

Memorial for Walter Holtkamp, Jr. scheduled for Saturday, November 10

by Daniel Hathaway



Walter Henry “Chick” Holtkamp, Jr. joined the Holtkamp Organ Company in 1956 after serving in the Navy, becoming president of Cleveland’s oldest continuously operating manufacturing company in 1962 when his father died unexpectedly. In 1996, thirty-four years later, he retired from what was also the oldest continuously operating pipe organ firm in the U.S. — founded in 1855. Holtkamp died on August 27 at the age of 89. His life and career will be celebrated in a memorial event in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art on Saturday, November 10 at 11:00 am.

That event will include musical tributes by organists John Ferguson (emeritus professor at St. Olaf College) and David Higgs (professor at the Eastman School of Music), and eulogies by Chris Holtkamp, Eric Kisch, and Sarah McFarlane Polly, as well as by Ferguson and Higgs. Gartner Auditorium houses one of Holtkamp’s flagship instruments, the McMyler Memorial Organ, built in 1971.

In general, the company’s instruments reflect a neo-Baroque tonal aesthetic in a move away from 19th-century Romantic organ design. Like another iconic Holtkamp instrument — the 1951 organ in St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Cleveland Heights — the Gartner organ turns away from the traditional practice of housing pipes in casework in favor of bringing most of the pipework into view, arranged in geometric patterns. (More recent projects have included modern versions of encased instruments. See the range of the company’s work in some of its milestone instruments [here](#).)



Gartner Auditorium

As Holtkamp's wife Karen wrote in an email, "Chick's memorial event will be open to the public. It is not a concert or a religious service, but will incorporate a good chunk of music. The eulogies will be brief, covering his work, his love of literature, and his great love of music, which extended to commissioning new music by American composers. David Conte is coming from San Francisco, as his *Soliloquy*, written to honor Chick, will be performed. The event should last somewhere between 60-75 minutes, but no longer."

Karen Holtkamp has kindly provided *ClevelandClassical.com* with the following details about her late husband's life.

Walter Henry "Chick" Holtkamp, Jr., was a graduate of Western Reserve Academy (1947) and the University of Chicago (1951), and served in the United States Navy for four years.

Holtkamp designed and built instruments for such major schools as the Juilliard School, Cleveland Institute of Music, Union Theological Seminary, University of Notre Dame, and University of Alabama, as well as several hundred other churches and colleges, including North Christian Church in Columbus, Indiana, and at Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art. He commissioned new music for the pipe organ by American composers and founded national competitions in the areas of organ composition and improvisation in conjunction with the American Guild of Organists.

Holtkamp was a board member of the Musart Society of the Cleveland Museum of Art for decades, an active member and leader of the Rowfant Club, and a former president of the American Pipe Organ Builders Association. In his leisure, he enjoyed oil painting, reading poetry, and collecting jazz and classical music for piano.



1996 portrait

Walter Holtkamp, Jr., is survived by his wife, Karen (McFarlane), sons Walter Henry Holtkamp, III, F. Christian Holtkamp (Heather Chapman), and Mark B. Holtkamp, stepdaughter Sarah McFarlane Polly (Steven), and seven grandchildren.

Memorial gifts may be made to the Judson Foundation (specifically for the Richard Gardner Music Fund at Judson Manor), 2181 Ambleside Drive, Cleveland, Ohio 44106, or the Musart Society of the Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 30, 2018.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)