

The Carl Barckhoff Organ

The organ's original date of construction is unknown; however, information about the life of the builder helps us to narrow down the range of possible years.

Felix Barckhoff & Sons Organ Company was originally founded in Philadelphia in 1865. The family had just come to the U.S. from Wiedenbruck, Westphalia, Germany, where Carl was born in 1849. He later inherited the company from his father in 1878. In the spring of 1900, the company was located in Pomeroy, Ohio (where the St. Francis of Assisi organ was built). Most of the organs that Barckhoff built during this period were moderately priced stock models. Barckhoff remained in Pomeroy until a flood in 1913 (undoubtedly the same rainfall that caused the flood in Franklinton) caused great damage, and forced the company to move to Basic, Virginia (now part of the town of Waynesboro). Barckhoff continued to build organs until his death in 1919.

In the Spring of 2002, under the guidance of Father Richard Weyls, Phil Adams and Andy Magee, the organ was restored/renovated to make it more useful for the leading of worship. Michael Lauffer, Vice President of Peebles-Herzog, Inc., wrote the following about the project:

“The Carl Barckhoff organ has served the musical needs of St. Francis parish for many years. With its key and stop actions being of mechanical design (tracker action) this late 19th century instrument is indicative of the most long-lived trouble-free type of pipe organ chassis; however, a century of wear had taken its toll on hundreds of moving parts. The process of restoration involved replacing worn felt bushings, replacing leather strips and nuts that had literally turned to dust, and in some cases fabricating new wooden parts to replace ones that were not salvageable. Restoration of parts and careful regulation have resulted in a key action that responds as if it were new.

As is the case with so many 19th century pipe organs, its tonal resources were limited – a fact well known to those who tried to make music on it. In an effort to compensate for this shortcoming two decades ago, the wind pressure was raised and the organ made louder. This not only made the organ more difficult to play, but it destroyed the characteristic gentleness of the 19th century voicing, replacing it with a harsh and driven sound. In discussing possible solutions to these problems with Phil Adams, Andrew Magee and Fr. Richard Weyls, a plan was developed by Peebles-Herzog, Inc. to restore the original voice of the organ and to replace redundant stops (sounds) for greater variety and color. Care was taken to select stops that would have been characteristic of a 19th century instrument and voicing techniques of that period were applied. The result is a remarkably colorful and versatile instrument of only 12 stops in a late 19th century style that will continue to serve the musical needs of St. Francis for the next century.”