

New life for Trinity Church Organ



The Trinity Church has been significant to New York City's history for over 300 years. In 1696, Governor Benjamin Fletcher approved the purchase of land in Lower Manhattan by the Church of England community for construction of a new church. The parish received its charter from King William III on 6th May, 1697.

The third and current Trinity Church began construction in 1839 and was finished in 1846. When the Episcopal Bishop of New York consecrated Trinity

Church on Ascension Day, 1st May 1846, its soaring Gothic Revival spire, surmounted by a gilded cross, dominated the skyline of lower Manhattan. Trinity was a welcoming beacon for ships sailing into New York Harbor.

Trinity Church held the title of tallest building in the United States until 1869, when it was surpassed by St. Michael's Church, Old Town, Chicago. At the time of its completion, Trinity's 86 metre spire and cross comprised the highest point in New York. It was surpassed in 1883 by the stone tower of the Brooklyn Bridge, and in 1890 by the New York World Building.

Trinity Church was home to ten pipe organs, each successively grander than its predecessor, the most recent being the 120 stops 161 rank Aeolian-Skinner Opus

408D pipe organ which had been at Trinity in Lower Manhattan for almost 80 years. Then came September 11, 2001. Debris and dust from the World Trade Center ruined the organ at Trinity Church, just a few blocks from Ground Zero in New York.

"The first thing I wanted to do was get back in the building, because I left the instrument on," said Owen Burdick, Trinity's music director at the time. When he was finally able to get back



into the church, he was stunned. “The dust was so pervasive throughout the instrument, so pervasive throughout the building...Everything, everything was covered.” Burdick says the dust was thick and oily. It seeped into every inch of the 5,000 pipe organ.

The Aeolian Skinner organ in Trinity Church, dating from 1923, somehow survived the conflagration without significant structural damage. But its contents were coated with dust, grime and debris, and, with its intricate inner workings and its use of degradable materials, like leather, the damage proved disabling. The organ lay idle and dismantled for several years as the church awaited an insurance settlement. The cost to restore the organ at the time was said to be \$US1.2 million. Finally, realizing that reconstruction or the manufacture of a new pipe organ could take another five years, Trinity Wall Street, which was in constant use, arrived at a radical solution: the manufacture of a new digital

instrument by Marshall & Ogletree, with sampled sound reproduced by ranks of large speakers, 74 in all, hidden behind dummy pipes in the choir loft. The instrument was developed quickly, at a cost of \$300,000. The digital organ was a masterpiece of its kind, but never satisfied the musical requirements of the church.

A decade later, the congregation of Johns Creek United Methodist Church, 45 km north of Atlanta, Georgia, decided that it was time to build a dedicated worship space. It was always accepted as fact that this space, the sanctuary, would be furnished with the finest pipe organ obtainable. An organ committee was formed and began the process of selecting an organ builder. Trips were made to hear organs in Georgia and neighbouring states. A builder was selected and a design formulated. However the funding of an organ project was not slated for the initial phase of building due to the cost. Nathan Frank, the church’s music director, says the recession meant church officials couldn’t afford a new organ. “And so they had to kind of backtrack and decide what would be best for the congregation as far as financially. And so they starting doing some investigating,” he said.

They reached out to see if there was a used instrument they could buy. That’s when they found out about the Trinity organ. The New York church gave it to Johns Creek as a gift. The Georgia church came up with over a million dollars to have the Casavant Organ



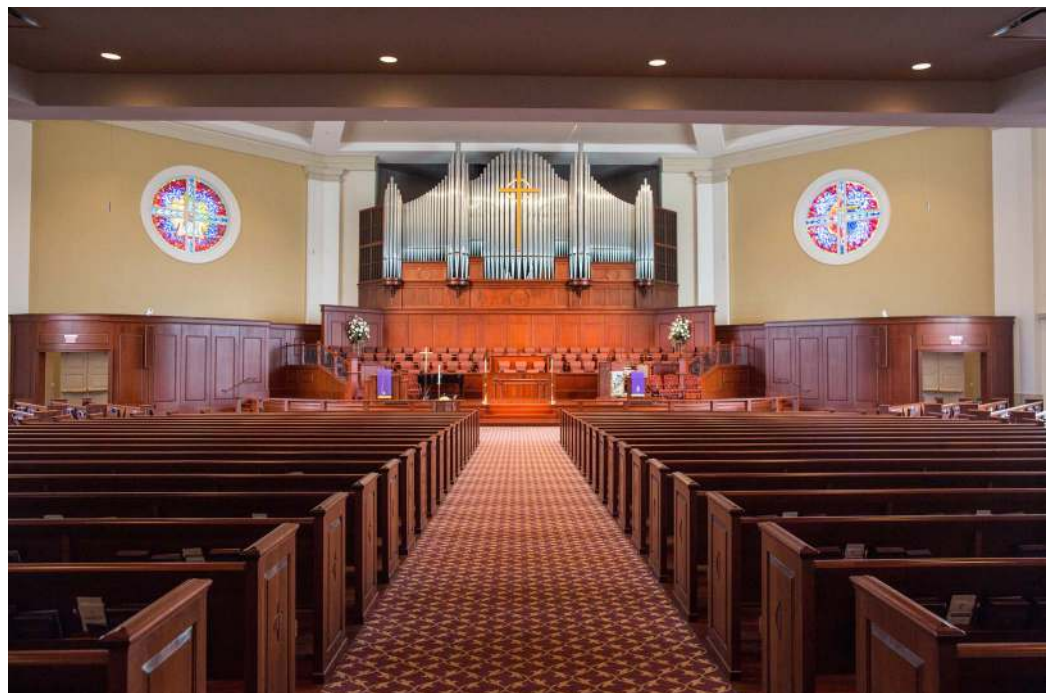
the organ installation began in August 2016. Following the installation was a two month process of voicing the instrument to its new home, completed on November 18. The organ was played again in

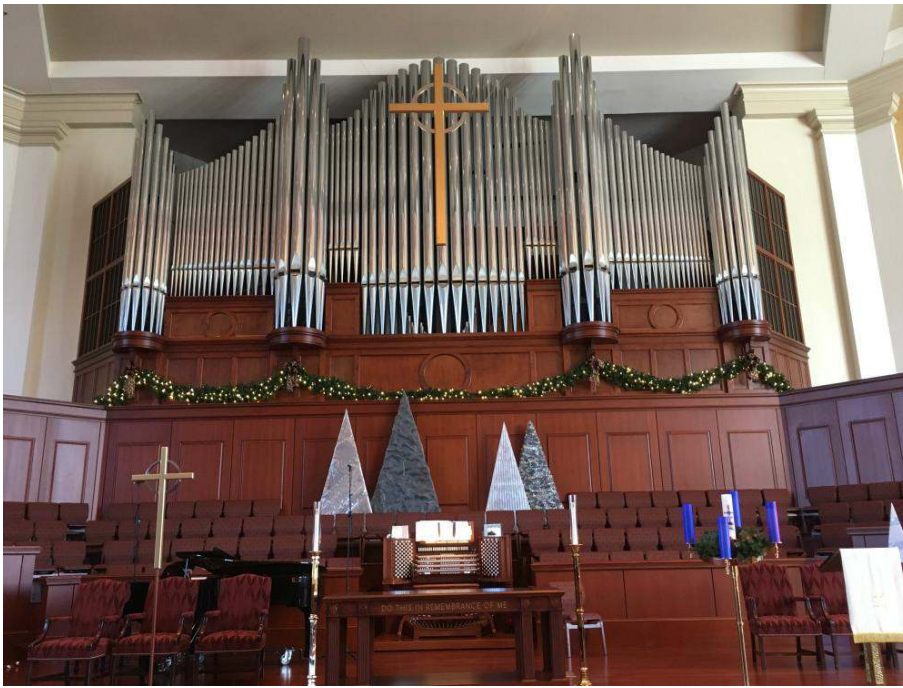
Company, Saint-Hyacinthe, Canada, clean and restore it.

The organ was removed from Trinity Church's storage space, inventoried and catalogued. The cost for this phase of the project was approximately \$US90,000. During this process, it was determined that it would cost in excess of \$1 million to restore and reinstall the organ. However, the cost to build a new pipe organ of the same quality and size would be over \$US4 million. The savings to the church would be significant.

That took a year, then another three months to install and tune it. The organ restoration is now complete and

worship for the first time in 15 years on the morning of November 20, followed by a formal re-dedication on December 4. The opportunity to salvage a victim of the horrific attacks on the World Trade Center and use it in praise to God is unique. What a tremendous tribute to those who lost their lives as a result of the events on that horrible day. It is





Johns Creek United Methodist Church's distinct honor and privilege to lovingly restore and reuse this magnificent instrument of praise.

It looks beautiful. The steel pipes soar above the sanctuary, a large cross suspended in front of them. The organ is a perfect fit for this church. The pipes look spotless. Not one bit of their age or the damage from September 11 shows. Frank says he's glad his church finally has an organ, but he says the instrument's restoration sends a broader message.

"I think on a global level, this instrument is an image and a representation of the American spirit coming from the

ashes. I think this instrument is a beautiful display of what we can do coming out of a tragic event," he said.

Frank says his congregation calls the organ an instrument of peace.

Meantime, in Trinity Church itself, the 15-year-old digital instrument will be replaced by an \$US8 million pipe organ now being made by Rosales Organ Builders, Los

Angeles, California, which also produced the acclaimed example in Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles. The Rosales is projected to be in place by April 2021.

Bruce Duncan

Information compiled from numerous sources:
The New York Times
John's Creek United Methodist Church
GPB News
Other internet sources

