

OHS 2013: In the Green Mountain State

Burlington, Vermont, June 24–29, 2013

By Barbara Owen

The 58th annual Organ Historical Society national convention differed in several ways from some of the recent ones. Its hub, Burlington, is the largest city in northern Vermont, but hardly in the same size league as Washington, Pittsburgh, or Chicago—the sprawling urban sites of recent conventions. Yet it is accessible via train, plane, and interstate, culturally vital, and full of amenities from good food to spectacular views of Lake Champlain, not to mention parking. Burlington has some important recent organs, although no really huge ones, and is within easy distance to a pleasing array of smaller towns to the north, east, and south, with a corresponding selection of smaller and older organs, all of them discussed in interesting detail in the substantial accompanying *Atlas*, edited and largely written by Stephen Pinel. However, that was bedtime reading for many of us, as all the programs, stoplists, and performer biographies were contained in a well-organized and more portable schedule booklet.

Monday, June 24

The convention opened on the evening of Monday, June 24 in the Recital Hall of University of Vermont's Redstone Campus, with welcoming words by Executive Director **James Weaver**, Convention Chair **Marilyn Polson**, and outgoing President **Scot Huntington**. This year's Biggs Fellows were introduced, and the 2013 Ogasapian Book Prize was awarded to **David Yearsley** for his groundbreaking work on organ pedaling and its history.

This was immediately followed by a recital on UVM's French-influenced 1975 **Fisk** organ by well-known recital and recording artist **Joan Lippincott**, who impressively displayed its French personality in works by Marchand (an opening and decidedly grand *Grand Jeu*) and de Grigny, and its more hidden German flavor in works by Bach, which included a knowledgeable performance of the classic *Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major* as the "sandwich" of a varied program that included de Grigny's *Veni*

Creator, performed liturgically with baritone John McElliott singing the appropriate chants between the registration-oriented organ movements.

Tuesday, June 25

Tuesday morning we were off and running in buses heading for the east of Burlington, beginning with **Hook & Hastings organs** in Plainfield (United Methodist, 1873) and Cabot (UCC, 1896)—coincidentally 1,000 opus numbers apart. Although of similar small size, their tonal philosophy differed noticeably, yet both were surprisingly capable of varied repertoire tastefully registered and played by **Lynnette Combs** (Plainfield) and **Parmelia Sears** (Cabot). In these two programs we heard excellent interpretations of music from the Baroque (Pasquini, Boyce, Muffat, Pachelbel, Homilius), 19th century (Thayer and Buck), and 20th century (Murphy, Langlais, Huston, Sears).

Two more organs, both somewhat tonally altered (although not greatly to

their detriment), rounded out the day's offerings. The resources of a small organ in Hardwick by a little-known Vermont builder, **Edward H. Smith** (1887), were capably employed by **Robert Barney** in a Bach concerto, a Mendelssohn sonata, and a short trio by Vermont native S. B. Whitney, while **Samuel Baker** also made excellent use of a larger 1868 **Johnson** organ in Greensboro, which began and ended with 20th-century works by Gawthrop and Willan, sandwiching four varied Baroque and contemporary preludes on *Wer nur den lieben Gott* by Bach, Krebs, Walcha, and Dupré in between.

The evening program was back in Burlington at the Congregational Church. It was unique in that it featured two 21st-century continuo organs by **A. David Moore** and **Scot Huntington**, plus an Estey reed organ, in a program of concerted works by Soler, Froberger, Caldara, Wagenseil, and Dvorák (this last with the Estey), all admirably interpreted by organists **David Neiveem** and **Mark Howe**, with string players of the Burlington Ensemble.

Wednesday, June 26

Wednesday brought us to the Montpelier area and three larger two-manual organs, all by notable Boston builders. In



Introduction of 2013 OHS Biggs Fellows



S. L. Huntington continuo organ (photo credit: Len Levasseur)



Joan Lippincott with 1975 Fisk



Lynnette Combs at 1873 Hook & Hastings, Plainfield



Parmelia Sears at 1896 Hook & Hastings, Cabot



Robert Barney at 1887 Edward H. Smith, Plainfield



Carol Britt at 1866 Stevens, Montpelier



Paul Tegels at 1884 Hutchings, Montpelier



John and Marianne Weaver, with 1885 Estey reed organ



Samuel Baker, with 1868 Johnson, Greensboro



1892 Ernest Desmarais, St. Albans



1893 Hook & Hastings, Congregational Church, St. Albans

Montpelier's Unitarian Church, **Carol Britt** displayed the **1866 Stevens** organ's varied colors well in four chorale preludes by Willan and Brahms, and showcased the Oboe stop in a delightful *Récit de hautbois* by Emmanuel Chôl, before closing with a robust transcription of an Elgar March.

In the auditorium of the Montpelier College of Fine Arts, the **1884 Hutchings** organ was expertly put through its paces by **Paul Tegels** in a varied program ranging from two of Haydn's chirpy "Musical Clock" pieces to three movements of Mendelssohn's Second Sonata, and closing with contrasted settings of *Wer nur den lieben Gott* by Böhm and Bach.

In nearby Stowe, the **1864 Simmons** organ in the Community Church, although twice rebuilt and enlarged (but retaining mechanical action), proved a perfect vehicle for an engaging program by **John Weaver** and his wife, flutist **Marianne**. Beginning with a smashing Bach *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* and ending with Franck's *Choral in E Major*, it included two fine works by Weaver, plus his pleasing arrangement for organ and flute of an excerpt from Franck's *Fantasie in A*, performed with a borrowed Estey reed organ. Although rain had been threatening all day, the sky cleared that evening for an enjoyable and relaxing sunset dinner cruise on beautiful Lake Champlain.

Thursday, June 27

On Thursday we journeyed north to towns near the Canadian border. St. Albans was the first stop, with three programs. **Isabelle Demers** led off in Holy Guardian Angels Church in a full-scale program well suited to the resources of the organ built in 1892 by **Ernest Desmarais**, a Canadian who built organs for a short time in Vermont. Beginning with



Rosalind Mohnsen at 1889 Jardine in St. Luke's Church, St. Albans

some little dances by Praetorius, she segued into another set of short pieces by contemporary Canadian composer Rachel Laurin, and then a fine interpretation of Mendelssohn's Fourth Sonata. The real *pièce de résistance*, commented upon by many, was her own transcription of four excerpts from Prokofiev's *Cinderella* (operatic transcriptions are not dead!), and was followed by a rousing performance of Dupré's *Prelude and Fugue in B Major* as a closer.

Christopher Anderson led off his program on the **1893 Hook & Hastings organ** in the Congregational Church with four pleasing light pieces from Daniel Pinkham's *First Organbook*, followed by a sensitive performance of two hitherto unknown and very contrasted works by the young Charles Ives (only published in 2012): a sedate and melodic *Canzonetta* and a rather crazily bitonal smash on "London Bridge." Demers had included some

of the recently republished Reger and Straube organ expansions of Bach harpsichord pieces, and Anderson did likewise in his closing selections.

The **1889 Jardine organ** in St. Luke's Church was the final St. Albans stop, and OHS favorite **Rosalind Mohnsen** did not disappoint in a varied full-scale program that began brightly with the solo organ version of Handel's Fifth Concerto. Works by Dubois and Dvorák followed, authentically registered on this organ's Romantic colors, and a *Fuga* by Cernohorsky revealed its classical side. Contrasting American works were Elmore's brash *Alla Marcia*, and a sensitively performed Air from the *Suite No. 1* by Florence B. Price, a gifted African-American composer whose classically crafted works have only recently begun to appear on concert programs, as have those of Anglo-African Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, whose *Impromptu* closed Mohnsen's program.



Gregory Crowell at 1837 Henry Erben, Highgate Falls

From the Romantic and orchestrally flavored late 19th-century organs of St. Albans, a fairly short trip to two nearby rural towns transported us back to the English-inspired early 19th century, represented by two delightful and more gently voiced organs by New York's **Henry Erben** in the Episcopal churches of Sheldon (1833) and Highgate Falls (ca. 1837), both remarkable for being unaltered, sensitively restored, and still in use liturgically. Most unusual was the Highgate Falls instrument, with only three stops—Stopped Diapason, Principal, and Trumpet (yes, you read that right). **Gregory Crowell** made imaginative and effective use of these stops in "period" selections by Handel, Mozart, Loud, and Byrd, plus one of Daniel Pinkham's *Saints' Days* pieces in honor of St. John, for whom the church is named.

The Sheldon organ is larger, though still of only one manual, transplanted

Convention report



George Bozeman at 1912 Estey, United Church of Randolph



1833 Henry Erben at Grace Episcopal Church, Sheldon (photo credit: Len Levasseur)

many years ago from St. Paul's in Burlington. Period-appropriate works by Shaw, Taylor, Pasquini, Stanley, and Rinck again predominated in **Peter Crisafulli's** nicely varied program, but the organ also proved equal to a more Romantic *Elevazione* by Peeters, and even Alec Wyton's prelude on "We Three Kings," a tribute to its Vermont-born author, grandson of Vermont's first Episcopal bishop.

Evening brought us back to Burlington, and the fine **1864 Hook organ** of the First Baptist Church, where **Ray Cornils** presented an imaginative program of mostly shorter works by American, German, French, and Spanish composers designed to showcase "The Colors of This Organ." Beginning with Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's *Prelude in F Major*, it ran the gamut from Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in G Major* to works featuring flute and trumpet solos, a French toccata by Bédard, and even a theatre-organ staple, Nigel Ogden's smile-producing *Penguin's Playtime*.

Friday, June 28

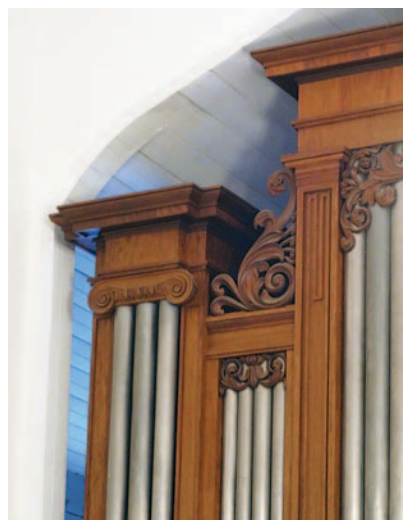
Friday, the last full day, began with two organs in Randolph. On the United Church's 1912 organ by Vermont's most notable organ builder, **Estey, George Bozeman** expertly brought out its warm and Romantic flavor in his creative use of its eight ranks (and various couplers) in decidedly "period" works by Honegger (*Two Pieces*, 1917) and Frank Bridge (*Three Pieces*, 1905). A nicely varied program of works by 20th-century American composers Nevin, Near, Thomson, and Pinkham played by **Glenn Kime** showcased the **1894 Hutchings organ** in Bethany UCC Church, and by concluding with a well-paced performance of the *Fugue in E-flat Major* proved the organ to be quite capable of convincing Bach performance as well.

The next stop was Northfield, home of a Hook and two Simmons organs—all, interestingly, "transplants" from other churches. The **Hook** in St. Mary's Episcopal Church, dating from 1836 and the builder's earliest extant two-manual, took us back to the gentler sounds heard the afternoon of the previous day. The English flavor of these early 19th-century American organs was fully exploited by **Lois Regestein** in a program that began with varied works by Purcell, Stanley, Samuel Wesley, S. S. Wesley, and Arne. The latter's "Rule Britannia" was given an authentic performance with the verses sung by tenor Edson Gifford, with appropriate interludes. The program concluded with a Trio by Vermont-born S. B. Whitney, and a selection from contemporary composer David Dahl's *English Suite*.

The versatility of the substantial **1855 Simmons organ** in the United Methodist Church was exploited in a varied program by **Lubbert Gnodde** that included two nicely registered works by Jehan Alain, and seemed quite ideal for two of Karg-Elert's chorale preludes as well as the smashingly executed Finale from Vierne's *Symphony No. 1* that closed the program.

Another **Simmons** of a decade later in St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church also proved equal to a varied program by **James Heustis Cook** that began with a flowing Frescobaldi Toccata on the warm 8' Principals and a bright Albrechtsberger *Prelude and Fugue in B*. Works different styles by 19th-century composers Hauser, Lemaigre, Mendelssohn, and Whitney followed, along with orchestrally inspired works by once popular 20th-century composer Harry Vibbard.

It will be observed that throughout the week, works by 19th-century American composers, both early and late, appeared



Detail of 1836 Hook, St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Northfield



Glenn Kime at 1894 Hutchings, Bethany United Church of Christ, Randolph



James Cook at 1865 Simmons, St. John the Evangelist, Northfield



Tenor Edson Gifford with Lois Regestein at 1836 Hook in Northfield



Christopher Marks, 1868 William Nutting, United Federated Church, Williamstown

on many programs. And in the final tour stop in the Federated Church of Williamstown, on an organ originally built by Vermonter **William Nutting** in 1868 and rebuilt by another Vermonter, **Harlan Seaver**, in 1895, **Christopher Marks** treated us to a program that was not only based on works by American composers born mostly in the middle decades of the 19th century, but works by these composers—Yon, Lutkin, Whitney, Chadwick, Parker, and Buck—in which canonic forms of the classical style occurred. Yet the ways that they did so also displayed great variety. Yon's *Eco* was a double canon, Lutkin's a quiet *Pastorale*; five of Chadwick's *Ten Canonic Studies* displayed a variety of registrations, and even the hymn sung was the well-known TALLIS' CANON. But the climax was Marks's brilliant performance of Buck's *Choral March*, in which "Ein

feste' Burg" and other themes are expertly canonically woven.

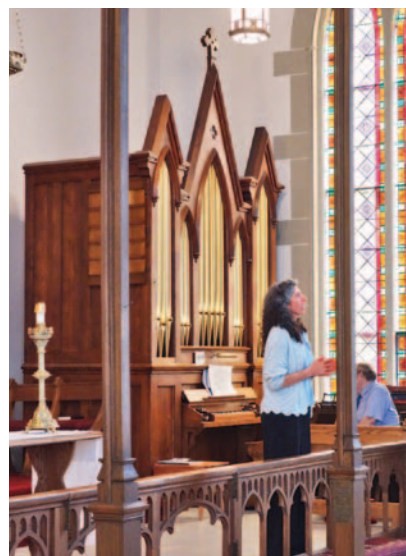
Back in Burlington, we gathered for the final concert on the **1973 Karl Wilhelm organ** in the modernistic and acoustically fine St. Paul's Cathedral that had risen after a devastating fire. While by no means lacking foundation, the organ's tonal design is Baroque-based, and **James David Christie** was in fine form for a varied program of Baroque works by Sweelinck, Schildt, Scheidemann, Vivaldi, Krebs, Buttstedt, and, of course, Bach. High energy was displayed throughout, not only in the brilliance of Scheidemann's *Alleluia! Laudem dicite Deo* and works by Krebs and Buttstedt, but also in the more somber *Paduana Lagrima* variations of Schildt, the delicately registered little dances from the Van Soldt manuscript, and Christie's own "Bachian" transcription



Demetri Sampas at ca. 1820 (anonymous) organ, Round Church, Richmond



Philip Stimmel at 1927 Estey, Vergennes United Methodist Church



Margaret Angelini at 1862 Hook, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Vergennes



1973 Karl Wilhelm, St. Paul's Cathedral, Burlington (photo credit: Len Levasseur)

of Vivaldi's *Concerto in D Major*. A vigorous and driving interpretation of Bach's *Fantasia and Fugue in G Minor* brought the audience to its feet at the close, and proved a fitting conclusion to a week of fine organs, music, and fellowship.

Saturday, June 29

But wait, there's a bit more. Just as a shorter and quieter encore can complete a more vigorous concert, so does a lighter optional coda often follow an intensive OHS convention. So on Saturday a smaller number signed up for a brief tour south of Burlington. The first stop was in the unique Round Church (now a museum) in Richmond, where **Demetri Sampas** successfully coaxed short pieces by Zeuner, Whitney, and Krebs from a rather strange little 19th-century chamber organ of anonymous parentage.

The next stop was in Vergennes, where in a well-chosen program of works by Bingham, Albright, Langlais, Yon, and Reger at the Methodist Church, Estey expert **Philip Stimmel** impressed us with what the (on paper) seemingly limited resources of a nine-rank **1927 Estey** were capable of in the hands of one who knows what can be done by judicious use of sub and super couplers.

Also in Vergennes is a pleasing one-manual **Hook organ of 1862** in St. Paul's Episcopal Church, where **Margaret Angelini** stepped a bit out of the expected box by proving it capable of three short pieces by Jongen, a reed organ *Service Prelude* by W. H. Clarke, and Daniel Pinkham's six *Versets* for



Detail of 1869 Derrick, Felgemaker & Co. at Shelburne Museum Meeting House

Small Organ, which indeed worked well on this small organ.

The final stop was the sprawling and impressive Shelburne Museum, where we had a leisurely time to wander around some of the exhibits and have lunch in its restaurant before the final program in the Meeting House, home of a small transplanted five-rank **Derrick, Felgemaker & Co. organ** of ca. 1869, where the OHS's current Executive Director, **James Weaver**, also slightly "out of the box," treated us to a varied program of short works by Stanley, Pachelbel, Merula, and Bach, closing with Domenico Zipoli's lively *Toccata all' Offertorio*.

All OHS members, whether attendees or not, received a copy of the impressively researched, written, and illustrated 234-page *Atlas*, with its detailed history of the organ in the State of Vermont. Non-members, including libraries and historical societies, may still obtain a copy from catalog@organsociety.org. In addition, the closing recital at St. Paul's Cathedral was digitally recorded, and has become available. ■

Barbara Owen holds degrees in organ and musicology from Westminster Choir College and Boston University. She is the author of numerous periodical and anthology articles, entries in The New Grove Dictionary of Music, and several books, including The Organ in New England, E. Power Biggs: Concert Organist, The Registration of Baroque Organ Music, The Organ Music of Johannes Brahms, and The Great Organ at Methuen. She has served the American Guild of Organists as regional councillor and chapter dean, is a past president of the Organ Historical Society, is a trustee of Methuen Memorial Music Hall, and is currently active as an organist, lecturer, and organ consultant.

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2014 E. POWER BIGGS FELLOWSHIP

HONORING A NOTABLE ADVOCATE FOR examining and understanding the pipe organ, this year's E. Power Biggs Fellows will attend the OHS 59th Annual Convention in the Finger Lakes Region of New York State, with headquarters in Syracuse, August 11–14, 2014. Hear and experience a wide variety of pipe organs in the company of professional musicians and enthusiasts.

The Fellowship includes a two-year membership in the OHS and covers these convention costs:

- ◆ Travel
- ◆ Meals
- ◆ Hotel
- ◆ Registration

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