

By Jacob R. Johnson, 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner, 2018

Tucked away in an inauspicious display in the Dunnam Bible Museum at Houston Baptist University is an eclectic musical instrument once used in a Texas Baptist church.

Although it is somewhat of an oddity i in fact an important part of the fascinating and evolving story of the millennia-old tradition of worship music in the Christian church.

The Ross Avenue Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas was the original user of this pump organ, made in the 1890s by the Jesse French Piano and Organ Company. After the church decommissioned the instrument, Elijah and Ruth Propps, a couple wedded at the church, restored it for home use. After the couple passed, the ldren, Gregory Dean Propps and Greta Collins, donated the organ to HBU (museum exhibit).

The Jesse French Piano and Organ Company was headquartered in Nashville. It had a huge retail presence in the South and Midwest, augmented by 100 traveling salesmen. Although its fortunes were largely tied to the popularity of ragtime music, its instruments obviously found their way into churches as well (Joyner).

Pump organs, while lacking the tonal versatility of their pipe organ cousins, are not built into a buildin m portable. This allows them to be used at a variety of venues. In this particular case, the organ was used at tent meetings before the church constructed a building. Additionally, due to being much less mechanically complex, they are significantly smaller, lighter, and cheaper (Huivenaar).

Though aesthetically similar to upright pianos and played similarly to pipe organs, pump organs, also known as harmoniums, reed organs, and melodeons, are nearly mechanically and

acoustically identical to accordions. Through the use of bellows, traditionally operated by hand

met its demise with the advent of the analog electronic organ in the 1930s. Due to patent laws, manufacturers of pump organs were legally required to use vastly different, and usually

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