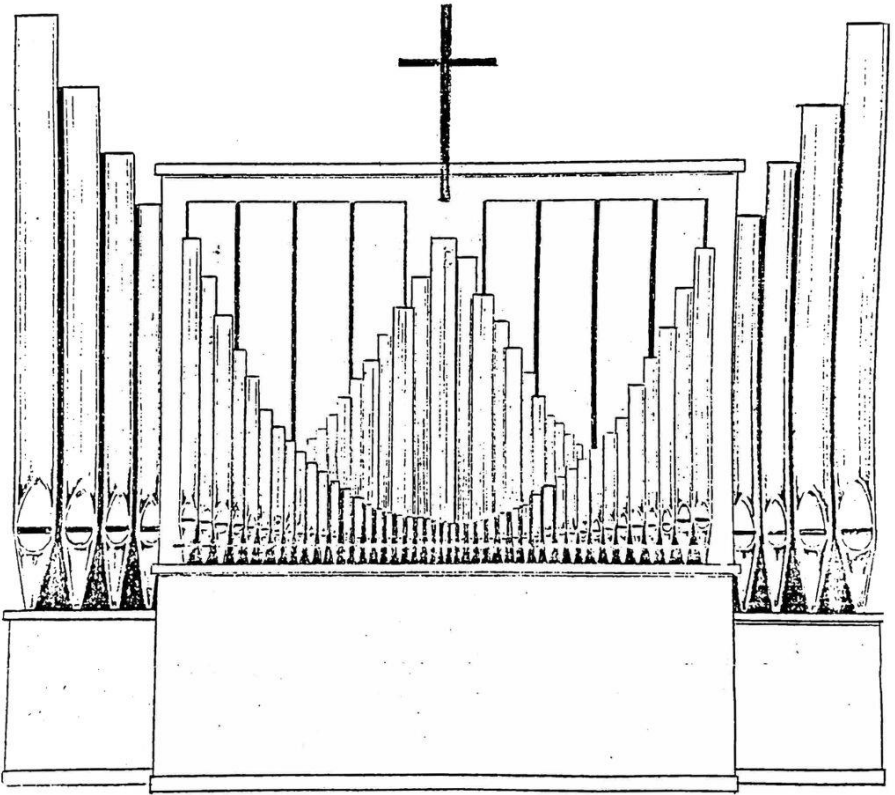


# The Kanata United Church Pipe Organ: A History, Revisited



## **The Kanata United Church Pipe Organ: A History, Revisited**

On October 9th, 1991, a letter was sent from Sally Duke, the Director of Music for Kanata United Church at the time, to Guilbault Thérien Inc., an organ manufacturer situated in St. Hyacinthe Quebec. The letter requested an estimate to remove, repair and install an organ into KUC's sanctuary. The organ in question was owned by Carman Milligan, former organist at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa, and was originally built by William Legge in the 1950s for a Masonic Temple in Ottawa. Milligan had the organ installed in his home after receiving it from the Temple, and had augmented it with additional pipes from the organ building company Cassavant Frères. After a long and established career as an organist in Ottawa, Milligan suffered a stroke that rendered him unable to play the organ. Duke learned of Milligan's intent to sell the instrument through Anthony King, the subsequent Director of Music at St. Andrew's, and later through Gordon Johnston, the Director of Music at St. John the Evangelist. It was Milligan's wish to see the organ he installed in his home still used, and it was this desire that led him to seek a new home for the instrument. At the time of the letter from Duke to Guilbault Thérien, KUC was using an Allan Digital Computer electronic organ to support their worship, and this instrument (14 years old as of 1991) was approaching the end of its expected lifespan.

In January of 1992, Sally Duke and Don Godbold went out to see the organ in Milligan's home. Afterwards it was determined that the console would need complete refinishing, and that the back corner of the sanctuary would need to be rebuilt in order to accommodate the pipes (however no new wiring or ventilation would need to be installed). Duke also sought out the advice of other organists that had recently acquired new pipe organs in their churches to get some ideas for fundraising and logistics.

A few months later in March of 1992, a report was made to the Official Board at KUC from the Pipe Organ Investigation Committee,

chaired by Don Goldbold. The report found the organ owned by Milligan (now colloquially referred to as the “Milligan Organ” or “MPO”) was a desirable and feasible addition to the sanctuary at KUC, and a welcome replacement for the aging electronic organ they had been using. Not only would minimal changes need to be made to the sanctuary space (the removal of a closet and repositioning of the seating for the choir being the only things mentioned here), but pursuing a used organ for the space would end up saving tens of thousands of dollars compared to the price of a new pipe organ. The report estimated a price of \$13,000 for the instrument itself, an estimate of \$50,076 for the repair and installation, and additional costs for transportation of the organ from Manotick to St. Hyacinthe and then to Kanata (compared with a *starting* price of \$120,000 for a new pipe organ at the time). The report concluded that the congregation should “consider the purchase, re-building and installation of the Milligan organ in Kanata United Church,” and “that a new organ committee be formed immediately to provide information to the congregation, to keep in touch with the Milligans and the organ builder and to organise a fund raising [sic] drive.” Both of these calls to action would be realized with overwhelming success by the end of the year. A public memo was circulated to the congregation one month later that invited congregants to consider the purchase and direct any questions to board members. The memo condensed the findings of the committee down to two pages, and included an updated total cost estimate of \$75,000<sup>1</sup>. Shortly thereafter, members of the congregation were invited by members of the board to attend organ concerts in nearby churches that contained organs built or refurbished by Guilbalt-Thérien.

In December of 1992, a report from the Pipe Organ Investigation Committee records that they had succeeded in securing \$39,865 in pledges from families within the congregation, in actual and planned donations through 1992-1995. This was exciting news to the committee, who reported that “the congregation has said yes, we are interested in the Milligan pipe organ for KUC as in a six week campaign half of the objective has been raised.” Furthermore, the investigation had raised the

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<sup>1</sup> \$146,204.82 adjusted for inflation, as of November 2024.

interest of members of the Royal Canadian College of Organists (RCCO), who wished to offer their assistance.

An information sheet from the Pipe Organ Committee was circulated on 17 October 1993 during a congregational meeting. The sheet detailed quite plainly the process, what was required, and the expenses involved. Emphasized in the sheet was the confidence of the committee in the quality of the instrument, based on the reputation of Mr. Milligan and the manufacturers. In an excellent concluding sentence, the occasion was summarized for the congregation as “a quality instrument at an exceptionally attractive price.”

At the end of November 1993, the necessary preparations were falling into place, and two letters were sent bearing the signature of Charles Hobbs: one to Mr. and Mrs. Milligan, and the other to Guilbault Thérien Inc. The first of these letters, enclosed with a down payment of \$1,000, provided written confirmation to Milligan that KUC was ready to purchase and remove the organ. The second letter confirmed KUC’s intent to hire Guilbault-Thérien for “a firm price of \$55,800.00 plus applicable taxes.” Intentions were set to sign a contract with Guilbault-Thérien in January 1994, and to have installment finished by Christmas of 1994, with a secondary date of Easter 1995.

The contract was signed on the 15th of January 1994 inside Milligan’s home in Manotick. Contained in the contract were the details of the tonal specifications, potential combination system, layout, windchests and pipework (a reduction from 1,400 to 800 pipes; unchanged from today), as well as a schedule for financial installments and an agreement that KUC would be responsible for the transportation of the instrument. Three days later, Hobbs received a letter from the Ottawa Presbytery of the United Church of Canada, voicing their support of KUC’s proposal to purchase, refurbish and install the organ.

With the agreements signed, prices fixed and deadlines set, the next step was for the Pipe Organ Committee to come up with the \$75,000 in funds. This began with pledges from the congregation. Through the pledge forms circulated by the Pipe Organ Committee, congregants were

asked for an enclosed cheque, plus their plans to donate between 1993-1995, then a total amount. Some of the pledge forms also asked for an amount in cash they would be able to provide on one month's notice, as a fallback measure. This campaign was highly successful, since by 5 October 1993 there were \$58,000 in pledges and cash alone - up from ~\$40,000 in 1992, and a testament to the commitment of the congregation and their genuine interest in acquiring this instrument.

Other means of raising the funds were used, such as the proceeds from KUC's annual Book Fair<sup>2</sup>, barbecues and a concert series: *Music for a Sunday Evening*, which ran from 1992-1996<sup>3</sup>. Musicians from around Ottawa who sympathized with the intentions of KUC to acquire this instrument, donated their time and work to this series so that the proceeds could be collected for the Pipe Organ Fund. The musicians in this series included Janet Roy, Sandra Webster, the Ottawa Chamber Orchestra, Elizabethan Consort, The Cathedral Choir with Frances Macdonnell, Kanata Theatre, Three Fiddlers Plus!, Calvin Sieb, Zhanna Gumenyuk, Thomas Annand, Louise Chan, Cindy Chong, Tamar Shostakovich, Keiko and David Hutchenreuther, and Jean Desmarais.

During this time, a newsletter titled "Pull Out the Stops" was circulated to the members of KUC, detailing the progress of the organ acquisition and highlighting some interesting facts or stories about organs around the world. The 5th and final issue of this newsletter projected a total of the funds raised to be \$85,000, well exceeding the cost listed as \$76,503. With this positive news, the Pipe Organ Committee suggested that the church invest in the aforementioned combination action for the organ, which was accepted by church council and included in the refurbishing.

Between 14-16 January 1994 Guy Thérien and his team along with members of KUC dismantled the organ from the Milligan residence to be transported to Ste. Hyacinthe for rebuilding. During this process,

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<sup>2</sup> The Book Fair would continue as an annual fundraiser, and as of May 2024, the KUC Book Fair has just finished its 32nd year.

<sup>3</sup> Likewise, the concert series continued afterwards, but ended around the year 2000.

congregants were invited to travel to the workshop of Guilbault-Thérien to see the progress, and those that did were well received. The organ remained at Ste. Hyacinthe until 23 November 1994, when it was transported by truck to KUC, ready to be installed in the sanctuary. Installation began immediately thereafter.

The organ was first used in worship at KUC on 11 December, 1994 - ready in time for Christmas as planned. An official dedication of the instrument was held on 15 January, 1995. This service featured organist Dr. Patricia Phillips Wright, who played a program of Bach, Mendelssohn and Vierne, and the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Choir in collaboration with the choir at KUC. The Milligans were present at this service, and were personally thanked by the congregation, followed by the words:

“Carman, we hope as future generations hear and play this organ that they will feel some of your touch, that they will be aware of your spirit, that they will be inspired by your great love of fine music and that they may be guided by your deep religious beliefs. We know that these gifts will be with this organ and in that sense it will always be yours.”

## **Acknowledgements**

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