

Recollected History of the Kilgen Organ

by

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I started working at the then Shrine to Music Museum (renamed National Music Museum in 2002) in 1978, and remember seeing the Kilgen organ stored in a then-unoccupied building, "Old Main," on the University of South Dakota's campus. Arne B. Larson saved the Kilgen organ (when he retrieved it from its church, I do not know), along with the church's baptistery, lectern, and, I seem to recall seeing 2 chairs that would have been placed near the altar, as well. Anyway, there it sat, apparently for years - perhaps as early as 1966 - when Arne moved to Vermillion and stored his collection temporarily in USD's Old Main building.

Arne wanted to have a whole gallery devoted to the organ with the church furniture there as "contextual" items. But his son, André, the Shrine to Music Museum/National Music Museum's founding director, did not want to do that. So, when the University of South Dakota finally decided to raise the funds to restore Old Main, we were given notice--around 1989--that we had to move a *lot* of instruments out, including the Kilgen organ. At that point, the organ was still Arne B. Larson's personal property and did not belong to either the university or the museum. Our then small staff deliberated about whether or not to keep it, but decided that 1) it would cost too much to have it professionally restored, 2) our keyboard curator/conservator did not want to take on such a project himself, and 3) we really didn't have room for it in any case!

Arne's son, André, brought the organ to the attention of Mike Pedersen, who was willing to take the organ for free (he had to disassemble and move it) and restore it for use in the tiny town store in Nora, South Dakota (Union County, not far from Vermillion). Pedersen, the Nora store, and the organ have taken on a new life of their own, as he annually opens up the old store building about 3 weeks before Christmas and invites people to come to sing Christmas carols to the accompaniment of the organ, a player piano, and/or a baby grand piano!

See

<https://www.argusleader.com/story/news/2014/11/26/need-dash-christmas-spirit-come-nora-store/19531663/>

for the story and a couple of candid photos that show the Kilgen organ with its polychrome pipes.