

SAINT MICHAEL'S CHURCH ARCHIVES
MARBLEHEAD, MASSACHUSETTS

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH HISTORICAL STUDIES
MARBLEHEAD, MASSACHUSETTS

Number 1

September 1975

Organs and Organists of St. Michael's Church

By

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ORGANS AND ORGANISTS OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

By ROBERT L. HOWIE, JR.

On Christmas Eve in 1974 a new pipe organ was heard in St. Michael's Church for the first time in fifty-four years. The dedication of this two manual, twenty-stop instrument on Candlemas 1975 marked the culmination of two years of building by C.B. Fisk in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Although the parish celebrated the restoration of an early nineteenth century case from a previous church organ to enclose the Fisk instrument, the history of organs at St. Michael's actually began in 1754.

In November of that year St. Michael's received a small chamber organ, apparently as a gift, from St. Peter's Church in Salem. This so-called "Clarke" organ had been in use at St. Peter's since 1743, but was replaced in 1754 by an organ made by Thomas Johnston in Boston.¹

There is no mention of this accession by St. Michael's in any surviving records. The first mention of an organ is not until three years later, in April, 1757, when the Vestry authorized a committee "to treat with Mr. Jacob Wilmore about tuning and playing upon the Organ."²

The probable location of this instrument was in the small southern gallery opposite the pulpit, a feature of the original 1714 edifice. The organ, a small instrument of one manual and probably no more than five or six stops, is not specifically mentioned again. We do know, however, that Mr. Wilmore remained as organist until April of 1762, a tenure during which he had received £ 4 "Lawfull money" each year. That April the Vestry voted to retain the services of "M^r John Horn Organist for the year Ensuing and be

¹"In 1743, John Clarke, Esq., imported an organ for the Church, the first to be set up in the town, and John Young was engaged to put it in place. The cost of the organ was £ 380, a generous part of which was paid by Mr. Clarke." Harriet S. Tapley, *St. Peter's Church Before the Revolution*, Salem, 1944, p. 27. Henry K. Oliver has written that after St. Peter's acquired the Johnston organ the parish "presented its old one to the Episcopal Parish of St. Michael's in Marblehead." *Organist's Quarterly Journal and Review*, April, 1876.

²*Saint Michael's Church Records: 1716-1784*, transcribed by Myles Standish, Boston, 1943, p. 62. Jacob Wilmore, sometimes Wellmore, was awarded £ 4 for his services in 1758.

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paid him Thirty pounds a year a Sallery."³ Captain John Wormsted received £ 4 for being organist in 1765.

In March of 1767 the following action was taken by the Vestry:

- Voted that a Committee of three men be chosen to purchase Two pews in the Gallery one of Peter Jayne and one of Miss Nichollson in Order to Enlarge the Organ Loft
- Voted that Messrs John Road, Jun^r Tho^s Lewis & Sam^l White be a Committee for that purpose
- Voted that the same Committee be Appointed to Build an Organ loft in the Gallery for the Receiving of the New Organ at the Expense of the proprieters of the Said Church.⁴

In April it was further voted for "James Poor to Keep order in the Gallery & Blow y^e Bellows of Organ with a Sallery of four dollars P Ann."⁵ A recently discovered bill sheds some light on the instrument being prepared:

The Curch St^t Michals in Marblehead

| | | | |
|------------------|--|-----|------|
| 1768 | to fitting the parts of an Organ | £ | |
| Ap ^{ll} | togeahter & Making Some pipes | 40- | 0. 0 |
| June | & puting the same up in the Church | | |
| | to fitting an other Stop such was | | |
| | taken out of the Old Organ | 2 | 0 0 |
| | to adding a half stop | | |
| | to cafh paid M ^r Harlly for Tuneing | | |
| | the Organ | 3 | 12 0 |
| | | 47. | 2 0 |

³*Ibid.*, p. 69. One year later in April, 1763, it was voted to give "John Hohn Organist four pounds Salery" (p. 71). This is the same "Horn" that received £ 30 in 1762. The reduction may have been caused by Hohn's simultaneous employment as organist elsewhere. In 1766 he was organist at both St. Peter's and St. Michael's, receiving £ 6.18.0 for playing 46 days at St. Peter's in addition to his £ 4 salary from St. Michael's. Tapley cites Hohn as being resident in Marblehead, and it may be that he assisted Samuel Blyth, Salem's famed portrait artist, who was another organist at St. Peter's in 1766. In St. Michael's records he is referred to as "Honn" in references subsequent to 1766. In 1767 his salary was increased by £ 1, for a total of £ 5 per annum.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 76. This is conclusive evidence of a gallery and organ loft in 1754, when the instrument here referred to was installed.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 86.

by Cafh fee of M^r Sandery
As Fo^r receipt given Him 3- 12 0⁶

Thus a new organ was installed in St. Michael's in April of 1768, probably similar in design and size to the Clarke instrument. Prior to the Revolution, men like Gilbert Deblois of Boston were importing numerous small chamber organs, and it is likely that this was such an import. The Clarke organ was probably retired and placed in the back of the gallery.

In March, 1769, the Vestry voted that "the Old organ be given to M^r Tho^s Porter for y^e consideration of his service as Clerk to the Church for three years."⁷ The "Old organ" here referred to is the "New Organ" of 1768, and it becomes apparent in the following resolution of April, 1769, that the instrument was destined for a short life: "Resolv'd The sum of Three pounds be paid M^r John Honn for his service 4 M^o before y^e year was out owing to y^e Organs being unfitt for use."⁸ St. Michael's second organ, then, lasted not even a year, and consequently was disposed of as a gift to the retiring Clerk.

A letter to the Vestry recently brought to light informs us that a third organ was set up in St. Michael's late in 1769:

Salem Nov^r 6 1769

Gentlemen

I thought to have been with you in perfon this Evening. but being somewhat indifpofed could not venture out so far in the evening air Should be glad that you would take into your confideration the affair betwixt us with regard to the Organ - I have not as yet received any thing for all my trouble & Expence except £ 2 70 3 of M^r Sanders wich I gave to Mr Hartly for tuning it - wich by the way I was not oblidged to do for my Agreement I was to put it in tune, knowing my Self in Sufficient for Y^t

⁶This note was brought to light in August 1975, and forms part of a cache of eighteenth century letters in the possession of the church. These appear never to have been unwrapped, and is here printed for the first time. "Mr. Harlly" is probably George Harland Hartley, organist of King's Chapel, Boston.

⁷Standish, *Records*, p. 91.

⁸*Ibid.*

Purpofe as to you not liking the Organ, or not knowing whofe it is, or where it came from &c &c it makes nothing to the purpofe – you do know that I did the work & that I put it up there by the order & with the afsiftance of the Committy & your own Reafon will tell you that I ought to be paid –

.....

in the mean time I am Gentlemen

Youser
Mafcolle Williams

More is known about the provenance of this third organ. Early in 1770 St. Peter's purchased an instrument from Gilbert Deblois for £ 75. The Deblois organ replaced the Johnston organ in use there since 1754, and the latter presumably came to St. Michael's.⁹ St. Peter's was apparently without an organ for a few months as they did not receive the Deblois instrument until 1770, and the Johnston organ was received by St. Michael's prior to November, 1769. It was Mascolle Williams then that transferred this old organ to St. Michael's. A reply to Mr. Williams letter was immediately forthcoming:

Mr. Mascoll Williams Marblehead Nov^r 6, 1769

Sir

The committee of S^t Michaels Church in Marblehead have rec^d your letter of this days date, respecting y^e Organ sett up in s^d Church— They look on the Organ as private property & Therefore not within Their power to Act upon, its true y^e Proprietors of y^e Church choose a Committee to receive it of the subscribers & to prepare a p[]ace for it, but not to receive it of M^r Williams but from the proprietors of it, and as they have not made a surrender of Their property, your letter, . . . would have been more properly directed to y^e propeietors of it or their

⁹ An anonymous author in the *New England Magazine* in March, 1834 has written: "Many years ago, when a new organ was procured for the church in Salem, this organ [of Johnston] was taken down, and was transferred to the Episcopal Church in Marblehead."

Agents, we as a Committee know nothing of your Agreement, in short sir it is not y^e property of the Church and our office does not impower us to intermeddle with the property or Agreement of any number of private persons by order of y^e Committee, I am, Your Hum Ser^t Tho^s Lewis Clerk to y^e proprietors of S^t Mich. Church.¹⁰

This would imply that the church committee had no clear title to the instrument. Perhaps several parishioners, acting independently, purchased the organ from St. Peter's and presented it to St. Michael's with the stipulation that the church would prepare a place for it at their own expense. We do know that by the early fall of 1769 this organ was in place.

Although the London builder of St. Michael's first organ remains a mystery, more is known about the instrument Johnston built for St. Peter's in 1754, transferred to St. Michael's in 1769. Johnston was among the first American organ builders in the colonies, and the first to pursue the trade professionally in New England. The Johnston organ, however, was probably much like the London organ Clarke imported in 1743. There was but one manual and six stops: 8' Stopt Diapson, 8' Open Diapson Treble, 4' Principal, 4' Flute, 2-2/3' Twelfth and 2' Fifteenth, and on a small ivory nameboard, inscribed in German:

Thomas Johnston, Fecit. Boston: Nov-Anglorum, 1754.¹¹

We last hear of organist John Honn (Horn or Hohn) in April of 1769, and it is not until 1795 that the name of a third organist, Henry Clark, appears on the records. He had been appointed organist the preceeding year at a salary of \$12.00 per annum. Mr. Clark is not heard from again in the records, although it is likely he was organist through the closing year of the eighteenth century.

¹⁰ Standish, *Records*, p. 97.

¹¹ This can be found in the *New England Magazine*, March, 1834, p. 207. Henry M. Brooks has written: "This organ was, it is said, in design and execution after the pattern of an English organ at Trinity Church in Boston." *Olden-time music: a compilation from newspapers and books*, Boston, 1888, p. 65. Johnston is known to have painted escutcheons (funeral hatchments) and engraved music on copper plate, in addition to his organ building. An account of his career can be found in Cornelia B. William's *Ancestry of Lawrence Williams*, Chicago, 1915, among others.

There is no record of repairs to the Johnston organ for the next thirty-two years, although undoubtedly some minor adjustments were made during this period, and salaries of the organist and bellows blower paid. We do find the following receipt among the Treasurer's papers for 1802:

Boston 30 July 1802

Received of M^r Williams
the Sum of ninety dollars
for Repairing the Organ at
Marblehead

P A. Hagen¹²

\$90/

This was a substantial expense for St. Michael's that year, and undoubtedly represents a major overhaul of the Johnston instrument. We do not know who played on this renovated organ, only that the Vestry voted him a salary increase of \$8.00 for a total of \$20.00 per annum, up from \$12.00 in 1795.

In May of 1818 we find a Treasurer's monthly statement suggesting that another organ had come to St. Michael's:

| | | |
|--------------|--|--------------|
| May 28, 1818 | Cash paid Geo Miliher for freight of Organ pipes to Portsmouth do paid Danforth for taking down and putting up Organ | 3 88 |
| | D ^o St ^l Peters Church toward Organ | <u>50.00</u> |
| | | 134 86 |
| | | <u>50.00</u> |
| | | 84.86 |

"Peters Church toward" and "50.00" has been crossed out in the statement with a different ink, presumably at a later time, and the amount subtracted from the original total. But St. Michael's did owe St. Peter's for an organ, for we find that in May of 1820 \$100.00 was still "due to Saint Peters Parish for ballance on organ." St. Peter's had acquired its fourth organ from Dr. Benjamin Lynde

¹²Peter Albrecht van Hagen, another Boston organist.

Oliver in 1818, and the Deblois organ in use there since 1770 was sold to St. Michael's.¹³

The Deblois instrument was set up in Marblehead by May of 1818, and the Johnston organ was retired. St. Michael's new organ was destined for a short life, for in 1822 it was voted for a committee "to dispose of the remains of the old Organ, as they may deem it expedient."¹⁴ The Johnston organ, now nearly seventy years old and perhaps considered historic, was saved for another eleven years.

In March of 1833, a list of repairs to the church included this accomplishment: "The old organ taken away and a new organ placed, in its stead presented by John Hooper, Esq^r."¹⁵ Hooper enlisted the firm of Elias and George Hook of Boston to design an organ for St. Michael's. The Hook brothers had moved their business in 1832 from Salem to Boston, but Hooper, a gentleman fond of things musical, undoubtedly had heard one or more of the Hook organs built in Salem between 1827 and 1832.

Before the new Hook organ was put in place, the old organ was dismantled and taken to Boston, where the brothers maintained a shop on Friend Street. It must have been a pleasant surprise when it was discovered they possessed the Johnston organ, with the 1754 nameboard still intact.¹⁶ The Hooks moved their factory to Tremont Street in 1852, and the nameboard went with them. It apparently did not survive a third move to a new factory in Weston in 1890, and the fate of this antiquity remains a mystery.¹⁷

The specifications of the organ designed for St. Michael's in 1833 do not survive, but we know what this organ looked like from

¹³Tapley, *St. Peter's*, p. 30. Dr. Benjamin Lynde Oliver was the brother of Thomas Fitch Oliver, rector of St. Michael's 1786-1791. Salem diarist William Bentley gives the disposition of Oliver's organ as prior to May, 1818. *Diary*, Gloucester, 1962, vol. II, p. 427.

¹⁴Standish, *Records*, p. 97.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁶"The writer has lately inspected, at the organ manufactory of Messrs. Hook . . . the remnants of the organ made by Johnston," *New England Magazine*, March, 1834, p. 207. Henry M. Brooks has written: "When Messrs. Hook made a new instrument for the Marblehead Church, they came into the possession of the old [Johnston] organ."

¹⁷I am indebted to organ historian Barbara Owen of Pigeon Cove, Massachusetts for this information. Ms. Owen has spoken with men who worked at the Weston Factory in the first quarter of this century, and they do not recall having seen it.

its handsome Gothic case still in the church. The keydesk was recessed into the front of the case, and had one manual. The case itself was made of pine, stained dark walnut and given contrast by a series of muted red panels. Seven ranks of gilded pipes were displayed within arched niches and two spires rose on each side of the central rank which culminated in a leaf finial. All of the gilded pipes were wooden and did not sound. The case was over 15' tall, and stood 12' from the back wall of the church. The organ had a main division which probably contained about four stops, possibly an Open and Stopped Diapason, Dulciana and Trumpet. We do know that there was a large bass pedal stop in the organ.

We know less about the organists of this period. No reference appears in the nineteenth century until 1839, when "Benjamin B. Bomen ask[ed] for compensation for Services as Organist."¹⁸ Another such reference does not appear until 1875, when William H. Aborne was organist for one year. Mary L. Martin was appointed to the position 1880, and stayed four years on the job. During this time a total of \$31.75 was paid to various people for "blowing the organ."

The first recorded repairs on the Hook organ were made in 1888, one year after Mrs. M.J. Wilson became organist. It was in April that the Vestry spent \$15.00 for "Repairing & Tuning Organ." Between 1888 and 1909, in fact, there are recorded only \$26.10 in additional expenses, of which at least \$6.70 went for tuning. All of these later repairs were made by the Boston firm of Cole and Woodbury. Most of the repairs after 1906 were undertaken by the Rector, Wells M. Partridge, a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His success at keeping the organ going may be seen from a motion passed in April of 1910: "Voted that the Vestry extend to the Rector a vote of thanks for the interest he has shown and the time, labor and mechanical skill he has expended in preserving the life and usefulness of the historic old organ in the Church."¹⁹

Mrs. Wilson retired as organist in 1907, after 20 years of service to the church. In 1916 Alexander E. Cleary took over the job, remaining four years. In June of that year the Vestry voted "a Committee of three be appointed by the Rector, he to be

¹⁸ *Record of St. Michael's Parish* [1833-1904], p. 23.

¹⁹ *Records and By-Laws of the Episcopal Parish* [1904-1929], p. 40.

Chairman of the same, to install a new organ and raise the money in any way they see fit."²⁰ Five months later the organ question again came before the Vestry, but no action was forthcoming. The Vestry had long considered this an "historic" organ, and they decided it was more appropriate to repair rather than replace the existing instrument. Major surgery was undertaken in March of 1917, when \$580.00 reported by the Budget Committee was spent on the organ.

In July of 1919 a second committee was empowered to obtain specifications on a new organ, and the Rector, Lyman Rollins, authorized to begin a fund raising campaign to pay for the new instrument.

Late in 1919 the church contracted with the Hook and Hastings Company for a new pipe organ. This was opus #2933 of the Weston firm, which traced its beginnings back to the Salem shop of Elias and George Hook in 1827.²¹ We know something of this organ from the man who played it.

Howard E. Foster had replaced Alexander E. Cleary as organist in 1919, and from him we know something of the period. The organ which was removed to make room for the new Hook and Hastings instrument had but one manual and five stops.²² Little alteration had been made through the years then to the original 1833 Hook organ. The keydesk was detached from the case, and the remains of the 1833 organ were disassembled and stored by the church in a local barn. Only the case remained, and this was incorporated into the new instrument in the early months of 1920. Six-foot pipe "wings" of false pipes were added to either side of this old case, and the area between the back of the organ and the rear wall of the church was closed in with additional pipes and machinery. The new instrument thus assumed grand proportions for the small church, and the old case all but disappeared amidst the pipework surrounding it. The console, detached from the organ for the first time, was removed to the south east corner of the gallery. This opened up the space in the gallery's central section for the choir, who now had ample room in which to sing. In this

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

²¹ From the Hook and Hastings printed installation list.

²² I am indebted to former organist Howard E. Foster of Lynn, Massachusetts for this information.

arrangement, the organist would face the choir but would also see the clergy down at the altar.

On 18 July 1920 the new organ was dedicated by the Rector, "to the Glory of God and in loving memory of Helen Sharp" (1837-1919).²³ Mrs. Sharp's daughters had given the organ in memory of their mother. The choir, under the direction of Howard E. Foster, sang two anthems during the service. A recital was given immediately after the dedication at 5 o'clock by W.B. Sache, a Cambridge organist. Mr. Sache was accompanied by Louise Baradacco, a soprano with the Boston Opera, and violinist Marie Zelezny. Selections from the work of Vieuxtemps, Debatt-Ponson, Gluck and Handel were featured at the recital. The Vestry went on record to thank the "Hook and Hastings Organ Company for the splendid quality and fine workmanship of the organ they have installed for us."²⁴ Rev. Rollins was thanked for his efforts at procuring this instrument from Helen Sharp's daughters, and the organ was promptly insured for \$10,000.00.

The fact that visitors to the church played the organ testifies to the organ's popularity, but this quickly got out of hand. A special motion of the Vestry less than a year later called a stop to "the indiscriminate playing of the organ by numerous visitors."²⁵

Howard E. Foster resigned as organist in 1921, and there were two more organists in the next two years. In 1923, Alexander E. Cleary returned as organist, staying on for 27 years. That same year the following recommendation to the Vestry was made: "The organ committee reported; recommending that the old iron organ pipes, because of their historic value, be cut into souvenirs and sold, which as a partial report, was accepted."²⁶ It is doubtful if this was ever carried out, for in 1924 the Vestry "voted to remove the old organ pipes from the Williams Barn and have them stored."²⁷

Initially the location of the console at the end of the gallery seemed to be a good arrangement, but three years later the Vestry

authorized that the console be moved, presumably back to the center of the gallery in front of the case.

In March of 1925 the Rev. W. Herbert Burk, founder of the Washington Memorial Chapel at Valley Forge, arrived in Marblehead from Pennsylvania to obtain the remains to St. Michael's old organ. Rev. Burk was under the impression that the old organ in St. Michael's had originally been at St. Paul's Church in New York City, and had played at Washington's first inaugural on 31 April 1789.

The Vestry decided to give all the parts of the old organ to Rev. Burk, and accordingly he shipped it back to Pennsylvania. The following March an account of the "Washington Inaugural Organ" appeared in the *Valley Forge Record and Washington Chapel Chronicle*. "The only part of the Organ retained by St. Michael's," it said, is the old front, with its gilded pipes, etc."

What Father Burk had brought back to Valley Forge was, in fact, the remains to the 1833 Hook organ. The first organ at St. Paul's was made in London by John England, and installed at St. Paul's in 1802. It remained there until 1870, when it went to St. Mary's Church in Port Jervis, New York. Because we do not know of any organs in St. Paul's prior to 1802 it is likely that no organ was played at Washington's inaugural service there, and this rumor need no longer be perpetuated.²⁸ The remains to the 1833 Hook organ still sit in a storage shed at the Valley Forge Historical Society.

The maintenance of St. Michael's new Hook and Hastings organ was to prove costly in the years ahead: by 1938 more than \$5,000.00 had been spent on repairs, and in that year the Vestry voted that no one, outside of Mr. Cleary, be allowed to play the organ, "due to the recent expensive repairs."²⁹ The console was giving mechanical trouble, undoubtedly due to the deterioration of the electrical action. In 1939, however, "Mr. Cleary was authorized

²³"Organ Recital and Dedication Service of the Helen Sharp Memorial Organ," p. 2.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁵*Records* [1904-1929], p. 206.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 289. These old pipes were actually composed of tin and lead.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 325.

²⁸Rev. Burk was not the only one who believed in the Washington connection. It seems that many parishioners of St. Michael's held this belief as well. The legend probably grew up at St. Michael's in 1832 when the pre-revolutionary Johnston organ was removed from the church to the Hook factory in Boston. The earliest published account of St. Michael's "Washington organ" can be found in the *Boston Globe*, 29 November, 1904.

²⁹*Records of St. Michael's Parish* [1930-1952], p. 182.

to remove vox Humana stop from organ, as he said that stop was the cause of the trouble."³⁰

As early as 1938 the Vestry was talking about replacement of the organ, but the church could only afford essential repairs. In 1940 the electrical contacts in the console were replaced, and a contract was signed for quarterly checks of the organ's condition. From then on the condition of the instrument slowly deteriorated, until February of 1947, when the console was removed from the gallery and rebuilt.

In October, 1950, Alexander Cleary stepped down after the longest tenure in St. Michael's history: thirty years as organist, twenty-seven of them consecutive. Soon after his departure problems began to arise once again with the organ. By 1952 it had become necessary to give serious thought to replacing the organ. The console was in bad repair just five years after it had been rebuilt. The Rector, David W. Norton, discussed some of the options with Marshall Roberts, who had become organist in 1952. The problem was critical by June of 1953, when the Rector wrote: "Our present console has frequently to receive emergency repairs and we are told that there's a possibility of its completely giving out at any time."³¹ Accordingly an organ consultant was asked to draw up specifications for a new console and a major overhaul of the organ, and to solicit bids for the same. Although several bids were received, at least two of these expressed reservations about the specifications themselves.

These reservations caused considerable delay in reaching some decision on the organ, and in February 1954 the consultant's stop-list was discarded.³² The organ builders now bid on specifications of their own. In August, 1954, a contract was signed with the William W. Laws Organ Company of Beverly, Mass., for a new console and a substantial rebuilding of the organ itself. The stop-list before rebuilding was as follows:



THE 1833 HOOK ORGAN IN THE SOUTHERN GALLERY
IN 1880

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

³¹ David W. Norton to William W. Laws et al, 30 June 1953.

³² St. Michael's never formally retained the services of a consultant. Although the latter was surprised to learn that the church understood his services to be voluntary and had no intention of paying him, this indeed was the case.



THE HOOK AND HASTINGS ORGAN WITH THE 1833
CASE ALMOST INVISIBLE AMIDST THE LARGE
DISPLAY PIPES INSTALLED IN 1920



THE 1974 FISK ORGAN WITH RESTORED HOOK CASE
Photographs Courtesy of St. Michael's Church Archives

| <u>Great</u> | <u>Swell</u> | <u>Pedal</u> |
|--------------|------------------|--------------|
| 8' Diapson | Diapson | 16' Bourdon |
| Melodia | 8' Stopped Flute | 16' Gedeckt |
| Dulciana | Aeoline | 8' Flute |
| 4' Octave | Salicional | |
| | Celeste | |
| | 4' Flute | |
| | 8' Oboe | |
| | 8' Vox Humana | |

So many repairs had been made to the 1920 Hook and Hastings organ over the years that it is impossible to know which of these stops were to be found in the original instrument. After William Law's alterations the stop-list appeared thus:

| <u>Great</u> | <u>Swell</u> | <u>Pedal</u> |
|---------------|------------------|----------------------|
| 8' Diapson | 8' Diapson | 32' Resultant |
| 8' Melodia | 8' Stopped Flute | 8' Stopped Flute |
| 8' Dulciana | 8' Aeoline | 4' Wald Flute |
| 4' Octave | 8' Salicional | 16' Lieblich Gedeckt |
| 4' Gemshorn | 8' Voix Celeste | |
| 8' Gemshorn | 4' Flute | |
| 16' Gemshorn | 8' Oboe | |
| 2-2/3' Nazard | | |
| 2' Fifteenth | | |

Space within the organ case was so tight that it was necessary to remove the Bourdon from the Pedal and the Vox Humana from the Swell to make room for the five new stops in the Great. These new stops would allow for more variety on the Great, where before the Melodia and Dulciana were so soft that only two stops, the Diapson and Octave, were audible in this division.

All the pipes were revoiced or replaced as necessary. The rebuilding was completed in April of 1955 at a cost of \$3,500.00, and on the 17th of that month the organ was rededicated. After the 8 P.M. rededication service, a recital was given by Marshall Roberts that featured organ music of England, Germany and the Low Countries, including works of Dunstable, Britten, Bach and Franck.

The belief that this instrument would last "for many years to come" would prove to be premature.³³ By 1961 the mechanical condition of the organ had greatly deteriorated, and in March of that year the rector appointed an Organ Committee to decide on a course of action. Despite overwhelming advice that a new organ was the best solution, the committee opted for a second rebuilding. On 1 September 1961 a contract was signed with Williams Organ Service of Boston for \$10,280.00. The contract included new manual windchests, a new blower, a new tremulo, new electrical contacts and three stops: an 8' Principal, Mixture III and a 4' Spitz-principal, a total of 305 new pipes.

Although the specifications had been contracted for, it was soon realized that these changes would be unsatisfactory. On 23 September a new contract was signed that discarded 244 of the proposed pipes and substituted reversible couplers on the console and extensive rewiring for an additional \$1,975.00. The mechanical work undertaken soon proved faulty; by May of 1962 the wind supply to the organ had nearly broken down. Any rapid succession of notes played on the keyboard would cause the organ to audibly wobble and shake. There was seemingly no end to problems with the organ, and in January 1963 there were listed by the organist over a dozen items that needed attention. The rebuilding of 1961 survived the decade through a series of periodic repairs that had now become predictable.

In 1971, the Rector, George A. Westerberg, decided that the time had come for an entirely new instrument. The church could not afford a major expenditure every few years to maintain an inferior instrument. Accordingly, a careful investigation was made concerning pipe organ builders, primarily in the Boston area. By June of 1972 proposals from four firms had been considered. Two schemes were rejected that called for an elimination of the organ gallery rail from 1714. In addition to the obvious historical loss, such action would greatly alter the church's appearance.

The proposal of C.B. Fisk of Gloucester, Massachusetts was the only one sensitive to the history of organs at St. Michael's. Fisk envisioned a completely modern instrument of some twenty stops, based on the English-American tradition as exemplified by the first two organs of St. Michael's Church. Fisk's specification

³³Rector's [Annual] Report, 1955, delivered 10 January 1956.

was fundamentally classical, but broadened by the addition of a Cèleste stop and several solo voices for music of the Romantic and contemporary periods. Perhaps the most unusual idea was to house this new organ in the original Hook case of 1833, which would be restored for the purpose. The zinc display pipes from 1920 which surrounded the old case would be removed, reclaiming much-needed space for the choir.

The merits of Fisk's proposals were carefully considered, and criticism from noted Boston-area organists was solicited. A second stop-list on 16 June was the result of this consultation, with some minor changes made to the Swell.

On 24 August 1972 a special Vestry meeting was called to order by the Senior Warden to "consider the purchase of a new pipe organ for St. Michael's Church," noting that the Rector had already received substantial pledges toward the organ.³⁴ After a lengthy discussion and by a close vote it was authorized to contract with C.B. Fisk for a new organ "not to exceed \$60,000.00." Four days later this contract was signed by the Rector and Senior Warden, and the remains of the old organ were sold for \$450.00.

The Hook case, badly fractured, was removed to the Fisk factory in Gloucester, where it underwent restoration.³⁵ The original layer of paint appeared to have been a dark yellow maple graining, but this had been changed to a burnt umber during a redecoration of the church in 1888. The false front pipes were found to have been gilded at least twice, but between the gildings was found a silvering with designs related to surviving wall frescos in the church from 1888.

It was decided to restore the second coloring of burnt umber, which matched more closely the rest of the present day church.³⁶ The wooden display pipes were regilded, and the recessed panels beneath the main rank of pipes, long since darkened with stain,

³⁴The Rector had actually notified Fisk on 2 August of his decision to engage him to build the proposed organ. While pledges were received primarily from within the parish, the Howard Johnson Foundation and the Eaton Foundation both made substantial contributions.

³⁵This restoration was made possible, in part, through a matching grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities.

³⁶The art of maple graining has been nearly lost, and an accurate restoration of this original treatment would have been difficult. Someday it will undoubtedly be relearned, but presently no local artisan is known to be able to grain in this manner.

were once again repainted their earlier red. The keydesk enclosure panels were removed from their original front position and incorporated into the new sides of the case, to allow for the addition of Swell shades.³⁷

A major problem was the dimensions of the Hook case, a mere 4' x 8'. In this case Fisk would have to fit nearly 1,500 pipes, if he were to confine himself within the volume of the original instrument, providing all the specifications of a modern organ. That this was a real challenge may be seen from examining the inside of the organ today: both upper and lower stories of the case are filled with pipework.³⁸ Fisk considers his opus 69 unusual for this reason alone; a remarkably compact instrument, able to handle contemporary organ music as well as an historical repertoire, yet within the confines of the case of a much smaller instrument. The size of the Pedal stops necessitated putting these against the back wall behind the organ. Seen from the church, these stops give the appearance of being not part of the organ, an effect which leaves the focus only on the original case.

The new organ appears much like the Hook organ of 1833, and in fact it is difficult to tell them apart in photographs. Besides the case, there are a number of features in common with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: mechanical, or tracker action; the physical arrangement of the pipes, with central Great and Swell divisions and rear Pedal; a mild chiff, or attack in the pipe speech; and a flexible wind system. In addition, all of the kinds of stops conjectured to have been in the Hook organ are to be found in the Fisk instrument.³⁹

The liturgics of St. Michael's also figured into the design of the organ. Because of a musically varied sung eucharist, organist Thomas Holland requested electro-pneumatic and combination stop action, a series of pre-set buttons on the keydesk that would

³⁷It was thought at first that these hinged front panels were part of the original Hook case, and their reuse as part of the otherwise new sides would have special meaning. Analysis of photographic records, however, indicate that these panels were installed in 1920. The original panels of 1833 were higher on their contiguous sides, forming a low Gothic arch when closed.

³⁸This arrangement is a great advantage, allowing all the divisions to speak directly out, unlike the old arrangement with divisions behind each other absorbing much of their own sound.

³⁹A complete specification and stop-list can be found in Appendix A.

allow the rapid tonal changes required by liturgical music.⁴⁰ The keydesk itself is low enough not to be visible from the church, allowing the case to dominate the gallery, and is constructed of Honduras mahogany. The 56 note manuals are of grenadil with ivory-covered sharps, and the rosewood stop knobs are faced with ivory that was hand engraved in England.

Thus confined to the dimensions of an antique case and modified to meet the liturgical needs of the church a totally new instrument was constructed over a 28 month period in Gloucester. To celebrate the completion of this unusual organ, an open house was held on 29 September 1974 at the Fisk shop, where parishioners of St. Michael's, interested Marbleheaders and organ enthusiasts from all over the North Shore congregated to witness the organ's unveiling. That fall it was installed in the gallery of the church and tuned to the acoustics of the building.⁴¹ The organ was played in the church for the first time on Christmas Eve, 1974, when organist Thomas Holland played Bach's "Wachet Auf" as the prelude to the midnight eucharist.

The organ was blessed by retired Bishop Albert A. Chambers on 2 February 1975 at a special 10 A.M. dedication service, and that evening at 5 P.M. the choir of Christ Church of Hamilton-Wenham, under the direction of Henry Lowe, sang Evensong with a congregation that included many of those who built the organ.⁴² Concerts by local ensembles and choruses, including such artists as Roger Voisin and McNeil Robinson, were given in February, March, April, May and June, all of which featured the new organ for the benefit of the community at large.

The antique case can be seen today set slightly above its original level and rising more than 16' into the southern arch above the gallery. It remains the predominant feature of the nineteenth century renovations to St. Michael's. The organ music heard here since 1754 continues today, a special gift by the people of St. Michael's, to the benefit of Marblehead and the enrichment of the musical community as well.

⁴⁰Without this request Fisk would have built a mechanical stop action in addition to mechanical key action, creating a completely tracker instrument. Such an instrument would have been less versatile and would require more work on the part of the organist to effect rapid musical changes.

⁴¹The acoustics of the church building are excellent, and for this reason the final voicing required little compensation for distortion. The sound of the organ is as natural as can be had.

⁴²A small varnished plaque can be found inconspicuously attached to the back of the case on which the 15 individuals who built the organ have signed their names.

APPENDIX A

Specifications of the Fisk Organ¹Great (61 Notes)

| | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| 1. Bourdon 16' | 49 pipes (bass from 16) | wood, stopped |
| 2. Open Diapson 8' | 61 pipes | metal, open |
| 3. Stopped Diapson 8' | 61 pipes | wood, stopped |
| 4. Italian Principal 4' | 61 pipes | metal, open |
| 5. Fifteenth 2' | 61 pipes | metal, open |
| 6. Cornet III | 183 pipes | metal, open |
| 7. Mixture IV-V | 276 pipes | metal, open |
| 8. Trumpet 8' | 61 pipes | metal, reed |

Swell (61 Notes)

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| 9. Spire Flute 8' | 61 pipes | metal, tapered |
| 10. Flute Céleste 8' | 49 pipes | metal, tapered |
| 11. Chimney Flute 4' | 61 pipes | metal, chimneys |
| 12. Flageolet 2' | 61 pipes | metal, open |
| 13. Sharp IV | 244 pipes | metal, open |
| 14. Sesquialtera II | 122 pipes | metal, open & chimneys |
| 15. Hautboy 8' | 61 pipes | metal, reed |

Pedal (32 Notes)

| | | |
|------------------|----------|-----------------------|
| 16. Sub Bass 16' | 32 pipes | wood, stopped |
| 17. Flute 8' | 32 pipes | wood, open |
| 18. Octave 4' | 32 pipes | metal, open |
| 19. Mixture III | 96 pipes | metal, open |
| 20. Basson 16' | 32 pipes | wood & metal, reed |

Tremulant

Cymbal Star

Couplers: Swell to Great
Swell to Pedal (Reversibles to all couplers)
Great to Pedal

¹Provision was made in this second revision of the original specification for an additional 4' Flute in the future, an eventual total of 21 stops.

Balanced Swell Pedal

Signal Light

Setter board combination action, with the following combination pistons:

General 1-2-3-4 Cancel (duplicated on too studs)

Great 1-2-3-4

Swell 1-2-3-4

Pedal 1-2-3-4 (toe studs)

Key Action: Mechanical

Stop Action: Electrical

Keydesk: Detached and of low and shallow silhouette; Manuals 56 notes CC-g₃, naturals of Grenadil with antique boxwood nosings, sharps of Rosewood capped with ivory; Pedals 30 notes CC-f₁; stops controlled by ivory-faced Rosewood knobs hand engraved in script. Manuals and Pedals located to A.G.O. standards.

Casework: Existing antique case front by Hook of Boston, properly repaired and with false front pipes regilded in leaf; raised slightly from present level and modified below impost by addition of swell shades. All later display pipes and other material at sides of case to be removed, the object being to make the case as viewed from the floor of the church to appear essentially as it did when originally built, and to create more room in the choir loft.

APPENDIX B

Organ Chronology

| | |
|------|------------------------------|
| 1754 | "Clarke" organ (built 1743) |
| 1768 | "New Organ" |
| 1769 | Johnston organ (built 1754) |
| 1818 | "Deblois" organ (built 1770) |
| 1833 | Hook organ |
| 1920 | Hook and Hastings organ |
| | 1955 rebuilt |
| | 1961 rebuilt |
| 1974 | Fisk organ |

APPENDIX C

Organists of St. Michael's Church

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Jacob Wilmore (Wellmore) | 1757-1762 |
| John Horn (Hohn, Honn) | 1762-1764 |
| Capt. John Wormsteed | 1765 |
| John Horn (Hohn, Honn) | 1766-1769 |
| Henry Clarke | 1794-c. 1801 |
| Benjamin B. Bomen | 1839-? |
| William H. Aborne | 1875-1876 |
| Mary L. Martin | 1880-1884 |
| Mrs. M.J. Wilson | 1887-1907 |
| Alexander E. Cleary | 1916-1919 |
| Howard E. Foster | 1919-1921 |
| Charles A. Young | 1921-1922 |
| Carl A. Garabedian | 1922-1923 |
| Alexander E. Cleary | 1923-1950 |
| John D. Wicks | 1951-1952 |
| J. Marshall Roberts III | 1952-1954 |
| William W. Parsons | 1954-1959 |
| Christopher M. King | 1960-1963 |
| Robert M. McEntire | 1963-1964 |
| B. Richard Wright, Jr. | 1964-1969 |
| Thomas F. Holland III | 1969 to date |