

ORGAN HISTORY TO 1949

St. Paul's United Methodist Church Monroe, Michigan

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St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Michigan's oldest Methodist congregation, attained its charter in 1811. On November 14, 1868, the congregation ordered—at the cost of \$375, and accompanied by a five-year warranty—a “portable pipe organ” from Derrick, Felgemaker & Co. (Buffalo, New York). The congregation built its present building during 1869-71.

The earliest extant pictures of St. Paul's organ show a two-manual mechanical action instrument—probably the Derrick, Felgemaker & Co. organ, but possibly a subsequent instrument. The tripartite case is typical of late nineteenth-century American organs; the decorative spires resemble those of Derrick, Felgemaker & Co. The instrument “made a lot of sound.”¹

In 1944, St. Paul's member Joseph Denniston, along with Butterfield Company of Detroit, donated the 1923 Barton organ² from Monroe's Family Theatre. Designed to accompany silent films and renamed the *Denniston organ*, this two-manual instrument spoke through a tripartite screen—designed by the architectural firm Bennett and Straight (Dearborn, Michigan)—featuring lattice-filled arches.

In 1946, St. Paul's members Mr. and Mrs. E. C. Betz donated indoor Deagan cathedral chimes “in memory of loved ones.”³ Named *Betz Memorial Chimes*⁴ and played from a keyboard near the organ console, these chimes were electronically amplified outdoors, from the church's tower.⁵

¹ Interview with Steve Cawood, Monroe, Michigan, fall 2002. A life-long St. Paul's member, Cawood heard this instrument.

² Barton Organ Company's opus 364, built in 1923 by Wangerin Organ Company for Family Theatre (Monroe, Michigan). The organ's wind pressure was five inches.

³ St. Paul's dedicated these chimes on October 27, 1946. “Music was chosen by Mr. Hugh Baker, minister of music, and consisted of organ meditations and an anthem sung by a choir of 35 voices. . . . At the conclusion of the sermon . . . the choir sang ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’.” (*The Monroe Evening News*, 26 December 1946.)

⁴ *The Monroe Evening News*, 17 November 1949.

⁵ *The Monroe Evening News*, 26 December 1946.

In the late 1940's, the wife and children of deceased St. Paul's member Lewis W. Newcomer donated funds for a new organ in his memory (see fig. 1).⁶ M. P. Möller Organ Company (Hagerstown, Maryland) built the organ⁷ in 1949, with St. Paul's music director and organist Hugh Baker as consultant.⁸ Named *Newcomer Memorial Organ*, it incorporated six Barton ranks from the Denniston organ, along with the Betz Memorial Chimes. The Barton ranks spoke from the Denniston organ's chamber, behind the altar; the new Möller pipework spoke from two grill-covered chambers, elevated opposite each other on the chancel's sides.



Fig. 1. Newcomer Memorial Organ dedication plaque.
“In memory of Mr. & Mrs. Lewis W. Newcomer, November 1949.”

⁶ The children were Mrs. M. H. Hollinshead (Grosse Pointe, Michigan), Irving Newcomer (Monroe, Michigan), Stanley Newcomer (Monroe, Michigan), Mrs. Jason M. Saunderson (Sioux City, Iowa), and Mrs. Millard Toncray (Grosse Pointe, Michigan). (*The Monroe Evening News*, 17 November 1949.)

⁷ Opus 7805.

⁸ The organ was dedicated on Sunday, November 20, 1949. A 10:45 a.m. service offered special music and a pre-dedication sermon; Hugh Baker presented an organ recital preceding a 4:30 p.m. dedication service; Bishop Marshall R. Reed—assisted by district superintendent Dr. Frank L. Fitch and the pastor Dr. Harry T. Howard—dedicated the organ. (See *ibid.*)

The Newcomer Memorial Organ represents early twentieth-century pipe organ sound: rich and symphonic, with solid bass (fig. 2). In 1949, Richard Whitelegg's artistry and aesthetic still guided M. P. Möller Company; as tonal director,⁹ he brought the firm's work to its apex. Whitelegg's ideal was the Anglican cathedral organ, drawing upon his experience as a pipe voicer for renowned English firm Henry Willis & Sons—experience that included voicing the organs of Liverpool and Westminster cathedrals. The Newcomer Memorial Organ comes from the Whitelegg era's sunset.



16' Bourdon

⁹ Whitelegg died in 1944.



16' Diapason

Fig. 2. Newcomer Memorial Organ bass pipes.¹⁰

¹⁰ Photograph dates: fig. 1, 12-22-02; fig. 2, 12-22-02 and 12-12-02. Photos taken by Ronald J. Swedlund.

Bibliography

"Cathedral Church of All Saints, Milwaukee." <http://www.ascathedral.org>. Includes photograph of a representative Derrick, Felgemaker & Co. organ.

Cawood, Steve. Monroe, Michigan. Interview, fall 2002.

The Monroe Evening News. 26 December 1946.

The Monroe Evening News. 7 November 1949.