

In Memoriam: Stephen Stoot
1881-1959



It was with great sadness that his friends learned of Stephen Stoot's passing on October 8, 1959. His place in the organ-building world was a large one; he was privileged to know and to count among his friends many of the greatest names in the art. With his thorough training as an apprentice, the considerable experience he gained from his work and the constant search for learning which characterized his reading, it was inevitable that he should command the respect of organ builder and organist alike, for these saw in him not only the perfectly trained craftsman, but the artist as well. Stephen Stoot played the organ better than many who call themselves organists but he was always modest about his accomplishment and preferred to keep it a secret.

He was born in Truro, Cornwall, on December 3, 1881. His formal schooling was complete when he was fourteen, though his search for knowledge lasted all his life. He became well versed not only in his chosen field, but also in that of astronomy and physics. He loved the challenge of mathematics, and the many strange relationships that numbers exhibit. He read the Bible, and could quote from it extensively and well. His use of the English language was precise and colourful; he studied the etymology of words, and the shades of meaning between synonyms.

As a youth of fourteen he was apprenticed to Heard & Son, organ builders in Truro. His apprenticeship was thorough—in those days when machinery was seldom found in an organ builder's shop, he learned to use all of the hand tools of the trade—and forever felt a little contempt for those who called themselves

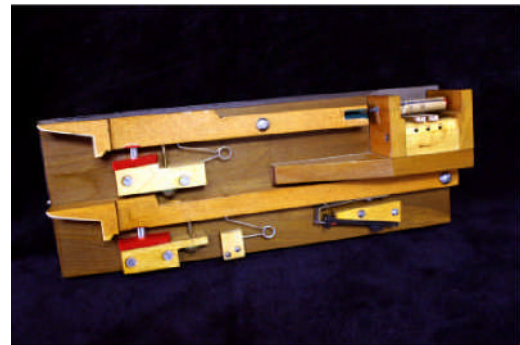
“organ men” and had never worked “ at the bench”. He was not only a voicer and finisher, but also a very capable mechanic, and his inventions and improvements did much to build up the reputation of his employers.



After 1910, four years after his marriage to Beatrice Roskelley, Stephen Stoot decided to seek his fortune overseas, and found employment with Charles Viner of Buffalo, N.Y. Here, for several years, he worked in the small shop at various jobs, and assisted in maintenance and tuning of organs in the Buffalo area. In 1916, he was to begin his long association with the Casavant firm, first at their plant in South Haven, Michigan, and later at Saint Hyacinthe.

He soon grew to greater and greater responsibility in the firm; his skill as a technician was much in demand; he sold organs and later finished them; he became particularly well-known in Toronto where he presided over the finishing of many of the largest instruments. On the death of Claver Casavant in 1933, he took over the technical direction of the firm and continued the same tonal traditions the Casavants had shaped.

Many jobs devolved on Stephen Stoot during the years he spent with Casavant; in addition to his normal duties as Technical Director, which meant the scaling of organs, the supervision of voicing and basic policy on tonal matters, he was one of the firm’s best salesmen and ambassadors of good will. He solved many a ticklish mechanical problem and left reams of carefully penned drawings of various mechanisms he had devised or improved. Shoddy work was anathema to him, and he was in large part responsible for the high standards maintained by the firm after the Casavant brothers died. He was made a director of the firm in 1938.



Traveling model used to show the difference between the roller-relay key contact mechanism invented by Stephen Stoot in 1915 (top) with the under key contact block frequently used by other builders.

In 1956 he retired from active duty, but continued as Director and Technical Advisor. Stephen Stoot had a prodigious memory—it never failed to astound those who knew him, --whether he applied it to recalling the name of an obscure organist whose organ he had tuned some forty years earlier, or the stop list of an organ visited in Europe with Sam Casavant, or humorous anecdotes and stories by the score which he seemed to have for every occasion.



Stephen Stoot's work speaks more clearly than any printed description and will be the greatest memorial any man could have. In hundreds of churches, organs he brought to life will speak their prayer in the voice he gave them. May they long continue.

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