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# A Conrad Doll Chamber Organ

by Raymond J. Brunner

During the latter part of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, many of America's finest craftsmen were working in and around Lancaster, Pennsylvania. This southeastern Pennsylvania area is well known for the fine furniture, clocks, metalwork, guns and decorative objects produced by German, English, and Scotch-Irish immigrants who settled there. The early history of organ building in this country also owes much to the area, for near Lancaster in the Moravian community of Lititz lived the master organ builder David Tannenberg. His extraordinary ability and prolific output of over 40 organs influenced other organ builders who succeeded him. One such man was Conrad Doll of Lancaster.

Doll was a remarkable man, for in addition to building organs he was an accomplished cabinetmaker, published a hymnbook, and was an organist and schoolmaster. He is best remembered for the organ which he built in 1807 for Peace Church, near Camp Hill, Pennsylvania. Long thought to be the only surviving Doll organ, it has one manual with six stops and is housed in a beautiful Chippendale case. The recent discovery of a second extant Doll organ prompts this article.

The organ is a two stop chamber organ in a small Hepplewhite style case. It was built probably between 1805 and 1810. The two stops are an 8' Gedackt, and a 2' Principal which breaks to 4' pitch at middle C. The size of the organ and case style suggests that it was built for household use rather than as a church organ.

Details of Conrad Doll's life are sketchy, despite extensive research, and much is open to speculation. He lived from 1772 to 1819 in the city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania. His grandfather had come to America in 1741 from Bretten, Germany. Doll's father, John, was a child of seven years when his family arrived at the port of Philadelphia. The Dolls settled in Lancaster and grew to a large family. Conrad Doll was one of seven children. His family was talented, as he had an uncle who was a cabinetmaker, a brother Joseph who was a clockmaker and silversmith, and a brother Jacob who was a York, Pennsylvania, gunsmith.<sup>1</sup> Conrad's father was schoolmaster of the church school at First Reformed Church in Lancaster. The church played a large part in Conrad's life, as he was destined to replace his father as schoolmaster and assume the role of church organist.

In 1798, at the age of 26, Conrad Doll published a music hymn book entitled *Sammlung Geistlicher Lieder nebst Melodien*.<sup>2</sup> The book includes an introduction by Christian Ludwig Becker, pastor of First Reformed Church at that time. Doll follows this with instructions for singing. The hymns in the book are of Swiss origin and are the works of Zollikofer,

Bachofen, and Schmidlin.<sup>3</sup> In the same year Conrad Doll, Caspar Schaffner and Caspar Fordney took up a collection to purchase a small organ for the church school.<sup>4</sup> They purchased a four stop Tannenberg organ, probably the one which had been built in 1775 for St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Lancaster.<sup>5</sup> The organ case exists in the church today, having been converted to a bookcase about sixty years ago.

This gave the church two Tannenberg organs, the four stop one for the church school and the two manual and pedal, 15 stop Tannenberg which the church had obtained in 1770.<sup>6</sup> Doll's uncle, George Burkhardt, was a Lancaster cabinetmaker who built the case for the 1770 Tannenberg organ. The case of this organ also survives in the church and testifies to Burkhardt's great skill. It seems likely that Doll learned his cabinetmaking skills from his uncle.<sup>7</sup>

In 1801, Doll married Maria Trissler; however, she died two years later at the birth of their first child, who also died.<sup>8</sup> Doll remarried in 1804. His second wife was Maria (Polly) Graeff, daughter of Andrew Graeff, a prominent judge.<sup>9</sup> They had two daughters.

It is uncertain when Doll started building organs. The Lancaster tax records list him as a "spinet and organ maker" from 1799 to 1814, and the deed for a house he purchased in 1805 lists him as "joiner and cabinetmaker."<sup>10</sup> There are no known Doll spinets surviving, nor do we have any information about them.

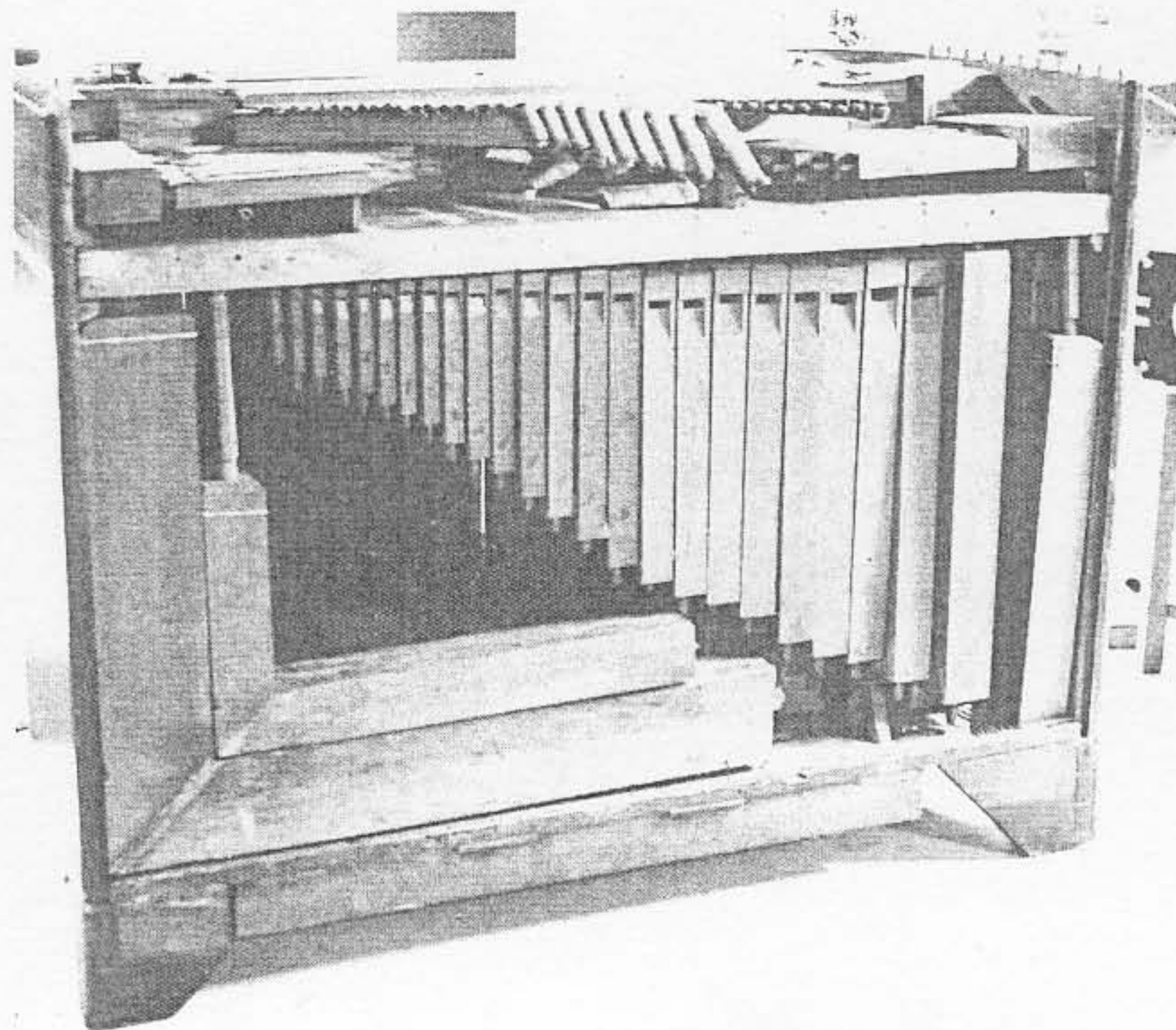
On July 6, 1807, Doll signed a contract with the German Reformed and Lutheran Congregations (a union church) near Camp Hill, Pennsylvania for the construction of an organ with six stops.<sup>11</sup> He agreed to complete the organ in five months for the sum of \$466.67. The church and organ are both preserved in their original condition today. Known as Peace Church, the building is used on special occasions and is open to the public during the summer. In 1974 the Doll organ was restored by the Noack Organ Co.<sup>12</sup> The Peace Church organ bears a nameplate which reads "Conrad Doll, No. 5, Lancaster." The meaning of the No. 5 is uncertain, as it could be the fifth organ or the fifth keyboard instrument he built. There are no records yet discovered of other Doll church organs which once existed.

In 1807, Doll's father died. By this time Conrad had become organist of First Reformed Church. In 1813, Doll's second wife died. The next year he was appointed to the position of schoolmaster of the church's parochial school.<sup>13</sup> In 1818, Doll petitioned the consistory for more money to operate the school, claiming he could not live on the allowance provided.





The Conrad Doll chamber organ.



Back view of the Conrad Doll organ.



Doll's life came to a tragic end in 1819 at the age of 47. At the church consistory meeting of April 26, 1819, a woman of the church accused Doll of attempting to rape her. He was dismissed from his position as schoolmaster. Apparently distraught over the incident, Doll committed suicide in August of 1819. The church consistory refused him burial in the church yard because of the circumstances of his death.<sup>14</sup> In June, 1820, Doll's estate was inventoried and was found to contain only \$107.45 worth of belongings.<sup>15</sup>

The Doll chamber organ which is the subject of this article came to light in May of 1978 at an estate sale in Lititz, Pennsylvania. It had been in the possession of a Mrs. Louella Carpenter, who had gotten it from an aunt, Agnes Spiro. The aunt in turn had obtained it years earlier from a Rev. Heidler in Rothsville, a small town near Lititz. This is as far back as its ownership could be traced.

At Mrs. Carpenter's estate sale in May, 1978 the organ was purchased by antique dealer William Warfel of Manheim, Pa. Shortly thereafter the author purchased it from Mr. Warfel. Nothing of its origins was known at that time. In searching for information, he was soon led to James R. McFarland, organ builder and organ historian of Millersville, Pa. After examining the instrument, the latter noticed a similarity between the stop action of the organ and that of the Conrad Doll organ in Peace Church. Upon visiting Peace Church to examine their organ and compare it to the chamber organ, it became obvious that they were both made by the same person. Among many similarities discovered were that the construction of both wood and metal pipework was identical in every detail, that handwriting on pipes and keys for identification was identical in both organs, that similar woods were used for various parts, that the moulded key nosings on both organs appeared to have been made with the same moulding tool, and that the inlay technique on the cheek blocks of the keyboards was the same. The most important documentary evidence in the chamber organ was found when the bellows were cut apart for releathering. The interior wood surfaces have newspaper glued to them to make the bellows more air tight. The newspaper, *Der Wahre Amerikaner*

(*The True American*), was a German language newspaper printed in Lancaster. The newspaper fragments are all from the fall of 1805. The Peace Church organ also has *Der Wahre Amerikaner* glued inside its bellows, dating from 1806.<sup>16</sup>

The chamber organ measures 4 feet wide by 2 feet deep and is 3½ feet high. Its Hepplewhite case is African mahogany with inlay banding of curly maple and walnut. The top of the case is solid mahogany, while the curved doors and the sides are mahogany veneer over pine. The 54 note keyboard has ivory natural coverings with poplar sharps, stained black. At each end of the keyboard is an inlaid cheek block and beyond the cheek blocks are pierced wood grilles for sound emission.

Wind is supplied by a bellows in the lower part of the case, actuated by a foot pedal on the right side. The pedal is retractable, so there is no indication that the case contains an organ when the lid is closed and the pedal is retracted. The bellows contains a single fold feeder, which supplies wind to a double fold wedge type reservoir. The reservoir has a section of its top board surrounded by four wood strips to form a compartment to hold two bricks for weight, providing wind pressure of 1⅞ inches, water column. The bellows is wedged in place between the wind duct and brackets on two of the mitered pipes.

The organ has a slider chest with pallet box below. The chest frame is made of maple with black walnut grid dividers, sponsils, pallets and sliders. The pallet box and toeboards are pine. Pallets are operated by brass pins pushed by the keys directly above them. One slider is located on the top of the chest and one on the bottom. The entire chest sits on a large channeled toeboard from which the 8' Gedackt pipes are suspended upside down, their tapered toes being pushed into tapered holes with beeswax to hold them in. The upper slider supplies wind to the 2¼' Principal rank whose pipes are placed horizontally above the large toeboard which feeds the 8' Gedackt and supports the wind chest. The slider beds are leathered as are the toeboards where they contact the sliders.

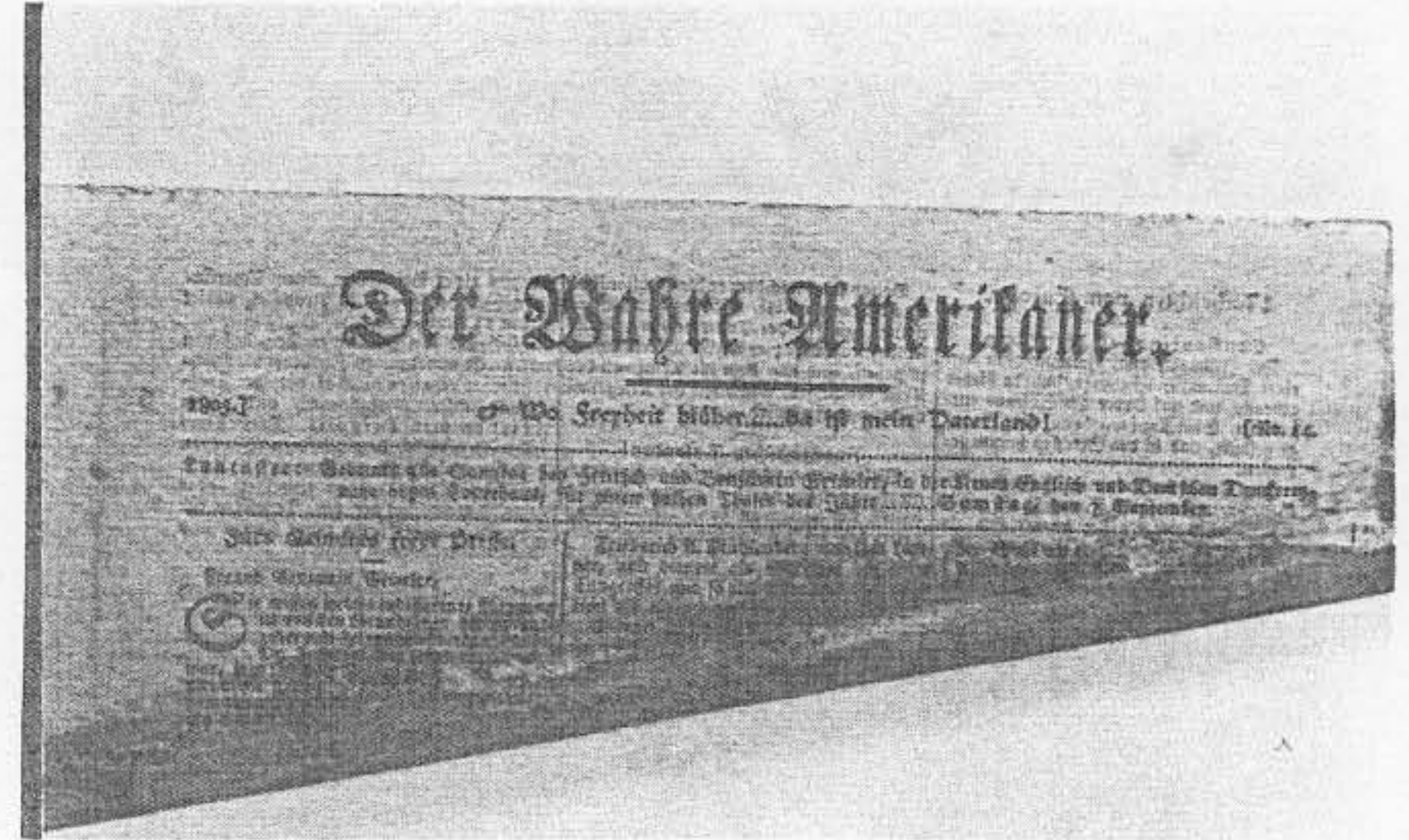
The wooden pipework of the 8' Gedackt is of pine to middle C and the rest of the rank is black walnut. Each wooden pipe has



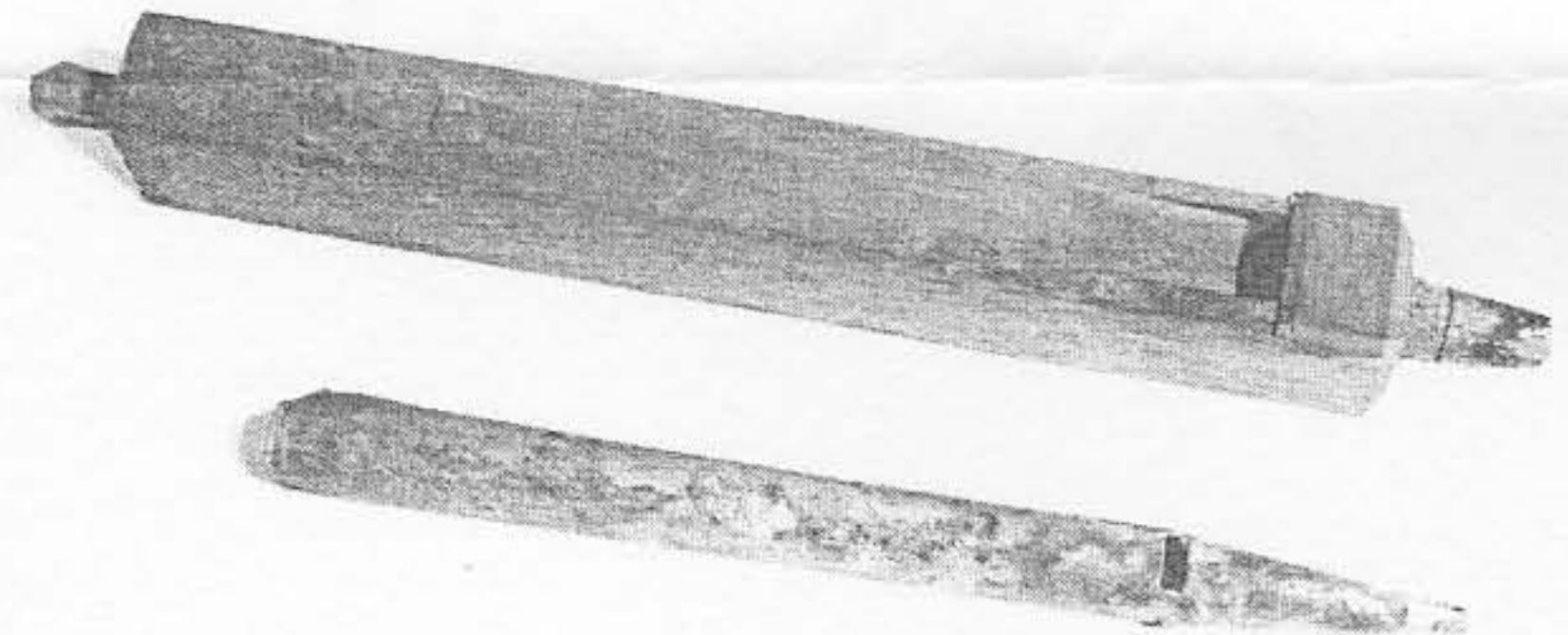


The keyboard, drawknobs, and pierced wood grilles of the Conrad Doll organ.

its block and toe shaped from a single piece of wood. The larger pipes have oak blocks, the smaller ones, walnut. Fitting the pipes in the lower part of the case required ingenuity, and pipes are placed in some unusual positions. They surround the bellows on three sides and the bottom 11 are mitered. One is attached to the bottom of the case, fed by a wooden tube, and two pipes protrude through the floor of the case in one back corner, hidden by the case foot and skirting. The stopper handles of the wooden pipes have faceted carving, identical to the Peace Church organ and distinctly different from Tannenberg stoppers.



Section of bellows rib showing *Der Wahre Amerikaner* No. 44, 1805.



Typical wood and metal pipes of the Doll organ.



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The Principal rank is of stopped wooden pipes at 2' pitch to middle C, where it changes to open metal pipes at 4' pitch. (As the stops are not labeled the designation of this rank is the author's.) This stop is most effectively used with the 8' Gedackt, rather than as a solo stop. The metal pipes are crudely made, as are the surviving original metal pipes on the Peace Church organ. Their construction is identical to that of the Peace Church Doll pipes, having the lanquid bent down at a right angle at the mouth to form the flue.

The scaling of the 8' Gedackt is identical to that of the 8' Gedackt on the Peace Church organ. The bottom two octaves of wooden pipes on the Principal are identical in scale to the 8'. The metal pipework of the Principal is scaled very near to the 8' "Dulciana" of the Peace Church organ.

There has been speculation in the past that Doll must have used Tannenberg's organs as models for his own, having access to two Tannenberg organs to copy. It is almost certain that Doll met Tannenberg on occasion when Tannenberg visited Lancaster to tune or service one of his organs. Unfortunately neither of the First Reformed Church Tannenbergs exist to compare to the Doll organs, but other similar Tannenbergs do. The four stop 1793 Tannenberg organ at the Lititz Moravian Church Single Brethren's House is quite similar to the four stop Tannenberg which Doll used in the church school at First Reformed. The 1793 Tannenberg contains an 8' Gedackt, an 8' Gamba, a 4' open wood flute and a 2' Principal. The Doll organ at Peace Church contains an 8' Gedackt and a 4' stopped flute identical in scale to the 4' open flute on the 1793 Tannenberg. The Doll 2' Fifteenth and 4' Principal at Peace Church are identical in scale to the Tannenberg 2' Principal. The so-called 8' Dulciana on the Peace Church Doll turns out to be the same scaling as Tannenberg's 8' Gamba, with the lower pipes borrowed from the Gedackt as Tannenberg did.



Typical wood and metal pipes of the Doll organ.

Restoration of the organ was done by the author, under the guidance of James R. McFarland. When acquired, the organ was well preserved and virtually intact except for two missing pipes and the original case back. An old note which came with the organ states that it was repaired by a Henry Hackman in June, 1922. His repairs appear to have been confined to patching the bellows, repairing split pipes, filling cracks in the wind chest, repairing broken and loose veneer on the case, and refinishing the case.

When restoring the organ, every attempt was made to avoid making any alterations to it, while returning it to as nearly original a state as possible. The bellows leather, apparently mostly original, was replaced. New leather gaskets were made for the wind duct and bung, but the pallet, pipe stopper, and slider bed leather was still serviceable, so it was left alone. The wind chest required some crack filling and the pallet box was resecured to the bottom of the chest, from which it had separated.

Some of the wooden pipework, mostly the lower octave of the 2' rank, had suffered rodent damage at the mouths, where wood had been gnawed away. Each of the damaged pipes was repaired by removing a portion of the pipe front at the mouth and replacing it with new wood, into which a new mouth was cut, thereby restoring the proper pipe speech. Other repairs to the wood pipework included regluing loose caps, lubricating stoppers and repairing a few split pipes. All of the wooden pipes

were found glued into the toeboards when the organ was acquired, but whether they were originally glued in is uncertain. They are now held in by beeswax, as it was felt that this would make the organ more serviceable.

The two piece, ivory, natural key covering were all intact, so nothing was done to them. Their condition, and evidence of later work on the keyboard, suggests that they are not original, but there was no way to determine this with certainty. The poplar sharps were originally stained black, but had been painted black at a later date. The paint was removed, and they were restained. Finally, repairs were made to some loose and missing veneer on the case and it was refinished.

On September 30, 1979, the Doll chamber organ was taken to Peace Church where it was used in a recital for two organs, both Conrad Dolls, at the annual meeting of Friends of Historic Peace Church. Dr. James Boeringer, chairman of the Susquehanna University Department of Music, and student Brenda Leach performed.

The Doll chamber organ was on exhibit at the Heritage Center Museum of Lancaster County, Center Square, Lancaster, from May through November of 1980.

#### PIPEWORK (dimensions in mm)

**Gedackt 8'** - C to b pine, c' to f''' black walnut. Stopped.  
C to f''' original except d''' (1979)

	C	c	c'	c''	c'''
Inside depth	96.0	56.0	32.5	18.0	8.5
Inside width	69.0	43.5	23.0	13.5	7.5
Cut-up	26.0	14.0	10.0	5.7	3.5
Wood thickness	10.0	7.5	5.0	3.0	2.5

**Principal 2' 1/4'** - C to b at 2' pitch, black walnut, stopped.  
c' to f''' at 4' pitch, metal, open.  
C to f''' original except e''' (1979)

	C	c	c'	c''	c'''
Inside depth	32.5	17.5			
Inside width	23.0	13.5			
Cut-up	9.5	5.5			
Wood thickness	5.0	3.0			
Diameter			21.0	13.5	8.0
Mouth width			13.5	8.5	5.0
Cut-up			4.0	3.0	2.0

#### Notes

1. Charles Edward Doll III, *300 Years of the Doll Family, 1672-1972* (Mount Clemens, Michigan, 1972).
2. Conrad Doll, *Sammlung Geistlicher Lieder nebst Melodien* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1798). Photocopy at Ganser Library, Millersville State Teachers College, Millersville, Pennsylvania, from an original at Clements Library, University of Michigan.
3. Robert B. Brown and Frank X. Braun, "The Tunebook of Conrad Doll," *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, Vol. 42, Third Quarter, 1948.
4. Elizabeth Clarke Kieffer, *Annals of First Reformed Church, 1733-1961*, (Lancaster, Pennsylvania). Copy at Shaff Library, Lancaster Theological Seminary.
5. Rev. W. Stuart Cramer, *History of The First Reformed Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania 1736-1904*, Vol. 1, 1904.
6. William H. Armstrong, *Organs for America, The Life and Work of David Tannenberg* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1967).

7. John J. Snyder, Jr., "Carved Chippendale case furniture from Lancaster, Pennsylvania," *Antiques*, May, 1975.
8. *Lancaster Journal*, October 17, 1801, and April 2, 1803. Lancaster County Historical Society.
9. *Lancaster County Historical Society Proceedings*, Vol. XII, p. 80, article about the Hives newspaper.
10. Lancaster Borough tax lists, Lancaster County Historical Society and Lancaster County deed 3-363, Lancaster County courthouse.
11. The original contract is at The William Penn Museum, Harrisburg, Pa.
12. Fritz Noack, "The Conrad Doll Organ at Peace Church, Camp Hill, Pa.," *ISO Information*, March 1977 and *The Tracker*, 20:1(Fall, 1975):7-10.
13. First Reformed Church Consistory Records, First Reformed Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.
14. First Reformed Church Consistory Records, entry of August 28, 1819.
15. Inventory of Goods and Chattels of Conrad Doll, June 30, 1820, Lancaster County Historical Society.
16. Information supplied in letter to author from Fritz Noack, March 11, 1980.

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