ST. MARY MOTHER OF GOD R.C. CHURCH

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By the 1840s, there were enough German speaking Roman Catholic immigrants living in Washington, D.C., to band together for services with a priest who spoke German.[1] At first they met in private homes, but in 1845 they were able to build a small church on land donated by General Van Ness, just off the corner of 5th and H streets, NW. Its German heritage was evident from the small onion dome on the tower.[2] The congregation grew as more people arrived from Germany, Switzerland, and Austria. By the mid 1880s, the church building was too small and a much grander edifice was begun. In 1890, the new church was dedicated, with stained glass windows from Germany and Stations of the Cross from Austria.[3] There was a large open space under the tower for the organ that was ordered from George S. Hutchings of Boston, but until it was installed, music was provided by an orchestra or a reed organ.

One bright spring morning in 1891 the pastor, George Glaab, DD, left the rectory in his buggy to return an hour later from the Baltimore & Ohio railway station at the foot of the Capitol leading the two horse drawn wagons carrying the new organ. Although she was only six years old at the time, one of the parishioners told me that she witnessed this. The magnificent building had cost $60,000 and the $2,500 organ was to be Glaab's crowning achievement.

The organ was certainly adequate for the building, but Hutchings added the 16′ Diapason on the Great without charge becausee he felt the room needed the extra foundation. Originally the facade was composed of two rows of pipes, the front in M configuration and the rear in A. The four pipes on the outside of the second row were from the 16′ Diapason of the Great, and the rest were "dumb," being short cylinders that sat on wooden circles screwed to the rack that held the front row. Of course a second set of full-length pipes would have blocked the sound, but no one could tell that the only part that existed was what rose behind the front set. There was a window behind the organ and the light that came through the facade showed that the second row did not really exist. He, therefore, cleverly moved the end four pipes back into the organ and left just one row of facade.

At some unknown time the diaper patterns on the facade were stripped and the pipes painted "radiator gold." Letters to all the churches still having Hutchings organs asking if their facade was original got only one response and that was negative. Central Pipe Organ Service Inc. took the pipes down and examined them carefully, discovering a bit of the pattern on one and a bit more that had been missed in the stripping on another. We designed a composite pipe out of paper and were able to see the original design, and thus cut stencils. The colors in the decorated ceiling (according to the records) had been copied from the organ pipes in 1925, so we reversed the process.

The novelty of pumping the organ by hand probably wore out quickly (the penciled and carved notations and initials stop in 1896, so that may have been when the water motor (still in the cellar) was installed. After all, churches got the water free! At some point, an electric blower was installed and the double-fold reservoir with its feeders was removed by Lewis & Hitchcock in 1964. Three cone-valve reservoirs were installed.

The tiny original beater tremolo is located in the swell box and was probably judged inadequate. In 1924, Evan Getz built a larger valve tremolo that was mounted on one of the swell chest legs. The original is operating again today.

One of the unusual features of the organ is the system of relief or compensating pneumatics on the lower 24 pallets of the manual windchests. As any player of a tracker action knows, the lower down the keyboard, the larger the pallets and the stiffer the action becomes as the larger pallets have

1. According to the Parish History, German was last used for the Sunday announcements on November 11, 1917. *Annotation by Carl Schwartz (C.S.)*

2. The first building exterior was neo-classic. The window and door detail were plain Gothic Revival. The onion dome capped an attached central tower that contained the main doors to the church. The building appears to have been constructed of brick. *C.S.*

3. The architect was E.F. Baldwin of Baltimore who designed early buildings at the Catholic University of America. *C.S.*

a larger surface to overcome the wind pressure in the pallet box. George Hutchings's ingenious and efficient solution was to mount a pneumatic on the bottom of each pallet the exact size of the pallet, and to exhaust it through a small hole in the base of each pallet. The bottom of the pallet is the top of the pneumatic and the board that is the bottom of the pneumatic has a small cross board that pushes up on two pins located just beside the pallet. These try to pull the pallet open and leave only the pressure of the pallet springs for the key action to overcome.

Another unusual feature is the double set of swell shades, one set behind the other, opening a full ninety degrees. It is amazingly effective.

The organ received routine maintenance, with the only repairs being the replacement of the winding system, recovering the stoppers of some wooden pipe ranks, the rebushing of the action squares, and the replacement of the pedal key tops. Because of "smiling mouths" caused by overzealous cone tuning, tuning sleeves were installed about 35 years ago and the pitch set at A440.

George S. Hutchings, Opus 239 (1891)

COMPASS: Manuals, 61 notes
Pedal, 27 notes
WIND PRESSURE: 3″
PITCH: A440 (originally A435)

CURRENT STOPLIST (2011)

GREAT
16 Diapason
CC–FF♯ monkey quints (Open Wood 8 with stopped 5⅓ attached—common windway), zinc to c^1, rest common metal
8 Diapason
zinc CC– e^0, rest common metal
8 Melodia
CC–BB stopped wood, rest open wood
8 Dulciana
zinc to c^0, rest spotted metal
4 Octave
CC–EE zinc, rest spotted metal
4 Flute d'Amour
stopped wood, metal trebles
2⅔ Twelfth
spotted metal
2 Fifteenth
spotted metal
Mixture III (15-19-22)
CC–c^1 15-19-22
$C^{\sharp 1}$–c^3 12-15-19
$c^{\sharp 3}$–c^4 8-12-15
8 Trumpet
Zinc stems with spotted metal bells CC-c^1, rest spotted metal
Swell to Great

SWELL
16 Bourdon Bass
12 pipes, CC–BB, unenclosed
16 Bourdon Treble
49 pipes c^0–c^4
8 Stopped Diapason
CC–c^3 stopped wood, $c^{\sharp 3}$–c^4 open metal
8 Salicional
CC–FF♯ capped zinc, GG–c^4 spotted metal
8 Voix Celeste
Replacement pipes for 8′ Aeoline, in storage
4 Violin Diapason
originally at 8′ pitch, 12 new trebles
4 Flute Harmonic
CC–EE zinc, FF–c^4 common metal, c^1–c^3 harmonic
2 Violina
originally at 4′ pitch, spotted metal, CC–c^3 only, no top octave now
Dolce Cornet III
CC–c^1 19-22-26
$c^{\sharp 1}$–c^3 15-19-22
$c^{\sharp 3}$–c^4 12-15-19
8 Cornopean
CC–c^1 zinc with spotted metal bells, rest spotted metal, c^2–c^3 harmonic, open metal flues $c^{\sharp 3}$ to top
8 Bassoon
12 pipes, CC–BB, zinc with common metal bells
8 Oboe
49 pipes, c^0–c^4 spotted metal; open metal flues $c^{\sharp 3}$ to top

PEDAL
16 Pedal Open Diapason
open wood
16 Pedal Bourdon
stopped wood
Great to Pedal
Swell to Pedal

Bellows signal
Wind indicator

PEDAL MOVEMENTS
Piano Great
Forte Great
Piano Swell
Mezzo Swell
Forte Great
Great to Pedal (reversible)
Tremolo

N.B. The original pipes 1–12 of the 8′ Violin Diapason, and 4′ Violina, and the entire 8′ Aeoline rank are stored and intact.

SOURCE

Article and documentation provided by Donald E. Clark.

A History of St. Mary's Church of the Mother of God, Washington, D.C., 1845–1945, Baltimore, Md., September 13, 1945. Courtesy of the Kiplinger Library, District of Columbia Historical Society.