

A History of the Organs of Christ Church Cathedral, Houston



Sources:

Christ Church Cathedral Archives — Texas Room, Houston Public Library (Central)
= CCCA

A Happy Worldly Abode, Marguerite Johnston = AHWA

Mr. Nelson Barden of Boston, MA

Mr. George Nelson of Seattle, WA = GN

Building I

- Frame school building — “They bought the school, moved it on to the property, fitted it up, and in late April, 1845, at last had a Sunday service in a room of their own possession.”... “This frame building was never considered by anyone a church – but rather a lecture room to become school room. It was never consecrated” AHWA, pg. 55

Instrument: ?

Building II

- First brick building facing Fannin Street; Construction started in 1845; Consecrated May 9, 1847

Instrument: Melodeon (keyboard), pg 59 AHWA

- “...that first church...before it was completed ... had ...a melodeon which cost \$150...The subscription for the melodeon at \$5 to \$20 amounts — the \$20 was from E. B. Nichols, \$10 each from the rector and such faithfuls as Gray, Andrews, Van Alstyne, Ruthven, Mrs. Reily and William Marsh Rice — is not dated.” AHWA, pg. 58–59
- *“A melodeon (also known as a cabinet organ or American organ) is a type of 19th century reed organ with a foot-operated vacuum bellows, and a piano keyboard. It differs from the related harmonium, which uses a pressure bellows. Melodeons were manufactured in the United States from 1846 until the Civil War era. While it was sometimes used as a substitute for the pipe organ in small churches, it was primarily used in domestic settings.”*
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melodeon_\(organ\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melodeon_(organ)); a type of accordion uses the same name (!)
- 1858 — “Doctor Dalzell (The Rev. W. T. D. Dalzell, the rector) raised money among the parishioners to buy an organ to replace the old melodeon.” AHWA, pg. 84

Building III

- Facing Texas Avenue; Cornerstone laid September 7, 1859; Ground broken for enlargement of church, May 26, 1876; Renovations completed Easter Day, April 1, 1877

Instrument: Hutchings-Plaisted Organ Co., Boston — Opus # 59, 1876 GN

- Two manuals — 19 ranks – 20 stops — tracker key action
- Located left side of church — picture available

Discrepancy:

- The organ builder’s opus date is 1876.
- The rector, John Julyan Clemens writes: “The new organ was opened on the 7th of August, 1875 ... Mr. C. H. Preston of Boston acting as organist. It was a day never to be forgotten. Laus Deo!”
- However, in the same year, 1875, the rector’s notes also state that a new organ was ordered costing \$2,500.000. In the rector’s notes there is inserted a small clipping of a printed article from *Texas Correspondence of*

The Church Journal and Messenger. This clipping also states that an organ has been ordered, not “opened.” CCCA

- The rector writes in 1876: “When I first became rector of this parish two years ago ... There was no organ worthy of the name ... today we can say that all this is changed . . an organ was built ... whose tones you heard today, which cost nearly as much as the original debt. This also, thanks to our good women, was paid for as soon as delivered ...” AHWO, pg. 105

Building IV

- Cornerstone laid Good Friday, 1893; current nave
- March 22, 1938 — Fire burns up to the rood screen, destroying chancel

Instrument: Hutchings-Plaisted Organ

- Organ moved from 1859 building to right front corner of 1893 building GN; picture available
- February 6, 1895 Vestry Minutes “... The Junior Warden was requested to look after leaks in organ room ...” CCCA
- Vestry Minutes, January 8, 1907: “Mr. Sears, for the Music Committee, reported that no progress had been made towards sale of the old organ, or repairs of Chimes.” CCCA

Instrument: Hutchings-Votey Organ GN

- In 1907, “The Vestry signed a contract with the Hutchins-Votey Organ Company of Boston to pay \$6,475 for a new organ. It would have a water motor with a minimum pressure of 20 pounds. F. M. Law was agent for the company in Houston.” AHWA, pg. 142
- “At some point, pre-1908, it was rebuilt by Hutchings with tubular action, possibly with move, more likely later.” GN
- “The Hutchings served Christ Church until the installation of Aeolian-Skinner #976 in 1938.” GN

Instrument: Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company, Boston – Opus # 976, 1938

- Bid from Henry Pilcher’s Sons Organ Co. for a new organ; Pilcher suggests retaining some of the Hutching-Votey organ pipework, May 25, 1936 CCCA

- “... We have an old organ in Christ Church. It is has an antiquated action, and at times becomes most difficult. It has, however, a beautiful tone, particularly the diapason. It is an old Hutchings, and was installed about thirty years ago ... this in itself presents an open field to a musician who could come here and make the proper contacts and develop an interest for the creation and development of a new instrument.” From letter dated June 16, 1937, written by The Rev. James Pernette DeWolfe, Rector, to Edward B. “Ned” Gammons, future Organist and Choirmaster. CCCA
- Contract from Aeolian-Skinner Organ Co. dated January 24, 1938. CCCA
- Hutchings-Votey Organ destroyed in fire of March 22, 1938
- Letter from Aeolian-Skinner Co. confirming receipt of contract, dated April 12, 1938 CCCA
- Schematics of both the Cathedral and the Chapel organs are in the Texas Room Cathedral Archives.
- Dedication of organ in morning and evening services, March 12, 1939
- Tonal revisions by Aeolian-Skinner, 1957 and 1967
- Revisions, additions, and mechanical work by William Stephens, and the companies of Visser & Associates and Schoenstein & Co.,1980-1990
- Addition of Schantz antiphonal organ, 1991
- Revisions and additions by John Hendriksen, 1993
- Renovations, 2012–2013, by Richard Houghten, Manuel Rosales, and Joe Sloane:
 - New 4 manual console
 - New pipe work: Great Trombas 16’ 8’ 4’; Sw. Contre Trompette 16’; Larigot 1 1/3’
 - SSL updated
 - 6 digital voices added by Walker
 - Existing pipes cleaned, repaired and regulated: Sw. Trompette and Hautbois 8’, Clairon 4’
 - Various ranks relocated for new pipes
 - Major wind leaks repaired
 - Expression shades and engines restored to original working condition; louvers removed, cleaned and rebushed
 - New reservoir for Pedal Posaune
 - Chambers completely cleaned
 - Maintenance and tuning access improvement with new lighting
 - Tremulants repaired and regulated

The above does not represent a full detail of work.