

THE STORY OF WESTMINSTER'S PIPE ORGAN

Westminster Church is a Presbyterian congregation (PCUSA) organized in 1919, the product of the merger of three Albany churches: Second Presbyterian, Third Presbyterian, and State Street Presbyterian, whose 1863 building the present congregation now occupies. The church has a rich musical tradition dating back at least to the 1890s, when the position of Organist at the State Street Church was occupied by Ferdinand Dunkley, a member of the American Guild of Organists. Similarly, the history of Westminster's pipe organ is both remarkable and unique.

Walter M. Skinner (1866-1960) is considered by many to be the finest pipe-organ builder America has ever produced. His instruments are highly prized for their tonal beauty and exquisite workmanship. In 1929 Skinner installed his Opus 780, a four-manual instrument of 42 ranks, in Westminster Church after a fire the previous year destroyed the church's roof and interior, including its original 1863 Johnson organ. The Skinner organ remained in Westminster Church until 1976, when it was replaced by an electronic organ, due to the church's inability at the time to fund some much-needed repairs. Fortunately the Skinner was not lost, but was moved to the nearby home of church members Dr. Thomas and Anne Older, who preserved the instrument by installing it in their home while keeping it tonally intact. When the church's electronic instrument began to fail in the late 1990s, the Older's donated the Skinner back to the church, more than 20 years after it had been removed.

In 2000, Westminster Church engaged Austin Organs, Inc., of Hartford, Connecticut to refurbish and re-install the Skinner in its original chancel location, with the work being completed in May of 2003. The Chancel Organ was largely retained, the most significant alterations being a new 4-rank Mixture and 8' Trumpet added to the front. In addition, a 2' Piccolo replaces a 4' Unda Maris on the Choir, and a new Solo Cor Anglais and Cornet (the latter from the old Echo Organ) were added to the Chancel stoplist. The original console was repaired and rebuilt, placed on a moveable platform, and fitted with a computerized multiplex switching system for multi-level combination action.

One of the instrument's most striking features is its Austin 10-rank Antiphonal division situated in the rear gallery. In its casework designed by the noted British organ architect and author Stephen Bicknell, this division was added to the organ during the 2003 re-installation to help support congregational hymn-singing. The organ encompasses 52 ranks of pipes distributed over its six divisions. It is tuned and maintained by the L. A. Carver Company of East Greenbush, NY.

Since its return to the church, Skinner's Opus 780 has quickly achieved wide recognition throughout the organ world. Shortly after its first dedicatory recital, performed by John Weaver (then organist at Manhattan's Marble Presbyterian Church and head of the organ departments at both the Juilliard School and Curtis Institute of Music), the organ was prominently featured during the 2003 Region II Convention of the American Guild of Organists, given by David Hill, then Director of Music at St. John's College, Cambridge, England. The organ was also showcased by the Organ Historical Society during its 50th Anniversary National Convention in June of 2006, when James Murray, Organ Professor at Yale University, performed a recital on the organ during that convention. Praising the event in the international organ journal *The Diapason*, Murray praised it as "a great recital on a great

Chancel Organ by E. M. Skinner, Opus 780 (1929)

Instruction of Chancel Organ and New Antiphonal Organ by Austin Organs, Inc. (2003)
manual drawknob console

REGISTRATION

MANUALS

Bourdon (Ped.)
First Diapason
Second Diapason
Harmonic Flute
Tenth
Eleventh
Twelfth
Thirteenth
Fourteenth
Fifteenth
Sixteenth
Seventeenth
Eighteenth
Nineteenth
Twentieth
Twenty-first
Twenty-second
Twenty-third
Twenty-fourth
Twenty-fifth
Twenty-sixth
Twenty-seventh
Twenty-eighth
Twenty-ninth
Thirtieth
Thirty-first
Thirty-second
Thirty-third
Thirty-fourth
Thirty-fifth
Thirty-sixth
Thirty-seventh
Thirty-eighth
Thirty-ninth
Fortieth
Forty-first
Forty-second
Forty-third
Forty-fourth
Forty-fifth
Forty-sixth
Forty-seventh
Forty-eighth
Forty-ninth
Fiftieth

SWELL

Dulciana
Concert Flute
Dulciana
Soprano
Alto
Tenor
Bass
Tuba
Trumpet
Trombone
Clarinet
Saxophone
Drum
Cymbal
Tambourine
Triangle
Bells
Chimes
Tremulant

ANTIPHONAL

(unenclosed)
8' Open Diapason
8' Stopped Diapason
4' Octave
2' Super Octave
Mixture IV
8' Trumpet
16' Pedal Bourdon

SWELL

8' Diapason
8' Rohrflute
8' Salicional
8' Voix Celeste
8' Flute Celeste II
4. Octave
4' Flute Triangulaire
Mixture III
16' Waldhorn
8' Trumpet
8' Oboe d'Amore
8' Vox Humana
4' Clarion
Star Bells
Tremulant

SOLO

8' Harmonic Flute (Gt.)
8' Cello
8' Cello Celeste
8' French Horn
8' Cor Anglais
8' Tuba
4' Flute (Gt.)
Tremulant

PEDAL

32' Resultant
16' Diapason
16' Contra Bass
16' Bourdon
16' Dulciana
8' Octave
8' Cello
8' Gedeckt
8' Dulciana
16' Trombone
8' Trumpet
4' Clarion

COUPLERS

Gt-Ped 8'
Sw-Ped 8'
Ch-Ped 8'
Solo-Ped 8'
Ant-Ped 8'
Sw-Ped 4'
Sw-Gt 8'
Ch-Gt 8'
Solo-Gt 8'
Ant-Gt 8'
Sw-Ch 8'
Solo-Ch 8'
Ant-Ch 8'
Gt-Solo 8'
Ant-Solo 8'
Sw-Sw 16'
Sw-Sw 4'
Sw-Gt 16'
Sw-Gt 4'
Ch-Ch 16'
Ch-Ch 4'
Ch-Gt 16'
Ch-Gt 4'
Solo-Solo 16'
Solo-Solo 4'
Solo-Gt 16'
Solo-Gt 4'
Gt-Gt 4'

ACCESSORIES

Electrical Technical Systems combination action with 208 levels of memory
Programmable Crescendo and Sforzando (13 levels)
General combination pistons (Nos. 1-8 duplicated on toe studs)
Individual combination pistons per manual
Individual combination toe studs