

A History of Casavant Organ

Opus. # 398, 1910

in

Free Masons Hall

Calgary

By

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## Casavant Op. #398

The organ is listed thus in an early order book of the firm of Casavant Freres Limited, Organ Builders of Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec; #398, Calgary, Alberta, "Perfection Lodge"; 2 claviers, 11 stops, 19 registers; 1910

The Specification of the Organ reads as follows:

PEDAL:	GREAT:	SWELL:
Bourdon 16'	Open Diapason 8'	Stopped Diapason 8'
Great to Pedal	Dulciana 8'	Viola di Gamba 8'
Swell to Pedal	Wald Flute 4'	Voix Celeste 8'
	Chimes to Great	Traverse Flute 4'
	Great Super	Oboe 8'
	Swell to Great	Vox Humana 8'
	Swell to Great Sub	Chimes to Swell
	Swell to Great Super	Tremulant
		Swell Super

## Historical

The Casavant Organ which occupies the gallery of the "Blue Room" is listed in the official register of the Casavant firm. It is one of 6 organs built for Masonic Buildings in Canada and the United States.

Around 1910 it was installed in the auditorium of the Perfection Lodge, located upstairs in the Alexander Block, a turreted sandstone structure at 8th Ave. and 1st St. W., the former Bank of Montreal building which is now A & B Sound .

Historically this organ is of extreme value as it was the sixth Casavant organ to be installed in Alberta. Except for it and Alberta's first Casavant organ opus #143, 1901 in St. Michael's Church, Pincher Creek and in St. John the Evangelist in Calgary Opus #492, 1912 , 3 claviers, 30 stops and 44 registers, all the others have been significantly modified or destroyed. It was one of the earliest organs in Canada and the very first in Alberta to employ electropneumatic action, being developed by the Casavant brothers who were world pioneers in the use of electric action.

Early in 1928 this instrument was removed and installed in a new building of red brick and 3 floors, a large building for its construction period. This building was named Free Masons Hall and it is managed by a holding company which has maintained the instrument in its historic condition. Even the front of the case is formed from the reshaped packing-board wood in which it left the

factory in 1910. The instrument was reinstalled by either Gedeon Papin of Edmonton, the Alberta agent for Casavant or E. Mansfield Harvey, an organ technician and cellist who resided in Calgary.

During the 1950's Robert Blanchard, the Casavant representative, replaced the Vox Humana with a Clarinet. Other than this change, the organ of Free Masons Hall is in its original state and exhibits the mellow voicing characteristic of the instruments from the turn of the century.

To tour this organ one has to enter the gallery by a rather steep stairway. At the top of the stairs on the left the visitor sees the display pipes. These are not the expected gilded pipes or stencilled pipes popular with a turn-of-the-century instrument. Instead these have been painted to suggest a pastoral country scene replete with blue sky and gold stars. Immediately behind the display pipes when one enters from the right door to the chamber is found the wind chest for the Great Organ. Its three rows of pipes correspond with the three stops of the Great Organ: Diapason, Dulciana and Wald Flute of wood. This flute sounds similar to an Orchestral Flute. Behind the Great pipes is found the passage board for the tuner to stand on and next to this are the shutters for the Swell-box.

Inside the Swell-box are found the six ranks of the Swell or upper manual. The shutters are opened or closed by the Swell-pedal at the console. These allow the organist to control the dynamic range of the instrument. Inside the box are located the Stopped Diapason, wooded pipes with stoppers to give a dark flute tone, the narrow-scaled Viola di Gamba and its partner the Voix Celeste which is tuned sharp to give a warm undulation when these two string stops are played together. Behind this is the Traverse Flute 4' and the two reed stops the Oboe and the Clarinet. Across the east end of the chamber is found the thirty pipes of the Pedal Bourdon, large stopped wood pipes giving the deepest bass tones of the organ. This compact instrument contains 579 pipes which fills the hall with sound very well. Immediately behind the display pipes near the ceiling is found the Chimes which are in reality tuned metal gongs. The Casavant representative Steve Miller says these are the only Casavant chimes he has ever seen.

At the west end of the gallery and turned to a 90 degree angle to the case is the console. When the roll-top is raised and the music rack extended an interior of highly polished mahogany is revealed. There are two 61-note (CC to C) keyboards (claviers), 20 drawknobs (registers) and a Pedal keyboard of 30 notes (CC to F). The drawknobs are arranged in a staircase design at both ends of each

keyboard. The bottom row of knobs enable the organist to couple the two keyboards together at various octaves and to couple them to the pedals. The middle row of knobs contains the Tremulant which imparts a gentle vibrato to the tone of the whole organ and the two knobs used to couple the Chimes to each of the two keyboards. The top row of knobs contains the ten controls which activate the actual speaking voices of the organ.

Above the pedal board is found the four combination pedals which activate pre-set stop combinations. To the right of these studs is found the Swell pedal which opens and closes the Swell shutters.

During the summer the original builder, Casavant Freres Limitee will re-leather the action and replace the blower. By early September this venerable piece of Alberta musical history will once again be able to sing as it was designed.

#### Organs built for Masonic Buildings by Casavant

Opus Number	Location	Year
#398	Calgary, Alberta	Perfection Lodge 1910
#827	Schenectady N.Y.	Masonic Temple 1920
#972	Hamilton, Ont.	Scottish Rite 1922
#1101	Middletown, Conn.	Masonic Temple 1925
#1388	St. John, N.B.	Masonic Temple 1930
#1401	Montreal, Quebec	Masonic Temple 1930