

Tell Us 'Bout The Good Old Days

The Mighty Kilgen Pipe Organ Still Making Heavenly Music

By Barbara Case Summerlin

I never had the privilege of attending a silent movie. They were a little before my time. But I surely must have missed out on something significant, because several people to whom I have talked recently tell me that the first time they ever saw a talking picture show they were convinced the industry had gone to the dogs.

Of course the quality of sound back then left a lot to be desired. Imagine, if you will, what it must have been like to listen to a lot of screeching and scratching after having been used to hearing beautiful live organ music that up until that time accompanied silent picture shows.

Thanks to Stentz Badgett and Mrs. Velpo "Sissy" Ward, I am able to share something that many of you are sure to find interesting — particularly those of you who remember the old Grand Theatre and silent movies, and Winnie Ward.

If you've every wondered what happened to the old Kilgen pipe organ that Winnie used to play at the Grand, well, we're about to fill you in on that, also.

But first things first. Sissy tells me that Winnie is living at a rest home in Galax, Virginia and that they visit several times a week. Winnie is "pretty as ever" and often plays the piano there for the pleasure of the residents.

The old Kilgen pipe organ? It's been making beautiful sounds at Rockford Street United Methodist Church since 1950. There are reportedly only 11 such organs in the United States — but wait, I'm getting a little ahead of myself.

Sissy talked with Winnie recently about her recollections of playing for the old silent films. It seems that Winnie, a native of nearby Lambsburg, had been playing at theatres in and around Macon and Atlanta, Georgia, when she learned that Mr. P.A. Boone and Mr. E. Q. Benbow had purchased the superbly-ranked Kilgen

organ to be used in the old Grand Theatre. This was in 1927. Winnie returned home and became a legend to those who remember her beauty and talent.

In the twenties, Mary Pickford may have been the star of the silver screen, but the "lovely" Winnie Ward, seated at the grand old Kilgen at the old Grand Theatre, was the star on the stage. Those who remember tell me that when she crossed the stage to seat herself at the organ, she would get a round of applause.

Winnie told Sissy recently that the first song she ever played on the old Kilgen was "My Blue Heaven." She also remembers well the last song she played — "My Blue Heaven."

Stentz Badgett recalls that back in the Twenties, the doors to the theatre would open at 6:30. Winnie would play the organ until the film started at 7 p.m. Once the film started, Winnie played from a script. From the sounds of a trumpet to the roar of thunder, Winnie synchronized the sounds with the images on the screen, in near perfection.

As you will notice on the reproduction of the billboard appearing on this page, she would play requests for thirty minutes prior to the screening of the film. Her most often requested selection? "Indian Love Call." Her rendition is described as "unforgettable."

Two speakers were mounted outside the old theatre in order for people on Main Street who maybe couldn't afford the price of a ticket to hear the beautiful music. One person I spoke with recently told me he could still see the beautiful Winnie Ward, leaning back on the bench of the organ, with her eyes closed, looking heavenward, playing that old pipe organ.

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GRAND
The Family Theatre



Presents

An Every Day Feature

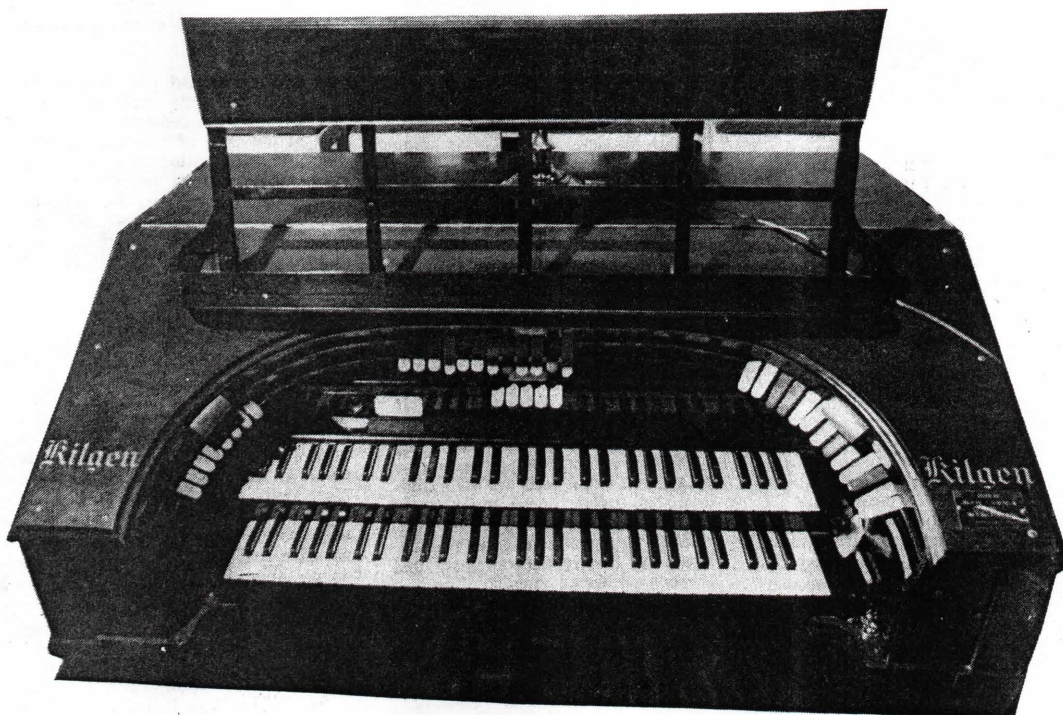
**WINNIE
WARD RAY**

At the Console of the

**MIGHTY KILGEN
PIPE ORGAN**



What's Your
Favorite Tune?
Ask Her, She Will
Play It!



There are said to be only 11 other Kilgen pipe organs in the United States, like this one at Rockford Street Methodist Church.

S'More 'Bout Our Triflin' Ways

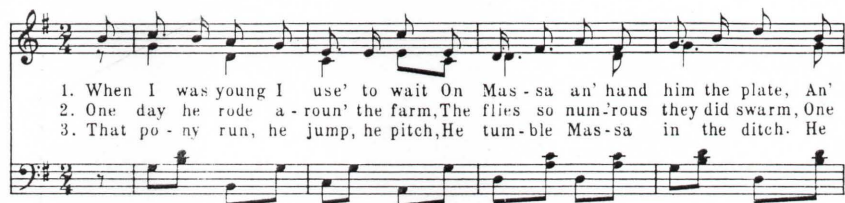


Old Tyme Music

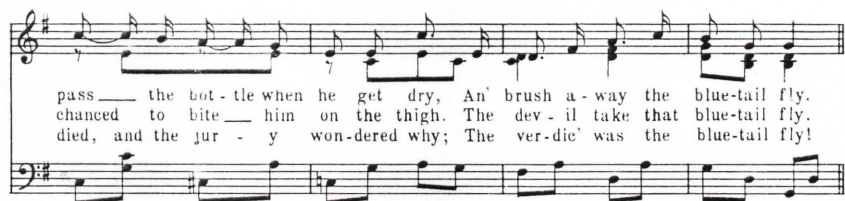
The Blue-Tail Fly

In an effort to come up with a song that makes reference to corn, we came across "The Blue-Tail Fly." The chorus to the song gives further recognition to the honors we are bestowing this month on corn.

In addition, if you've ever shucked much corn, you're aware of the big attraction it has to flies. Whether or not they have blue-tails, we are not certain. Perhaps we have been to quick to swat.



1. When I was young I use' to wait On Mas-sa an' hand him the plate, An'
2. One day he rode a-roun' the farm, The flies so num'rous they did swarm, One
3. That po-ny run, he jump, he pitch, He tum-ble Mas-sa in the ditch. He

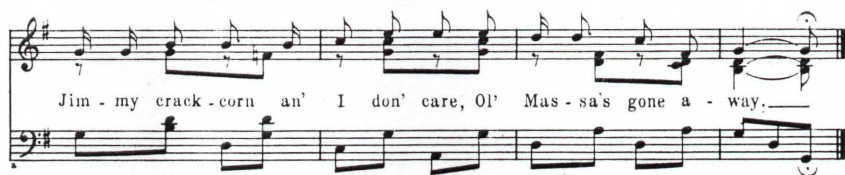


pass the bot-tle when he get dry, An' brush a-way the blue-tail fly.
chanced to bite him on the thigh. The dev-il take that blue-tail fly.
died, and the jur-y won-dered why; The ver-dic' was the blue-tail fly!

CHORUS



Jim-my crack-corn an' I don' care, Jim-my crack-corn an' I don' care,



Jim-my crack-corn an' I don' care, Ol' Mas-sa's gone a-way.

Kilgen Organ

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Winnie said that the speakers were eventually taken down at the request of downtown merchants because another theatre had opened, and they didn't want them to feel upstaged.

The old Kilgen organ seems to have had a divine destiny. One morning, back in 1950, Stentz was enjoying something to eat with Mr. Boone in the back of the old Blue Bird Cafe. Mr. Boone casually mentioned that he didn't know what he was going to do with the old organ, but he needed to do something.

It just so happened that Stentz's church, Rockford Street Methodist, had laid a cornerstone for a new building August 20, 1925, completed a beautiful building in 1929, but did not have a pipe organ. The purchase of such an expensive piece of equipment was still some years down the road.

Stentz told Mr. Boone the church sure could use it. His passing comment didn't fall on deaf ears. Mr. and Mrs.

P. A. Boone and Mr. and Mrs. E. Q. Benbow made a gift of it to the church in 1950.

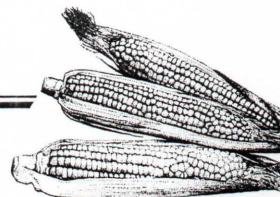
On Sunday, September 22, 1929, at precisely 11 a.m., the congregation of Rockford Street Methodist Church stood to sing hymn number 21 — "Holy, Holy, Holy." They were there to celebrate the completion of their labor of love.

Since 1950, the congregation has enjoyed the accompaniment of the rare Kilgen pipe organ to their singing — thanks to the generous gift from the Boone and Benbow families.

Over the years, heavenly strains of music have been played by Pauline Wimbish, Kate Christian, Tamara Carter, Priscilla Marshall, Margaret Nichols, Karen Robertson and Jamie Robertson.

There's a good possibility that "When We ALL Get To Heaven," there'll be someone there playing the old Kilgen pipe organ to usher us in. Folks who remember Winnie Ward well are banking on it being her.

A Corny Little Joke



FIRST LADY: "I know my husband doesn't love me."

SECOND LADY: "Why would you say such a thing?"

FIRST LADY: "Cause if he had, he would have married someone else."



This sign near Kibler Valley is a classic reminder of how simple advertising messages once brought unprecedented results.



History

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Information on nearly 1,000 soldiers been taken from the official military records from National Archives and Surveys in Raleigh. The names of parents, wives and children are listed, if found. These family names are taken from federal census lists, Surry County records and family records.

One section of the book is given to about 75 letters written by the Surry County soldiers. These letters give some insight into the experience and emotions of the soldiers during that terrible period. These are priceless voices from the past.

Another section gives short histories of the seven companies raised in Surry County as well as the companies joined by Surry men in Virginia.

The book will have over 400 pages, 8 1/2 x 11 in hardcover and softcover. There are a few pictures and full index.

Please take advantage of our discount on all books ordered before Oct. 1. Make checks payable to Surry County Historical Society Publication Fund. Mail to Hes Jackson-Marion Venable, Box 707, Durham, N.C. 27017.