

## The Pipe Organs of Seneca Presbyterian Church

By: Robert Moffat, Organist

A number of members and visitors have been interested in our pipe organ over the past several years and have asked about its history. I thought I might outline the history of the two pipe organs Seneca Presbyterian has had since 1918, as I understand it from documents in the archives, from things people have told me, and from my thirty years as organist here.

In 1916, shortly after the present sanctuary was built, inquiries about the building of a pipe organ were made to the M.P. Moller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland. Apparently the "Ladies Aid Society" planned to purchase the organ. On August 5, 1918, the church gave the Moller Company approval to begin building the organ for a base price of \$1,650.00. Moller recommended that the church consider several "upgrades" in the initial proposal. One was to equip the instrument with both hand-pumped bellows and the "newfangled" electrically-powered blower at an added cost of \$100.00; the other was to add a Viole Celeste stop and a Viola de Gamba to the Great Manual (duplexed as a Viola to the Swell) bringing the total cost to \$2,000.00. Apparently those items were approved. The church's correspondence with Moller seemed more concerned with the staining of the wood of the organ case than the tonal resources of the instrument, for a letter from Moller assures the organ committee that the wood would be stained as dark as oak can be stained. Most of Moller's correspondence was addressed to Mr. W. O. Hamilton who seems to have been chairman of the committee. The organ and case formed what is now the wall behind the central portion of the choir, and a door was provided in the case to the right of center. It must have appeared that the choir and organist entering the choir area were emerging from the organ!

In 1962, when the educational building was added, the choir/chancel area underwent a renovation that included enlarging the opening surrounding the choir and installing the Greco-Roman architrave framing that opening. I was told that the original plan at that time was to replace the 1918 organ with an electronic imitation, but at the last minute, the fortunate decision was made to purchase instead the present organ, a "double Artiste" pipe organ from the Moller company at a cost of just over \$10,000.00. The "Artiste" series was a "sideline" business to the custom-designed instruments made by Moller and offered small, one-size-fits-all pipe organs comparable in price to electronic imitations, prefinished and installed in cases at the factory. The 1962 installation consisted of two cases containing all of the pipes. Both cases were behind the grille at the rear of the choir area. Neither case faced into the sanctuary, and both cases were slightly below the bottom of the grille. Moreover, the choir loft floor was two and one-half feet higher than it is today, so when the choir stood, the sound of the organ was horribly muffled. That installation was the worst pipe organ installation I have ever seen.

In 1976, shortly before I was appointed organist, interest in improving the organ's effectiveness led to the formation of a Building Committee to study possible ways to renovate both choir area and organ, and soon after I became organist, the committee began meeting regularly, leading to a proposal to lower the choir loft floor, add the wings to the outer choir area, and reinstall the organ with an exposed Great division and a Swell in its own chamber behind the grille and elevated to the same height as the central part of the exposed Great. Also, to improve the instrument's design while keeping costs down, it was decided to add a two-rank mixture and a metal flute to the Great, move the wooden flute from the Great to the Swell, and complete the 16-Bourdon rank in the pedal. All of the specific organ renovations and the reinstallation cost less than \$6,000.00, and no money was used from the organ fund in hopes that at some point in the future the church could invest that money in an instrument designed and scaled for this building and this music program.

*Continued →  
on attached page*

## The Pipe Organs of Seneca Presbyterian Church (continued)

By: Robert Moffat, Organist

At the time of the 1962 renovations, the 1918 organ was given to Mrs. Edna Holleman who stored it in a building near her home. A few years ago, her daughter, Martha, asked that I examine those pipes to see whether or not any might be used in a new organ for Seneca Presbyterian. With the help of a number of choir members, we salvaged two complete ranks of wooden pedal pipes that are currently stored in the metal building behind the Chapter House. Hopefully, those pipes from the 1918 instrument can be restored and, along with the pipes in the present organ, incorporated into a new instrument designed and scaled for this church. The original bellows pump handle from 1918 was also rescued and, thanks to Biff Kennedy, has been cleaned and now hangs over the chalkboard in the choir room.

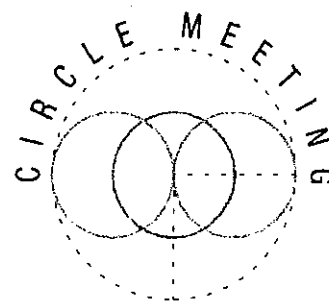
An interesting observation about all of this is that from 1918 to the present, the church has spent (excluding routine tuning and maintenance twice a year) \$18,000.00 to have a pipe organ in the sanctuary. Had the plans to get an electronic imitation in 1962 been carried out, by now the church would probably be on its fourth or fifth electronic and would more than likely have spent four or five times the amount that it actually has spent for organs! This church's organ history proves that pipe organs – even when poorly installed initially and limited in resources – are the best investment in the long run because they last.

### FEBRUARY CIRCLE MEETINGS

**Circle 1** – Monday, February 5, at 3:00 pm in the Sara Davis Stribling classroom. Remember to bring sugar for Collins Children's Home.

**Circle 2** – Tuesday, February 6, at 10:00 am in the Sara Davis Stribling classroom. Our Bible Study "In the Beginning" will be Lesson 6. Remember to bring food or money for the Golden Corner Food Bank.

**Circle 6** – Sunday, February 18, at the home of Patricia Henry at 6:00 p.m. Please call Patricia for directions (885-9774). Please bring items for the pregnancy center.



THANK YOU!      THANK YOU!      THANK YOU!

My Friends,

Thank you so much for the retirement reception and gift. I have made life-time friends with many of you and I thank you for that most of all. Thanks for sharing these thirty-four years with me.

---Judy

THANK YOU!      THANK YOU!      THANK YOU!