

Pipe organs: What are they?

Organs are like a complicated set of whistles. If you've ever played with a whistle, you know the basics. There is a source for wind (your lungs in the case of the whistle, a blower in the case of the organ), then a place where the wind enters the instrument and finally an opening that "splits" the column of wind to create a sound.

Organ pipes take the materials of wood and metal and from there the glory of God in nature takes off. Organ builders add length to the pipes ("the whistles") and then shapes to those lengths. Some pipes are cylindrical and others are squared off. The length and width of each set of pipes take on mathematical proportions so that the lowest pipes of a certain shape match the highest ones. The narrower pipes have a more concentrated sound in general, while the wider ones are often sweeter.

Then the whole machine needs to work together so that a player at the keyboard can choose which sounds to use and which keys to press to make the lungs of the instrument, and the mouths of the pipes come to life. Understanding each sound on the organ takes years of study and practice for both organ builders and organists. The culture around the pipe organ and the music it can make has been around for centuries to the glory of God, and to move the hearts of listeners.

The organ you hear on Sundays - "The Andover"

In the mid-1970s at the cathedral, then organist Thomas Murray wanted the choir to sing from the chancel, rather than from the choir loft. The Andover pipe organ firm was contracted to install a mechanical-action organ at the front of the sanctuary, where an unused chamber was available at the left of the chancel. Although largely new mechanically, this organ employed pipework from the E & G.G. Hook organ, #355, built in 1865. In the nineteenth century, the Hook brothers headed a successful organ company based in Boston known for building fine instruments. The Hook organ #355 was salvaged from a then recently demolished nearby Swedenborgian Church.

What are some of the characteristics of the Andover organ in the front of the church?

If you look at the organ's console, you'll see three keyboards. The top one is called the *Swell* because all the pipes are located in a box with wooden shutters that open and close, and are operated by a pedal at the console. This particular swell box is useful because of the easy way the sounds get louder when the

swell shutters are opened. The sounds swell in volume, and then decrease when the shutters are closed.

The middle keyboard is called the *Great* and has more robust sounds. Those pipes are not enclosed. The bottom keyboard is silent because the pipes for that keyboard are only prepared for and not physically present at this time.

The organ pipes that are now in the Andover were beautifully crafted in 1865 when the Hook Brothers firm was in full swing. The sounds from those pipes range from warm and full to sweet and lithe. The 1,705 pipes of the Andover organ sound best when you are sitting in the chancel, because the organ chamber opens into the chancel. It was meant to play for the choir, which was sitting in the front. The Andover organ was never meant to support the whole congregation.

How is congregational singing meant to be supported at St. Paul's?

The organ currently in storage - "The Aeolian-Skinner"

In 1950, as part of a larger renovation of the worship space, the choir loft was retrofitted for the reception of a 3-keyboard, 5,466 pipe Aeolian-Skinner organ, employing 69 different sets of pipes known as "organ stops". This organ, Opus 1207, was designed by the firm's noted director, G. Donald Harrison. The cathedral's organist, George Faxon, dedicated it. Opus 1207 was a precedent-setting expression of Harrison's eclectic "American Classic" tonal philosophy. Harrison blended tonal elements from differing periods of music thus encouraging performance of organ music from the Baroque, Romantic and contemporary periods, as well as suitable accompaniment of choral music and congregational singing.

Recordings of this organ demonstrating G. Donald Harrison's tonal ideas can be heard on Vol. 1 of "Aeolian-Skinner Presents The King Of Instruments - The American Classic Organ," a 30-volume set documenting many Aeolian-Skinner organs. Though not attributed, one of the organists on the recording was Cathedral organist George Faxon, and one of the organs was Opus 1207, the organ at St. Paul's.

In the 2010s, after almost six decades of service, it became increasingly evident that the windchests and other components of Opus 1207 would soon require major maintenance beyond the regular tunings. But at the same time plans were afoot for another renovation of the building's interior, and to prevent potential damage, much of the pipework was removed to storage where they remain. Thus this organ is now silent.

Pipe organs at our cathedral: What is needed? What is next?

The sung prayer of the cathedral's congregations, including diocesan gatherings, and the repertoire of sacred music have each expanded tremendously in the last 100 years. While some of this expansion is well-supported by piano or other instrumentation, a good organ, in good repair, and appropriate to the space is still central to our life together and our vocation as a cathedral. A well-functioning instrument expands our capacity to host excellent worship in person and online using the breadth of resources of our Episcopal tradition (per our 2020 Strategic Plan).

For the short term, we hope to fund much-needed repairs to the Andover organ so that it can continue serving us while we explore long-term instrumentation possibilities.

The first phase of the Andover Restoration project will include a thorough cleaning of all the pipes, extensive work to the windchest, key action, and pedal division. The estimated cost of that work is \$150,000.

Further work on the Andover is planned. For more information, please contact Louise Munding at lmunding@diomass.org

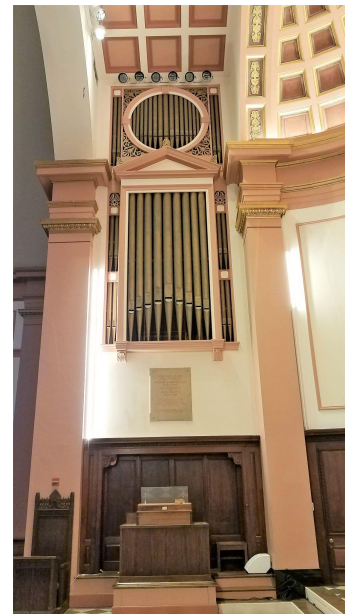
To donate to the Organ Restoration Fund, go to <https://www.stpaulboston.org/> and scroll down to the bottom and click the *Give* button. You will be directed to a Donation Page. On that page is a pull-down menu where you can direct your gift to the Organ Restoration Fund.

You may also use the QR code below to connect to the Organ Restoration Fund.



The Organs at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul

Aeolian-Skinner, Opus 1207 (1953)



Andover Organ Company Opus 77 (1976)/ E & G.G, Hook, #355 (1865)