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THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL CANADIAN COLLEGE OF ORGANISTS
LE JOURNAL OFFICIEL DU COLLÈGE ROYAL CANADIEN DES ORGANISTES

A SPENCER ORGAN IN HAMILTON

An irreplaceable part of Hamilton's musical heritage

WORLDS OF SOUND, CIRCLES OF SONG

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ORGAN SELECTION

Prelude on Down Ampney by John Beaver



ORGAN CANADA

ROYAL CANADIAN COLLEGE OF ORGANISTS

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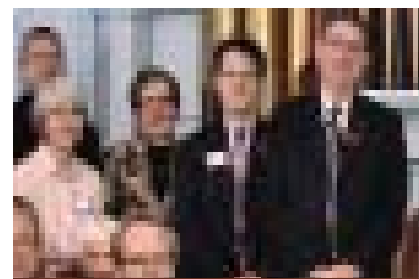
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ON THE COVER: The 1901 Walter Spen-
cer organ of St Luke's Anglican Church,
Hamilton, incorporates a locally built ca.
1853 organ. Photo by Boris Nusko

HISTORIC ORGAN



A Spencer Organ in Hamilton

The Spencer Organ at St Luke's Anglican Church: An irreplaceable part of Hamilton's Musical Heritage

The organ at St Luke's Anglican Church has served Sunday by Sunday for the entire length of the history of the parish. On July 9th, 1882, a small frame church was opened for worship. An article on the history of St Luke's parish in the *Hamilton Herald* of Saturday, May 3rd, 1902 tells us, 'St Luke's was the sixth Episcopal place of worship erected in this city... There happened to be a frame building, formerly used as a Methodist chapel, for sale at the time. This was purchased, removed to Macaulay Street, and transformed into St Luke's church in 1882.' The frame

church served for seven years, until the present brick church was opened in 1889. The *Herald* again takes up the story: 'Plans were called for, and the new building was erected. It is a substantial brick building, and has a seating capacity for 300 worshippers... The surpliced choir is under the leadership of Walter Spencer, who possesses the knack of keeping the boys in order without any apparent stringent measures. Ernest G. Brown is the organist, and the instrument he plays was built many years ago. Indeed, it is said to have been at one time used in a Masonic Lodge. No matter when built or where used in bygone years, Mr Brown extracts good music from it at this late date, and his playing adds much to the heartiness with which the musical part of the services is rendered.' The *Hamilton Spectator* of

February 12th, 1889 tells us that the organ was 'transferred this week from the old church.'

It cannot be said for certain who built the original organ which was certainly in use at St Luke's before 1889, but there is strong evidence that the organ was built in Hamilton in 1853. Inside the chest of the present Swell division are newspapers glued to the wood surfaces: the *Hamilton Gazette* of September 22nd and 26th, 1853 were used to line the chest. An examination of these newspapers in the Hamilton Public Library reveals that there was indeed an organ builder active in Hamilton: an advertisement reads 'Piano Tuning. Messrs Hager & Vogt, Organ Builders, Cannon Street, Hamilton will be happy to receive orders for Tuning and Repairing Piano Fortes.' Hager & Vogt enjoyed mixed



Bruce Cross



Rev. Bob Hudson

St Luke's Anglican Church as it was when first opened in 1889



The choir and orchestra of St Luke's Anglican Church, early 20th century

success in Hamilton between 1846 and 1858. As the advertisement demonstrates, they had to take in work on pianos in order to stay in business. George Vogt, who came to Canada from Germany, was the father of Augustus Vogt, who founded the Toronto Mendelssohn Choir in 1894.

The entrance of the name Walter Spencer into the narrative as organist of the church is important, for it was he himself who undertook to enlarge the organ. At the Easter Vestry of 1905, 'the most important item of business considered was the enlargement and modernisation of the organ. A committee was appointed to look into the matter and report at a later vestry meeting.' The committee must have acted rapidly, for by December of the same year Walter Spencer had completed the enlargement of the organ to two manuals and pedal. Far from being 'modernised', the organ was built according to traditional principles: tracker action and hand pumped winding.

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The *Hamilton Times* of December 6th, 1905 carried a full report of the dedication service:

SUNDAY ENTERTAINMENTS NOT FOR PLACE OF WORSHIP

At Dedication of New Organ Bishop DuMoulin Speaks on Sunday Evening Recitals

An important event in the history of St Luke's Church, the dedication of a new organ, was solemnised last evening before a very large congregation.

The service opened with evensong, led by the Rector, Rev. E.N.R. Burns, assisted by the Rev. Herbert Leake of St Phillip's Parish.

On behalf of the contributors, the Rector presented the instrument to the St Luke's Church, and the religious formalities were conducted by Bishop DuMoulin. The organ is a welcome addition to that place of worship and is the make of Walter Spencer; having a two manual keyboard with the following specifications: Open diapason, great organ, flute, piccolo, oboe, swell organ, melodeon, dulciana, violina, stopped diapason, gamba, treble and bass. It also contains the tremolo and the usual couplers. E.G. Brown is the organist and he played the new organ in a finished manner. Although last evening was the opening it was used for the first time at Sunday's service as a trial.'



Rev. Bob Hudson



The occasion was made more interesting by an address by the bishop on a little history of music ages back and the use it has been and should be put to. During the course of his remarks he made special reference to choirmaster Spencer under whose construction the new organ was installed, and for his labour of love and faithfulness to the church for many years, he paid the people high tribute. The speaker made two other statements worthy of mention. The organ was to be paid for by free will offering of the church attendants and not by commercial benefits such as were derived from bazaars, high teas, socials, and concerts, etc. His Lordship is strictly opposed to such and said he thought such entertainments should not be used as a means to raise funds for the work of the church. Referring to what the organ is to be used for, he was indeed very earnest. He gave the people to distinctly understand that the new addition to the church

was for the praise of God and was not to be used for concerts and the kind of entertainments that were given in many of the leading churches on Sunday evenings. The Bishop said it was this that drew the crowds and the professional singing and organ playing had more to do with the attendance than the preacher and the Bible. He was pleased that St Luke's had done nothing of that sort.'

The rebuilt organ served well for many years. In 1931, the Hamilton Herald reported 'the choir is in the good hands of Ben Walling, with W. Shaw at the organ, which is believed to be in all probability the oldest instrument in the city.' But by 1965 there was evidently a desire to enlarge the organ. At the Easter vestry, '...It was also announced that the organ is being restored. Funds for the restoration were contributed by members during the past 10 years.' In fact, the work performed can more accurately be called 'alteration and enlargement' than true restoration. The hand pumping mechanism was discarded in favour of an electric blower and supply house reservoir. Electric contacts were installed under the pedal and two new pedal stops installed on electric chests. For a power supply, a Canadian Tire battery charger served the purpose. A pneumatic puffer chest was added for a Great Mixture, the Swell Oboe was discarded in favour of a Krummhorn, and the Violina discarded to make way for a Scharff. These alterations may have served to supply some of the sounds then in vogue, but they also damaged the integrity of the historic organ. The application of electricity may have provoked a desire for a louder organ, and it may prove that the pressure was increased to make the organ louder, with the result that the pitch is now about a semi-tone sharp.

For over forty years, the true nature of this historic organ has been obscured by the alterations made in the 1960s. It is a worthy goal to restore the organ to its 1905 disposition, and in so doing preserve a unique part of Hamilton's ecclesiastical and musical history.

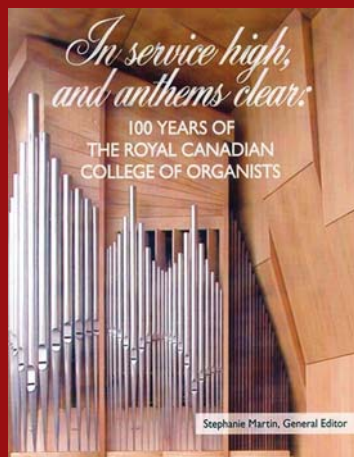
- Bruce Cross



The organ as it stands today

Boris Nukco

In service high, and anthems clear: 100 Years of the Royal Canadian College of Organists



This history of the RCCO is a celebration of Canada's oldest musicians' association and is filled with photographs and stories from Centres all across Canada. Members from each of the eight regions were asked to write articles on their region and as the general editor, Stephanie Martin, said in her introduction, "Each writer brings his or her own personal approach, so you will find a delightful variety of storytelling in this book."

The book describes the founding of the College, talks a bit about each of the individuals who have led the College throughout its history, presents chapters on each of the eight regions and also includes an historical membership list. The name of everyone who has been a member of the College appears in this book.

Do you have a copy yet? If not, you are missing a real treat: informative yet highly readable and entertaining. The book was released during the 2009 centennial convention and is available from the National Office for a limited time at the price of \$34 (shipping & handling included). There are a limited number of copies remaining from this print run, so please act quickly if you are interested in purchasing a copy. Centres may order multiple copies for their members.



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