

# Second Annual Church & Organ Tour

April 27, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

By Ross Stretton

In 1980, I was appointed organist and director of music at Queen Street Baptist Church in St. Catharines, a position I held for 18 years. In 1998, I was appointed organist and director of music at Lundy's Lane United Church in Niagara Falls. During those years, I conducted 23 organ and church tours throughout Ontario and New York State. These tours generated a lot of interest and I easily filled two buses for each fall tour and maintained a very long mailing and waiting list.

When I was appointed as organist and director of music at St. Paul's United Church in Oakville in 2010, I was strongly encouraged to restart these tours. In the spring of 2012, the congregation of St. Paul's toured four major churches in downtown Toronto, an experience of sights and sounds enjoyed by all that attended. We were warmly welcomed by the clergy and organists at Metropolitan United Church, Yorkminster Park Baptist Church, Timothy Eaton Memorial United Church, and St. Clement's Anglican Church.

On April 27, 2013, a lovely Saturday morning, one bus and twelve cars (approximately 80 people) set out for our second annual tour of Waterdown, Dundas, and Hamilton. This was made possible by the terrific support of members of the Hamilton RCCO who played in these churches.

The School Sisters of Notre Dame Chapel (built in 1956) is in Waterdown, in a beautiful countryside setting hidden away. The Yvonne Williams stained glass windows were beautiful as the morning sunlight came through. Organists and organ students had an opportunity to play the fine Casavant organ (Opus 2507—three manuals, 30 stops, 29 ranks, installed in 1959) in the gallery.

We then arrived at St. James' Anglican Church in Dundas. Our hosts were Chris Dawes, Alan and Dorothy Gregson, and



The Cathedral of Christ the King, Hamilton, Ontario, group photo

Richard Birney-Smith. The new Leslie Smith pipe organ was demonstrated by Richard—indeed a wonderful sound in this worship space. St. James was built in 1925 and the cornerstone was laid by the Bishop of Niagara at that time. The church was totally destroyed by fire in January 1978 and re-opened and dedicated in April 1980. An electronic organ had served the congregation up to the time of the arrival of the new organ. The new Leslie Smith organ (Opus 6) was installed at the front of the church in 2008, consisting of three manuals, 31 stops, and a total of 2,297 pipes. This organ originated as a 1913 Karn-Warren in the sanctuary of the now closed Church of St. James-the-Apostle in Hamilton. Although eleven of its voices are authentic to the original organ, and its matching Arts and Crafts style cases now house the Great and Solo divisions at the baptistery end of the church, with the exception of one pedal chest the entire mechanism is new and custom built for St. James. The pre-existing Karn voices have been augmented by the addition of both new and vintage pipework, including a rare free-reed Cor Anglais.

The unusual characteristic of the organ, inspired by St. James' famous acoustics, is its placement in four cases around the sanctuary: two at the baptistery (south end) and two at the chancel (north end).

Our next stop was the Cathedral of Christ the King, where our group was welcomed by Robert Corso, director of music, who gave us a guided tour. We were given an extensive and most interesting tour of the cathedral to appreciate the architecture and windows, and also a demonstration and short recital at the great Steinmeyer organ in the gallery. This organ (Opus 1570) was installed after the cathedral was completed in 1933. Built in Ottingen, Bavaria, it contains 85 ranks, 67 stops, and approximately 5,000 pipes. In 1990, a new four-manual console was installed by R. A. Denton & Son of Hamilton, Ontario, built by R. A. Colby, Johnson City, Tennessee (temporarily used by the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Utah during their organ console rebuild in the late 1980s).

Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Hamilton is the largest Presbyterian church in the region. The church was built in 1908, and on June 14 that year, when it opened, Casavant Opus 321 organ was already installed. The Echo division was added by Casavant in 1917, a new console was installed in 1950, and the organ was tonally revised and overhauled in 1982 and 1999 by Alan T. Jackson, Toronto, for Casavant Frères. In 2008, the console underwent solid-state conversion by Robert Hiller for Alan T. Jackson. In 2010, the Echo division was revised and cleaned by Robert Hiller for Alan T. Jackson. Paul Grimwood, director of music at Central, was host for our lunch break, followed by a mini-recital and organ demonstration.

Our tour group marveled at the array of beautiful stained glass windows at Melrose United Church. Rev. Liz Mackenzie welcomed everyone warmly. After a brief talk about the history of the church, some of the organists had a chance to play the fine Casavant organ (Opus 1360) in the chancel. This instrument consists of 38 stops, 42 ranks and 3,017 pipes. There were some alterations to the organ in 1978 by the Keates Organ Company of Acton, Ontario. At this point, our group sang that wonderful evening hymn, "The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended," with Andrew Adair at the organ. We thank David Buckley, director of music at Melrose, for allowing us the chance to see and play the organ.

Our day ended at Christ's Church Cathedral, with Michael Bloss as host.



Window at Central Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, Ontario



Christ's Church Cathedral, case of 3-manual Casavant



Leslie Smith console, St. James Anglican Church, Dundas, Ontario

A thrilling performance of Bach's "Jig Fugue" filled the chancel and nave from the console of this fine Casavant organ (Opus 1048).

Originally a Johnson organ, this Casavant was installed in 1924 with three manuals. It was rebuilt by the Dubay Organ Company of Burlington, Ontario, in 1962, and again in 1998 by Alan T. Jackson of Toronto. At that time a new principal chorus and mixtures were added to the Choir division. The organ now has 59 stops, 65 ranks, with 3,898 pipes. One of the members of the cathedral staff spoke about the history of the cathedral and the stained glass windows. We thank them both for their time and warm welcome.

Future tours are planned for the Niagara area in 2014, as well as tours to London, Buffalo, New York, Guelph-Elora, and Rochester, New York. ■

Photo credit: Doug McConnell  
Ross Stretton is organist and director of music, St. Paul's United Church, Oakville, Ontario, Canada.

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