could take place in early 2018, with installation completed in summer of 2018. This estimate is subject to the builder's schedule at the time of agreement.

STATUS OF REPLACEMENT PROJECT

In May 2015, parish leadership renewed discussion with the senior staff at Dobson Pipe Organ Builders. While travelling on business, Garry Sloan visited the Dobson shop in Lake City, Iowa, and was given a tour of the facility. He saw projects in various stages of completion and observed first-hand the skill and quality that distinguish a fine organ. Soon after Garry's return, we received an updated purchase price and production schedule from Dobson.

On July 20, the Vestry approved the purchase of a new congregational organ to replace the current instrument. The organ will be built and installed under the terms of a mutually acceptable agreement between Dobson Pipe Organ Builders and Bruton Parish. Such an agreement will not be signed until the financial requirements for the project are assured.

CONCLUSION

Music permeates this community of faith. The pipe organ leads us in service music and hymns old and new. It beckons people to enter in every season of the year and provides students and musicians a setting to refine their ability. Perhaps most of all, it brings exposure to and nurture of music to the lives of our children, revealing God's love through song. We are fortunate to contemplate replacement of our pipe organ. In the near future, we will each be given opportunity to help realize the goal. Thank you for your prayerful consideration.

FURTHER READING

Bruton's Organ, Rebecca Davy, The Bruton Fount Fall 2013, pages 7-8
<http://images.acswebnetworks.com/1/1318/THEBRUTONFOUNTFALL2013.pdf>

Bruton Parish Church. An Architectural History, Carl Lounsbury

Let the Anthems Swell, James S. Darling

Visit our website at www.brutonparish.org