

The Story of the St. Marcus Pipe Organ

The pipe organ presently found in St. Marcus's balcony began its life in 1881. In that year the congregation built its first church building on the lots they owned at Beaubian and Short St. (Garfield at Palmer today). It was a frame structure with a full horseshoe balcony and cost \$5,800. On December 4, 1881, the congregation resolved to contract with the William Schuelke Co. of Milwaukee to build a pipe organ. The cost was \$1,700. Electric blowers were still in the future, and so when organist Rudolph Fritzke wanted to practice, his boys had to pump for him. The St. Marcus organ of today still uses ten ranks of pipes from that original organ.

William (Wilhelm) Schuelke (c.1849-1902) was born in Könitz, West Prussia, and immigrated to America in 1866. He worked in an organ shop in Ann Arbor in 1870, moved to Dayton and then Hamilton, Ohio. By 1874 he was in Milwaukee and had an established organ manufactory at 492-494 10th St. with William Steinart. The following year he went into business on his own. Later shops were at 685 12th St. and 22nd & Walnut. His company produced some 160 pipe organs in 17 states for both Protestant and Catholic churches. Among his notable local installations were organs in Trinity Lutheran on 9th & Highland (badly damaged in the great fire), Bethlehem Lutheran on 24th & McKinley (somewhat altered), St. Francis Catholic on 4th St. (survives virtually intact), St. Lucas Lutheran (later rebuilt by Wangerin), St. Anthony Catholic, and St. Josaphat's Basilica (long since removed).

In 1873 Schuelke patented his "ventil" chest, and over the years he received four more patents for other mechanical innovations. He had quite a number of able assistants whom he mentored, all of whom went into business on their own after his death: Henry and Ignatius Tellers, Elmer Hunholz, Frederick Roesler, Charles Besch, and the Swede Olof Hammarberg. Clients and employees remembered him for his integrity, kindness, and fairness. He died in 1902 at the train station in Columbus, Ohio, after inspecting his recent installation of an organ in St. Mary's Catholic Church. His sons Max and William continued the business, but they didn't have their father's skill and the company didn't last.

When the new St. Marcus Church building was being built in 1913, the congregation resolved to contract with the Wangerin-Weickhardt Co. to construct a larger two-manual organ. The new organ utilized most of the 1882 Schuelke pipework, but with a new console, electro-pneumatic action, and Weickhardt's "firecracker" chests. The console faced east, facing the two cases. St. Marcus' "Wartburg" Youth Society paid for the entire \$4,000 project.

George J. Weickhardt was born in Ueberlingen, Bavaria, around 1850. In 1891 he emigrated to America, landing first in Salem, Ohio, then Madison, Wisconsin, and in 1895 came to Milwaukee. He had a brief partnership with Nicholas Bach. In 1903 he joined the firm of Hann-Wangerin, which made fine church chancel furniture at their shop at 112-114 Burrell St. (The new company, Hann-Wangerin-Weickhardt, built the altar and pulpit for the now-demolished St. Jacobi Lutheran Church on 13th & Mitchell. These pieces now stand in St. Marcus' chancel.) Apparently Milwaukee organ builders don't retire—Weickhardt was struck with "apoplexy" at his desk in February of 1919 and died a few days later. Wangerin continued the firm alone (Hann had left years earlier), although Weickhardt's son Fred did a lot of work for the Wangerin Co.

Pipework from the 1882 Schuelke that was incorporated into the new 1914 organ:

Great Organ:

Open Diapason 8'
Gamba 8'
Melodia 8'
Salicional 8'
Octave 4'
Rohrfloete 4'

Swell Organ:

Bourdon 16'
Violin Diapason 8'
Stopped Flute 8'
Flauto Traverso 4'
Dolce Cornet III

Pedal Organ:

Open Diapason 16'
Violoncello 8'

To the above Schuelke stops Weickhardt added the following:

Great Organ:

Open Diapason 8'
the Schuelke Diapason 8'
becomes the
Second Open Diapason 8'
Doppelfloete 8'
Trumpet 8'
Schuelke's Salicional 8'
is renamed
Dulciana 8'

Swell Organ:

Voix Celeste 8'
Salicional 8''
Aeoline 8'
Oboe and Bassoon 8'
Cornopean 8'
Tremulant

Pedal Organ:

Sub Bass 16'
Lieblich Gedeckt 16' (sw.)
Octave 8' *ext. from*
Open Diapason 16'

Over the years a few further changes were made. The console was replaced in January, 1960, at a cost of \$4,700 and repositioned so that it now faced south. The United Organ Co. of 640 W. Virginia St. in Milwaukee installed the new console. (A good guess is that it was manufactured by the Klann Co. of Waynesboro, VA, and installed by Fred C. Weickhardt, George's grandson.) A new 32-key pedalboard was installed (the top two keys of which had no function on most ranks). The Swell Flauto Traverso 4' at some point was inexplicably replaced with a Vox Humana 8'.

In later years the organ suffered some debilitating accidents. On April 17, 1969, the church was struck by lightning and parts of the organ had to be rewired. The lightning surge had burned off insulation from some wires and ruined some of the magnets. The cost of repairs was \$1,127. In the 1970's the south church tower sprang a major leak during a heavy rainstorm, and quite a bit of water entered the Great case. Some of the chests were warped; seven ranks on the Great needed releathering. The electrical repairs, releathering, and tuning during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's were done by the Roesler-Hunholz Co., 2200 N. 11th St. During the 1980's the blower motor seized up during Holy Week. Only some timely emergency surgery by Henry Weiland made organ music possible for Easter Sunday.

Both Schuelke and Weickhardt's tonal choices followed the "Romantic" style of the times. Characteristics of Romantic design: heavy use of the 8-foot pitch, a lot of soft strings to produce an orchestral sound, no pedal reeds, and no brightness in the treble (no 2-foot stops; no mixture on the Great).

In the 1990s enough chronic mechanical problems had arisen in the organ to become really irritating to those who had to play it. In 1997 the congregation contracted with Peters, Weiland, & Co., 1729 N. Pulaski St., to clean the chests and pipes, releather all three divisions, and completely overhaul the chests and valves. In addition, to broaden the tonal design a bit to compensate for the limitations of the Romantic design, the Vox Humana 8' on the Swell was replaced with a 4' Harmonic Flute salvaged from a 1913 Esty organ. The extremely soft Dulciana 8' on the Great was replaced with a Fifteenth 2', and the Pedal Division received a completely new Octave 4' rank, made in Buffalo, NY, by the Schlicker Co. The entire organ was retuned to A 440, since its pitch had sunk or been lowered at least a quarter step. All missing or damaged pipes were replaced or repaired.

Stanton Peters and Henry Weiland had been employees of Charles Besch's organ company, and at the time of Besch's death in 1972 the two bought the business and formed the Peters, Weiland Co. Stanton was the pipe guy and Henry was the mechanical guy. When Herman Schlicker died in 1982, the Schlicker company made Stanton first their chief artistic and engineering officer, then president from 1992-2002. Just like Schuelke and Weickhardt, Henry passed away in the middle of a job on December 8, 2010.

1998-2016 Disposition of the 25-rank St. Marcus Pipe Organ

Great Organ

Open Diapason 8'
Second Open Diapason 8'
Doppelfloete 8'
Gamba 8'
Melodia 8'
Octave 4'
Rohrfloete 4'
Fifteenth 2'
Trumpet 8'
Tremolo

Great-Great 16'
Great unison
Great-Great 4'
Swell-Great 8'
Swell-Great 4'
Three pistons

Swell Organ

Bourdon 16'
Violin Diapason 8'
Stopped Flute 8'
Salicional 8'
Voix Celeste 8' t.c.
Aeoline 8'
Harmonic Flute 4'
Dolce Cornet III
Oboe 8'
Cornocean 8'
Tremolo

Swell-Swell 16'
Swell unison
Swell-Swell 4'
Three pistons

Pedal Organ

Open Diapason 16'
Sub Bass 16'
Lieblich Gedeckt 16' (sw.)
Octave 8' (ext. from Open Diapason 16')
Cello 8'
Octave 4'

Swell-Pedal 8'
Swell-Pedal 4'
Great-Pedal 8'
Sforzando toe stud
Crescendo pedal
Swell pedal

Still, certain problems remained. The console's wiring was obsolete and its functions were getting erratic. The combination action (pistons) had long ago become so unreliable that organists couldn't even use it. The Great chests had been patched up after the water damage, but they weren't quite right. And even with the 1998 pipework expansion, the tonal chorus of the organ was

incomplete. The Swell and Great divisions were out of balance. The pedal division wasn't strong and independent enough and the treble end still wasn't very bright.

In 2013 an organ committee was formed whose members included Joel Schwartz, Jerry Siegmann, Chara Fedke, and Minister of Music Jeff Krumbein. After spending some time assessing the state of the art of modern digital electronic organs and hybrids, they resolved to keep the St. Marcus organ all pipe. Their modest first vision was to replace the console, rebuild the Great chests, extend some manual ranks to the pedal and vice versa, and add some completely new ranks, including independent Pedal reeds and a mixture for the Great. The firm of Milwaukee builder John Nolte was selected.

John's first career was actually as a pastor, but he had always been fascinated by pipe organs, working for American Organ Supply during his Seminary days from 1973-77. He was ordained and assigned to a parish in Winona, Minnesota, but he so missed the organ business that in 1984 he resigned his call and went back to work for AOS. He opened his own shop on Electric Ave. in West Allis in 1987. His business has grown steadily and the company now services 150 organs. Notable installations include St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Milwaukee, St. Matthias and St. Joseph's in Waukesha, St. Andrew's Milwaukee (now moved to the sanctuary at Divine Peace in West Allis), Our Lady of Mt. Carmel in Kenosha, and several major house organs. John is assisted by sons Ben and Jeremy and Chuck Habeck, and on this project he received a great deal of help from electrician Al Vormann.

Modest funds available to St. Marcus at the outset meant that a staged project was a necessity. The only work that could be afforded in 2013 was to move the casework façade forward to make more room inside for future expansion. In addition two new blowers were installed inside the casework in place of the one large blower in the basement. The increased wind pressure was immediately apparent. The organ sound benefited also from the removal of the chancel carpeting, replaced by bare hardwood flooring. St. Marcus' live "room" is one of the organ's greatest assets.

The project received a huge boost when the congregation allocated funds from the bequest of the Richard and Lydia Gamm Trust, which now permitted a project somewhat larger than the initial draft. Work on the rest of the project commenced in early 2016 and was completed in the fall of 2017. The committee's charge to John Nolte:

1. Build a completely new Great main chest, as well as auxiliary chests in both the Swell and Great cases, for all the new pipes.
2. New air regulators (bellows) for the Great. A second blower was added in the Swell case.
3. The old console was retired with thanks. Nolte was able to acquire a two-manual 1930 Austin console which was completely disassembled and refinished by the Graybar Co. The ivory keys were polished and buffed. All toe studs are the original brass.
4. The console now features computerized combination action (pistons), two side banks of drawknobs, and an adjustable bench.
5. New capabilities: chimes, Zimbelsonne, and MIDI interface.
6. Old ranks removed: the Aeoline 8' (too soft) and the Dolce Cornet III (replaced by Sesquialtera)
7. *New* ranks added:
 - Pedal: Posaune 16'
 - Swell: Flute 2'

Sesquialtera II
Great: Octave 4'
Flute 2'
Mixture IV

8. *Extensions*. An extra octave (12 pipes) was added to certain ranks to add flexibility:
Subbass 16' to 32' (Subbass)
Subbass 16' to 8' (Bassflute)
Oboe 8' to 16' (Bassoon)
Oboe 8' to 4' (Oboe Clarion)
Open Diapason 8' to 16' (also from the 1930 Austin)
New Posaune 16' to 8' (Posaune)
9. *Borrowed* ranks. To increase flexibility some ranks can now be selected in two places:
Pedal: borrowed the Bassoon 16' and 8' from the Swell
 borrowed the Flute 2' from the Great
Great: borrowed the Oboe 8' from the Swell
Swell: borrowed the Trumpet 8' from the Great

An unusual feature of the St. Marcus organ is its Zimbelsonne. Quite a few historic North European organs feature a *Zimbelstern* ("cymbal star"), which when engaged sounds a continuous shimmering five-note handbell effect. Zimbelsterns often also feature a visible gilded star which rotates when the little bells are ringing. Instead of a star, St. Marcus' version uses a sunburst mounted high on the altar. It is a sweet visual reminder that the Lord God is a sun and shield (Psalm 84:11) and that Christ our Savior is the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings (Malachi 4:2). The beautiful carving and gilding are the work of Nathan Sebald of Sebald Millwork. The sunburst was motorized by Jerry Siegmann and wired by Al Vormann.

In 2018 Nolte did a little extra work on the organ. A fourth blower was added. The Sesquialtera II was split into a separately controlled 2-2/3' Nazard and 1-3/5' Tierce, and an entirely new Mixture III was added to the Swell. The additions brought the number of ranks to 34, stops to 45, and the number of pipes to 1,987.

New Disposition of the 34-rank St. Marcus Pipe Organ

Great Organ

Open Diapason 16'
First Open Diapason 8'
Second Open Diapason 8'
Doppelfloete 8'
Gamba 8'
Melodia 8'
Octave 4'
Robrfloete 4'
Quint 2-2/3'
Fifteenth 2'
Flute 2'
Mixture IV

Swell Organ

Bourdon 16'
Violin Diapason 8'
Stopped Flute 8'
Salicional 8'
Voix Celeste 8'
Octave 4'
Harmonic Flute 4'
Mixture III
Nazard 2-2/3'
Tierce 1-3/5'
Flute 2'
Cornopean 8'

Pedal Organ

Subbass 32'
Open Diapason 16'
Second Open Diapason 16'
Subbass 16'
Lieblich Gedeckt 16'
Octave 8'
Bassflute 8'
Violoncello 8'
Octave 4'
Flute 2'
Posaune 16'
Posaune 8'



ST MARCUS

Trumpet 8'
Oboe 8'
Chimes
Zimbelsonne

Trumpet 8'
Oboe 8'
Bassoon 16'
Tremolo

Bassoon 16'
Bassoon 8'
Oboe Clarion 4'

Couplers

Great to Pedal 8'
Great to Pedal 4'
Great to Great 16'
Great to Great 4'
Great Unison off

Swell to Pedal 8'
Swell to Pedal 4'
Swell to Swell 16'
Swell to Swell 4'
Swell Unison off
Swell to Great 16'
Swell to Great 8'
Swell to Great 4'

MIDI to Pedal
MIDI to Swell
MIDI to Great

