



Sentinel photo by Matthew Rice

Ralph Krueger tries out the new pipe organ he helped restore for his church.

Pipe organ restored

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By Matthew Rice

As 54-year-old Granville resident Ralph Krueger began putting "the machine" through its paces, the floor in the South Granville Congregational Church vibrated and didn't stop until he switched off the power.

Krueger's feet rocked and his fingers scampered across the keys as the unmistakable sound of a pipe organ filled the church with music.

"The machine," said South Granville Congregational Church pastor Bob Flower, is how enthusiasts refer to their favorite instruments, church pipe organs.

Determination, skill win out for South Granville church

The rare organ, which fits perfectly in the small church on Rte. 149, was acquired for a song - inoperable, and in pieces.

Krueger's determination, and skill, brought the instrument back to life, and it'll be dedicated on Sunday, Sept. 10.

Krueger said he began repairing smaller organs as a hobby 18 years ago and it is still a hobby for him, despite the time and investment he has made in the rehabilitation of

the church organ.

"Before you know it, you're deep into it," Krueger said.

Found in Cleveland, N.Y., near Utica, "in pieces scattered across the floor," Krueger said, the organ was a basket case.

"I wouldn't have given you a dime for it," Flower said, "but Ralph saw something the rest of us couldn't."

"You've got to look beyond the dirt," Krueger said he told

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directed a film made from the book by Stephen Spielberg that premieres this

age Greeley passed the years of his printing apprenticeship before leaving for New

14 miles to East Freetown to apply for his first printing job.

Professors from Green Mountain and

Organ

Continued from front page
Flower. "It can be reborn."

"It was in dreadful condition," Krueger admitted, "near a basket case, but the size was ideal."

Krueger said his choice of the organ almost had more to do with the size than the condition, because he knew it would fit perfectly into the chosen corner of the church and he knew he could fix whatever was wrong with it.

"He told me he had a half inch to play with," Flower recalled, shaking his head in amazement.

The only evidence of that half inch sits hidden from the view of nearly every parishioner in the form of a tiny notch cut from an existing handrail leading to the choir loft.

Krueger only recently finished the project after five years of painstaking labor, but the results are remarkable.

Fortunately for him the company that built the organ, Barnes & Buhl Organ Co. of Utica, had used high-quality materials, which helped in the restoration.

"They made a wonderful machine," Krueger said.

The organ had been pulled, not removed, from the church it had probably occupied since its construction in about 1924 to stay ahead of the wrecking ball, Krueger said.

"The organ had suffered from the hands of a butcher," he said.

After being removed from the old church, and fortunately somewhat labeled, the pieces of the organ were hauled away to sit on the floor of another church where antiques were being sold.

Despite the organ lying on the floor in pieces and no chance to hear what it might sound like, Krueger said he told Flower this was the one.

"I know what it'll sound like," he recalled saying.

Krueger said he was back to pick up the organ about two weeks later after the antique salesman accepted his offer of \$800 or \$900.

As bad as the condition had been, Krueger said he still estimates the organ, in pieces, had been worth about \$5,000.

too soft.

The cost for a new organ, somewhere between \$80,000-\$100,000 for an organ of similar size and only moderate quality, was completely out of the question for the church, Krueger said.

"You can get a Chevy or a Rolls Royce in these instruments," he said.

So he concentrated on finding something used and still found the cost to be in the \$60,000 neighborhood.

Still far too much for the church budget, Krueger said he kept on looking.

Krueger said the project began with a promise to his late mother, Florence. Already into organ repair at the time, he said he told her he would try to find an organ for the church.

An unusual feature of the organ is its lineage.

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During that time they managed to produce only five organs - total - and only three of them, including the one now in South Granville, are known to have survived.

Krueger said he found out about the organ through an ad with an asking price of \$1,000, despite the poor condition.

The casing, the front of the organ that faces the congregation, perfectly matches the color and tone of the woodwork in the rest of the historic church as if the two had been one from day one.

Krueger said the organ was manufactured during what is called the Romantic Period in pipe organ construction in the United States and as a result has a "soft" pleasant sound.

The gold pipes rising from the organ toward the ceiling gleam like a brand new car - and they should, Krueger said, because each pipe is finished in six coats of gold automotive paint and then a thick layer of clear-coat.

After about four years and countless hours of work, Krueger said he had the organ together but it was not quite right.

"Something just did not work," he said.

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"They're fantastic," Krueger said, "and they saved my hide."

"We negotiated that," Krueger said, "and we asked \$40,000 to do the life." Already a skilled man himself, Krueger said he assisted the Carey Organ Co. with their Troy work.

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the young reader. From this rural farm
setting, the teenaged Greeley walked the
14 miles to East Poultney to apply for his
first printing job.

Professors from Green Mountain and

Finally influenced the populace to elect
Abraham Lincoln president.

Greeley ran, himself, after Lincoln's
death, against Grant. Shortly after his defeat
by the popular General, and the loss of his
wife, the famous editor died a broken man.



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"We negotiated heavily on that," Krueger said, "They asked \$40,000 to bring it to life." Already a skilled repairman himself, doing local repairs on other organs, Krueger said he arranged to assist the Carey people in their Troy workshop in

exchange for help and parts, bringing the church's cost down to about \$14,000.

With the organ finally complete, Krueger said area organ players have been giving "the machine" a test drive and it has gotten rave reviews.

Krueger said Paul Carey, owner of the Carey Organ Co., will be giving a demonstration Sept. 10 when the organ is officially dedicated.

"He's been playing since he was five - he'll put it through its paces," Krueger said.