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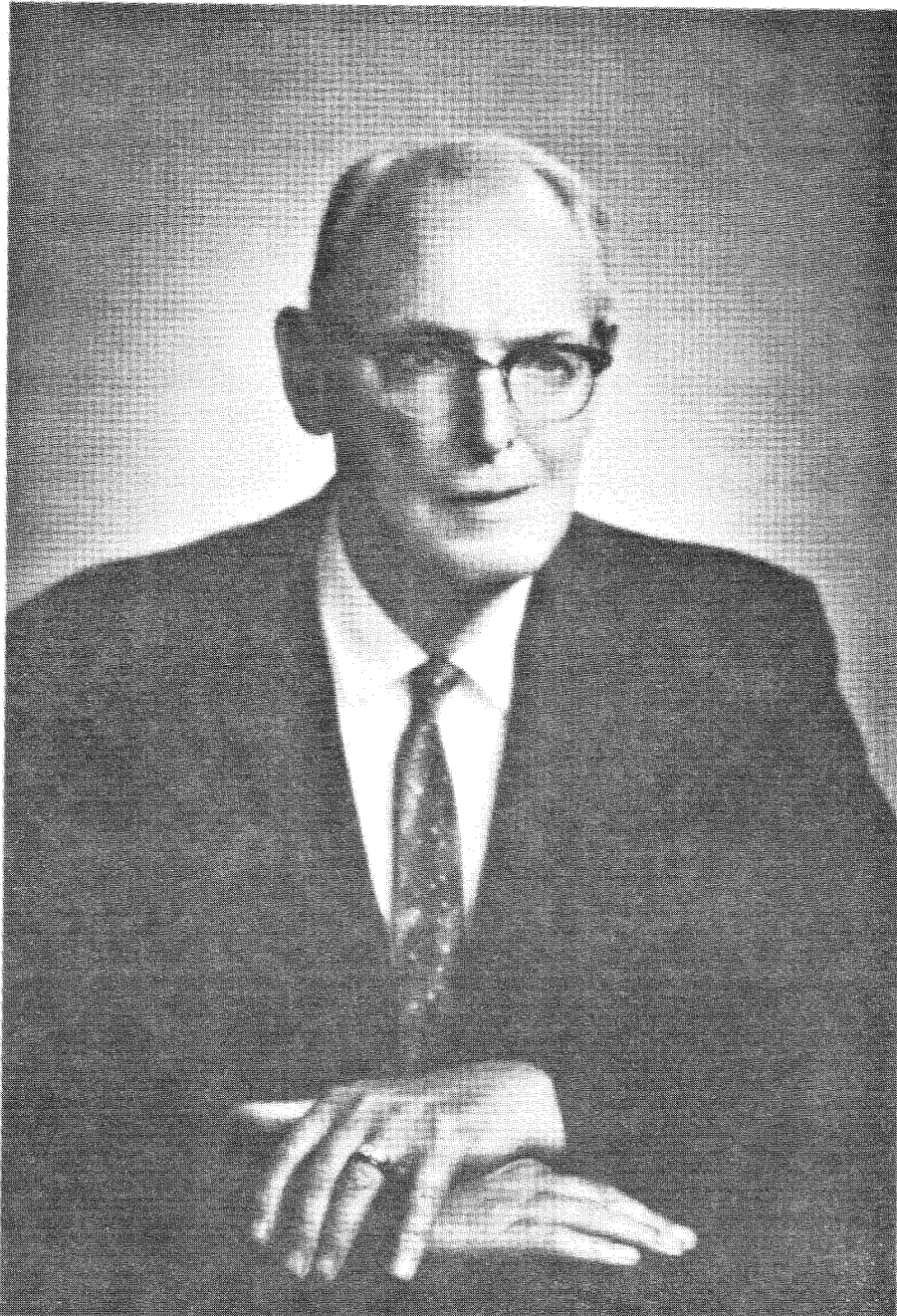
THE *STOPT DIAPASON* is published by the Chicago-Midwest Chapter of the Organ Historical Society.
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DR. WILLIAM HARRISON BARNES (1892-1980)

A TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM HARRISON BARNES

by David M. McCain

In 1930 William Harrison Barnes wrote a book which was to become, throughout its nine editions, a layman's standard reference work regarding organ construction. A notable medium, The Contemporary American Organ was profusely illustrated with photographs of organ components, facades, and four- and five-manual consoles. It was easily accepted by those who had even a remote interest in the organ. One can easily surmise that the popularity of this work led to a substantial demand for Dr. Barnes' services as a consultant for new organ installations, and increased his visibility as a performer on extant organs as well as a dedication recitalist on organs which he designed.

Dr. Barnes' popularity was most viable at the end of an era in which huge, impressive instruments were erected to supply the proper musical setting for cavernous churches and auditoriums. A later generation's enchantment with that period enhanced the importance of Dr. Barnes' presence among us, as he was a link to an era of performers and instruments now past.

An insight to that period, which for most of us takes on an "historic" flavor, could be gained by a discussion with Dr. Barnes. He welcomed an opportunity to give an audience to those who sought out his guidance or counsel, and would illuminate his conversations with prismatic stories concerning well-known personalities of the organ world. Many of these illustrations are contained in two short volumes which Dr. Barnes produced as retirement projects.

Through these publications, William Barnes leaves to recorded history some valuable insight into some of his more colorful contemporaries. The titles are self-descriptive:

In My Adventures with American Organs and their Builders; From Tracker to Tracker: (1908-1968), Barnes relates the following classic anecdote regarding Ernest M. Skinner:

"When he was chided that his 32' Bombarders were slow in starting to speak, he remarked, 'But just think how long they hang on, after you let off the note.'"

In Barnes' 1976 offering entitled My Recollections of Church Musicians, he said of Virgil Fox:

"While playing at the Riverside Church, Virgil bought a home at Englewood, New Jersey, and it was very large. It had six bathrooms, which seemed to impress Virgil and he tried to impress his friends with this fact. He told this story to my son-in-law, Harvey Nelson. Harvey asked him, 'Virgil, with only six bathrooms, what do you do on Sunday?'"

A native of the Chicago area, William Barnes was frequently to be seen wherever organists gathered and if given an opportunity to speak, he could be depended upon to deliver one or more of his risqué limericks, much to the embarrassment of everyone present, except himself.

(Barnes Tribute, cont.)

Barnes enjoyed attending the conventions of both the AFO and the Organ Historical Society, and once reported that because of the congeniality of the OHS members, he much preferred the OHS conventions over those of the AFO.

As much as he may have enjoyed socializing with OHS members and others who appreciate mechanical action, he did not share their enthusiasm for tracker organs. In some respects, William Barnes believed that a renewed emphasis on mechanical action was misdirected in its rejection of the "improvements" afforded by electric action. In My Adventures with American Organs and Their Builders, Barnes stated:

"I am afraid that I do not share the younger generation of organists' enthusiasm for the tracker organ. They may be a novelty to them, but they certainly are not to me."

He continued to say,

"I know too well their shortcomings as well as their merits. I am satisfied that the shortcomings far outweigh their merits."

Not adverse to the electronic substitute, Dr. Barnes served as a tonal advisor to the original Saville Organ Company. It is now difficult to assess the effect of his work with that company, as the original company is no longer in existence.

In keeping with a similar action of the national OHS organization, the Chicago-Midwest Chapter conferred honorary membership upon William Harrison Barnes as one of its first official actions.

He is sorely missed, not only by the Organ Historical Society and especially by the Chicago-Midwest Chapter, but by all who came to realize the importance of his innumerable contributions to our understanding and appreciation of the pipe organ.

(Editor's note: A limited number of copies of Dr. Barnes' book, My Recollections of Church Musicians is available and will be offered for sale during the OHS convention in Maine at the Chicago-Midwest chapter exhibit. This 68-page paper-bound book may also be ordered by mail. Send orders to Thomas A. Burrows, Treasurer, 1621-B Salisbury Ct., Wheaton, IL 60187 with checks made payable to Chicago-Midwest Chapter, OHS. Price: \$3.00 per copy. Add \$1.00 per book for postage and handling on mail orders.)

Enclosed with this issue are two items sure to be of interest: the first is a reproduction of a sales brochure of the firm of Marshall & Odenbrett of Ripon, Wisconsin dating from circa 1867, which will also be available at the OHS convention at 10¢ each; the second is an up-to-date extant list of all historic and contemporary tracker organs in Illinois, which we hope to revise and republish annually and which will be supplemented by other states' lists when readied. Its price for extras is 50¢; mail orders must include stamped, self-addressed envelopes.

WHEN WILL WE HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE AND HEAR LOIS REGESTEIN?
