

*United Methodist Church
North Canaan, Connecticut*

*Richard Geddes Pipe Organ Co. 1968
Winsted, Connecticut*

I examined the organ in detail on Sept. 30, 2023. This is a new organ with some old parts, built by Richard Geddes and Ted Gilbert, the later briefly in Geddes' employ after spending a number of years at Aeolian-Skinner in Boston. As Geddes worked primarily with electric action, this instrument is the mostly work of Ted Gilbert. The present instrument is a potpourri of parts and pipework of various ages and provenance. While it very probably recycled the Conkey organ as a starting point, the organ has been so thoroughly revised it is impossible to determine what, if anything, remains from the 1905 Conkey rebuild of a 19th-century instrument. The Great pipework could very well be Johnsonn—it's very narrow scaled, was always cut to length and near A440 in pitch, so it could very well be pre-1860 Johnson metal pipework. The Great diapasons have all had their languids replaced with nickless languids up to about 6"-C, and the cut ups lowered during the reassembly process just enough to remove the original skiving. The voicing is thin and mildly speechy, and sounds neither new nor old, but something in between. The wood flutes are unaltered and sound genuinely old, and are quite fine. The Swell pipework is from a variety of sources, most of which are 19th-century, but the *Hautbois* (Oboe) is definitely pre-War. The first 19 pipes of this stop are missing, and were obviously once in place, suggesting a malicious act may be responsible for their disappearance. The Pedal Bourdon is from two legacy sources, and disposed over three pneumatic chests which themselves are older than 1960.

The large single-fold reservoir is supply house, and painted gray, age indeterminant. The key action is 1968 of all new components, and the stop action is also 1968 but using old parts, likely recycled from Conkey. The Swell box is old, but the vertical shutters are post-War and the chest contained within is full compass, with only a remote possibility it was pre-War. The original Johnson Swell would have been short compass. The key action is unreasonably heavy with extremely tight springs.

The windchests are stacked, Swell over Great, and are mostly new construction with plywood tops and bottoms, and in-built *Schwimmer* pressure regulators on the bottom side. Only the grids are potentially old and are likely those of the Conkey instrument, having 3 screw bars that are mortised through the front and rear rails in the manner typical for 19th-century chest building. The pallet boxes would originally have been at the rear, but the Swell is now at the front and difficult to access for service, being behind facade basses and case stiles. The rackboards are new, and the toeboards are a mixture of new and old with added slider seals. The stop action is extremely hard to move and needs attention, as does the key and coupler action. Something is jamming the Swell *Hautbois* slider, and its stop action is immovable. The center three flats of facade pipes speak, the two outer flats are dummies, with pipes of newer zinc than those in the center flats. The mahogany case stylistically is that of an organ build between 1870 and the late 1890s, but the lack of finials or decoration of any kind on the posts and rails suggests this was a vernacular purpose-built case front from 1905, built perhaps by talented local cabinetmakers.

The key action is modern, using an "einbau" or "single-unit" German-made chassis containing the couplers and new reverse-color keyboards. The keyaction components are all new, utilizing German needle-bearing metal squares, aluminum rollerboards and wood trackers. These would showcase the knowledge of modern mechanical-action organbuilding brought to the firm by Gilbert. The pedal action perhaps now by Geddes, is electro-pneumatic using recycled windchests

that stylistically look to be built between 1920 and 1950. The electric action switching components from Geddes are antiquated and the wiring is poor, both typical traits for Geddes work of the period. The second Pedal *Bourdon 16'* is simply a second action fitted to the bottom 12 pipes, feeding the large bass pipes on a lower pressure for a softer effect, but the notes 13–27 are unaffected and speak with their normal volume on either *Bourdon 1* or *Bourdon 2*.

The recessed apse serving as an organ chamber was added as part of a church remodeling in 1905. Previously, the "apse" containing what was likely a one-manual organ was only 2' deep—equal to the thickness of the limestone blocks forming the rear wall of the church prior to the 1905 expansion. The present deep and roomy apse was created specifically to contain the "new" organ by Conkey.

There are three plaques on the nameboard, the center one being original to the Conkey. The flat-jamb arrangement is reminiscent of a Marklove organ, and dates from the Conkey installation. The five stop jamb holes plugged by Geddes were for additional stops. The stop-action square rails reused by Geddes still contain squares for these missing stops, and the rebuilt windchests contain empty spaces where said stops would once have stood. The Great stop trundles rail has two blank spaces where trundles have been removed, and which line up with the empty spaces on the chest where ranks once stood. It is further likely Geddes reused the Conkey stop knobs and labels, now controlling different stops, while removing completely the knobs for the stops he took away.

Plaque one (center):

Rebuilding of Organ
In Memory of Her Parents
Dr. & Mrs. Frank H. Lee
By
Miss M. Elizabeth Lee
1905

Plaque two (right):

Redesigned and Rebuilt
Richard M. Geddes Pipe Organs
Winsted, Connecticut
1968

Plaque three (left):

Presented by
Mary C. Corbit
In memory of her husband
Julius L. Corbit
1968

The extant stop labels give a clue as to the original disposition of the Conkey organ that preceded the Geddes. The present and likely recycled stop knobs are oblique (ebony) on sound shanks, and the lettering on ivory inserts is Olde English.

It is possible that Conkey recycled the Johnson Opus 70 from Litchfield, but the dates of the Litchfield organ history don't align and would require further investigation. (No documentation has yet surfaced on that church's organ activity between the Johnson purchase in 1857 and the

purchase of a new Austin organ in 1915). There are several scenarios as to how the 1857 Johnson Opus 70 may have survived to end up in North Canaan in 1905:

1a) The Johnson was moved into the new gothic-style Congregational church in 1870s when the congregation abandoned their historic building and moved it down the street.

1b) The Johnson could have been modernized for the new building in 1870 which could explain some anomalies between the original and Conkey instruments, but these two scenarios don't work out quite as neatly as the next scenario. If this organ was in the 1870 church and was sold to North Canaan in 1905, what did the Litchfield church then do for an organ for the next decade until they bought the new Austin in 1915?

3) The Johnson was simply left in the gallery when the historic church was picked up and moved down the street and sidelined for a period as the municipal building. The Litchfield congregation then replaced the Johnson in the 1870 building with an as yet unknown new or new-old organ in 1870, which was in turn moved into the historic building when it was moved back to its old site and again repurposed as their official church—this mystery organ being the organ replaced by Austin ca. 1915. At the point the former building is again in service, the old-fashioned Johnson, now superfluous and in the way, was sold, perhaps to North Canaan.

4) When the Congregationalists abandoned their former home and built their new building in 1870, they simply sold the Johnson to another local church, which then found its way to North Canaan in 1905.

The recent (Jan. 2024) discovery of the original disposition of Johnson Opus 70, has cast new light on the possibility that the North Canaan was in fact the place the Litchfield organ was moved in 1905. The surviving Conkley stop labels, including the unusual *Bell Gamba* could have been the original Johnson Great but without the *Trumpet* (for which there would be no room on the present chest). The full-compass Swell chest now in North Canaan presents an anomaly compared to what would likely have originally been a short-compass chest with an unenclosed two-stop "Choir Bass". The metal diapasons are thin-walled, with a distinctive mouth flating that is distinctively Johnson-like. The string stops are completely spurious, and the Great 8', Swell 4', and Swell bass 8' flutes show Johnson construction traits. The *Hautboy* has several design traits that make it the most convincing of the surviving stops as being pre-War Johnson pipework. The "Olde English" stop faces and oblique knobs are of a piece, and either date from Conkey or a post-War modernization of an older instrument with a new projecting keydesk. Stops marked with an ★ could very possibly be from an 1858 Johnson.

CURRENT ORGAN DISPOSITION

GREAT

Chest parts mostly new, reusing an old 19-century grid and random toeboards, with new rackboards.

Gr. Open Diapason★	8'	56 pipes. 1-17 façade, old 19 th -century zinc; on the windchest from note-18, zinc 18-23, then common metal, dead length. New unnicked languids, cut-ups lowered 1968. Pre-Civil War. Labeled " <i>Sw. Op.</i> " Narrow scale.
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Gr. Std. Diap. [&] Bass★	8'	56 pipes. Pine, likely pre-War. Caps now fitted with flat-head screws. Pyramidal stopper handles. Modern supply-house feet. Walnut caps and blocks. Labeled " <i>Bdn</i> ". Two sliders, treble and bass, yoked together on one knob.
Gr. Principal★	4'	56 pipes. Like <i>Open Diapason</i> in age and construction. Zinc 1-12, then common metal, dubbed mouths, small ears in the bass. Pipes have lowered cut-ups and new unnicked languids until the top octave, which pipes are unaltered and original. Labeled " <i>Sw. Pr.</i> " Narrow scale.
Twelfth★	3'	56 pipes. Like <i>Open Diapason</i> in age and construction. Zinc 1-5, then common metal. Pipes with new languids and lowered cut-ups to approximately 6"-C, then unaltered original. Labeled "12". Narrow scale. Modern label.
Gr. Fifteenth★	2'	56 pipes. Like <i>Open Diapason</i> in age and construction. Common metal throughout. Pipes with new languids and lowered cut-ups through 6"-C, then original. Labeled "15".
3 plugged knob holes.		Space on the chest for two additional ranks or small scale, perhaps a tenor-c 8' string and 4' Flute. One of the plugged and unused knobs could have controlled the <i>St. Diap. Bass</i> .

SWELL

		Enclosure with vertical shutters is old and of pine, now painted inside and out. Interior chest is full compass, mostly new construction reusing a 19 th -century grid and random toeboards with new rackboards. Division stacked over the Great.
Sw. Std. Diap. [&] Bass	8'	56 pipes. Very old pipes 1-12, then a wood <i>Flute d'Amour</i> with bored stoppers of younger provenance, perhaps 1870s-90s.
Gr. Bell Gamba	8'	44 pipes. From tenor-c; now a sharp-tuned celeste, made of 20 th -c. pipes of no distinction. Hoyt metal, letter-stamp notation " <i>Dulciana</i> ".
Sw. Viol di Gamba	8'	56 pipes. 1-12 rolled 20 th -c. <i>Quintadena</i> , then post-1870 pipes marked. " <i>Sw. Violin</i> ", high-tin spotted metal.
Gr. Waldflute★	4'	56 pipes. 1-12 stopped wood, then open with inverted mouth; the fronts have been planed thinner to remove the nicking from the blocks, which obliterated any identifying graffiti.

Sw. Octave (★)	[2']	56 pipes. Tapered construction. First few pipes of zinc, remainder pipe metal. No pipe notations, but could very possibly be made from a <i>Bell Gamba</i> with the bells cut off and rescaled with spurious treble pipes.
Sw. Hautboy★	8'	44 pipes. Originally tenor-c. Dead length, typical <i>Oboe</i> construction, shallots have reverse-taper bottom bevel, top 7 pipes are flues. Notes 13-26 are missing, with one spurious boot laying in the Swell box, the sky racks are still in place.
<u>PEDAL</u>		Multiple electro-pneumatic chests spread across the rear of the chamber, separated a distance from the main instrument by the large static reservoir installed behind the Great. Post-1890 stop labels with a sans-serif font.
Ped. 1 st Bourdon	16'	30 pipes. Post-Johnson vintage stopped wood. Notes 1-12 had their arched cut-ups lowered with thin screwed-on slats.
Ped. 2 nd Bourdon	16'	30 notes. 1-12 have a separate action with volume regulators to play the bass pipes on reduced wind. When both 16' stops are activated, the stop plays with increased wind from both sources. Notes 13-30 play the same pipes as the main <i>Bourdon</i> .
Ped. Gedackt	8'	12 pipes. Treble <i>Bourdon</i> extension with spurious pipes from a different source.

COUPLERS BY HITCHDOWN PEDAL

Swell to Great
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal

S.L. Huntington, October 5, 2023.