Praise the Lord J. W. Walker Organ

In 1987, we commissioned the J. W. Walker & Sons Ltd., founded in 1828, in England to design and build a new organ for us.

The free-standing case of St. John's new Walker serves to focus and project the sound, for a musical, as well as a visual, purpose. Designed by Walker's architect David Graebe, it is made from Brazilian Mahogany. The case pipes are made of tin mined in Thailand. Derek Riley hand carved the shades at the tops of the case pipes. These decorative items depict the instruments of praise from the 150th Psalm and also function to help mix and filter the sound that emerges.



Walker's technical designer Andrew Pennells used a variety of materials and hardwoods imported from many countries for the construction of the organ, including: Rosewood from India for the sharp keys and draw stop knobs; African utile for the main structure; Canadian pine for the Pedal Subbass; American oak pedal keys; Western red cedar trackers; American basswood for the manual keyboards. The action parts are made variously of American hard maple, titanium brass and steel, according to their functions. The natural keys are covered in cow bone, and the stop names are hand engraved on ivory. The organ weighs 7,800 pounds.

Tonally, the Walker Organ is built in a style which embraces all schools of music. The organ has 2 Manuals and Pedals with 21 speaking stops, four couplers and two tremulants, comprising 26 ranks and 1384 pipes grouped into distinct divisions within the case and each provided at the console with its own keyboard to form its own harmonically complete chorus. Walkers' tonal director Michael Butler designed the dimensions and other technical details for the construction of the pipes, while Paul Fulcher, his assistant, undertook the voicing and tuning of the instrument. The pipes are made of various alloys of tin and lead or wood, according to the tone required from each rank. All the pipes, as indeed all other parts except the electrical components, are manufactured by Walker craftsman.

The manual and pedal actions of the organ are tracker, while the stop control is electro-magnetic, with a solid state capture combination action. The organ was constructed and assembled in Walker's workshops in Suffolk, England, under the direction of Andrew Dolby, then packed in a sea-going container for its journey to Sudbury. The unpacking and installation was undertaken by Andrew Pennells and Walker's American sales and installation manager George Gilliam.

It operates by tracker mechanism between the organ keys and the pipe chests. This type of mechanism was used for many years before electronic and electropneumatic organs were developed. The organ arrived in the middle of a January snowstorm in 1988. Technicians spent several weeks assembling and voicing the new instruments. The Luosalo family graciously offered their in-law suite as a place for the team to stay. The organ's wide front of gleaming pipes and wood are very impression. The carved wood filigree at the top of the pipes combined both Scandinavian and Christian heritages featuring acanthus vines, a motif traditional in Scandinavian art, entwining musical instruments from Psalm 150.

Guest organist Michael Farris performed a dedicatory concert in February. Dr. John Ferguson of St Olaf's College led a hymn festival co-sponsored with the Worcester Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. The Cambridge Chorale, the New England Brass Quintet and many other groups and individuals presented Christian music for the enjoyment and inspiration of the congregation and the community.