

Organ Notes

In 1891, the 320 opus of the J.W. Steere & Sons company was commissioned for the Quincy Second Congregational Church (the name of our congregation at that time). The organ was moved from the third Meeting House on Maine Street to its present residence in 1913. Indeed, our present church building at 1479 Hampshire Street was specifically designed to surround and house the organ exactly.

A tracker organ was a unique development of 19th century America and used purely mechanical means to initiate and produce sound from key to pipe. The sound is a full yet delicate, melodious result--distinctly American and romantic in quality. Cleaned and evaluated in 1976, the organ was disassembled to have its pedal and key action rebuilt and to have its wind system completely renovated the following year. This included a new, more compact electric blower, thus forever removing the need to ring a blower boy to work the bellows.

John Wesley Steere began building organs in 1866, founding his own company near Springfield, MA in 1879. Our organ (we call her Gertrude -- she has a personality all her own) is signed J.W. Steere & Sons. There was just a short period of time when that signature was used, but it started in 1891 when Gertrude was built. Organ building seems to have been a family craft, because two sons went to work in the family business, then one left a few years later to partner up with another builder who had worked for J.W. for a while. At the time the sons joined the business, the family name spelling changed from Steer to Steere. When son #1 left, the signature became Steere & Son. Then at the turn of the century, Steere Company. It was eventually bought out by a bigger firm. Steere organs were known to have a particularly sweet sound, very good for playing lyrical melodies. Gertrude certainly bears that out. There are Steere organs in the university chapels at Yale and Cornell. There is at least one left serving an Episcopalian church in New York City and several in the Chicago area.

