



### A Short History of the Pilcher Family of Organ Builders

Henry Pilcher was born on Jan. 27, 1798 in Canterbury, Kent County, England. He began learning organ building as an apprentice with his older brother, William, in London. In 1820, Henry opened his first independent workshop in Dover. He married and began raising a family of five children. News from the great "Land of Opportunity" enticed Henry to journey to New England. After having favorably assessed the American market, Henry sent for his wife and children in 1832. The family settled in Newark, New Jersey and opened shop. However, this was only the first stop in a long series of moves. In 1838, the Pilchers moved to New York, where Henry worked for the renowned organ builder, Henry Erben. Mr. Pilcher not only built organs, but also held organist positions and taught organ privately. In 1848, the Pilchers moved back to Newark. Because of the fierce competition in New England amongst the organ builders and because of the great migration of the American population westward, the Pilchers moved to St. Louis in 1852 and opened shop under the name of "Henry Pilcher and Sons." Henry Jr., William E., and Robert E. helped their father expand the family business. Not only did they build organs, but they also sold music, pianos, musical instruments, and even published music. In 1858, Henry Sr. retired.



With the dangers and uncertainties of the Civil War, the Pilcher sons decided in 1863 to pack up shop again and move to safer ground in Chicago. The Pilchers paired up with organist Henry William Chant to produce organs under the nameplate of "Pilcher and Chant." But three years later, the name was changed to "Pilcher Brothers." The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 left the city in physical and economic ruins. The time had come for the Pilcher Brothers to go their separate ways. William Sr. remained in Chicago for a short time with his son William Jr., but then moved to St. Louis and finally to New Orleans where William Sr. died in 1912.



Henry Pilcher Jr., on the other hand, moved to Louisville, Kentucky with his two sons Henry Wendover and William Edward and built organs under the name "Henry Pilcher and Sons." Four years after the death of his father on Nov. 1, 1880, Henry Jr. passed the business in Louisville on to his sons, the third generation. Some 2,000 organs were built with the nameplate "Henry Pilcher's Sons." It was during this part of the Pilcher family history that our organ was built. Henry Jr. (b. July 25, 1825) died on Feb. 22, 1891. The business continued to flourish but barely survived the hard time of the Great Depression of the 1930's. Finally, in 1944, the company was sold to M. P. Moller Inc. of Hagerstown, Maryland. Moller went on to become the largest organ factory in the United States but went bankrupt in 1992.

