

History of Parish Organs St. Joseph Church, Bristol, Connecticut

FIRST ORGAN IN THE ORIGINAL CHURCH BUILDING

St. Joseph Church in Bristol Connecticut has had two church buildings. The first church, a wooden structure in the same location as the present church was built in 1864. George Ryder, of Boston Massachusetts was a popular organ builder at the time and was a student of the famous E & G.G. Hook organ builders. Mr. Ryder provided the organ for the original Church. Once he formed his own company, he built 185 organs between 1871 and 1896.

SECOND ORGAN IN THE NEW CHURCH BUILDING

The second church building was erected in 1923. An Austin Organ of Hartford, Connecticut, opus 1317, was installed in 1925. There was a program of dedication on August 9, 1925 at "St. Joseph's New Church" under the direction of Professor Edward J. Keegan. When organs were installed in Roman Catholic churches in the 1920's, they were voiced so that they would quietly aid the choir or play background music through portions of the Mass. The music belonged to the priest and choir, not the congregation.

"Except the chant of the celebrant and the sacred ministers at the altar, which must always be sung in Gregorian chant without any accompaniments, the rest of the liturgical singing belongs properly to the choir of clerics..."

Instruction on Sacred Music V12. 1903

Austin Organ opus 1317 served St. Joseph Parish very well with this stop list:

Great: 8' Open Diapason, 8' Melodia, 8' Dulciana, 8' Viola and 8' Tuba (prepared)

Swell: 8' Stopped Flute, 8' Salicional, 8' Violin Diapason, 8' Aeoline,
4' Harmonic Flute, 8' oboe

Pedal: 16' Bourdon (Melodia), 16' Gedackt (stopped Flute)

The Second Vatican Council in 1963 changed the way we worship. The congregation was now to participate and not be a spectator. The organ at St. Joseph Church was refurbished to meet contemporary needs. The congregation was now to sing the Mass acclamations, responses, psalmody and songs and to participate actively.

"The entire worshipping assembly exercises a ministry of music."

Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, Liturgical Music Today #63, 1982

REBUILD OF AUSTIN ORGAN OPUS 1317 IN 1988 BY FOLEY-BAKER COMPANY

In 1988, under the co-pastors, Fr. James Leary and Fr. Tom Shepherd along with the director of music, Jean Degan, the project to refurbish and upgrade the existing opus 1317 was begun to better serve this parish. The contract for this work went to Foley-Baker Inc. of Tolland, Connecticut. The new stop list can be found on this website on the Music Ministry page "Stop Lists for the Austin Organs". This refurbished instrument helped the music ministry to grow and the parish worship to be more animated.

In 1989, the Church was renovated to keep with the suggestions from the second Vatican Council which recommended many changes to the worship space. The organ was covered and worship

took place in the hall of the church for several months while asbestos was removed and the church was remodeled. During this time, a piano was used for congregational accompaniment.

When the renovations of the church were completed, worship was again back in the church starting on Palm Sunday of 1989. The organ was uncovered and came back to life. The piano was brought upstairs into the church as well and was used for more contemporary psalm settings and some choir accompaniments.

A SECOND CONSOLE WAS ADDED

In 1996 a new grand piano was acquired and placed in the front of the church. The organist/pianist was using both instruments, organ in the loft and piano in the front, during Masses. Around this time, another console was added to the front of the church making it convenient so that the organist didn't have to go back and forth during Mass which was both distracting to the congregation and exhausting to the organist. This console played the organ in the gallery and took a great deal of skill to accommodate the acoustic setting and length of the church. When the console was renovated to fit the stop list of the new opus 1317, it was arranged so that perhaps someday another organ would be placed in the front of the church near the new console and piano. This would assist in several ways. First, in order to play the organ at a volume adequate for the organist and cantor to hear it, the sound was very loud in the back pews but soft in front where the cantor was leading the congregation. The other problem for the organist was that the delay from the time that the key is depressed until the sound comes out of the pipe and reaches the front of the church was way too long to be able to play musically.

A SECOND ORGAN WAS ADDED IN 2007: A HYBRID WITH PIPES FROM Möller organ (Hagerstown, Maryland) opus 5443 (1929) from United Methodist Church in Watertown and Austin Opus 1747 from the factory studio on Woodland St. in Hartford.

The following is a write up from the Austin Organ Company about the Austin Opus 1747.

The organ was originally connected to a brilliant innovation of the Austin firm – the *Austin Quadruplex Roll Player!* This allowed the organ to play by itself, much like a player-piano. Organists from around the country would come to the factory and record their favorite works, which would then be cut on paper rolls and sold to purchasers of these mechanisms! The little studio also was wired into, what we believe was then WTIC AM Radio, for its Friday evening broadcast – complete with live music from Austin Organ Company! As this novel concept faded into history, the organ was sold to Mrs. Ida Young for installation into her residence in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. In the 1950's, the organ was donated to Emmanuel Congregational Church in Springfield, and once again moved and re-installed. As years went on, the congregation at Emmanuel dwindled away to nothing, and the organ was rescued by the Austin factory, and eventually offered to St. Joseph's. As we know, there was already the remnant of an old M.P. Möller Organ intended for installation at St. Joseph. Some creative thought was given to melding the best parts of the two organs into one cohesive instrument. The design chosen was to install steel beams in the walls of the chancel on which to place the old Austin windchests.

Our concept was to utilize the old Austin pneumatic mechanisms, and build new chests that would fit the specifications for this new organ in a more logical way. This would allow for better tuning access and tonal egress. As we developed the tonal and mechanical design, we also eliminated the steelwork, building the organ into proper cases, which would serve to focus the sound, conceal mechanical and non-decorative pipes, and give support without the added expense of structural additions to the building. It is important, as an organ architect, to design an instrument that is either so very stunning, that it stands alone on its own merit, or most often the case, to design an organ that looks and feels like it has always been part of the fabric of the church. While we certainly know that an organ would not have ever been installed in the sanctuary of a Catholic church built in 1923, we feel that we have achieved a sense of graceful elegance in this installation. Care was given to incorporate the stylistic elements of the gallery organ into the new instrument in the sanctuary.

Tonally, we looked at the available resources, and chose to discard more of the Austin, some of the Möller, and add a few new stops, and some other substitutions. In the final tonal specification, we ended up with only three of the Austin stops being used, and three from the Möller. We built one entirely new set of pipes, rebuilt two others, and revoiced every rank to create an instrument that holds together tonally, creating another example of an instrument that should sound and perhaps feel like it has always been a part of the worship life of the church. So much new pipework (new voices, and new sounds from old pipes), new chests, new actions, etc., that we chose to assign the organ a new opus number: The 2790th organ built under the Austin name!

This process as described by the Austin Organ Company was not a typical smooth installation. The contract was signed with the Austin Organ Company in March 2004. They took all the parts that were in storage from the Möller Organ and brought them to their factory in Hartford to start the work of piecing the new instrument together. Work was progressing and was on schedule for a completion date in the Spring of 2005. Fr. Leary who had been pastor at St. Joseph was reassigned to another parish, and Fr. Joe DiSciacca was assigned in August of 2004 while this project was in progress. Then in March of 2005, the Austin Organ Company closed their doors after being in business since 1893! The parish was sent an e-mail on Monday morning saying that the factory will be closing that afternoon and we should come to Hartford to pick up our incomplete organ. Mr. Allen Hill, the organ technician for our church instrument, assisted us that day in procuring all the parts which were then loaded into a storage unit in town.

In January of 2006 Richard Taylor and Michael Fazio purchased what remained of the Austin Organ Company and asked if they could finish the job that was started by their newly acquired company. Many of the employees were the same and knew the project well. They were very interested in seeing it to completion.

The "new" Austin Organ Company came to Bristol. All the parts were retrieved from storage and returned to Hartford. The almost finished organ was played for Palm Sunday of 2007. The case work was completed within a few months and is a work of exquisite craftsmanship.

Austin Organ's new opus 2790 was blessed on October 13, 2007 by Archbishop Henry Mansell with a concert of dedication by Mr. Scott Lamlein.

Both organs can be played separately or simultaneously from either console and serve the cantors, choirs and congregation beautifully.