

Church Organ

On Friday, December 6th, 1895, the following article appeared in the Fort Smith newspaper.

A \$2,000 PIPE ORGAN!

After several months of diligent inquiry into the merits and prices of the different pipe organs, the German Catholic Church gave the order to our music dealer, R.C. BOLLINGER, for a fine Kilgen & Son \$2000 Pipe Organ. Congratulations are in order to Mr. BOLLINGER for affecting the sale, and to the church for buying such a fine Organ from our reliable home man. This Organ will be a delight to everyone in Fort Smith, as it will not only be the first modern pipe Organ in Western Arkansas, but the finest in the State. It will be ready for use the latter part of January.

This particular large and beautiful full toned pipe organ that was purchased by the parish was the eighteenth organ that the German based company had made. It was installed in the first church in March of 1896. One can only imagine the sacrifice the parishioners made to be able to purchase this organ, and also their deep pride in having it to lead them in song during Mass.

On February 6th, 1939, a contract was signed to have the original 16 ranks Geo. Kilgen and Son organ moved from the old church to the new church, by S.A. Guantt of Fayetteville, Arkansas. The cost for this was \$790.00, which included the organs' complete rebuilding and installation, with renovations, modernizations, and electrifications. The organ pipes were placed into two chambers, one on each side of the choir loft that had been built for this purpose. The generator was installed on the west side of the church basement. This original generator is still being used today.

1962 is the first year documentation could be found referencing repair work on the organ. In that year, it's recorded that the console was deteriorating. A decision was made to replace the console and rebuild the organ. Mr. Hale, from Hale Organ Works in El Dorado, Arkansas, did all the refurbishing and rebuilding. He also installed pipes that had been in storage since the organ had been moved. All the pipes were put to one large room on the north side of the choir loft. Work on the organ was finished in 1963. In a letter from the pastor to the Bishop, dated April 9th, 1962, authorization was requested to spend \$10,000 for this project.

In the following years, additional work was done, some of which was by individuals who actually damaged the organ. Fortunately, the damage was repairable and the organ survived.

Due to many years of water seepage and plaster falling, the organ chamber had to be re-plastered, cleaned, and painted. The damage also affected the pipes. In March, 2007, Lothar Karl, an organ builder from Missouri, came to clean and tune all the pipes. He had been servicing the organ for several years.

From 2007 to 2009, additional work was done to replace

many failing parts. This work was done by R.G. Copra Organs, Inc., in Germantown, Tennessee. This company is currently under contract to continue servicing and tune the organ.

The organ has a total of 1024 pipes in various sizes, which are made up of a combination of wood and metal. Of these, there are nine German decorative metal pipes that were hand painted with colored designs. Since 1963, the organ has had 20 ranks. A rank is a set of pipes producing the same timbre for each

note on the keyboard, and pedals of the organ. The use of tabs on the organ console enables the organist to produce many different combinations of sounds. The pipes are also like whistles, in that for them to make sounds, the organ has to pump air from the chamber box into the individual pipes.

This romantic style organ may be small in comparison to organs built today, however it still commands a sweeping sound of warm resonant tones. It is truly a living piece of history, one that should be appreciated and enjoyed for many years to come.

