

COMMENTARY ON THE PIPE ORGAN OF THE BASILICA OF STS. PETER AND PAUL

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## THE BASILICA'S PIPE ORGAN

The majestic organ at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul sits centered in the gallery of the 125-year-old nave. Originally built by Barckhoff Organ Company of Ohio in 1890, it has as long and glorious a history as the Basilica itself. While there are no surviving records from the Barckhoff Organ Company, an article from *The Chattanooga Times* dated 1911 declares it to be “finest organ in the area” and “the only three-manual organ in the city.” It was quite an accomplishment for a parish built by poor Irish immigrants.

In 1936, when the church was rebuilt, Kilgen and Son of St. Louis, Missouri rebuilt the organ using the original Barckhoff pipes. They built new wind chests with electric-pneumatic action and a new console, which is still in use today. They also added seven new ranks of pipes. In 2006, Barger & Nix of McDonald, Tennessee undertook the massive task of rebuilding and restoring this jewel of the church to her former glory. The work of an attempted modernization in the 1990's had to be reversed. New mechanisms were installed in the Kilgen console and all new wind chests were built. Barger & Nix carefully preserved the historic pipes and were able to retain the spirit and tonal intention of both the Barckhoff and Kilgen Organ Companies, with the only significant change being the addition of a principal chorus in the Great. New and vintage pipes were used to complete the organ's specifications according to the original designs of Barckhoff and Kilgen. This historic instrument is a blend of both “Romantic” and “American Classic” organ sounds.

The Basilica's organ has 33 ranks with over 2,000 pipes. There are ten ranks of pipes (600+ individual pipes) that have been played consistently on Sundays for 125 years. These are the oldest playing pipes from an original Chattanooga organ!

**“The Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul, with its magnificent Gothic architecture, is widely known to have the best acoustics of any church in in the city. It is most fortunate that this historic instrument has this magnificent space to speak its tones into,”** writes Barger & Nix. Indeed, the Chattanooga community is blessed to have such beautiful, historic instrument in its midst.

*Sources: the American Guild of Organists, the Organ Historical Society, and Barger & Nix  
Organs*