

Eddie Butler, 90

July 7, 1910 – Feb. 7, 2001

OMAHA, NE – William E. (Eddie) Butler was born July 7, 1910, to William and Helen Baker Butler in Council Bluffs. He began to study the piano at age 4 and the organ at age 7. At age 11 he began making weekly trips to Chicago to study in the Chicago Theater with Jesse Crawford until he was 16. In the summer of 1926 he went to Catalina Island to play in a new theater built by the Wrigley family. He lived in Council Bluffs, Harlan and Omaha during his lifetime. He was a graduate of Abraham Lincoln High School, and attended the University of Iowa and the University of Nebraska. During World War II he served in the Navy at the Naval Academy and Panama, where he became proficient in Latin music. In Panama he also served as organist in "The Church of the Golden Altar". He played at the Orpheum Theater for 50 years and also part of that time at the Paramount Theatre in Omaha. In 1934 he played his first service at St. John's Church on the Creighton University campus where he still played every Sunday. He had played in Rome at the "Chiesa Il Jesu Di Roma", was the first American organist to give a private concert for a Pope in the Sistine Chapel and played in St. Peter's Basilica. He performed on two of the world's largest organs both of which are in the United States; the 7 keyboard instrument in the Atlantic City Convention Hall with 455 ranks of pipes and the 6 keyboard instrument in the John Wanamaker Department Store with more than 400 ranks of pipes. He owned his own recording company and has entertained five presidents: Hoover, Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower and Kennedy.

In 1976 Eddie and his wife, Sylvia, toured Europe where he gave concerts on the world's greatest organs. He was a member of St. John's Church in Omaha. He died at the Veterans Medical Center in Omaha at age 90 years.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Sylvia, July 2, 1982. He is survived by his niece, Donna White (Rich) of Independence, MO, and nephew, James L. Devitt of Florida.

Funeral services were held Feb. 6, 2001, at St. Francis Worship Center. Burial was in St. Joseph Cemetery in Omaha. Belford-O'Neill Funeral Home in charge of arrangements.