

National Library opens exhibition on organs and organists

An exhibition tracing the role played by the organ in the history of music in Canada opened at the National Library of Canada in Ottawa on May 17.

Pipes and Pedals: Chronicles of Canadian Organs and Organists traces the evolution of the organ in Canada and the careers of Canadian organists and organ builders.

The exhibition covers the period from the first century of European settlement, when several organs were imported from Europe, through to the early eighteenth century, when there is evidence of some repairing and building taking place locally, and up to the second half of the nineteenth century when the demands for organs by churches or by individuals had increased to such a degree that organ building was a relatively important industry in eastern Canada. The exhibit also documents contemporary organists and organ builders.

One entire section of the exhibition is devoted to the Royal Canadian College of Organists, which this year will hold its biennial congress in Ottawa. Since its formation in 1909 as the Canadian Guild of Organists, this institution has played a major role in establishing standards of excellence for Canadian organists throughout their careers.

Organ building trade

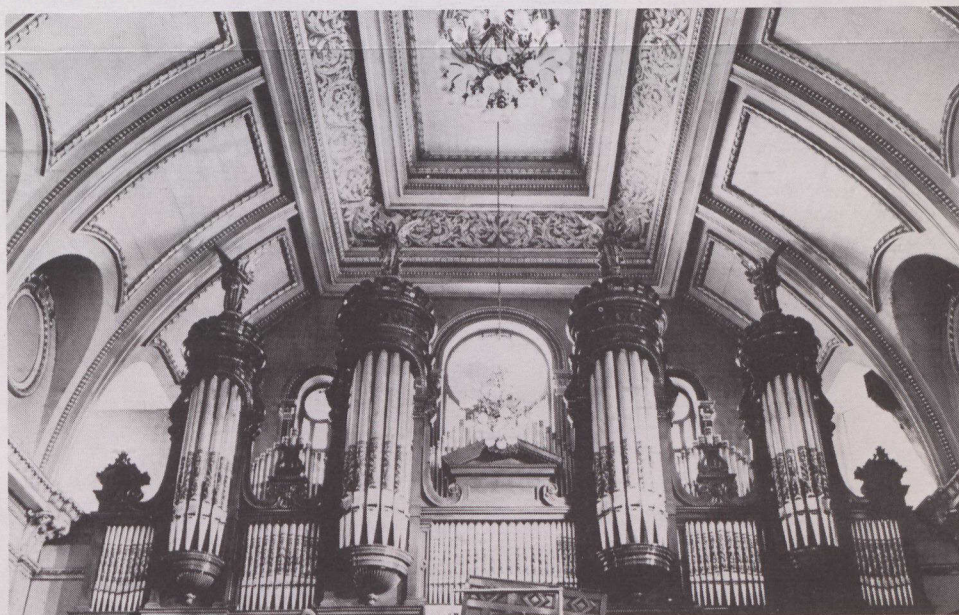
The organ building trade in Canada started only in the nineteenth century. A barrel from one of the two barrel organs constructed by Richard Coates (1778-



Pipe organ built about 1830.

1868) for the Children of Peace sect in Sharon, Ontario, in the 1820s — one of which survives, as does a manual instrument — is included in the exhibit. For comparison, there is on display a pipe organ built by the cabinet-makers Blythe and Kennedy in Bytown (Ottawa) in the 1830s. From this time on, manufacturers in Quebec specialized in pipe organs, whereas manufacturers in Ontario later specialized in reed organs.

Several documents in the exhibit highlight the career of Joseph Casavant (1807-1874), the first Canadian-born organ builder of professional standing, and that of the company of Casavant Brothers.



Casavant organ installed in the Church of Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Montreal in 1911.

This firm continues to manufacture organs at the original location. By the end of the nineteenth century, some of its pipe organs were installed at Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes (1880) and Notre-Dame (1890) in Montreal, at the chapel of the Saint-Hyacinthe Seminary (1884), and at the Catholic basilica in Ottawa (1892), as well as at several locations in the United States.

In Ontario, organ building was concentrated in the southwestern part of the province, especially in Toronto. There was also some activity in London, Woodstock and Preston. Reed organs were being widely produced by W. Bell and Company (founded in 1864 in Guelph), R.S. Williams (founded in 1854 in Toronto) and the Dominion Organ and Piano Company (founded in 1872 in Oshawa and moved in 1873 to Bowmanville) among them. In the Maritimes, the following individual craftsmen or firms were active: Watson Duchemin in Charlottetown, James Hepburn in Pictou, Nova Scotia, John Bath Reed in Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, and Landry & Son and Peter Organ Co. in Saint John. West of Ontario, however, most organs were ordered from Casavant or imported from the United States or England.

The first Canadian-born organist known by name was Louis Jolliet (1645-1700), the explorer, who played and taught in Quebec. In addition to biographical notes on Jean Girard (1696-1765), a Montreal organist, mention is made of early practitioners in Quebec and Ontario.

The late nineteenth century witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of organists and in published organ music. However, it witnessed as well the beginning of separate organ traditions for French and English Canada. In French Canada, the talent was basically indigenous but studied with the great French masters. French Canadians, like Romain-Octave Pelletier (1843-1927), who taught Alphonse Lavallée-Smith (1873-1912) and Omer Létourneau (1891-), were also well-known teachers. On the other hand, English-Canada preferred to import talent rather than develop it at home. Charles A.E. Harriss (1862-1929) in Ottawa and Montreal and Healey Willan (1880-1968) in Toronto were born and trained in England, although they eventually looked on Canada as their adopted country.

Perhaps the most renowned organist produced by Canada was Lynnwood Farnam (1885-1930). According to the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, "he was counted among the great interpreters,