



The Schuelke Organ

In 1901, organ maker William Schuelke and his workers completed installation of the magnificent St. Mary pipe organ. At the time, his advertising gave a "sure guarantee for the utmost in perfect functioning of the most solid system ever created." Shuelke received \$5,000 and the old organ as a trade-in.

Like the Energizer Bunny, that organ has kept going and going over the many years, serving as a musical treasure for St. Mary parishioners.

To be sure, repairs have been necessary over the years. In the early 1970s, full replacement was considered, but a price of \$114,000 was beyond the means of the parish at that time, and repairs took more than a year to complete.

The 1974 restoration included replacement of the large single air chest of the lower level with three smaller reservoirs pumped up by a fan and motor. This lower level is large enough to comfortably seat a dinner party of 12! Two upper levels mostly containing pipes complete the organ assembly.

In the year 2000, the organ again underwent a major refurbishment, with work being done by the John W. Muller Company

The organ consists of four major sections. The "swell" organ produces a softer volume from the upper keyboard, mainly used to accompany the choir. The "great" organ produces the loud volume for congregational hymns. The "pedal" organ produces heavy bass sounds from the foot pedals.

The last refurbishment included a complete replacement of the existing console with a new state-of-the-art solid-state electronic switching for on-off control of the sound pipes. Also, the keyboard console was mounted on castors and equipped with a 15-foot umbilical cord to allow positioning for the console to suit various presentation situations.

The organ uses 2,318 separate pipes, all located on the second and third levels of the organ and ranging from the visible large 16' outside pipes down to hidden tiny 3/8" inside pipes.

William Schuelke, a Prussian who emigrated in 1874, set up his organ company in Milwaukee. The company operated only with hand tools until 1899 when he built a new factory which was mechanized with a 15hp gas-powered motor. Our St. Mary's organ was one of the last of 200 produced by the Schuelke company.

When originally built, Schuelke's organ was ahead of its time. He patented the innovative electric-motor-powered bellows crank, in those days normally hand- cranked by a "bellows boy".

A very detailed and informative report about the St. Mary organ by Anthony Fabro of Hilliard, Ohio can be found at <http://www.n8rrb.com/pipeorgans/stmarycc/>. Included are many photos and sound clips as well as a detailed history of the organ manufacturer. Many thanks to Anthony for pursuing and publishing such an extensive project.

