

Historic Organs in Minas Gerais – Brazil:

The instruments in Diamantina and Córregos

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The Gold Rush era in the Capitania das Minas Gerais during the 17th and 18th centuries stimulated extensive cultural activity in that particular region of colonial Brazil.

Music was an important activity in several historic cities, being led by the *irmandades* (brotherhoods) whose main aim was to improve the liturgy. At that time, organs had not only been brought from Europe but also built by local organ builders (read my article on The Organs of Brazil in *The Organ*, 338, pp. 34-5).

Recent research has shed further light on the history of the Brazilian organ, despite the lack of documentation. Apart from the European instruments still found today at the Se Cathedral of Mariana (Schnitger/Ulenkampf) and at the Church of Santo Antonio in Tiradentes (unknown builder), there were many interesting small organs in several churches and farm chapels in Minas Gerais. But the majority of them have disappeared without trace. There is still an interesting positive organ at the Museu Regional (Regional Museum) in the historic city of São João del Rei, though only the case, the mechanism and one pipe have survived. In the historic city of Caeté, there are the remains of a cabinet organ (converted into a wardrobe) at the Church of Bonsucesso. No pipes or mechanism survive. There is also a cabinet organ at the chapel of the Rio São João Farm in Bom Jesus do Amparo, a district of the historic city of Itabira. Unfortunately, this organ is presently in a deplorable situation.

Diamantina city (formerly Arraial do Tejuco) was an important centre for the extraction of precious stones (mainly diamonds). The charming lady Chica da Silva (1732?-1796) lived there, and became a legend as the richest and fashionable black woman legend of that historic city. Da Silva, together with Padre José Rolim (1747-1835), raised for the construction of

the organ for the Church of Carmo, while two organs were built by Padre Manuel de Almeida e Silva for the churches of Carmo and Santo Antonio. There is no information about the instrument built for the Church of Santo Antonio, since the building was demolished in 1930. However, the small instrument found today at the Church of Carmo is well documented. The majority of the pipes, the complete mechanism, the wind supply and the bellows are all very well preserved. Another instrument is located in the village of Córregos, at the Igreja de Nossa Senhora d'Aparecida (Church of Our Lady of Aparecida). The existence of a pipe organ in the main church of such a small village – with precious stones encrusted on the stop knobs – is evidence of the abundant richness of the region at the time. The stones have disappeared, and the instrument is not working, having been abandoned for many years. But the majority of the pipe work and the mechanism survive, albeit in a deplorable condition. The organs in the Churches of Carmo and Córregos both deserve to be completely



Diamantina



Córregos

Photos: Handel Cecilio

restored. A recent MMus dissertation entitled *The eighteenth-century pipe organ of Carmo Church in Diamantina: its enigmas and its close link to the organ of Córregos* (State University of Campinas – 2008) written by organist Handel Cecilio Pinto da Silva shed much light on the history of these small but especial pipe organs in an impressive and accurate study based on much documentation, as well as through extensive research. ■



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