

Schaefer Organ, ca 1910

St. Mary's Ridge Catholic Church, St. Mary's Ridge (Cashton), WI

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The Schaefer Organ Company of Slinger (Schleisingerville), WI was active from about 1880-1950, supplying tubular-pneumatic and electro-pneumatic organs. Originally called the Wisconsin Pipe Organ Factory and owned by Bernard Schaefer, it was later called B. Schaefer and Sons and finally the Schaefer Organ Company. The Organ Historical Society organs database lists some 45 organs by Schaefer, mostly in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois. Two were installed in New York City.

The 11-rank tubular-pneumatic Schaefer at St. Mary's Ridge, outside of Cashton, WI (south of Sparta) was installed sometime around 1910. Under the guidance of Fr. Michael Klos, the church has undergone an extensive and historically informed restoration. The restored building provides a view into traditional Roman Catholic architecture of the late Nineteenth Century, with three carved altars and polychrome paintings on the ceiling. While the organ was being removed in late 2013, the flooring in the chancel was replaced with solid maple and walnut, removed from the nearby school prior to demolition. The new floor sets off the painted altar pieces and further enhances the live acoustics.

The modest organ is in a natural oak Gothic case in the center of the balcony where its sound reflects from the arched ceiling to fill the room with sound. There is evidence behind the organ of an arch in the bell tower that was filled in when the organ was installed. The detached console required hundreds of feet of lead tubes to control the 11 ranks and the sub and super couplers in the original, and a hand-pumped feeder bellows filled an enormous reservoir in the base of the oak case. The hand pump was abandoned when a blower was placed in the unheated bell tower where its roar was somewhat muffled by the heavy bricks of the tower.

The internal layout is very much like the tracker organs built around 1900. The free-standing swell box is at the back, with the great immediately in front. The façade consists of bass pipes of both the 8' Open Diapason and 4' Octave, all painted. The 16' Subbass stands at floor level along the sides of the case, with the open wood 8' Bass Flute across the back behind the swell box.

The Schaefer tubular mechanism was very cleverly designed and extremely modular. It should have been easy to service, but its rural location required lengthy travel time to reach. It was not the beneficiary of much work by technicians over the years. The little work it did receive consisted mostly of leather patching and sealing as the tubular action began to fail. There is also evidence of window screen inserted in an attempt to keep mice away from the tender leather! When we took the organ out in late 2013, Fr. Klos, himself an organist, told us it had not been playable for at least 20 years.

In order to hear a bit of the mute organ we "hot-wired" it with screw drivers to open valves with ruptured pouches. Very little would play. We heard enough, both this way and by blowing on a few

pipes, that it was obvious this organ had a lot of potential. The live response in the room also seemed to be very promising.

The pipes were in excellent condition, although they were understandably dirty. Nobody had ever tried to “baroquify” this organ, so all pipes were in original condition. The three pedal chests held promise for rebuilding (later abandoned), but the manual chests were completely beyond re-use if we hoped to make the organ reliable and give it longevity.

We could have restored the tubular chests, but this action is known to have a fairly short lifespan in this climate. Had we restored all of the leather in the hundreds of pouches we would have condemned the organ once again to eventual failure. It is similar to tracker organs of the same era so we opted for tone channel chests. What to do about the key and stop action? The organ never had tracker action, and with a detached console at the balcony rail it would have been a tricky – but possible – undertaking to create a tracker action. The preponderance of 8’ stops would have required large pallets and a heavy action. The presence of sub and super couplers from its inception placed a tracker action out of the running. We opted instead for Blackinton-style tone channel chests, built by Organ Supply Industries, with new keyboards, a new nameboard by Peterson, and relay and combination action by Syndyne.

This rural location also indicated that we wanted the organ to be extremely reliable – especially in case of lightning strike. After all, St. Mary’s *Ridge* is a high point of land, and with a high steeple, we could assume the church has had its share of strikes. The local electrician – a member of the parish -- was advised on how to double-ground the organ so it is grounded both when its running and when it is shut off. Standard organ circuits on the 120v side do not regularly ground the organ when it is off, so this is a little unusual and required some special components.

The old blower in the tower was immediately ruled out for reuse. In addition to its noise, it drew in sub-zero air in the dead of winter from the unheated tower. We wanted the organ to be more stable, so a new Laukhuff blower was put into a double box for soundproofing, with both intake and output silencing baffles. It is truly silent. A 3’ x 4’ single rise reservoir supplies air to the two slider chests, and a smaller reservoir supplies the two pedal stops. All is installed within the base.

After cleaning, we found that the pipes were in need of only minor regulating and voicing correction. The one exception was the large pipes of the façade. The toes had gradually closed under the weight of these pipes. After opening up the toes and correcting some low languids, the heroic nature of the typical 8’ Diapason of this era emerged to provide a solid foundation for the organ and to carry beautifully throughout the room.

The preponderance of 8’ stops was a puzzle until they were all playing again in the room. Concerned about the need for super couplers, we took the opportunity to add a 2’ to each manual – a Fifteenth to the Great and a Harmonic Piccolo to the Swell. While these additions are successful and add variety, we found that the 8’ stops are all different and each contributes in its own way. In particular, the Dulciana is not as soft as many such examples and has considerable body. The Aeoline, though almost inaudible in our shop, has a lovely edge and even with the swell box closed it can be heard everywhere in the church. The Geigen Diapason is a perfect foundation for the Swell and contrasts with the Open

Diapason of the Great. The Salicional is extremely bright and, in fact, almost fulfills the function of a mixture and reed by providing many high harmonics. The flutes are not exceptional, although they are all different. The 4' Flute d'Amour pipes are wood, with pierced stoppers.

We are grateful to Fr. Klos for having the vision to restore the Schaefer organ and the faith in his congregation to fund it. The "new" organ functions essentially the same as it had when built, although it now has the advantage of a multi-level combination action, a transposer, reversibles, and an "auto-bass" pedal-to-great coupler for those who don't use their feet (a reality in this area). There is a crescendo pedal as it had before, and the swell linkage is still mechanical. The best stop, of course, is the wonderful acoustic of this room, and the location near the ceiling projects its tones throughout the room. Both building and organ are now ready for their next century.

Andrew Paul Fredel, music director at Gethsemane Episcopal Church in Minneapolis and a member of our staff, played a re-dedication concert to a large and appreciative crowd on Sunday, October 12, 2014. Much of the music was drawn in spirit from the early years of this organ. The organ is admittedly small, and much of its strength is in the wide variety of softer unison stops. The program sought to highlight these sounds and display, within its limits, the large range of musical options available.

There are many Schaefer organs in the Midwest. We found the Schaefer design to be rich tonally, and it is unfortunate that so many of their instruments were built with a key action doomed to early failure. This project proved conclusively that on top of new slider chests the old organ can be brought back to life and might even surpass what was originally built.

Stoplist:

Great:

8' Open Diapason	73 old pipes, 1-19 in façade, 44 scale
8' Melodia	73 old pipes, 1-12 stopped, 13-61 open wood, 62-73 open metal
8' Dulciana	73 old pipes
4' Octave	73 old pipes, 1-6 in façade, 58 scale
2' Fifteenth	61 new pipes, 72 scale
4' Great to Great	
16' Swell to Great	
8' Swell to Great	Reversible
4' Swell to Great	
Pedal to Great Bass	

Swell (expressive):

8' Violin Diapason	73 old pipes, 1-12 stopped wood, 13-73 metal
8' Salicional	73 old pipes
8' Stopped Diapason	73 old pipes
8' Aeoline	73 old pipes, 1-12 stopped wood, 13-73 metal
4' Flute d'Amour	73 old pipes, 1-49 wood with pierced stoppers, 50-73 open metal
2' Piccolo	61 new pipes, harmonic

Tremolo

Swell to Swell 4'

Pedal:

Subbass 16'	30 old pipes
Bass Flute 8'	30 old pipes, open wood
8' Great to Pedal	Reversible
8' Swell to Pedal	Reversible

The 16' and 4' couplers are per the original.

Combination action with 64 levels of memory.