

The History of the St. Mary's Nativity Church Pipe Organ *By Eric Ordoyne*

In 1960, the newly appointed Pastor of St. Mary's Nativity Parish, Rev. Sebastian Arjonilla, undertook the task of refurbishing the Old Church which was built in 1876. As a part of the renovations, a 2 manual, 4 rank pipe organ from the Wicks Organ Company of Highland, Illinois was purchased and installed in the rear gallery, becoming OPUS # 4049. The organ was donated by Mr. L.M. Toups. In 1966, the present parish Church was built, and the Church called upon August Laine, pipe organ builder, to move the organ to this new Church. The organ was placed in a chamber behind the Main Altar, a place where it would sit for over forty-years. In May 2008, the organ played its last hymn from this position.



*Organ Dedication in Choir Loft of Old Church-1960
(Donor-LM Toups on the far left)*

In 2006, we began questioning why the pipe organ was unimpressive and inadequate for the liturgy. Contact was made with the New Orleans Chapter of the Organ Historical Society through parishioner and choir member Ray Pitre. Several members of the society, including University of New Orleans music professor Dr. James Hammann, Dr. Carol Britt from Nicholls State University and husband Bennett and Mr. John DeMajo, president of the society at the time, visited the Church in April, 2007.

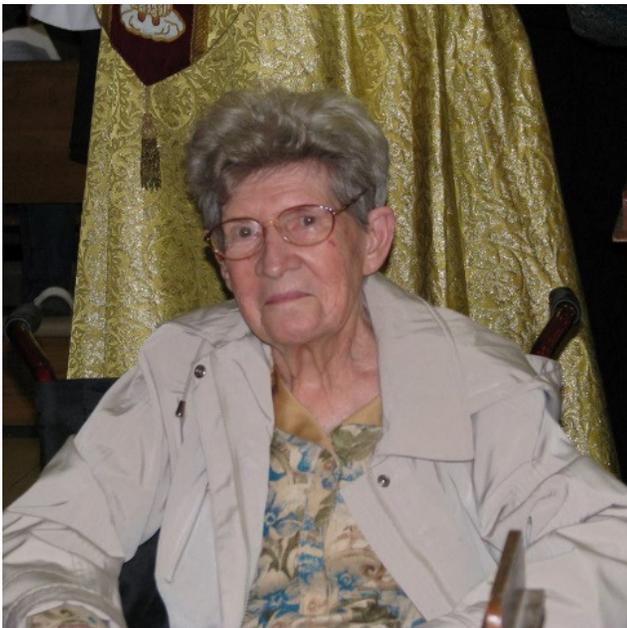
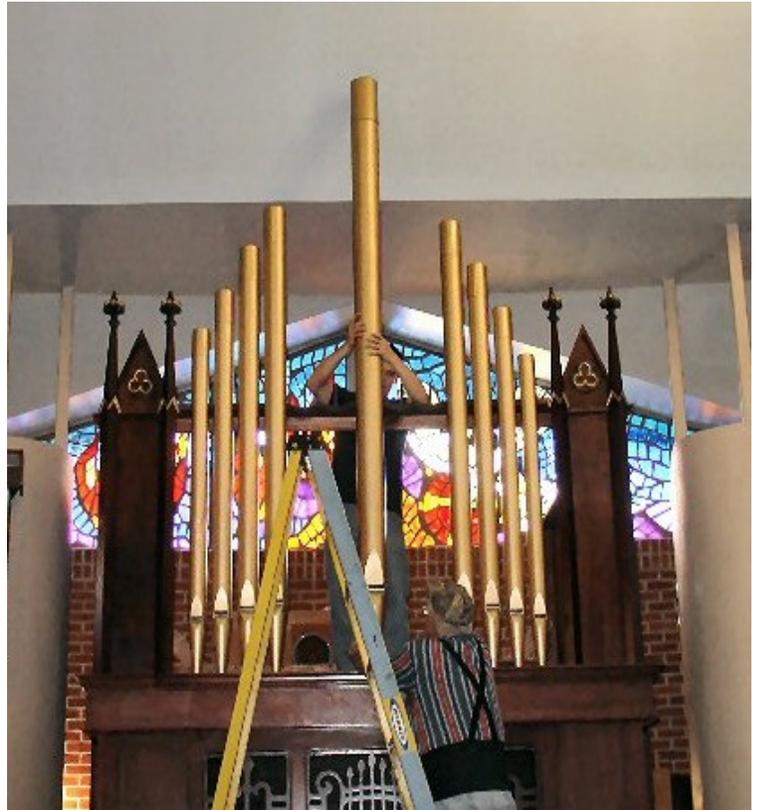


It was determined that the location of the organ chamber behind the Altar prevented the organ from being heard in the Church as the brick wall was dampening the sound as it tried to emerge from the chamber. Dr. Hammann recommended that the organ be removed from the chamber and placed in the main body of the Church. At this time, we already had received a donation for the organ. This was not enough to complete the project, so we began to seek additional funding. After receiving a total of \$23,925 from two donors specifically for the organ, the decision was made to expand the organ. Dr. Hammann generously offered to be the consultant to the project.

In May 2008, the organ was disassembled and reinstalled inside an antique case removed from St. Matthias Catholic Church in New Orleans. The case was in deplorable condition, but was refinished to its original glory and expanded with the help of several parishioners. Dr. Hammann also donated the original pipes from the St. Matthias organ. Its windchest was added to our organ as a second division windchest. ("Great" windchest). Much preparation was required before the project could begin. First, we removed the decorative steel panels and repaired the holes in the drywall before we could install the case. Then, a new choir seating area was constructed using the pews removed to make room for the organ case. Work continued at steady intervals until the aftermath of two hurricanes delayed progress.



In January, 2009, work resumed at full speed until December. We worked exclusively with volunteers in their available spare time. The only cost incurred were for parts. Another phase of work involved removing the old console and replacing it with a larger console donated by Dr. Hammann. New wiring was installed to all the valves in the organ and all valves were replaced on the great division. The original blower was replaced with a new silent blower, and the winding system was redesigned. A new Syndyne computer system was added, making the organ more responsive and allowing the organist to record performances and play them back. John DeMajo, along with Baton Rouge electrical Engineer, John Couvillion, served as excellent sources and volunteered several hours to help in these areas.



Mrs. Wanda Hitt attends the Recital

We take pride in that fact that we are one of only two Catholic Churches in the Houma-Thibodaux Diocese that is fortunate to have a functional pipe organ. Our Church cherishes the opportunity to host organ recitals to cultivate greater interest of music in our parish. The restored organ was formally dedicated in December 2009 featuring organists Dr. Carol Britt and Dr. James Hammann. The organ was dedicated in honor of former organist, Mrs. Wanda St. Romain Hitt, who was an organist at St. Mary's Nativity for no less than fifty years.

The following inscription is mounted to the organ console:

St. Mary's Nativity Church
Pipe Organ Restoration & Expansion

Dedicated to former Church Organist, Wanda Hitt, for her countless years of service to this parish, in honor of all past, present, and future musicians.

Donors of Treasure:

In Memory of Clarence J. & Wanda L. Savoie

By Ms. Alberta M. Savoie

In Memory of D.D. & Doris G. Toups

By Mrs. Emily T. D'Arcangelo

Donors of Time, Talent, & Treasure:

Mr. & Mrs. Roland Griffin

Mr. & Mrs. Roy Griffin

Mr. & Mrs. Benton Gaudet & Shane

Mr. & Mrs. Pierre B. Foret, Jr.

Mr. Ray Pitre

Mr. & Mrs. Alex Picou

Mr. & Mrs. Michael Ordoyne & Michelle

Alyssa Porche

Mr. & Mrs. Mark Savoie

Hamilton Dantin-Project Co-Chairman

Eric Ordoyne-Project Chairman

Rev. Charles J. Perkins-Pastor

John Couvillon

Dr. Carol & Mr. Bennett Britt

John DeMajo-Former OHS President-N.O. Chapter

DR. JAMES J. HAMMANN-ORGAN BUILDER

This plaque is in memory of two helpers and supporters who passed during the
process of this project:

Mrs. Nathalie F. Dantin

Mr. Paul O. Foret