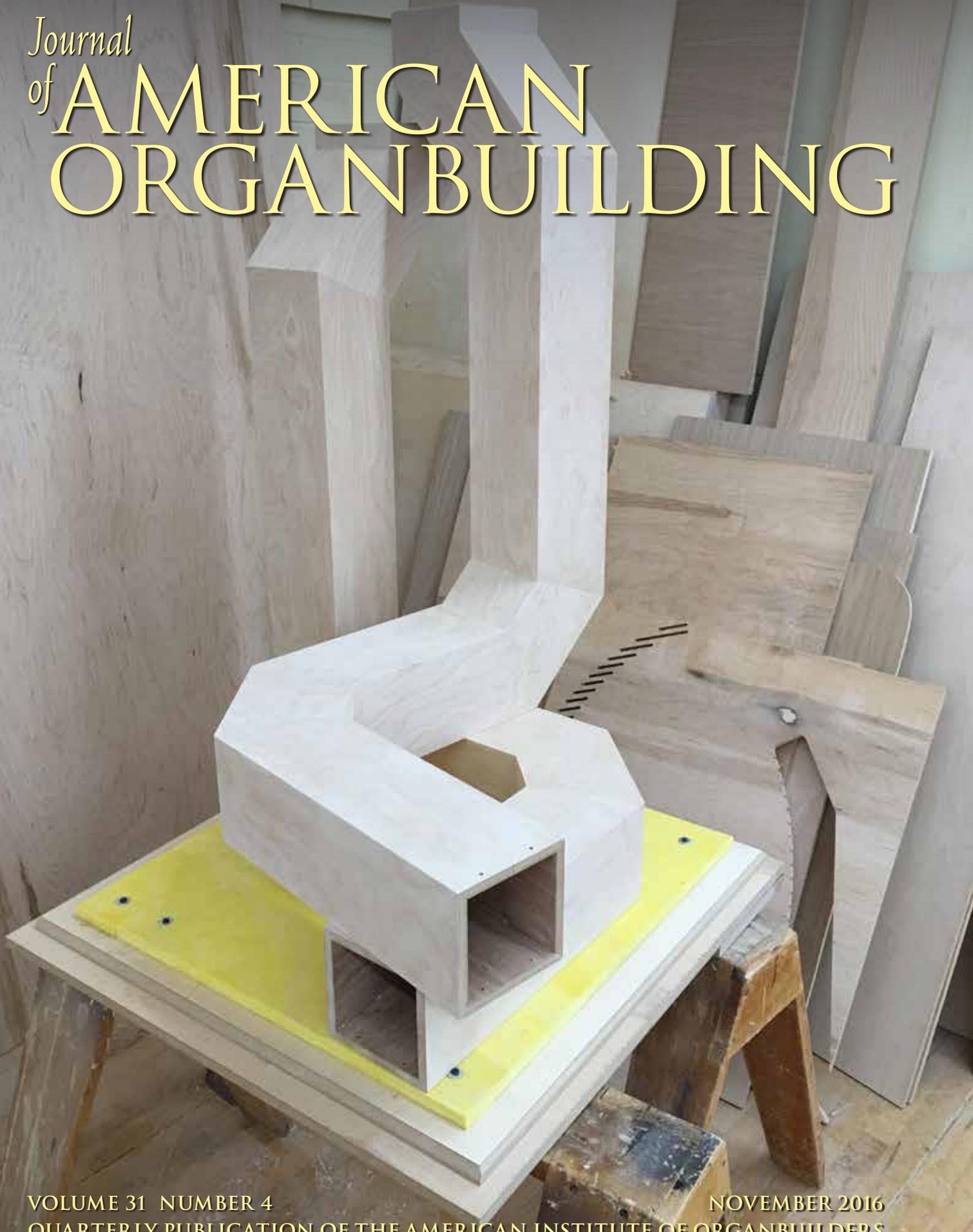


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# A Boston Convention Diary

by Chris Bowman

PHOTOS BY RYAN BOYLE

**F**RIDAY MORNING is here, and with it a sigh of relief for many of us who have been in the trenches all summer long working on projects, meeting new prospective clients, or just keeping up with standard maintenance contracts and carrying out day-to-day tasks. The sun is shining, Atlanta traffic is making me pull the few remaining hairs out of my head, and I am headed off to Boston for the annual AIO convention.

Those of you who came to Boston certainly have your own review, and we missed those of you who could not make it out this year. Unfortunately a review only allows a snapshot of the event, or at least a series of snapshots. And there's a lot to cover: between Saturday and Friday, we saw eighteen different organs as well as an organ shop. Prior to leaving, my dear friend and colleague Fred Bahr warned me to leave personal preference aside. I cannot thank him enough for that coaching, as it prepared me to try and see each instrument in its own unique light.

## SATURDAY

Eight o'clock came quickly, with four instruments on the menu in a variety of styles, starting due west of Boston and circling up to Gloucester some thirty-five miles northeast of the city center. First up was the 2006 Juget-Sinclair at Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church in Wellesley, an elegant twin-cased mechanical-action instrument that packed a lot of color into a little space. The cabinetry not only matches the sound very well, but also commands the attention of the room and is respectful of the altar space. In the tonal department, the Clarinette was surprisingly smooth.

A short trip from Wellesley to Concord brought us to Trinitarian Congregational Church, where the Noack Organ Company was in the final stages of installing their Opus 159. Though the instrument had some pipework yet to be installed, what we heard was nicely balanced.

Perhaps the most enjoyable demonstration for me was the 1935 Aeolian-Skinner at Groton School. I was actually moved to tears, and I was not alone; many left the demo talking about how long they had dreamed to hear this instrument. The organ was smooth in dynamics and color throughout each division.

Our final stops for the day were Christ Episcopal Church, home to Fisk's Opus 137 of 2012, and the birthplace of that instrument, the Fisk workshop in Gloucester, Massachusetts. In Andover, I was particularly enthralled with the color of the flutes, given the difference in tonal quality between the German-styled Great and the French-styled Swell. The Fisk shop was filled with curiosities, perhaps the most interesting on that day being a self-pumping bellows setup in the erecting room, for a chapel organ they are building for Cincinnati.



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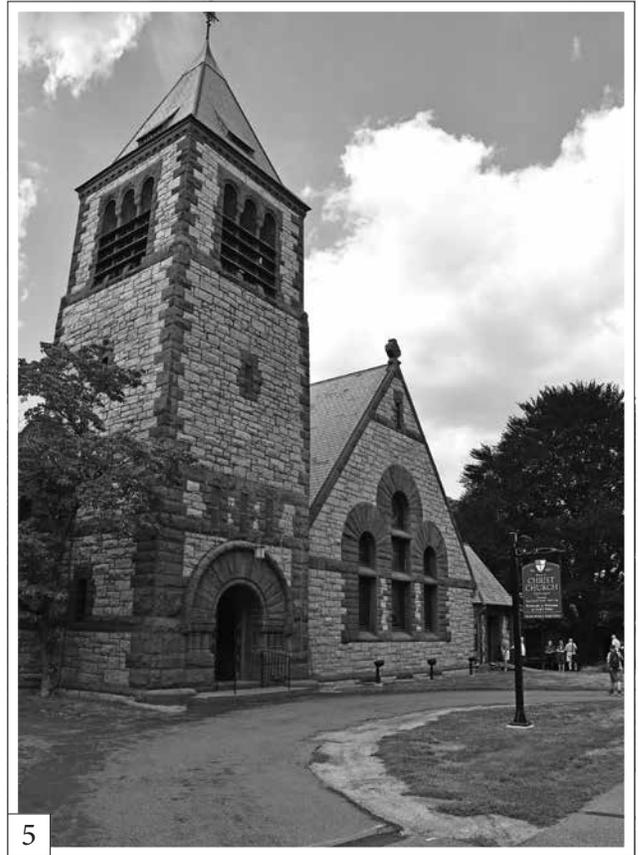
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[1] The 2006 Juget-Sinclair at Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church in Wellesley [2] Don Glover sits at the console of the new Noack at Trinitarian Congregational Church in Concord while talking to AIO President Phil Parkey [3] at the Fisk shop is seen the scale model for their new organ at Old Christ Church (Episcopal), Philadelphia [4] at the Fisk shop, an example of their rollerboards with large

access cutouts, described on page 13 [5] Christ Church (Episcopal), Andover, home to a 2012 Fisk which [6] Ryan Bartosiewicz tries out while Ryan Luckey looks on [7] Saint John's Chapel, Groton School, Groton, and its renowned 1935 Aeolian-Skinner, demonstrated by Frederick A. MacArthur

## SUNDAY

I distinctly remember bolting out of bed at 9:30 a.m., thinking I had overslept and was missing lectures! I dressed and scurried down to Dunkin' Donuts to enjoy the remainder of the brisk Boston morning [*Editor's note: brisk? it was 66°!*] before heading to the day's events.

Convention chair Matthew Bellocchio started us off by going into fascinating detail about Andover Organ Company's restoration of the 1892 Woodbury & Harris at Saint Mary's Church in Charlestown. What makes

this job so fascinating is not just its Barker Lever, but how that machinery is buried into a gallery floor. The photographs Matthew shared demonstrated what a tough job it must have been to restore those key- and stop-actions; kudos to the Andover crew. As my experience with tracker organs is miniscule, it was a great experience to be walked through the challenges of such a project.

Chris Nagorka followed, discussing the new format for the Tonal portion of the AIO Exam (which remains a hot topic among many of us and was

discussed some at the 35-and-Under Dinner). Chris also covered basic topics such as scaling, halving ratios, cut-ups, and voicing techniques.

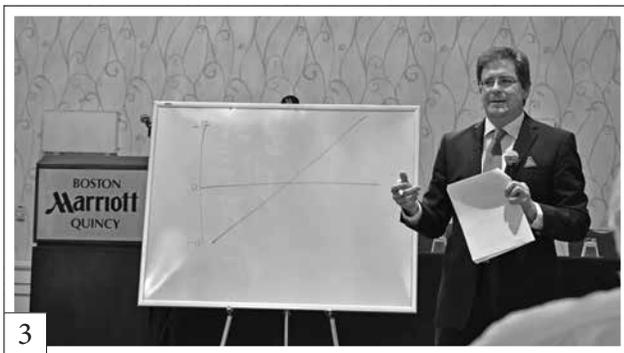
The evening concluded with a combined bus and trolley ride over to the Parish of All Saints, Ashmont, to hear a wonderful Evensong. The choir and the church's two organs captivated the entire room. As a voicer, this Evensong was an incredible inspiration to me. My goal is to help create instruments that will move others like those organs moved me, spiritually and emotionally.



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[1] The crew from Peterson Electro-Musical [2] Fred Oyster (left) having a serious moment with Joe Nichols [3] Chris Nagorka lecturing about tonal basics [4] AIO Board member William Catanesye (left), Joe Sloane and Scot Huntington at [5] the Parish of All Saints, Ashmont and the 1995 Fisk organ there

## MONDAY

Mondays have always been a stay-in day, and there was plenty to learn. It began with Barbara Owen and Jonathan Ambrosino walking us through noted Boston-area organbuilders from the 19th century to the present day. Among many takeaways from these lectures was having so well illustrated the links from one builder to the next: for example, how the Hooks employed Hutchings, who in turn brought on Skinner. It was an excellent example to see just how tightly knit a group we have been.

Tom Wood later discussed the development of early pneumatic windchests, from ventil chests, present-day slider chests and everything in between. The differences in styles created a nice dialogue between builders in this lecture, comparing strengths and weaknesses of the various designs presented. This lecture was a logical run up to Michael Fazio of Austin Organs, Inc. discussing maintenance of that company's Universal Air Chest design.

This year's Table Talks were a revolving door: four sessions lasting a half hour each. Among the topics were

tool sharpening; re-packing of wood pipe stoppers; a look into Philip Wirsching's tool chest; and a look into our own tool boxes. The smaller class size really allowed for one-on-one discussion with each presenter. It was a relief to know that at one point or another, we all were missing an item out of our tool kits to never leave home without.

Monday night concluded with the 35-and-Under Dinner, which I embraced even more than last year. Discussion at my end of the table centered around the AIO exams and future personal goals within the industry.



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[1] Martin Near demonstrating wood pipe stopper re-packing [2] Philip Wirsching's two pitch pipes in his tool chest [3] record attendance at the 35-and-Under lunch [4] Deneb Puchalski discusses tool sharpening [5] Barbara Owen at her lecture on 19th century Boston organbuilding [6] Scot Huntington and Joel Vanderzee (left) look at a scale sheet John Panning has unrolled at his Table Talk on the Wirsching tool chest

## TUESDAY

In the typical convention format, this day is usually one of adventure: getting into the buses and going to see recently completed work in the area. This journey proved to be *full* of adventure. We started the morning visiting the newly-renovated Hook-Hastings at Saint John's Seminary, across the street from Boston College on the western edge of Boston. The project, completed by Andover, was given a stop-by-stop demonstration, played by Seminary organist Janet Hunt and narrated by Andover voicer Don Glover. The full ensemble inspired a room packed with organbuilders to sing heartily in unison.

Fast-forward a little bit, and you find us in Brookline at United Parish, with its 1933 Aeolian-Skinner finished by Ernest Skinner. Easily my favorite demonstration by virtue of its cuteness, Peter Krasinski and Jonathan Ambrosino showed off the various

colors of this organ by performing an abridged "organ-ized" version of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*.

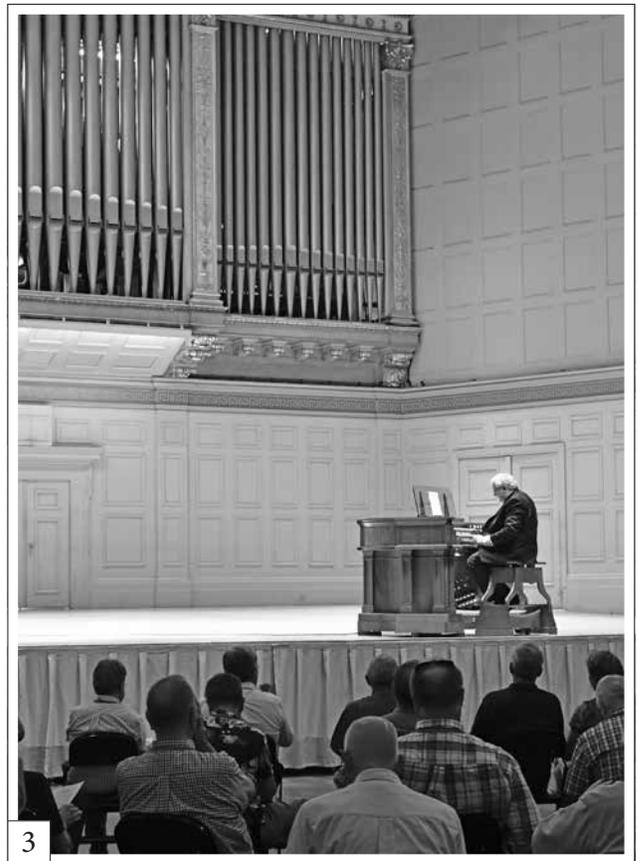
The afternoon brought us to renovated Aeolian-Skinner organs at Boston Symphony Hall and the First Church of Christ, Scientist (The Mother Church, Extension). Both of these instruments were extraordinary in body and presence. Katelyn Emerson's demonstration of the Mother Church organ really blew us away. Not in the least afraid of this 242-rank instrument, she commanded every bit of it with a careful ear and sense of musicality that puts her at the top of recitalists performing today.

Onward across the Charles River to Cambridge, where we had the pleasure of listening to the 2006 Schoenstein at Christ Church, Episcopal. The casework is handsome, but also misleading. A quick glance into the corner would make you believe that the organ was limited to just a few ranks, given

the apparent space. Glancing at the stoplist, I was amazed how the Schoenstein crew was able to pack a great deal of the instrument into a wall and around a corner: and it still sounded like it was in the room with you the whole time. Double expression shades also did the instrument wonders; at its softest, a mere whisper, but still full of life and color.

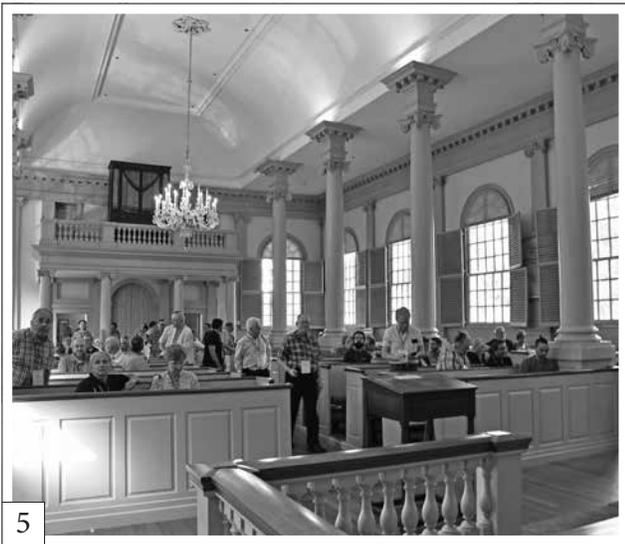
A short walk down the street brought us to Peter Sykes' collection of keyboard instruments at First Church. I'll be the first to admit that my knowledge of the instruments featured ended at the names of each kind, but I found the various timbres and temperaments fascinating in their own right.

We found dinner on our own in Harvard Square that night, and enjoyed being a "local," however briefly. A ska band was loading gear into the pub as I left; I wish we'd had the chance to listen. But, it was time to get on the bus and head back to the hotel.





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[1] The Chapel at Saint John's Seminary in Brighton [2] (from left) Joe Sloane, John Boody, Steve Dieck and Peter Krasinski at United Parish in Brookline with its 1933 Aeolian-Skinner [3] James David Christie demonstrates the 2004 Foley-Baker rebuild of the 1950 Aeolian-Skinner at Symphony Hall [4] The First Church of Christ, Extension (Mother Church) [5] Christ Church, Episcopal, Cambridge and [6] the console of the 2006 Schoenstein there [7] inside The Mother Church and its 243-rank 1952 Aeolian-Skinner, renovated in 1997 by Foley-Baker and Austin Organs, Inc.

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 Anthony Meloni ..... Rye, New York  
 Jonathan Rose ..... Logan, Utah  
 Michael Kraft ..... Salem, Massachusetts

#### UPGRADE TO REGULAR MEMBERSHIP

Ryan Bartosiewicz ..... Rochester, New Hampshire  
 Kevin Mathieu ..... Rindge, New Hampshire

#### ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP

Peter LaMaria ..... Providence, Rhode Island  
 James Kmon ..... Coventry, Rhode Island

#### AFFILIATE MEMBERSHIP

Joseph Olefirowicz ..... Nashua, New Hampshire

#### STUDENT MEMBERSHIP

Mason Hill ..... Newport News, Virginia

#### CORRESPONDENCE

*regarding the professional qualifications  
of nominees should be directed to*

Michael Lauffer, AIO Membership Committee  
 50 Hayden Avenue, Columbus, Ohio 43222  
 Michaellauffer@peeblesherzog.com  
*(please post "AIO membership" in the subject line)*

## WEDNESDAY

The convention came to a close, but not before another round of fantastic lectures. While I am not a business owner, I found the information presented by Michael Foley and Brooks Sullivan to be extremely valuable. Mike Foley relayed how he did marketing in the 1970s and '80s, and discussed general discipline for business conduct; Sullivan talked about modern marketing and business practices. Coming up in the industry, you learn success by following success; it was good of these men to share their experiences.

Fire suppression systems and humidification were covered next, the first in a lecture by Jon C. Jones, and the second in a panel discussion led by Sean O'Donnell and including Mike Foley, Joseph Dzeda and Jeff Weiler. This panel dealt with many pros and cons of various approaches, and brought forth considerable discussion from the audience. The day's final panel, led by Joseph Rotella on working with lead, provided valuable insight into shop safety and proper handling.

The closing banquet was nothing short of entertaining, thanks to Joe

Nichols' charming banter giving away prizes. It is always nice to see the group come together, smiling, drinking and enjoying each other's company. An impromptu organ performance by Jonathan Ortloff rounded off the evening in the best possible way, playing some jazz standards as supper ended and people said goodbyes. Finally, the group bid farewell to Steven Dieck, the outgoing president of C.B. Fisk, who in retirement is moving to Japan to be with his wife.



[1] Dave Beck (left) as Vanna White; Joe O'Donnell (center) as the lucky contestant; Joe Nichols (right) as Monty Hall



[2] Emcee Nichols handing out more banquet prizes to LouAnna Dyer as Katelyn Emerson (center) looks on

## THURSDAY AND FRIDAY

But wait...there's more! Call in the next ten minutes and you will receive a post-convention tour that was both exciting and relaxing. Our Thursday tour brought us to the behemoth of an instrument at Methuen Memorial Music Hall. I was unable to take my eyes off of the ornate case. Even after seeing pictures, it is wild to stand in front of the real thing. Our afternoon was spent at the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunkport, Maine. A box lunch, relaxing trolley ride through the surrounding area, and a tour of train restoration work was a nice break in the organ lineup. After that, we headed to Merrill Auditorium in Portland, Maine, which yielded a plethora of surprises.

The Kotzschmar Organ was full of color and had (quite literally) all the bells and whistles, which were masterfully demonstrated by municipal organist Ray Cornils. I had never heard a march played on an organ with percussions before — remarkable.

The final day included stops at several Boston churches, all within walking distance. A crisp, clear day made the time spent outside truly enjoyable, even marching up Beacon Hill to get across town. Six organs in all, in a variety of different flavors, were demonstrated: some old, some new, and some in the middle. The 1875 Hook and Hastings at Holy Cross Cathedral had a nice, warm fuzz about it that I've noticed to be

somewhat common for instruments of its vintage. Next up, Old South Church in Copley Square has a 115-rank organ, mostly Skinner, which matches the room both in sound and looks. I'm a sucker for percussions, and the demonstration included a rendition of *Dance of The Sugar Plum Fairies*, brought to life with the twinkle of harp under the melody. Two blocks away, Church of the Covenant is home to a rebuilt 1929 Welte-Tripp, pleasing in its color and effect. Principal chorus voicing was taken into careful consideration, providing the instrument with a range of attitudes, from calm to authoritative. After lunch, we walked a further two blocks to First Lutheran Church, which has a baroque-styled

instrument that handled its repertoire very well. I'm sure the 2000 Richards, Fowkes & Co. stands up to the might of a singing Lutheran congregation. Another Aeolian-Skinner was found at Church of the Advent, from 1936, altered over the years and now somewhat restored. Like many of its time, the differences in principal choruses really allowed for the instrument to speak to us as much as we sang to it. Our final stop, at Old West Church,

is home to a famous early Fisk from 1971. As demonstrated by John Robinson, the organ played Bach very well and filled the space nicely.

Looking back through my notes, I'm noticing that as I grow in the industry, I am moving away from the approach of "like" or "dislike" and instead moving towards an appreciation for what can be done and is being done by various builders, maintenance companies, and restoration firms. One

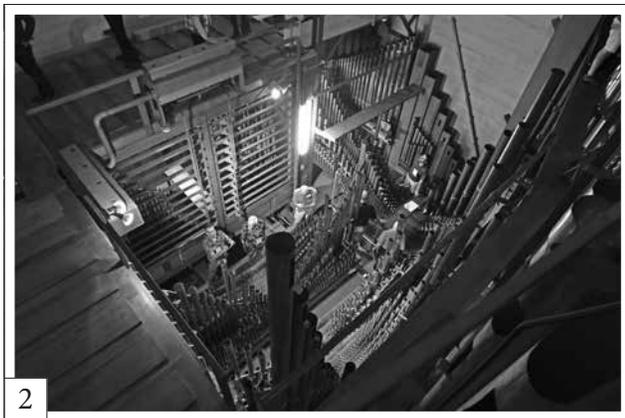
of the downsides of living in a city like Atlanta is the lack of perspective. We have, of course, many good organs, but most are from World War II forward. So, to be an apprentice organbuilder and come to a city with a history like Boston's, both for the nation and as a hub of organbuilding, was a true eye-opener. And, not just that; it was truly a pleasure to be among everyone. I look forward to what awaits us all in Fort Collins next year.



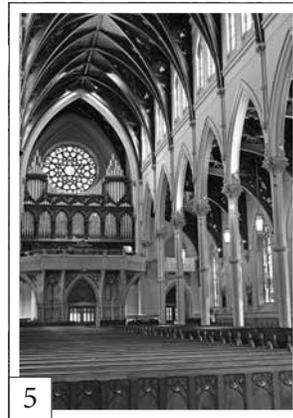
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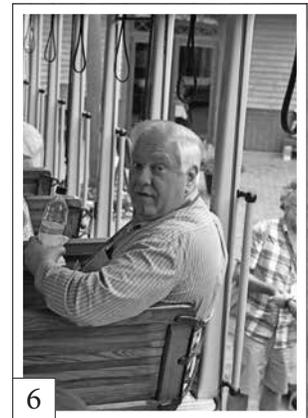
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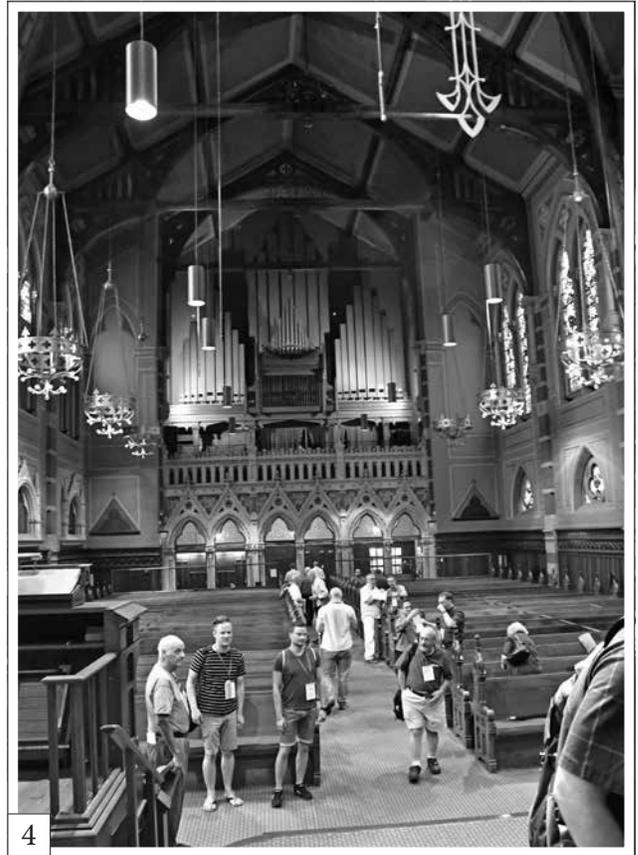
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[1] Douglas Major demonstrating the 1863 Walcker/1947 Aeolian-Skinner at Methuen Memorial Music Hall which [2] the group later explored in depth [3] the Kotzschmar organ at Merrill Auditorium, Portland, Maine [4] Thomas Murray demonstrating the [5] 1875 Hook & Hastings

at Holy Cross Cathedral, Boston [6] William Czelusniak in a state of rapturous ecstasy aboard a vintage trolley car at [7] the Seashore Trolley Museum in Kennebunk, Maine



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Boston organs: [1] The console and right-hand chamber screen of the 1929 Welte-Tripp/2000 Austin at Church of the Covenant [2] the 2000/2010 Richards, Fowkes & Co. at First Lutheran Church [3] the 1971 Fisk at Old West Church [4] the relocated and much-rebuilt 1921 Skinner

at Old South Church [5] Church of the Advent, with its 1883 Hutchings-Plaisted façade housing the 1936 Aeolian-Skinner