

A History and Description of the Organs of Trinity Church, Branford

- Gabriel Rhys Simerson -

- 2015 -



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Thanks must be made to Doreen Denhardt, Trinity's current archivist, who readily made available the documents used to compile this history;

to Winnifred Judge and Jeanne McParland, who spent many years organizing and building the archives;

to the Rev. Sharon K. Gracen, who regularly encourages and supports (and contributes to!) music at Trinity;

and to Ronald Baldwin, Organist and Music Director, who keeps the choir, the organ, and their music alive and fresh

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A History and Description of the Organs of Trinity Episcopal Church, Branford

Visitors and regulars at Trinity unfailingly mention the music program as one of its most impactful strengths. Music at Trinity has been a mainstay from before the construction of our present building in 1852 to today, when the unprecedentedly-large choir whispers and roars its way through Sunday and holiday services. It is supported, of course, by the longest-serving member of our music ministry: the Trinity organ.

-THE FIRST ORGAN-

Trinity has had some form of organ since the church was built. The first, of which no written records are said to be available, was built in the church's rear balcony before the building was even dedicated in 1852. Secondary sources put its resources at about seven stops, pumped manually. It is referred to as a "pipe" organ in these sources, while some doubt it, considering the possibility of a reed organ instead.

-THE EMMONS-HOWARD CHANCEL ORGAN-

It was in 1885 that work begun on enlarging the chancel to its current state, providing, among other things, the chamber to the congregation's right of the choir stalls which houses much of today's organ. On December 29, 1890, when



Melville K. Bailey was Rector, plans were made with the Emmons-Howard organ company of Westfield, Massachusetts to build a new organ (pictured on the previous page with “Mrs. Baldwin” at the console in 1924) into this chancel chamber. It was to be a two-manual instrument, with a fifty-eight note compass in each of the manuals and twenty-seven in the pedal. Five stops were outlined in the Great division, eight in the Swell, and one sixteen-foot Bourdon in the Pedal, which by crude, unofficial calculation brings the proposed organ to fourteen stops and 711 pipes. Every manual stop had fifty-eight notes except for one Swell Oboe, which had forty-six. The agreement with the organ company was short on details (other than that the organ shall be “first class in every respect”) and heavy on legalese, referencing only an attached specification list (of stops and couplers). The tracker-action Emmons-Howard cost Trinity \$1,875 in 1890, equal to roughly \$49,000 in 2014.

-DID WE HAVE A HALL?-

Some previous histories state that the 1891 organ was a Hall, built in West Haven. The written 1890 agreement with Emmons-Howard of Westfield seems to say differently. There is no record available of any other proposals honored, and what curatorial supplements were attached to this document imply that the Emmons-Howard was the organ put into service in March, 1891, as per the agreement of the previous year. When, then, was there a Hall organ at Trinity?

The Emmons-Howard was manually pumped (without the help of an electric blower), until 1920, when previous histories say a blower was installed. A letter, probably from the mid-1950s to 60s, to eventual Organ Committee chairman Whitby Maddern claims that 1920 saw a complete overhaul and repair of the existing organ. One theory regarding the question of the

Hall organ is that the Hall company carried out the 1920 overhaul. When an organ is modified, rebuilt, and especially enlarged, the company that enlarged it often becomes the company associated with the organ. The renowned “Aeolian-Skinner organ” at Yale’s Woolsey Hall, for example, was originally built by Hutchings-Votey, and expanded by Steere, before ultimately being drastically modified and enlarged by Skinner. Therefore it is possible our “Hall” was the post-overhaul Emmons-Howard.

-THE HAMMOND-

What must have been a somewhat sadder period of organ music at Trinity began in 1950 when a \$2,881 electronic Hammond Organ was installed. No documentation is available on the Hammond, either, though we do know that by the time it arrived, an amplified, electronic carillon had already been installed in 1948, given by Michael Desi as a memorial to his daughter, Mary. Then with the organ in 1950 came a new carillon, to supplement the Desi carillon, given by J. DeForest Venter in memory of his mother. It was designed to be played from the organ, and installed so it could be heard inside the church, outside the church, or both. A newer carillon is in service today, often heard alongside Trinity’s 1869 bell.

- THE MÖLLER ARRIVES-

By January 2, 1968, M.P.Möller, Inc. of Hagerstown, Maryland had been chosen to bring the pipe organ back to Trinity. An Organ Committee had been assembled, and some sources say \$50,000 was put aside for the new organ. Ultimately, our Möller cost Trinity \$42,150, of which all was to be paid upon “satisfactory completion of installation.” The organ was to have three manuals and pedal, twelve couplers, and twenty-one independent stops, according to the factory specifications. In all, 1,280 pipes were planned for Trinity.

Current organist Ronald Baldwin says the late 1960s saw a Baroque craze in organ building, and our organ as it was originally built reflected this in its stop choices like the many flutes as opposed to more lush, Romantic registrations. There was also an “enormous” mixture, whose use the Rev. Hank Burdick is said to have forbidden. In 2002, Baldwin set out to “de-Baroquify” and balance the organ, and made several changes to voicing and registration.

- The aforementioned mixture in the Great was softened and reduced to two ranks, in the interest of making it less startling
- a trumpet stop in the Swell (whose quality Baldwin does not praise) was switched out with an oboe, which is now often heard as a solo stop in more mellow prelude or communion music
- in the Positiv, Baldwin installed a 2-foot piccolo (to serve as a softer solo voice);
- in the Pedal, a Contre Trompette of 16 feet was replaced with a bassoon stop, in reality an extension of the Swell oboe
- Also in the Pedal, a speaker was installed that emits the sound of a 32-foot bourdon stop (Trinity’s architecture wouldn’t allow for a set of 32-foot pipes), creating more of a rumble than anything else.

-THE ORGAN TODAY-

Today, the organ still opens, accompanies, and closes most Sunday services (as well as holiday services such as the particularly rousing one on Christmas Eve), and lends its voice to weddings and funerals. Its versatility is made possible by its range in registration:

The **Great** division (pictured below), cantilevered on the house-right side of the chancel has principal and flute stops useful for providing the core voices in hymn accompaniment, and a mixture to add brightness, then complemented by coupling other divisions.



The **Swell** division is housed within a swell box (a chamber with moving louvers which can muffle the sound for expressive purposes) inside the chancel chamber, behind the Great and the façade pipes. Notably versatile, Swell sounds range from lush strings (often heard in preludes and in music during the communion) to more biting, brassy combinations, making the Swell quite fierce when registered more liberally. It often contributes some brightness and substance when coupled to another division.



The **Positiv** division (pictured above), cantilevered over the organ console, has stops primarily useful for solos (such as the several flutes, and the oboe borrowed from the Swell), sometimes made more sultry with a deep, intense tremolo.

The **Pedal** division's pipes are all in the chancel chamber, with the exception of the façade pipes facing the congregation (comprising part of the 8-foot octave stop, featured on the cover) and the 32-foot stop (the speaker behind the console). The pedal stops add a firm, balanced foundation during all types of music, and every once in a while get a solo.

The **Zimbelstern** (from the German meaning "cymbal star"), the twinkling bell sound heard on occasion, is a retrofitted wooden platform holding nine small bells, suspended from hooks and struck by four rotating strikers. It was installed in memory of Howard Tuttle in 1992.

-THE FUTURE-

Predicted as of late 2015, the near future could see the installation of a multi-level, solid state memory system in the organ console, in place of the aging pneumatic system. This will allow for more reliable combination action as well as many more possible combinations.