

Historic Niemann Organ Destroyed in St. Stanislaus Construction

by Meredith Cohn, [The Baltimore Sun](#)

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Before St. Stanislaus Kostka Roman Catholic Church in Fells Point was closed a few years ago, the Polish congregants enjoyed music played on a Henry Niemann organ.

Only a handful of the well-regarded instruments remain out of about 40 built more than a century ago by Niemann, a German immigrant who studied organ making in France and settled in Baltimore.

Despite its local heritage and historic value, the church organ became "matchsticks and scrap metal" as crews recently cleaned out Stanislaus for a redevelopment project.

Crestfallen local organ enthusiasts thought they had an understanding that they would come and disassemble the pipes, pedals and cabinets, and then reassemble them, after some refurbishing, in another church. They came over the weekend and hauled what parts they could save out to a van headed to storage.

"Who takes a chain saw to grandma's sideboard?" asked David Storey, who owns David M. Storey Inc. Pipe Organ Builders in Hampden and had maintained the organ when it was in use. "I just can't believe this. A piece of Baltimore history and art is gone."

Storey said he and two other organists tried for years to get the church to allow them to remove the organ. And when the historic building, constructed in 1889, was finally sold to a developer for a new use, they had their chance.

Andy Evans of BTN Building Salvage Specialists in Baltimore called and said he'd been hired by the new owner to salvage everything he could. He said no one outside of Baltimore was interested in the organ and invited the organists to come take it.

This is where the stories diverge. Evans said "the door has been open for weeks," and Storey and his group couldn't get to the organ in that time. His crews had to begin deconstructing it themselves to stay on the construction timetable.

"Of course we wanted it saved, that's what we do, and that's what the owner wanted done," said Evans. "We didn't get so much as a nibble when we shopped it around the country. ... We'd been trying to get someone interested in it locally. I don't think [Storey] could find someone who wanted it."

Storey acknowledged it wasn't worth much in its deteriorated condition — perhaps somewhere around \$1,000-\$2,000. Restored, it could sell for \$200,000-\$300,000, and he said he thought he and his group were expected Saturday. He said a church in Laurel wanted the organ, and congregants were willing to pay to restore it.

When they got to the church on South Ann Street in Fells Point, there were pieces of square wooden pipe splintered and lying on the floor beneath the balcony where the organ was housed. Round pipes made of lead and tin were crushed and lying in a heap. Half of the parts were in a trash bin out back. Storey's hands turned black from rifling through the rubble. But he managed to save several crates of parts with the help of Michael Britt, the organist at St. Margaret's Roman Catholic Church in Bel Air, and James Houston, the music director at First Unitarian Church of Baltimore.

"We're worried this will happen again," said Britt, noting there are just seven other Niemanns left in the area. *"It's just heartbreaking."*

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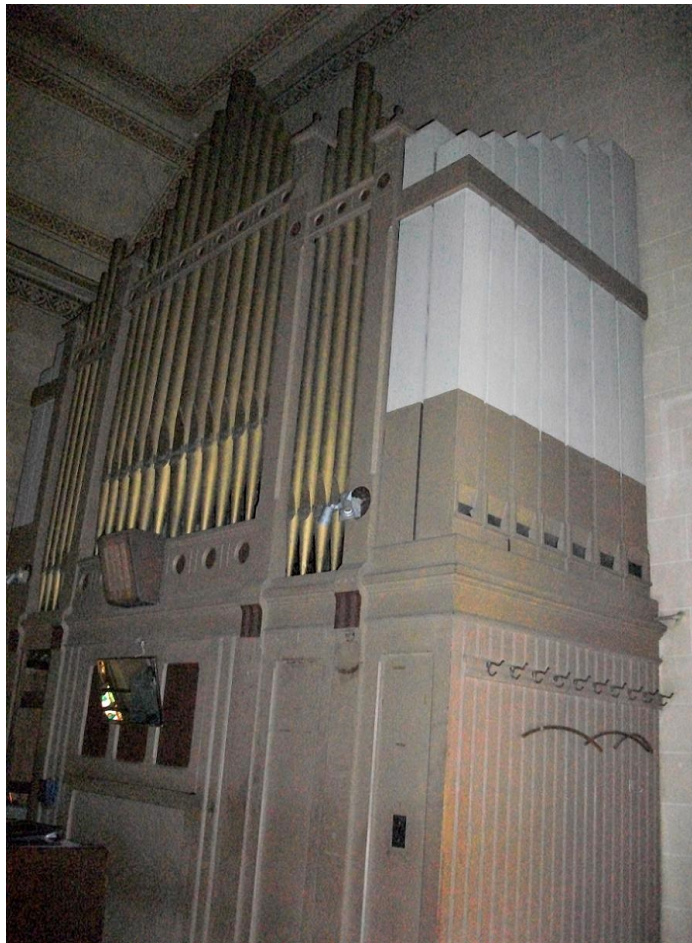


Photo by David. M. Storey from the Organ Historical Society Database