

VIGNETTE – 29 JULY 2007
ORGANISTS OF ST MATTHEW'S

St Matthew's acquired its first organ in 1873 and Susan Tidmarsh was hired as the first organist. She was a widowed music teacher who had been the organist and choir director at St Paul's. She held the post until 1877.

Arthur Bird, an American-born and German-trained musician, was organist and choirmaster from 1877-1881. While at St Matthew's he composed five works for organ, including the *Three Oriental Sketches*, and the *Organ Sonata No 1 in g minor*. They were published by G Schirmer of New York in a set entitled Compositions for the Organ by Arthur Bird in 1903. He had many conflicts with the congregation and Session about his style of playing, his choice of music, and his recruitment of non-church members to the choir. He resigned from St Matthew's and returned to Germany in 1881.

Controversy regarding the use of the organ during worship continued to dominate the terms of the next six organists, C H Porter from 1881-1883, Mr Marshall 1883, Harriet Hesson organist from 1883-1886, and Mrs Fielding from 1886-1888. C H Porter was re-hired from 1888-1890, followed by R C Wright 1890-1891 and Tom J Payne from 1891-1894. Members were concerned about the interference with silent worship by the playing of preludes and postludes. It was during Charles H Porter's second appointment to St Matthew's, a twelve-year period from 1894-1906, that the organ became an accepted feature of the service of worship. Mr Porter was also a composer and wrote anthems as well as works for piano, violin, and orchestra.

Following his tenure, the organists were William Bauer, 1906-1907; Herbert E Starr, 1907-1908; William E Beazley, 1908-1910; and Ira D Hubley from 1910-1921.

Allan McKenzie Reid arrived in 1921 and stayed until his death in 1953. He helped to select the Casavant organ which was installed in 1921. He was well-liked and provided a varied musical programme which included anthems, cantatas, solos, trios, and duets by composers such as Mendelssohn, Handel, Wesley, Stainer and Parker. He was proud that these works had been performed by a choir composed mainly of volunteer singers. He wrote in 1930, that for the quality of music "no church in Canada maintains a higher standard". Under his leadership, the choir also enjoyed a special camaraderie that went beyond practices and performances to include social gatherings such as picnics. This feature was also present with the choirs of Paul Murray and John Hudson.

Following Mr Reid, were organists Alda MacDonald in 1953; Clifford Gates from 1953-1966; David Morgan from 1967-1972; and Brian Start from 1972-1978.

Paul Murray, who passed away on July 17, was organist from 1978-1986. Under his direction, the choir grew and several great works were performed including Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Handel's *Messiah*. He also composed music for the choir including *Five Seasonal Introits*, published in 1984 which states "for the Junior and Senior Choirs of Saint Matthew's United Church, Halifax, Nova Scotia", and a Gloria.

He was a man of profound talent in music, of human sensitivity and concern, and had a fantastic sense of humour. He enjoyed sharing his puns with the choir.

John Hudson, organist from 1986-2006, continued the tradition of choir building and by 1999 the choir was 40-voices strong. Under his direction works such as Bach's St Matthew's Passion and the Mozart, Faure, and Brahms's Requiems were presented.

Next Sunday, a new organist and choir director, Wayne Rogers, begins at St Matthew's. We are looking forward with anticipation and, I think, with a sense of excitement to his leadership.

Written by Margaret Fay