



# The History of the Pipe Organ at First Presbyterian Church Austin, Texas

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Music has been an important part of First Presbyterian Church from the very beginning. Founded in 1850 in the Texas State Capitol log cabin, some historians date the church back earlier to 1839. Possibly made in Concord, Massachusetts, the original instrument at First Church was a harmonium that lasted until about 1857. A five octave melodia was then purchased for \$300 from George A. Prince of Buffalo, New York. One picture of the church in 1897 shows an organ with several ranks of pipes, both wood and metal, in the chancel area of the church and could be the melodia organ.

Under the leadership of long-time pastor, the Reverend E. B. Wright, the 1890 church building was built debt free. When the opportunity came later to add a fine pipe organ, the church was able to do so without adding to any existing mortgage debts. In October of 1899, the purchase of a pipe organ was approved by the Session at a cost of \$2500. As part of the agreement, the old melodia organ was sold for \$300 to the organ builder, the Möller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland.

Mathias Peter Möller was born in Denmark in 1854 and began working as an apprentice with a carriage maker before coming to the United States at age seventeen. Later known for building luxury cars and taxicabs, Möller used his mechanical skills to good use in the organ industry. A series of moves in Pennsylvania and a disastrous fire at the Hagerstown location in 1895 allowed the company to rebuild and expand from a production of 20 organs a year to over 250 organs a year by 1921. After building almost twelve thousand pipe organs during a career spanning over a hundred years, the Möller company went bankrupt in the early 1990's.

Built for the church's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Opus 263 was installed sometime early in 1900. The first of two inaugural concerts on the instrument was Friday, March 16, 1900, by famed organist Clarence Eddy. Eddy was born in Greenfield, Massachusetts, on June 23, 1851, and later concertized at the Vienna Exhibition in 1873, the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, the Paris Exhibition in 1881 and the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. Known especially for his wide repertoire, Eddy presented 100 weekly concerts without ever repeating any selection. Soon after his concert at First Church, he began a series of recitals around the country.

Eddy's First Church concert included such music as "Morceau de Concert" Opus 24 (*Prelude, Theme, Variations and Finale*) by Alexander Guilmant, "O Divine Redeemer" by Charles Gounod, "Pilgrims Chorus" from *Tannhaeuser* by Richard Wagner, "The Holy Night" by then-contemporary organist Dudley Buck and "Fugue in G minor" by J.S. Bach. Eddy and Buck were some of the leaders in the U. S. to bring the music of Bach to the listening audience, and regularly included Bach's music in their recitals along with the typical opera and popular musical transcriptions of the day. An original copy of the recital program survives in the church archives.

A total of \$69.52 was raised from the Eddy recital and added into the organ fund, along with other donations and concert offerings. Among the donors of the day were the Brackenridges, L. T. Scarborough, Laura Driskoll along with concerts by the Blind Pupils and resident organist David Grove. The First Church Ladies Aid Society gave the largest donation; a \$1015 gift, which was quite a sum in 1900! In worship the organ was dedicated on Sunday, March 18, 1900, with a music sermon by pastor Rev. Wright and later published by the Organ Fund Committee at the request of the choir. Though a few pages are missing from a later copy of the original, the fifteen pages of the sermon that survived probably show how long and detailed the weekly sermons of this popular preacher were.

The organ remained mostly untouched for the next fifty plus years. Some changes may have been included in 1929 while Dr. Dan Grieder was pastor, though no details remain. Undoubtedly the organ blowers were electrified at some point, but according to restorer Otto Hofmann, the original pump bellows were in existence at the 1957 rebuilding. Renovations to the sanctuary were included in the 1929 project, with special attention to improving the acoustics as well as a new heating system. One picture taken about 1914 shows the old stove pipe that was used to heat the big church during the cold winter months. The organist salary at that time was \$25 a month.

Rebuilt again in 1956-7 by Otto Hofmann of Austin, Texas, at a cost of \$9600, a new pedal chest was added to the organ, along with electro-pneumatic stop action, "tripper" type of combination action, and an American Guild of Organists standard pedal board (*replacing a flat, 30 note board*). Hofmann added several mixtures (*including an eight rank Mixture on the Swell*) and pedal stops while keeping the original tracker playing action, which had been stiff and heavy to play. In an article dated May 29, 1960, the Austin American Statesman said the following:

*"We might add, that this particular organ's antiquity was brought to the fore recently, when in its renovation, many old newspaper that had been used as glue-battens in the original installation were withdrawn from its innards. Those old news sheets headlined the Boer War and carried advertisements about the sale of 'high class' women's shoes, 75 cents per pair, and 'choice' beefsteak, 15 cents per pound!"*

Hofmann has since noted that another newspaper found in the organ proclaimed "Dewey Takes Manilla." The first American organ builder to be a part of the American Classic Organ renewal movement, Hofmann was influential in bringing affordable tracker and electro-pneumatic pipe organs to the smaller churches in Texas and the Southwest. His trips to Europe and encounters with pipe organ builders in other countries, led him to experiment with organs on low wind pressure and limiting the number of lower sounds while increasing the number of higher pitches and timbres, an "inverted pyramid."

The musicians of the church must have been heartbroken when they learned the church would be moving to the Jackson Avenue location only a few years after the last organ rebuilding project. Dr. John Boe, a University of Texas organ teacher and Organist/Choirmaster at St. David's Episcopal Church, Austin, presented a recital on the Presbyterian organ on May 29, 1960, for the 110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of First Church. Performing an all-Bach program, the concert featured "Prelude and Fugue in B minor," three chorale tunes, "Sonata No. 1 in E-flat," and "Toccatina in F Major" among others. This was possibly the last concert on the organ before it was dismantled by Otto Hofmann and put into storage. For the next eighteen years the organ

sat in the PeeWee Warehouse on East First Street at a rate of \$15 a month. Robbers broke into the warehouse at one point, but fortunately ignored the many pipes stacked in a confusing array. During this time a Baldwin electronic organ was used at the Jackson Avenue site for the interim.

When the congregation decided to move to the Mesa Drive location, attention was again focused on the former organ and the many beautiful stained glass windows from the 1890 sanctuary. Rebuilt in 1978 by Rubin Frels of Victoria, Texas, the organ was given its present home on the east wall. Frels designed the beautiful layout, and built the wood pipes for the façade in his own shop. This time the organ included a new principal (*Prestant*) on the Great division, the addition of a Celeste and the subtraction of a Mixture on the Swell. Frels also added the Cromhorne and Cymbal on the Great. Though the 16' Pedal *Prestant* is an extension of the Great stop of the same name, the 16' Fagott is full length. The total cost to rebuild was budgeted at \$11,000.

The dedication recital was on November 12, 1978 at 3:00 p.m. by Dr. James H. Cook, a former organist. Music included "Fugue in E-flat Major" by J.S. Bach, "Voluntary in G" by Henry Heron, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" by J. G. Walther, "O Sacred Head" by Johannes Brahms, "La Nativité" by Jean Langlais, and "Finale" from *Symphony No. 2* by Louis Vierne.

Later minor renovations over the next few years included the addition of a Pedal 16' Gedeckt, a Great 8' Trompette (*which used to be a horizontal Trumpet*), an 8' Krumhorn to replace the Swell Schalmey, a reworking of the shutters to open to 90°, and the removal of the Schalmey for later use by the church. Other work hoped for included replacing the *Prestant* with a new 8' Spitz, changing out the 4' Octave in the Great, and replacing the 2' Nacht with a rebuilt Schalmey. A letter dated June 29, 1983, by Broocke Eubank proposed re-racking the Swell 8' Principal at 4' pitch because of its various origins, poor sounds and too many 8' stops on Swell. This was carried out to good success. Eventually the Trumpet was put in the Swell box, and the Krumhorn brought to the Great manual.

Today about ten ranks of pipes of the current thirty-five ranks are original to the first 1900 organ. The nickname of the organ, "Oscar," attests to its sometimes finicky nature. As the church turns towards its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the year 2000, more work will be needed to repair broken and worn parts. Some of the pipes should be replaced while a few others need to be revoiced to produce a clearer and quicker speech. It would also be exciting to add several ranks of pipes or to add another manual and division to give organists a wider range of sounds. As the music program grows with the congregation, it is hoped that the interest will be available to maintain and increase the versatility of this historic instrument. Through lectures, workshops, recitals, private lessons, and music academies, the music staff is dedicated to promoting this special pipe organ to the Austin community.

First Presbyterian Church is committed to maintaining the highest quality instrument possible in its worship of God Almighty. For that we can be very grateful that many others have led the way. Worship is not directed at some machine that speaks sonorous tones or faint whispers. We worship a living God that we hope is pleased with our humble efforts to sing psalms and spiritual songs. The stained glass window above the organ pipes shows an urn with fire rising out of it. Whether this represents the Holy Spirit or simply was a great place to put the large half-circle window, it seems right and proper that the blaze should crown the heart of his majestic organ. May Opus 263 lead all people to greater understanding of God, and closer to the Divine Mystery.

Special thanks go to Otto Hofmann, Broocke Eubank, Ruben Frels, Alan Laufman of the Organ Clearing House, and the many church members, staff and friends who helped with the details. Published pamphlets, church bulletins, newsletters, photographs as well as Session minutes from as far back as 1897 helped with the research of this project.

## 1900 Stoplist

	PEDAL		SWELL		GREAT
16'	Bourdon	16'	Bourdon	8'	Open Diapason
16'	Flute	8'	Open Diapason	8'	Viola
16'	Open Diapason	8'	Dulcianna	8'	Stopped Diapason
		8'	Doppel Floete	4'	Flute Harmonique
		4'	Principal	4'	Violina
		4'	Flute d'Amour	2'	Flautinal
		2 2/3'	Twelfth	III	Mixture
		2'	Fifteenth	8'	*Oboe
		8'	Trumpet	8'	Bassoon
				8'	Aeolina

21 stops, 21 ranks with 1371 pipes with a 30 note pedalboard

\*Oboe not installed

## 1956-7 Stoplist

	PEDAL		SWELL		GREAT
16'	Principal	8'	Bourdon	16'	Quintadena
16'	Quintadena	8'	Quintadena	8'	Principal
8'	Octave	8'	Prestant	8'	Rohr Flute
8'	Gedeckt Pommer	4'	Rohr Gedeckt	8'	Dulciana
4'	Choral Bass	2 2/3'	Nasat	4'	Octave Principal
2'	Nachthorn	2'	Principal	4'	Gedeckt
III	Mixture	1 3/5'	Terz	2'	Quintadena
16'	Fagott	1 1/3'	Larigot	IV	Mixture
		1'	Octave	II	Cymbel
		III-VIII	Mixture		
		8'	Schalmei		

29 voices, 42 ranks with about 2,272 pipes

## 1978 Stoplist

PEDAL		SWELL		GREAT	
16'	Principal	8'	Principal	16'	Quintadena
16'	Subbass	8'	Bourdon	8'	Principal
8'	Octave	8'	Spitzgamba	8'	Rohrflote
8'	Gedeckt	8'	Celeste	8'	Dulciana
4'	Choral Bass	4'	Rohrflote	4'	Octave
2'	Nachthorn	2 2/3'	Nazat	4'	Holz Gedeckt
III	Mixture	2'	Spitzflote	2 2/3'	Quint
16'	Fagott	1 3/5'	Terz	2'	Principal
		1 1/3'	Quinte	IV	Mixture
		1'	Octave	II	Cymbel
		8'	Schalmei		

29 stops, 34 ranks with 1787 pipes

## 1996 Stoplist

PEDAL		SWELL		GREAT	
16'	Prestant	8'	Bourdon	16'	Singend Gedeckt
16'	Subbass	8'	Spitz Gamba	8'	Prestant
16'	Gedeckt	8'	Celeste	8'	Rohr Flute
10 2/3'	Quint Bass	4'	Principal	8'	Dulciana
8'	Octave	4'	Rohr Flöte	4'	Octave
8'	Gedeckt	2 2/3'	Nasat	4'	Holz Gedeckt
4'	Choral Bass	2'	Spitz Flöte	2 2/3'	Quinte
III	Mixture	1 3/5'	Terz	2'	Principal
16'	Fagott	1 1/3'	Quinte	IV	Mixture
4'	Schalmei	1'	Octave	II	Cymbel
		8'	Trompete Tremolo	8'	Cromorne

32 Stops, 35 ranks with 1894 pipes