

Holtkamp Organ (1938)
Holtkamp Organ Company Job Number 1603
Organ Historical Society Database ID 37860
Grace Episcopal Church
43 Elizabeth Street
Pemberton, New Jersey 08063



Photographs taken by Gregory D. Smith, May 14, 2015

In 1938, the Holtkamp Organ Company of Cleveland, Ohio installed a pipe organ designed by Walter Holtkamp, Sr. in the newly constructed Grace Episcopal Church located in Pemberton Township, New Jersey. Grace Church's new organ was the first Holtkamp instrument in New Jersey and, to date, the only one located in the southern part of the state.

➤ **Pemberton Township**

Pemberton Township is located in the northeast quadrant of Burlington County, New Jersey. Incorporated in 1846, the township covers 62.5 square miles of territory, much of it consisting of forest and farmland. Based on Federal census data, the township's population during the 1930s ranged from 1,929 (1930 census) to 2,386 (1940 census). At the time, several unincorporated villages existed within Pemberton Township, including Browns Mills, New Lisbon, Mount Misery and Ong's Hat. Today, the township, along with dozens of other municipalities in the southern part of the state, is located within the New Jersey Pinelands National Reserve, which has been designated as a United States Biosphere Reserve.

➤ **Grace Episcopal Church**

In 1854, The Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey granted a charter for the establishment of a new parish in Pemberton. Seven years later, the congregation purchased its first building, an existing wooden structure, from a local Baptist congregation. Subsequently, construction of a new building began in 1937. On February 20, 1938, the Rt. Rev. Wallace J Gardner, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey laid the cornerstone for the new Grace Church, which at the time was expected to cost approximately \$25,000. According to an article in the Courier-Post, parishioners expected that "it would be sometime before the church is ready for occupancy." The article went on to state: "The floor must be laid, windows installed, walls finished, organ installed, and tower and bell erected."¹



Grace Church, Pemberton, New Jersey

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Courier-Post (Camden New Jersey), February 21, 1938, page 9, accessed on January 20, 2020; newspapers.com digital version

Grace Episcopal Church Holtkamp Organ: Installation and Dedication

From the start, planning for the new building included space for a pipe organ. Grace Church and the Holtkamp Organ Company executed a contract for a new organ on January 18, 1938 at an expected cost of \$4,094.00.² Early in August of the same year, the Courier-Post reported that workers were “busy installing a new \$5,000 electrical pipe organ in the New Grace Episcopal Church on Elizabeth Street.” The article went on to state: “installation is to be completed within two weeks” following which “the organ will be tested by prominent organists before it is formally dedicated in September.”³ The service of dedication for the organ took place on September 22, 1938. During the service, Parvin Titus of Cincinnati, Ohio played the dedication recital, which included compositions by Pachelbel, Delphin Strungk, Widor, R. Cochrane Penick, Vierne and Harvey Grace.⁴

The Grace Church organ is one of only four instruments completed by the Holtkamp Organ Company during 1938.⁵ Also, the 1938 organ at Grace Church is the first of only seven instruments that the Holtkamp Organ Company has installed in New Jersey.⁶

➤ **Grace Episcopal Church Holtkamp Organ: Specifications**

Two manuals

Three divisions: Great, Swell and Pedal

Manual compass: 61 notes

Pedal compass: 32 notes

Great

Principal 8’

Rohr Flote 8’

Nachthorn 4’

Swell (Enclosed)

Quintaton 8’

Principal 4’

Gehmshorn 4’

Nazard 2 2/3

Kornet Mixtur

² “Grace Newsletter,” Grace Episcopal Church, Volume I, Number 1, November 23, 2016

³ Courier-Post (Camden, New Jersey), August 6, 1938, page 18; accessed on January 20, 2020; newspapers.com digital version

⁴ “Service for the Dedication of the Organ, Grace Church, Pemberton, New Jersey, Thursday Evening, September 22, 1938, at Eight O’clock;” photocopy provided by Kathleen J. Waugh, Grace Church warden and archivist

⁵ The other three are: the Hawken School, Cleveland, OH (Job 1606); First Congregational Church, LaSalle, IL (Job 1604.); and St. John’s Evangelical Church, Dover, OH (Job 1575).

⁶ The remaining six are: William Scheide Residence, Princeton (Job 1684, 1956); First Presbyterian Church, Princeton (Job 1721, 1958); St. John’s Lutheran Church, Summit (Job 1839, 1968); Westminster Choir College, Princeton (two organs – Jobs 1855 and 1856, 1969); and St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Montvale (Job 1864, 1969).

Pedal

Sub Bass 16'
Violin Cello 8'
Choral Bass 4'

Couplers

Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal
Swell Pedal Quint
Swell to Great 16'
Swell to Great 4'
Swell 16'

Combinations

Swell Unison Cancel
Great Unison Cancel

Accessories

Chimes

Gregory D. Smith provided this data to the Organ Historical Society (OHS) on July 24, 2013.⁷

Many individuals contributed to the process that eventually resulted in installation of a Holtkamp organ in the new Grace Episcopal Church building. Some added more value to the effort than others. A few no doubt were key players when it came time to handle such issues as fund raising, selection of a builder and design of the instrument. These participants included:

- Franklin and Anne Chambers
- Florence DeCou Jarvis
- Parvin Titus

➤ **Franklin Smith Chambers and Anne White Chambers**

Franklin Chambers was Grace Episcopal Church's Senior Warden during the period that witnessed the erection of a new building, selection of Walter Holtkamp, Sr. as the organ builder and installation of the Holtkamp instrument. His wife, Anne Chambers was the daughter of Joseph J. White, the sole owner of one of the largest firms in New Jersey growing cranberries.⁸

Franklin Chambers graduated from the University of Pennsylvania. He worked as a power production engineer until 1912 when he became an assistant to his father-in-law at the family's firm, Joseph J. White, Inc. At the death of Mr. White in 1924, Chambers became president of the company, a position he held until his death in 1947. In addition to his lay leadership position at the church, he also held a number of other professional and civic positions, including president of the Grower's Cranberry Company and the Cooperative of Pemberton, president of the Board of Managers of

⁷ The OHS Pipe Organ Database, ID 37860; accessed on January 23, 2020; <https://pipeorgandatabase.org>

⁸ Franklin Chambers Obituary, New York Times, March 2, 1947, page 60

Burlington County Hospital (Mount Holly, New Jersey) and director of the Farmer's Trust of Mount Holly.⁹

An article in Grace Church's newsletter from 2018 summarized the involvement of Franklin and Anne Chambers in the selection of an organ builder as follows:

"Franklin Chambers and his wife spent much time and effort searching for just the right organ for the church. Mr. Chambers was the senior warden at the time Grace Church was built. They fell in love with the Holtkamp Organ from Ohio and insisted that it was the perfect organ for the church."¹⁰

One can understand that Mr. Chambers, university trained as an engineer, no doubt appreciated the contemporary approach to organ design and appearance with its emphasis on clean lines, exposed pipework and visibly moving parts espoused by the builder, Walter Holtkamp, Sr. John Bishop, writing in the September 2019 issue of The Diapason, related this approach to that of the Bauhaus School of Architecture.

"This visibility of interior components reflects the Bauhaus School of Architecture as practiced by Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier, where 'form follows function.' It reflects Holtkamp's thought that an organ should be 'honest.' What you see is what you get."¹¹

In addition, Franklin and Anne Chambers were both prominent members of the local community and, given their ownership of a large company, wealthier than most other area residents. As such, they no doubt were in a position to influence, if not control the selection of an organ builder for Grace Church.

➤ **Florence B. DeCou Jarvis**

Florence Jarvis was Grace Church's organist at the time of the Holtkamp organ's installation and dedication.¹²

Florence DeCou was born in 1904, one of the seven children of Ebner DeCou and Emma Frances Worrell DeCou. The family lived in Pemberton, New Jersey. On February 15, 1929, Florence married Leonard Jarvis, Jr., a local businessman. According to an article in the Mount Holly Herald, at the time of her marriage, Florence was employed as a "stenographer" in the Burlington County prosecutor's office, as well as a musician.¹³

To date, no references to Mrs. Jarvis' music training have been found. It appears that she combined work for the county prosecutor with her musical activities, the latter most likely on a part-time basis. Contemporary references mention her playing the organ at Grace Church, as well as organ and piano for other church functions both in Pemberton and the nearby town of Mount Holly.¹⁴

⁹ The Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), March 2, 1947, page 12; accessed on January 21, 2020; digital version at newspapers.com

¹⁰ "Grace Notes Newsletter," Grace Episcopal Church, Volume II, Number 1, Winter, 2018

¹¹ John Bishop, "Walter Holtkamp and the American Classic," The Diapason (September, 2019), page 14

¹² Courier-Post (Camden, New Jersey), August 6, 1938, page 18; accessed on January 20, 2020; newspapers.com digital version

¹³ Mount Holly Herald (Mount Holly, New Jersey), February 15, 1929, page 8; information accessed on January 27, 2020; digital version at www.findagrave.com

¹⁴ Courier-Post (Camden, New Jersey), June 3, 1925, page 20 and August 18, 1934, page 7; accessed on January 27, 2020; newspapers.com digital version

➤ Parvin W. Titus

Parvin Titus not only played the dedication recital on the Grace Church organ built by the Holtkamp Organ Company, but also served as tonal consultant for the project. Gregory D. Smith, Director of Music from 1997 to 2015, reports that, during his tenure, the Grace Church organ console had two nameplates. The first listed Walter Holtkamp, Sr. as the builder. The second named Parvin Titus as the tonal consultant.¹⁵

Parvin Titus was born on December 26, 1896 in Elizabeth, New Jersey into a family that traces its history in North America back to colonial times¹⁶. Titus was one of the four children of John Wesley Titus and Lillian Mickle Harris Titus. He began his study of piano and organ while attending high school in Roselle Park, New Jersey. Titus continued organ study at the Institute of Musical Art (now the Juilliard School) in New York City, where he received instruction from the highly regarded Belgian organist, Gaston Dethier (who had been taught by Alexandre Guilmant at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Liege). At some point after completing his studies in New York City, Titus travelled to Europe for additional study with Marcel Dupre and possibly with Andre Marchal.¹⁷

In 1924, Titus moved to Cincinnati, Ohio and took a position as head of the organ department at the Conservatory of Music (now part of the University of Cincinnati) in that city. He remained at the conservatory for more than 40 years. He also served as music director at Christ Church in Cincinnati for 35 years.¹⁸

The connection between Parvin Titus and Walter Holtkamp, Sr. dates from as early as 1934. In that year, Titus served as a consultant for the two manual Holtkamp organ (Job number 1581) installed in St. John's Roman Catholic Church in Covington, Kentucky. John Allen Ferguson's book about Walter Holtkamp indicates that Titus collaborated in the design of the Covington instrument with its uncased pipes and swell box that did not hide the visible moving parts.¹⁹

According to an article in the Mount Holly Herald, the Covington organ featured prominently in Grace Church's decision to choose Holtkamp.

"Some members of Grace Church, while attending a convention in Cincinnati last year learned of that organ, heard it played by several visiting organists and were thrilled by its beautiful tone."²⁰

¹⁵ Email from Gregory D. Smith dated January 13, 2020

¹⁶ John Woolf Jordan, editor, Colonial Families in Philadelphia, Volume 2 (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911), page 1,699

¹⁷ Monmouth Democrat (Freehold, New Jersey), January 2, 1933, page 3; accessed on January 21, 2020; newspapers.com digital version; and The Asbury Collegian (Wilmore, Kentucky), April 2, 1932, page 1; accessed on January 27, 2020. Titus' study abroad may have been in 1925. His name, along with that of his wife, Ophelia Perkins Titus, appears on passenger manifests from the United States Lines ship "Leviathan" for its voyage from Southampton to New York in September 1925.

¹⁸ University of Cincinnati Libraries, Archives and Rare Books Library, Parvin Titus Papers, Biographical Note

¹⁹ John Allen Ferguson, Walter Holtkamp American Organ Builder (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1979), page 30

²⁰ Mount Holly Herald (Mount Holly, New Jersey), September 16, 1938; photocopy provided by Kathleen J. Waugh

Parvin Titus maintained contact with his home state even after relocating to Ohio. As an example, on Sunday, January 15, 1933, he returned to New Jersey to play a recital on the 1916 Aeolian organ located in Proctor Hall, the Graduate College's Dining Hall at Princeton University.²¹ Aeolian had installed the Proctor Hall organ behind a Gothic style case in a gallery at the rear of the room.²²

Grace Episcopal Church Holtkamp Organ: Later History

Subsequent to installation by the Holtkamp Company in 1938, Grace Church's organ received regular, routine maintenance. Since the 1960s, Richard Kurtz of the R. W. Kurtz Organ Company and, until 2015, organist and choirmaster at Christ Episcopal Church in Woodbury, New Jersey, provided regular maintenance.²³ In addition, the church funded more extensive work on the organ on at least three occasions in 1965, 1978 and 2018.

1965:

Grace Church contracted with Organ Industries, Inc. of Princeton, New Jersey to perform a major overhaul of the then twenty-seven year old Holtkamp organ. The contract required the company to remove, clean, re-install, tune and regulate all pipes in the three divisions of the organ. Provisions in the contract also called for work on the two keyboards and pedal board, as well as the organ's electronics and pneumatics. In return, Grace Church agreed to pay the company \$2,900 in several installments during the course of the repair work.²⁴

1978:

In 1978, an arson fire severely damaged Grace Church. In the process of extinguishing the fire, the Holtkamp organ received extensive water damage, especially to the Great and Pedal chests. Richard Kurtz re-leathered these sections where necessary.²⁵ At the time, repairs that involved disassembling the entire instrument were estimated to cost \$9,300 and take approximately seven weeks to complete.²⁶

²¹ Monmouth Democrat (Freehold, New Jersey), January 2, 1933, page 3; accessed on January 21, 2020; newspapers.com digital version

²² OHS Pipe Organ Database ID 58654. In 1968, a new Gress-Miles instrument replaced the 1916 Aeolian organ, but the Aeolian's Gothic Case was retained.

²³ Emails from Gregory D. Smith dated January 13, 2020 and Richard Kurtz dated January 30, 2020

²⁴ Gregory D. Smith provided a digital copy of the contract between the church and Organ Industries. On April 8, 1965, Grace Church's Junior Warden signed for the church and Chester A. Raymond, President of Organ Industries, Inc., signed for the company.

²⁵ Email from Richard Kurtz dated January 30, 2020

²⁶ "Grace Newsletter," Grace Episcopal Church, Volume I, Number 1, November 23, 2016, page 4. The reference to the arson fire in the OHS Pipe Organ Database for the Grace Church Holtkamp indicates that it occurred in 1977, not 1978. Also, the OHS database narrative indicates that the work done by Richard Kurtz brought the instrument back to its original state "with no additions or revoicing."



1978 Arson Fire

2018:

In 2016, Grace Church's "Friends of Music" established an Organ Fund as part of an ongoing effort to maintain and periodically refurbish the 1938 Holtkamp. The Winter 2018 issue of Grace Church's newsletter reported on the progress made since fund raising started.

"The Organ Fund established in 2016 has grown through the generosity of people and memorial gifts. The expectation is that we will be able to completely restore our Holtkamp organ this year with repairs commencing this summer."²⁷

Grace Episcopal Church contracted with the R. W. Kurtz Organ Company to perform the restoration at a cost of \$39,000. Richard Kurtz described the process of refurbishment as follows:

"This involved updating the original two manual organ console with new wiring, contacts, stop-key units, new pistons and toe studs and an Opus Two system (retaining console and ivory keyboards and pedal board). This system replaced the outdated switches and relays in the chamber that were giving problems. All the old wiring was replaced and a Peterson Swell Shade Operator was installed. No changes were made to the pipework."²⁸

In addition, Gregory D. Smith reported that the renovation of the Holtkamp included installation of a new set of Deagan chimes (that replaced the older set)."²⁹

²⁷ "Grace Notes Newsletter," Grace Episcopal Church, Volume II, Number 1, Winter, 2018

²⁸ Email from Richard Kurtz dated January 30, 2020. In addition to work on the Grace Church Holtkamp, Mr. Kurtz also mentioned his renovation of another New Jersey Holtkamp organ, this one the three-manual instrument at the First Presbyterian Church in Princeton (Job number 1721, 1958).

²⁹ Email from Gregory D. Smith dated January 13, 2020

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