

CELEBRATING

125  
YEARS

October 8, 2023

Choir and Organists at St. Paul's:  
A Tentative History

"God has preached the Gospel through music"

*Martin Luther*

### Part One: Organists and Organs

Although organists and organs are crucial components of worship services, the various anniversary booklets produced have said little or nothing about the organists and choirs. This essay is a tentative compilation of bits of information found in previous anniversary booklets, church records, and the memories of long-term members of the congregation.

According to one of the booklets, the first organist that we have a record of was Ann-Clare Carlisle Berry who played the organ from 1929 until her death in 1969, an impressive forty years. The records of St. Paul's include a collection of church bulletins from 1061 to 1979. Fortunately, some of the ones from the 1960s listed organists and choir directors. In the bulletins, Mrs. Berry is listed as Mrs. E. Y. Berry. At that time, women were referred to by their husband's name with a Mrs. in front. Mrs. Berry shared the duties of being organist with Charles Ogle and Mr. K. R. Erikson.

1961 was the year that the congregation voted to have two morning services—8:15 and 10:45. As a result, one organist would play for the 8:15 service and another would place for the 10:45 service. Ogle, Erikson, and Berry continued sharing the duties as the organist. On 20 August, a new organist appeared and Terrill Wenzel played the organ while he was on vacation from attending college in Texas. Over the years, he would continue to play the organ as needed. During 1962, Ogle, Berry, and Erikson took turns playing the organ while during 1963 only Erikson served as organist. Things were more crowded in 1964. Again, Erikson and Berry shared playing the organ but in October they were joined by Karl Oliver. In 1965 Carl Oliver played the 8:15 service and Mrs. Berry played at 10:45. Mrs. Carl Oliver joined her husband in playing the organ in September. During the same time period, Terrill Wenzel, now with the title of Dr., would also play the organ on occasion. Mr. and Mrs. Oliver continued to share playing the organ at 8:15 while Mrs. Berry played at 10:45. She continued to play for that service during 1967. Mr. Oliver began 1967 as the

organist for the 8:15 service but on 26 February Miss Diane Black took his place as organist for 8:15 and continued to be the organist for that service through most of 1969. Mrs. Berry continued to play for the 10:45 service through 1968 until 9 February 1969. She died that year. Miss Perrin Morin took Mrs. Berry's place at 10:15 beginning 16 February. Dr. Wenzel and Miss Black continued to fill-in as organist on occasion. During the second half of 1969 and early 1970, the duties of organist were shared by Mrs. Eugene Story, Dr. Wenzell, Mrs. Lanny Yocum, and Mrs. T. Livingston.

At that point, there is a gap in organist history. On 15 February 1970, the church bulletins stopped listing the organists. In 1986, Beverly Thatcher became the assistant organist to the then-current organist Agnes Johnson. What we don't know is when Agnes Johnson started as the organist, nor do we have a record of when Beverly became the sole organist. Beverly would go on to play the organ for twenty-nine years until 21 May 2015, with Peggy Webb, Patricia Scheler, and Ramona Landers playing on occasion from 2006-2008; Paul Colba played frequently from 2009-2016, sharing regular time on the bench with Beverly her last two years. Mark Blaske began playing in 2014 and became the organist in 2015 when Beverly Thatcher retired and in which position he continues to provide beautiful music.

The organs also have their own history. What we know is that in 1972 the Organ Fund established. As a result, a new organ was purchased. On 19 January 1975, the Allen Computer Organ was dedicated. It was purchased with money from the Memorial Fund and was dedicated to the Glory of God and in moving memory of the departed. The current organ was purchased with a Memorial gift in 2007 when the Sanctuary was remodeled.

If anyone has additions or corrections regarding this history, please contact Ron Fritze at [rfritze@wowway.com](mailto:rfritze@wowway.com) or 256 497 2413. Any corrections or new information will be gratefully accepted. Also if you are interested in joining the choir, new members are very, very welcome. And it is good fellowship too!!! Stay tuned for what we know about the history of the choir next month.

