

Casavant Frères



Toronto, Ontario – The Royal York Hotel

Five manuals and pedals, 84 stops, 111 ranks
Detached drawknob console, compass 61/32
Electro-pneumatic action
Opus 1312, 1929
Photographs: Casavant Frères Archives

The Royal York Hotel was constructed between 1927 and 1929 and was, at the time of its completion, the largest hotel in the British Empire and the only building in Canada to have elevators. Modern in every way, its convention suite occupied the entire second floor level of the twenty-seven-story building and included a hall that could seat 1500 people. In this room, in large chambers behind curtained tone openings at the back and sides of the stage, Casavant Frères installed the then largest organ in Canada and the only instrument in the Dominion to have five manuals.



Postcard from 1929

When the Royal York Hotel was opened on June 11, 1929, the focus of attention that morning was in the Concert Hall where was situated what was described as “a mammoth Organ, the largest and finest in Canada, and one of the largest in the world.” The new Casavant organ had 5 manuals, 108 speaking stops and 7,304

pipes. A few months later, the Great Depression struck and the organ was little used for many years. In the 1930's however, it was heard regularly on Sunday evenings. To this day, the "mammoth pipe organ" weighing 50 tons is mentioned in hotel advertising.



Photograph of the console taken in the Casavant workshop prior to its installation in Toronto

In addition to convention use, it was not uncommon at this time for hotel auditoriums to be the center for concert activity for communities. For example, the Grand Hotel in Saint-Hyacinthe was the location for performances by artists such as pianist Philippe Entremont and contralto Maureen Forrester. Dr. Harvey Alexander Robb was the organist for the Royal York Hotel and, according to the September 14, 1929 *Musical Courier* published in New York, performed a recital for the joint meeting of the National Association of Organists and the Canadian College of Organists held in Toronto that year. Dr. Robb was a dentist who appeared as a recitalist on both the piano and organ, also presenting concerts of light classics and popular song of the day with his wife, soprano Willa Helson as well as accompanying silent films on pipe organs installed in some movie theatres in Toronto. Prior to taking the position of Director at the Western Ontario Conservatory of Music in London, Ontario, in 1938, he presented popular weekly organ recitals on the Royal York instrument.

The instrument is of a classical design and therefore is more of a concert organ than a theatre organ regardless of the presence of the percussion stops in the Orchestral and Pedal divisions. All manual stops are independent, the only extensions or borrowing being in the Pedal. Stephen Stoot, who had to work under difficult conditions brought about by last-minute construction work on the building, directed the tonal finishing. Because of the noise created by other workers still on site during the day, they had to work at night even after the hotel was open for guests. On August 3, 1929 he wrote to the Casavant brothers.

We have been working under grave difficulties all the week but I hope to have all the flue work completed by tonight. ... The Hall is far from being quiet. ...Next week from Monday until Friday there are conventions being held, so we can only have the Hall at night. I suppose the sleepers in the rooms over the Hall will begin to grumble when they hear me working on the reeds.

Claver Casavant, who was 74 years old at the time, journeyed to Toronto to verify the final tonal work on the instrument.



Claver Casavant at the console of the Royal York Hotel organ in 1929

The organ was used and maintained through the early 1970's until a change in the hotel management led to the dismantling of the console in 1973. At this point the history of the instrument becomes unclear as the owners discussed selling the organ while efforts were underway by various individuals on both sides of the border to preserve it, perhaps in a new location. Eventually the organ was sold to a private individual and parts were installed in 1989 at First Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi. Unfortunately, the complete instrument is no longer extant.

Great Organ

Double Open Diapason	16
Contra Clarabella	16
Open Diapason I	8
Open Diapason II	8
Open Diapason III	8
Hohl Flöte	8
Rohr Flöte	8
Dolce	8
Quint	5-1/3
Octave	4
Principal	4
Flûte harmonique	4
Flûte d'Amour	4
Twelfth	2-2/3
Fifteenth	2
Mixture III (12, 15, 17)	2-2/3
Harmonics V (15, 17, 19, ^b 21, 22)	2
Contra Tromba	16
Tromba	8
Octave Tromba	4
Harp (Orchestral Organ)	
Chimes (Orchestral Organ)	

Swell Organ

Contra Geigen	16
Bourdon	16
Open Diapason	8
Geigen	8
Clarabella	8
Stopped Diapason	8
Viola da Gamba	8
Salicional	8
Voix Celeste (CC)	8
Octave	4
Flauto Traverso	4
Superoctave	2
Mixture IV (12, 15, 19, 22)	2-2/3
Cornet V (1, 8, 12, 15, 17)	8
Doublet Trumpet	16
Trumpet	8
Oboe	8
Vox humana	8
Clarion	4
Tremulant	
Harp (Orchestral Organ)	
Chimes (Orchestral Organ)	

Choir Organ

Contra Dulciana	16
Open Diapason	8
Melodia	8
Spitz Flöte	8
Flûte Céleste (CC)	8
Dulciana	8
Unda Maris (CC)	8
Dulcet	4
Lieblich Flöte	4
Nazard	2-2/3
Harmonic Piccolo	2
Tierce	1-3/5
Dulciana Mixture IV (12, 17, 19, 22)	2-2/3
Contra Fagotto	16
Trumpet	8
Clarinet	8
Clarion	4
Tremulant	
Harp (Orchestral Organ)	
Chimes (Orchestral Organ)	

Orchestral Organ

Contra Gamba	16
Gross Gamba	8
Gamba Céleste (CC)	8
Gross Flöte	8
Quintadena	8
Viole d'Orchestre	8
Viole Céleste (CC)	8
Octave Viol	4
Concert Flute	4
Cornet de Violes III (10, 12, 15)	3-1/5
Bassoon	16
French Horn	8
Orchestral Oboe	8
Cor Anglais	8
Tremulant	
Harp	
Harp Sub	
Xylophone	
Chimes	
Castanets	

Bombarde Organ

Stentorphone	8
Mixture VII (1, 5, 8, 12, 15, 19, 22)	8
Trombone	16
Trompette harmonique	8
Tuba Sonora	8
Quint Horn	5-1/3
Octave Tuba	4
Tuba Mirabilis (Unenclosed)	8

Pedal Organ

Double Open Diapason (Ext.) ¹	32
Open Diapason I	16
Open Diapason II (Great Open)	16
Open Diapason III (Great Clarabella)	16
Violone	16
Gamba (Orchestral Organ)	16
Bourdon I	16
Dulciana (Choir Organ)	16
Gedeckt (Swell Organ)	16
Quint	10-2/3
Octave (Ext. Open Diapason I)	8
Cello (Ext. Violone)	8
Stopped Flute (Ext. Bourdon I)	8
Octave Quint (Ext.)	5-1/3
Superoctave (Ext. Octave)	4
Mixture IV (15, 17, 19, 22)	2
Contra Bombarde (Ext.)	32
Bombarde	16
Trombone (Orchestral Organ)	16
Bassoon (Orchestral Organ)	16
Tromba (Ext. Bombarde)	8
Clarion (Ext. Tromba)	4
Bass Drum	
Snare Drum	
Timpani	
Timpani Roll	
Chimes (Orchestral Organ)	

¹ A twelve note extension of Open Diapason I consisting of 7 open pipes plus 5 quints.