

Alaska State Library  
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Kimball Pipe Organ Dedication, 1977

PCA 53

photographs (6 panoramas)  
13 slides [*missing*]  
2 manuscript items

Processed by: Staff

**ACQUISITION:** These views were taken by Rick Kieffer and Larry Stevens. The Kimball Organ was presented by the Save The Organ Committee on May 1, 1977 on behalf of the people of Juneau.

**ACCESS:** The collection is available for viewing, however, the photographs may not be photocopied.

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ORGAN

By J. Allan MacKinnon

April 28, 1977

The silent pictures and the "one man orchestra" or theatre organ were of a particular era in our history. On a contract dated July 22, 1927, W. D. Gross, pioneer Alaska theatre owner, placed an order for a theatre organ for his "silent movies" at The Coliseum Theatre in Juneau, Alaska. At this time The W. W. Kimball Co., Chicago had organs in The Coliseum Theatre in Ketchikan and The Empress Theatres in both Anchorage and Fairbanks, Gross bought his new organ from Kimball's Seattle representative, C. M. (Sandy) Balcom. Mr. Balcom designed the specifications and performed the original installations. He founded the Balcom and Vaughn Organ Co. in Seattle.

Carol Beery Davis was the young lady who played the organ in 1928 and for several more years. She has been instrumental in many cultural activities and has taught piano and organ for many years in Juneau.

The organ was moved to the new 20<sup>th</sup> Century Theatre building in 1940 and was played during intermissions with the "talkies." The organ was out of use for many years from the mid 40s until 1953 and fell into disrepair.

Franklin W. Butte was a young man stationed with the U.S. Army Signal Corps in Juneau. In 1953, with the aid of Fred McGinnis, pastor of the Juneau Methodist Church, Butte rewired the organ and made it playable for the Community Thanksgiving Service.

W. Ray Howes was theater manager during the late 1950's and early 1960's. He featured the organ nightly and for Saturday Matinees. Franklin Butte played the organ during Statehood ceremonies in 1959. It was also used during John F. Kennedy's visit in Juneau. The organ was featured on a KJNO radio show with Milton Furness, Jr., announcer and Franklin Butte, Organist, and on the Dodie Wheeler show "Woman to Woman."

J. Allan MacKinnon was employed by Ray Howes at the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in 1960, and played the organ on a regular basis. Robert K. Gregg, theatre manager after Howes, and William M. Thomasson, an employee, worked with MacKinnon on maintenance and upkeep and moved parts of the organ during theatre remodeling.

Miles and Letha Remley purchased the organ in 1970. During July 1975 the organ was donated to the State of Alaska. The organ was to be an "active" museum display, to be restored and made playable, to remain in Juneau and to be installed in a public place for the enjoyment of all.

When the organ was threatened with disposal due to storage problems, Earl-Prince of the Department of Administration, contacted Connie Boochever to see what could be done. Boochever convinced the Greater Juneau Arts and Humanities Council chaired by Jane Stewart, to sponsor a committee to raise funds for the restoration.

The "Save the Organ" Committee held its first meeting December 11, 1975. The campaign fund drive was a success bringing in an excess of \$30,000.

The committee contracted for the renovation and restoration of the organ with William Bunch, President, Balcom and Vaughn Pipe Organs of Seattle. Don Meyer, Organ Technician with that firm and Franklin W. Butte assisted in the installation.

The enclosure for the organ on the Plaza Level of The State Office Building was designed by Frank Maier, architect and built by Niels Finn Larsen, contractor.

The location in the grand lobby is unique with cathedral-like acoustics judged excellent. Reverberation time is four seconds.

Funding for the enclosure was provided by the state and Senator Bill Ray aided in this regard. Senator Mike Gravel was instrumental in gaining the funding from the Lily Endowment for the project.

The organ was dedicated and opened to the public May 1, 1977. The organ is used for Concerts at Noon and other special gatherings.

### SCOPE AND CONTENT

Library files also include:

1. Testing of the Kimball Organ following restoration in Seattle and after installation in the State Office Building, Juneau. Cassette tape by Don Myers.
2. Kimball organ dedication and concert/May 1, 1977, State Office Building, Juneau, Phonotape 10", 7 1/2 IPS, 1/4 track stereo, recording on 1 side.

Photographs by Rick Kiefer (1-11), photographs by Larry Stevens (12-20). Also included are the dedication program and "A Brief History of the Organ," by j. Allan MacKinnon.

### INVENTORY

1 - 2	Organ
3 - 10	Dedication Ceremony
11 - 14	Carol B. Davis, Organist
15	Franklin Butte, Organist
16 - 18	Interior, State Office Building

19 J. Allan MacKinnon, Organist

20 Jay Hammond, Governor

ALASKA STATE LIBRARY  
Slides of Organ and Juneau

*[Note: 8//8/2005, these slides are not in the Collection]*

3 loading in Seattle

5 workshop, Seattle

7 unloading console, Juneau

11 unloading in Juneau

19 van, unloading

29 Blower fan for organ in lobby

30 installed blower in janitors' closet

32 unloading in lobby area - pipes, etc.

42 interior organ chamber

44 Franklin Butte, organ renovator at organ console in lobby

53 view from West Juneau

69 Carol B. Davis and Bill Bunch from Balcom and Vaughn Organ Restorers at Chapel by the Lake.

73 Trevor Davis