

Pilcher Organs

Information compiled by Elizabeth Towne Schmitt from extant documents.

Sources

The American Organ Archives of the Organ Historical Society holds the most important and reliable sources of information on Pilcher organs. In summary they are:

1. The Factory ledgers, believed to date from soon after the factory was rebuilt after it burned in 1856.
 - a. The first volume is headed "Detailed list of Organs." The earlier part is believed to be a reconstruction.
 - b. The second volume is missing.
2. A handwritten list of organs interspersed with notes on the firm's history. The list begins with St. Louis built instruments.
3. A printed list of organs taken from a catalog, probably ca. 1870. Factory numbers have been added in ink. 30 organs added in hand-writing with numbers on some of these altered. 3 have numbers given which are crossed out.
4. Typescript list of Pilcher organs labeled 'apparently all major work done since 1874 arranged geographically. No opus numbers are given. From William E. Pilcher of Louisville with handwritten notes added.
5. Index to volumes 3+ of the Pilcher factory ledgers. Begins in 1901. Opus numbers often not given for rebuilds. These are listed with the last previous opus number followed by a + to indicate that they follow this opus number.

Opus Numbers

In the first existing ledger of the Pilcher firm, opus numbers were assigned beginning with the organs produced by the St. Louis firm, which was formed in 1852 by the brothers Henry Pilcher Jr. and William Pilcher.

About 1868 the brothers added 23 organs to their list, from the earlier period when they were working with their father. "The enumeration of twenty-three additional organs in our published list of instruments built wholly or in part by us while associated with our father in the east"

The numbering of the existing opus list as it appeared in the ledger index was then changed to reflect the addition of those instruments. The c. 1868 printed list is hand numbered, and the numbers reflect this addition. Christ Church, Booneville, MO, for example is numbered 7 in the first ledger, but 28 on the printed list. The difference in numbering is actually about 20. Christ (Episcopal) in St. Paul, MN is originally 2, but 22 on the printed list. The change in numbering is not completely consistent. Sometimes the printed list reflects the fact that the

organ has been moved. For example the original list showed St. Paul's Episcopal in Evansville, IN as number 1. The printed list assigns #21 to the Baptist Church in Morris, IL which is the same organ, but relocated in the interim. In addition, one instrument has an old numbers assigned, but never received a new number. Three of the early instruments (appended in handwriting to the printed list) were assigned new numbers, but those numbers were crossed out and no new numbers were reassigned to them.

In general, the old numbers appear in the ledger index and ledger, and the new numbers appear on the printed list. The numbering then continues on the ledger index beginning with #119 at St. John's RC in Chicago. But that organ is listed in the ledger itself as #96. The next organ on the list is St. Peter's Lutheran, Chicago which is assigned 120 in the ledger index, and 117 in the ledger, which is then crossed out and corrected to 120. The name and number 120 are handwritten on the bottom of printed list along with a number of additions, presumably built after the list was actually published.

The Pilchers appear to have inserted instruments and began numbering then with 117, but then found a couple more they could insert and corrected again for that. The new opus number usually appears in the opus number field of this database, and the old one is entered into the notes. The new numbering provides the longest most consistent numbering.

The numbering problem exists only with the earliest ledger. The next ledger, which should cover the years 1891-1901 is missing entirely. The only the information available for most of the organs built during this period is a list compiled by Wm. E. Pilcher. Judging from the gap between the last opus number in the first ledger and the first opus number in the third ledger, some 40+ organs are missing from our lists.

Most of the list is taken from the ledger indexes (inside the covers of ledgers 3-9) and not from the ledgers themselves. Only those entries that show a volume number and page number draw information from the actual ledger.

Builder/Nameplate Identification

The nameplates used by the firm in the early years are not known. The few existing examples of these organs have been altered and no longer carry an original nameplate. The instruments built before 1852 presumably carried only the name of Henry Pilcher (Sr.).

After the sons, Henry Pilcher, Jr. and William opened their firm in St. Louis, they operated under several names. The firm seems to have been somewhat unstable in terms of personnel and probably finances, at least until Henry Jr. moved to Kentucky and began a company with two of his sons, H. Pilcher and Sons. The firm descriptions below are primarily taken from these sources: the index to the

first Pilcher ledger and St. Louis, Chicago and New Orleans city directories. The opus numbers shown are from the index to the first ledger. No opus numbers are known for William Pilcher's instruments.

H. & W. Pilcher, 1852 directory (Morrison's), 1854-55 directory (old Op. 1-20).

In 1856-58 (old op. 21-28) the participants were Henry Pilcher (Sr.), Henry Pilcher, Jr. and William Pilcher. 1858 city directory lists H. & W. Pilcher. A different 1858 directory (Bartletts) shows Pilcher & Sons.

William Pilcher was alone 1858-1859 (old op. 29-38).

Henry Pilcher, Jr. was alone 1859-1862 (old op. 39-46), the 1859 city directory listing H. Pilcher & Son (Henry Pilcher Sr. and Jr.).

Henry Pilcher, Jr. and William again together in St. Louis 1862 (old opus 47-49).

Then Henry Jr. and William moved to Chicago. 1863-64 (old opus 50-61). Pilcher & Co. Nameplate on an 1864 instrument – Pilcher Bros., Chicago.

In 1864 H. W. Chant also entered the firm, 1864-66 (old opus 62-70). Pilcher Bros. and Chant

The Pilchers bought out Chant in 1866 (old opus 71-76). Firm renamed Pilcher Brothers 1866-1867 (old opus 77-86).

Old Op. 87 and 88 are crossed out - but are shown in the ledger with a stoplist for 88.

Petition in bankruptcy filed 1867. In 1867-68 listed as "Warren Root (formerly Pilcher Bros.)"

Business continued by Henry Jr. and William as Pilcher Brothers 1867-1869 (old opus 87-95 and 119-121).

William withdrew and went to Robins Nest, IL. Then next instruments were presumably built by Henry alone, 1869-71 (new op. 122-125).

William returned 1871-1873 (new op. 126-137). (Historic notes in the first ledger indicate only that he returned to the firm in 1871. However, no Pilchers are listed in the 1871 Chicago city directory – the year of the fire. William is listed with his son William Henry as Wm. Pilcher & Son in the 1872 and 1873 Chicago city directories. Henry is listed separately in 1872, and no longer listed in 1873.)

H. Pilcher & Sons is the name on the index to the first ledger for the firm in KY in 1874, Henry Pilcher Jr., Henry W. Pilcher, and William E. Pilcher (beginning with op. 138).

The firm became Henry Pilcher's Sons after Henry Jr's death in 1891.

Meanwhile, William Pilcher and his family returned to St. Louis from 1874-1878. He then was briefly in Galveston, TX (1880 census) and Mobile, AL. By 1883 he was in New Orleans Louisiana.

From 1883 to 1892 the New Orleans city directories show the firm as Pilcher Bros.

No firm listings between 1893 and 1905, though family members are listed, some working as pipe organ builders with Philip Werlein Co..

In 1906-1910 the firm is listed as W. & C. H. Pilcher (William and Charles H.), and in 1911 William is listed alone as an organ builder. He died in 1912.