

Peter Pelham and Charles Pachelbel: New England's Immigrant Organists

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H. Joseph Butler

Abstract: Immigrants Peter Pelham and Charles Pachelbel were two of the first professional musicians to work in the American colonies. Charles, son of Johann Pachelbel, was active in New England before settling in Charleston, South Carolina; he was Pelham's teacher. Pelham, raised in Boston, was the first organist at Trinity Church. He spent most of his life in Williamsburg, Virginia where his music was heard by many of the nation's founders. Some of Pelham's teaching materials survive, providing examples of his and Pachelbel's work.

Chronology of Peter Pelham

- 1721 Born in London.
- 1726 Family moves to Boston. Father Peter Pelham is a mezzotint engraver and teacher.
- 1731 "First American concert" held at the Pelham house.
- 1734 PP begins nine-year apprenticeship with Charles Theodore Pachelbel.
Assists CTP assemble organ for Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island.
- 1736 PP follows CTP to Charleston, South Carolina.
- 1741 Letter from grandfather to father speaks of PP's "charicter."
- 1743 Returns to Boston; advertises for students.
- 1744 Copybook of spinet lessons produced.
Hired to set up organ at Trinity Church, Boston; appointed organist at £80 per year.
- 1750s Itinerant teacher in Hampton and Suffolk, Virginia. Frequent visits to Williamsburg.
- 1755 New organ for Bruton Church imported; assembled by PP.
Appointed organist at Bruton; paid £20. Petitioned yearly for salary.
- 1758-1775 Oversees printing of money.
- 1760s Teaches Martha Wayles Jefferson; Jefferson/Pelham MS begun.
- 1764 Travels to New York; advertises for students. Meets Benj. Franklin. Returns to Williamsburg.
- 1768 Directs a production of *The Beggar's Opera*.
- 1769-1770 Clerk for Governor Botetourt
- 1770 Appointed jailer for Williamsburg.
- 1773 Performs a dirge at a Masonic funeral. Music not extant.
- 1780 Capital moves to Richmond; Williamsburg falls into decline.
- 1802 PP is unable to play at Bruton; daughter Elizabeth takes over.
- 1805 Dies in Richmond.

Works: Several minuets for keyboard alone, possibly other teaching pieces and songs.

(See sources in bibliography: Darling, Butler, Pappas.)

Chronology of Charles Pachelbel

- 1690 Born in Erfurt as Carl Theodorus Pachelbel, son of Johann.
- 1734 Assembles organ for Trinity Church, Newport, Rhode Island.
- 1736 Performs in New York City.
- 1740 Organist at St. Philip's in Charleston, South Carolina
- 1750 Dies in Charleston.

Works: Magnificat in C for double choir (Pachelbel/David)
Song: God of Sleep (Butler)
Minuet (Butler)

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(Page 2)



Beginning of a song by C. T. Pachelbel, found in the Pelham manuscript of 1744.

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