

About the Organ and Morley Music Hall

The Helen Rockwell Morley Hall Building was built to house Opus 647. The Morley Music Hall and Skinner Organ were made possible by a gift from Charles Morley in honor of his mother. Helen Rockwell Morley was a graduate of the Willoughby Seminary and is the daughter of one of Lake Erie College's founders. The building was designed by Abram Garfield, son of President James A. Garfield. It is of classic Greek design in Bedford limestone. The building has Corinthian pillars at the Mentor Avenue entrance, and wreaths of bas relief around the top commemorating the names of great musicians. Its 812-seat auditorium has a stage large enough for a 90-member choir. The auditorium and its pews are of Philippine mahogany. The organ (Opus 647) in the Morley Music Hall was hand-built by Ernest M. Skinner. In its original configuration, it consisted of Great Swell, Choir, Solo, Echo and Pedal divisions with 63 ranks, 55 stops and 4,226 pipes. With the exception of the Skinner Organ in Cleveland Public Hall, it was at that time the largest Skinner Organ in Ohio.

From 1927 through the mid-1980's, prominent organists, such as Russell Gee, Edwin Arthur Kraft, Jock Darling and David Gooding were artists in residence. Christmas Vespers and organ recitals drew full house audiences. Guests were exhilarated by the distinguished sound of the Skinner at Founder's Day, Baccalaureate, Commencement and many festive community events.

The Skinner was in need of service in the early 1970's. Influenced by the organ reform movement that spread across the United States in the 1960's, it was decided that the Skinner was out of fashion and needed to be "modernized". This modernization resulted in the loss of the original console and many of the original pipes. The Skinner, showing the wear of time and in need of repair, was last played in 1995. The Morley Music Hall's building was renovated in 1991 and opened for special events. Its mahogany pews are also showing 77 years of wear and tear and need to be refinished. Most have been entirely discarded and replaced as they went out of fashion during the "Organ Reform Movement" which hit the United States in the 1960's and 1970's. Lake Erie College is somewhat fortunate, in that nearly all of the "chassis" (blower, ductwork, chests) of Opus 647 remains as Skinner built and installed it. Although today only some of the original pipe work remains, those pipes that do exist are the most costly and important ones, namely, all of the 32' and 16' pipes, along with many of the 8' ranks. Had these been lost, they would have been the most difficult and costly to

replace. Opus 647 is worthy of being restored since it is a rare example of a Skinner organ that is found in an academic setting, and that is relatively intact. Furthermore, the College has replaced the missing pipe work with original Skinner pipes from other sources.

Beautiful Morley Music Hall is the center for musical studies and performances on the Lake Erie College campus. This facility has received numerous acclaims from international performers as one of the best concert facilities to be found on any college or university campus. The remarkable acoustics of Morley also make the perfect soundboard for the newly-restored, 64-rank E. M. Skinner Organ, Op 647, that is integrated into the concert hall.