

Brief history of Geo. H. Ryder

(Opus No. 76, 1883)

- Re-Built by Andover Organ Co.
- Manuals: 2
- Divisions: 3
- Stops: 11
- Registers: 17
- Position: Key-desk attached.
- Manual Compass: 61
- Pedal Compass: 30
- Key Action: Mechanical connection from key to chest (tracker, sticker or mix).
- Stop Action: Mechanical connection between stop control and chest.
- Console Style: Traditional style with a keyboard cover that can be lifted to form a music rack.
- Stop Controls: Drawknobs in horizontal rows on terraced/stepped jambs.
- Combination Action: Fixed mechanical system.
- Swell Control Type: Balanced swell shoes/pedals, not in standard AGO position.
- Pedalboard Type: Concave straight pedalboard.

Scot Huntington on June 12, 2021:

The Andover Organ Company renovated the organ with further tonal revisions in 1983. The work included restoration of the wind-chests, replacement of the Swell string with a 2' Principal- a standard Andover treatment of the period, as well as general renovation and regulation of the keyboards, pipework and action. Andover provided elegant stop labels for those missing or altered, which were exacting replicas of the originals and replaced the temporary labels from Wessel. The stenciled facade decoration is original.

The organ was originally built for the substantial 1848 Italianate estate "Ashmere" in Windsor Locks, Conn. in 1883, and moved to the Broad Brook, Conn. Grace Episcopal Church in 1959 when the home was sold and demolished after ultimately serving as the Ashmere Inn from 1952-59. Grace church was condemned as unsafe and torn down in 1962. No space was allowed for the organ in the replacement edifice so it was sold to the Hebron church and moved by John Wessel of Brattleboro, VT in 1963 with two tonal changes. The organ received maintenance and minor repairs by Richard Hamar between 1971 and 1979.

The First Congregational Church disbanded in 2019 and the building sold to the Church of Hope pentacostal congregation. Emerging from Covid-19 distancing in the spring of 2021, the congregation has removed all evidence of traditional worship from the room and is planning to junk the organ as soon as possible as of the first week of June, 2021

Andover Organ Co. (renovated 1983)
rb. Hewitt & Wessel (1963)
Geo. Ryder No. 76, 1883
First Congregational Church
Hebron, Connecticut

Compasses: 61/30
* Wessel alteration



Music Room at Ashmere

** Andover alteration

GREAT

Gr. Open Diapason 8 ft. basses in the facade, replacement label
Gr. Melodia 8 ft. stopped basses
Gr. Dulciana 8 ft. 1-12 from Melodia
Gr. Octave 4 ft.

SWELL [enclosed]

Sw. Stop. Diap. 8 ft.
Sw. Flute Celeste 4 ft.
Sw. Nasard* 2 2/3 ft. replaced Violin 4', replacement label
Sw. Principal** 2 ft. replaced Keraulophon 8', replacement label
Sw. Oboe 8 ft.

PEDALE

Ped. Bourdon 16 ft. replacement label
Ped. Nachthorn* 4 ft. replaced Violoncello 8', replacement label

Swell to Great replacement label
Great to Pedale
Swell to Pedale
Bellows Signal replacement label

Pedal Movements [unlabeled]:

Great combinations: Piano, Forte
Gr. Octave Coupler [4']
Sw. Tremolo
Balanced expression pedal

The history of this instrument continues to coalesce as source information comes to light. Organbuilder Richard Hamar has shared with me his shop notes dating from the period of his experience with this organ. He was first called to tune the instrument in 1971 and prepared a report detailing numerous challenges facing the instrument at that time. His notes confirm the instrument was moved and slightly altered by John Wessel for this location in 1963, and it was a low-budget job. The most serious problems were with the cracked and leaking windchests, and deteriorated leather in the wood pipe stoppers, bung and trunk gaskets, and bellows. Beginning in 1975 the church signed numerous contracts for repairs, some being completed with others experiencing delays both on the part of the builder and church holds due to shortfalls in fund raising. In the spring of 1978 a contract was signed for windchest retabling followed in March 1979 with a contract to replace the Great Dulciana with a new Super Octave 2'. A dispute arose between the church and builder over continuing delays in August, whereby Mr. Hamar agreed to cancel the contract in September 1979, reinstalled the unrepaired windchests, and refunded the church's money.

Cutting a pedal Cello in half to create a cantus firmus 4' stop was a typical treatment of Mr. Wessel during the 1960s and 70s, and Mr. Hamar's shop notes indicate the Keraulophon was still in place through the end of 1979. It is likely the Nasard was made from the former Violin 4' rescaled or shortened and revoiced. At this time there is no evidence of any reworking of Welcome K. Adams pipework incorporated into the Ryder, so this appears to be an unsubstantiated myth.

In 1983, the organ was refurbished by the Andover Organ Company. This work included rebuilding of the windchests, refurbishment of the Oboe, and replacement of the Swell string with a 2' Principal-- a standard Andover treatment at the time. The replacement stoplabels appear to be done by the same hand and are excellent replicas of the originals. The typed labels provided by Wessel were replaced at this time.

We received the most recent update for this note from Scot Huntington on June 12, 2021.

Scot Huntington on June 10, 2021:

Notice was sent today (6/10/21) to local friends of the organ stating the instrument is available for the taking, for immediate removal, otherwise it will be removed by the end of the month by church volunteers and discarded. The Ryder organ was originally built for "Ashmere", the 1840s Italiante mansion estate of the Dexter/Coffin family. Seth Dexter was the chief engineer of the Windsor Locks canal. Later members of the family (later married into the Coffin family) owned the Dexter Paper Mill into the 1960s. This was the most elegant estate ever built in Windsor Locks. The house was sold in 1960 to developers who demolished it, and the organ was given to the local Episcopal church. The history from there is reproduced in previous entries for this instrument.

We received the most recent update for this note from Scot Huntington on June 10, 2021.

Database Manager on June 22, 2008:

Updated through on-line information from Lisa Lucius. -- This organ was previously located in Broad Brook, CT Grace Episcopal.

We received the most recent update for this note from Database Manager on April 09, 2020.

Database Manager on October 30, 2004:

OCH. Tonally altered by J. Wessel 1963. Uses pipes of former 2 manual W. K. Adams. Rebuilt Andover 1983, 2-11.

Correction: "Ashmere" was actually built by Edwin Douglas and his wife Harriet Dexter on land gifted to her by her father Seth. Her daughter Julia married Raymond Coffin who ran the Dexter family paper mill, and is the purchaser of the Ryder for the estate in 1883.

Alan Laufman's files are rarely wrong, but his date of the 1983 for the sale of the Ryder organ from Broad Brook to Hebron, Conn. is highly questionable. The 1975 O.H.S. extant list already has the organ in Hebron-- moved and rebuilt for that place in 1963. I've consulted five different sources about the history

of this organ and its moves, and they all disagree widely. The most plausible is the highly-accurate annotated Ryder opus list compiled by a private individual, which agrees in broad strokes with the construction of the present Grace Church building.

Circa 1961-62, the 19th-century Broad Brook church was condemned and replaced with a new, smaller structure at 44 Ellington Road. A photo of the Ryder when newly installed shows a massive crack traversing the back wall above the organ. Pews, a special window and other artifacts were saved, but there was no room allowed for the transfer of the Ryder so it was sold to the First Congregational Church in Hebron, Conn. where it was moved with tonal changes by John Wessel of Brattleboro, Vermont in 1963. It was later renovated and possibly altered again by Andover at some point between 1983 and 1990. The Hebron church became the pentacostal Church of Hope ca.2019- 2020 and reopening after Covid in June, 2021 is rushing to junk the organ as quickly as possible. In March 2019, the Grace Episcopal Church building in Broad Brook was deconsecrated and the congregation merged with Grace Episcopal in Windsor, Conn. The Broad Brook church was sold in June 2019 to the pentacostal Covenant Church congregation.

Two sources suggest the Ryder was rebuilt in Broad Brook with pipes from the original Welcome K. Adams organ in Grace Episcopal-- an instrument gone without a trace when Ed Boadway recorded the Ryder stoplist as it was newly installed in Broad Brook without alteration in 1959. It may be the sources are conflating the location of the Adams, which could plausibly have been the original organ in Hebron, not Broad Brook, and Wessel may well have incorporated Adams pipes into the tonally altered organ as part of his moving and modernizing it for Hebron. One source indicates the Broad Brook Adams was a two-manual while the other more accurate source states it was one. It is suspicious that a two-manual organ would have been replaced with an instrument of exactly the same size and similar age unless the Adams was failing, and it's more likely the Ryder was an upgrade from one manual to two.