

## **E. & G. G. Hook, opus 342 (1864)**

### **First Baptist Church, Burlington, VT**

The pipe organ installed in the First Baptist Church in Burlington, Vermont, late in 1864, and in constant use since that time, was the 342nd organ built by Elias and George Greenleaf Hook of Tremont St., Boston, Massachusetts, indisputably the foremost organ builders in all New England for several decades.

The Hook brothers, sons of cabinet-maker William Hook, were apprenticed to Boston's first full-time organ builder, William Goodrich. They established their own firm in 1827, in a small shop behind their father's house in Salem, on the same site where Alexander Graham Bell did his first experiments on the telephone, many years later. The first organ they built is still in existence, a six-stop chamber organ which may still be played in the Essex Institute in Salem.

In 1831, the Hooks set up a new shop in the north end of Boston and quickly rose to the top of their profession in the golden age of organ building in America. By the 1850's, their brilliant reeds and diapason choruses and their fine and light actions, were receiving high praise, and their instruments could be found in most of the major Boston churches. In 1853, they built a large factory on Tremont Street, near Roxbury Crossing, where they remained into the 1880's. That is where the First Baptist Church organ was built.

Despite the size to which their firm grew, the Hook brothers kept in close touch with every instrument built in their shop during their lifetime. Elias was the business head of the firm, dealing with customers and suppliers, and probably doing some of the design work. George was more likely to be found in the shop. He was head voicer, in charge of all tonal matters. Both were musical. George, in particular, excelled as an organist, serving for many years in that capacity at Tremont Temple in Boston, where there was a large, fine Hook organ, unfortunately destroyed by fire.

Frank Hastings came to work for the Hooks in 1855, advancing rapidly to a responsible position in the design department. In 1872, he became a full partner, the name being changed to E. & G. G. Hook & Hastings. After the death of the brothers in 1880 and 1881, it became simply Hook & Hastings. A new, larger factory was built in Kendal Green (now Weston) in the 1880's, but, after the death of Hastings, business declined because of lack of talented leadership. The firm received a mortal blow during the Great Depression, and went out of business in 1936. At that time, it enjoyed the distinction of being the oldest organ-building company in America.

According to a report in the *Daily Free Press* of Tuesday, November 1, 1864, "The new organ manufactured by the Messrs. Hook of Boston for the Baptist Society in this place has been erected in their new and elegant place of worship, under the superintendence of Mr. F. H. Hastings, agent for the makers, and was tried in the presence of a small audience of amateurs and music lovers, on Friday evening. The performers were Mssrs.

Gerrish of Boston, S. C. Moore and Proctor of this place, who displayed the quality and powers of the instrument very fully and skillfully. The universal verdict was that the organ is a superior one, of unusual power for its size, and combining many valuable new mechanical arrangements." The stop list was given, and the location, at the left and rear of the pulpit, "the sound finding full egress through large gratings of wire gauze."

Six years later, the First Baptist Church was enlarged by one-half its original length, and the pulpit and choir area was deepened to 28 feet and widened by three feet. The organ was moved to the extreme west end (where it stands today) and the choir loft was made large enough to accomodate twenty singers. The woodwork of the church, previously white, was "neatly grained to imitate chestnut and black walnut, corresponding with the pews." A new organ was installed, consisting of "rich and handsome pilasters, with carved capitals, bearing a heavy entablature, the spaces between the pilasters being filled with screens of arabesque openwork, all of black walnut." (*Daily Free Press and Times*, Dec. 24, 1870)

In 1884, the Church celebrated its semi-centennial, with a renovation of both exterior and interior, this time in elaborate frescoing by "the celebrated Fogazi of New York City." In keeping with the rich colors and patterns of the walls and ceiling, the carved work of the organ case was gilded, "bringing into bold relief the symbols of the cross, crown, anchor, goblet and other Christian tokens."

It appears that when the next major redecoration occurred in 1905, some of the ornamentation was removed, and the natural black walnut finish restored. Red cloth draperies filled the spaces between the pilasters.

Then, when the chancel was widened and remodelled as part of the renovation in 1961-1962, the traditional organ case gave way to a modern treatment with an acoustical screen across the entire wall, surmounted by a white cross. At this time, the organ was renovated by Elroy Hewitt, who had worked with the Estey Organ Company from 1917 to 1956. He was assisted in rebuilding this organ by John Wessel, who came to the United States from the Netherlands in 1954, and was associated with Mr. Hewitt in an independent organ building enterprise in Brattleboro, Vermont. After Mr. Hewitt's death, Mr. Wessel continued building organs and tuning throughout New England. The organ was played for the first time after renovation at a rededication service February 11, 1962, and an organ recital the same afternoon.

This organ has two manuals and pedal keyboard, 982 pipes in 19 ranks, and 17 speaking stops. Small in comparison with the many giants in the pipe organ family, it is well balanced, with two reed ranks and a Mixture to lend brightness and a solid foundation of diapasons for hymn playing. It is a "tracker" organ, which means that there are no electric components. The only electricity used is to power the blower, replacing the hand lever which was operated by reluctant blower boys in the early years. A knob labelled "Bellows Signal" still remains on the console, but an electric switch now activates a steady flow of air from a blower located in the basement. When the keys are depressed, a direct wooden action (including "trackers") conveys the impulse from the

fingers and feet of the organist to open and close the pallets which admit wind to the pipes. The pipes vary in size from metal ones smaller than a pencil to square, wooden pipes up to 16 feet long. The Swell organ is above and to the rear, enclosed in a box with shutters which open and close by means of a pedal to produce expression. The Great organ is at the front of the chamber and the Pedale pipes at the sides.

The 100th anniversary of this organ was commemorated by an organ recital, on January 17, 1965, given by Miss Barbara Owen of Pigeon Cove, Massachusetts.

During 1995-96 the first complete restoration of the instrument was carried out by Stephen J. Russell of Cambridgeport, Vermont. Damage had been done to the instrument because of settling of the floor beneath its 10,000 lb. weight. The floor was rebuilt and specially-engineered trusses were installed by the men of the church. The organ restoration involved repair or replacement of trackers and leather nuts, regulating and repair of all pipes, releathering of the bellows, and most challenging of all, the fabrication of new wind trunks and a curtain valve. It was discovered that portions of the organ had been substantially rearranged when it was moved in 1870. Surprisingly, some of the original workmanship and materials, particularly the lumber, were found to be of very uneven quality, a situation uncommon for the Hook firm. Mr. Russell speculated that the pressures of manufacture during the Civil War may have contributed to this. The organ was reinstalled in August, 1996, and first played on Sept. 29, when members of the congregation were encouraged to try hand-pumping.

The First Baptist Church organ has survived the era when organ building deteriorated into experimentation with orchestral effects and mechanical gadgets, and when many of the fine, old instruments were scrapped to make way for the more imitative "romantic" machines. It survived the craze for electrification which often resulted in unreliable action. And in recent years, it has survived the pressure for electronic substitutes. Fortunately, congregations have come to recognize the high degree of tonal and mechanical quality which characterizes the mid-nineteenth century organs and have taken steps to preserve and protect them. The First Baptist Church is privileged to have one of the oldest and best-preserved of these historic instruments in Vermont. There is no reason to suppose that it cannot continue to serve to the glory of God for many years to come.

Mrs. Katharine E. Dopp, Organist  
January 17, 1965  
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About the Dopp Organ Recital Series.

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**STOPLIST**

**GREAT**

Open Diapason		8 ft.	56 pipes
Dulciana	TC	8 ft.	44 pipes
Melodia	TC	8 ft.	44 pipes
Stopped Diapason Bass		8 ft.	12 pipes
Octave		4 ft.	56 pipes
Twelfth		2 2/3 ft.	56 pipes
Fifteenth		2 ft.	56 pipes
Mixture		III ranks	168 pipes
Trumpet		8 ft.	56 pipes

**SWELL**

Bourdon Treble	TC	16 ft.	44 pipes
Bourdon Bass		16 ft.	12 pipes
Open Diapason	TC	8 ft.	44 pipes
Keraulophon	TC	8 ft.	44 pipes
Stopped Diapason Treble	TC	8 ft.	44 pipes
Stopped Diapason Bass		8 ft.	12 pipes
Octave		4 ft.	56 pipes
Flauto Traverso		4 ft.	56 pipes
Oboe	TC	8 ft.	44 pipes
Bassoon		8 ft.	12 pipes
Tremulant			

**PEDALE**

Double Open Diapason		16 ft.	27 pipes
Double Stopped Diapason		16 ft.	27 pipes

**COUPLERS**

Swell to Great  
 Great to Pedale  
 Swell to Pedale  
 Pedale Check  
 Bellows Signal

Unlabeled single-acting combination pedals for Great

Piano and Forte