

A Pipe Dream Comes True: The Keweenaw Heritage Center’s Barckhoff Organ

Anita Campbell

It’s interesting to think back about the Barckhoff Church Organ Company located in Latrobe, Pennsylvania in 1899, and picture the many German immigrants employed there, bringing with them from the old country their expertise in organ building. Flash forward 107 years to the little community of Calumet, Michigan, in a remote area of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula, where a group of organ enthusiasts are busily cleaning 957 pipes in preparation for the restoration of a historic Barckhoff tracker pipe organ built in Latrobe, Pennsylvania in 1899. (For a history of pipe organs in this area, see Janet Anuta Dalquist, “Pipe Organs of the Keweenaw: Houghton County, Michigan,” in THE DIAPASON, February 2007.)

Barckhoff history

It is written that Carl Barckhoff and his employees built over 3,000 organs. Most of the organs were, of course, built for churches, but he also built residence organs and organs for recital halls, Masonic temples, and at least one college. Carl Barckhoff was born in Wiedenbrück, Westphalia, Germany in 1849. His father, organ builder Felix Barckhoff, brought the family to the United States in 1865, and in that same year the first Barckhoff organ was built in this country. The firm was established in Philadelphia, and was for a time during the 1870s known as Felix Barckhoff & Sons, the sons being Carl and Lorenz. Carl continued managing the company after his father’s death and relocated to several different towns due to various misfortunes, such as the financial panic of 1893, a fire in 1897, and a disastrous flood in 1913. The business grew, and by 1889 the Barckhoff Church Organ Company had 54 employees. In 1904 the company was shipping “an average of three organs per week, and nothing smaller than two-manual instruments.” Barckhoff organs are unfortunately not identified by opus numbers. Due to various disasters, all company records have been lost. Nameplates have merely his name and location.

The Barckhoff organ in Calumet

The Barckhoff Church Organ Company remained in Latrobe, Pennsylvania for only three years. It was during this short period that the two-manual, 16-rank tracker pipe organ was built and installed in the Carmel Lutheran Church of Calumet in 1899. This organ served the Calumet Swedish Evangelical Lutheran Church, Carmel Lutheran, from 1899–1965, when the congregation merged with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church in the neighboring community of Laurium. When Carmel Lutheran closed, the congregation donated the pipe organ to their retired pastor and organ enthusiast, Rev. John Simonson, and his wife, Hortense, also an organist. The Simonsons had a building constructed to house the organ on their wooded property near their home in Dollar Bay, Michigan. Besides the steeply pitched roof, the organ house featured haymow doors like those on a barn, which were there “to let the music out.” The Simonsons and friends and family enjoyed several years of pipe organ music before the death of Hortense in 1990 and John in 1991. The Simonson children looked for an organization to donate the organ to and chose the Keweenaw Heritage Center, Calumet, Michigan.

The Keweenaw Heritage Center

The Keweenaw Heritage Center, formerly St. Anne’s Catholic Church, was built in 1900 for the large French-Canadian community that had immigrated to Calumet to work in the booming copper mines. The structure was built of red



Restored Barckhoff organ (photo credit: Sharon Butera)



Barckhoff façade restored (photo credit: Anita Campbell)



Keydesk (photo credit: Sharon Butera)



Organ loft building, Rev. John and Hortense Simonson (photo credit: Jean [Simonson] Stauffer)



Keweenaw Heritage Center (photo credit: Anita Campbell)



Keyboards and nameplate (photo credit: Anita Campbell)

sandstone with French Gothic ornamentation generously applied. After decades of service, St. Anne’s was deconsecrated in 1966 and sadly fell into years of decay and desecration. Eventually, the abandoned building was home only to pigeons. Lack of heating and the rugged Keweenaw winters took their toll. In 1994 the Keweenaw Heritage Center began as a broad-based community effort to purchase and restore St. Anne’s. Their intent was to ultimately use this historically and architecturally significant building as a home for a community center, highlighting the social history of Michigan’s Copper Country. Local contributions and several grants from foundations, the National Park Service, and the hard work of numerous volunteers



Pedalboard (photo credit: Sharon Butera)

have brought St. Anne's back to life. The Keweenaw Heritage Center is now one of eighteen Heritage Sites of the Keweenaw National Historical Park.

The pipe organ was moved to the Keweenaw Heritage Center in May 2000, thanks to the efforts of Mike Dudenas, then president of the Keweenaw Heritage Center. It was temporarily placed in the chancel area until funds could be raised to repair the plaster and leaks in the choir loft. The organ sat untouched for six years until 2006, when the choir loft was repaired and plans began to move and restore the pipe organ. Fund-raising efforts began with an ambitious "Adopt-A-Pipe" program initiated by volunteer Mike Maksimchuk. Generous grants and major donations were received from the Strosacker Foundation, the Taubman Foundation, Mrs. Valeda Tomasi of Calumet, and Mr. David Simonson of North Carolina.

Restoring the organ

Organ builder James Lauck, owner of the Lauck Pipe Organ Company, of Otsego, Michigan, was contracted by the Keweenaw Heritage Center to restore the Barckhoff pipe organ. Lauck has been building organs since 1975 and maintains many of the Copper Country's historic pipe organs.

In June 2007, on a very hot and muggy day, 25 volunteers worked with Lauck to dismantle and move the pipe organ from its location in the first floor chancel area to the balcony of the Keweenaw Heritage Center. The move was completed in ten hours. Volunteers continued to raise funds and work on the organ during the summer and fall of 2007 under the direction of Jim Lauck, all dreaming of the day when the grand old Barckhoff tracker pipe organ would fill this majestic building with amazing music.

The restoration was slow, due to the fact that the Keweenaw Heritage Center closes its doors during the harsh winters and that organbuilder Lauck had to travel 500 miles to work on the organ. The summer of 2008 brought renewed energy of the volunteers, and Lauck continued to make trips to work on the organ.

The oak casework was in excellent condition and needed little work outside of cleaning. The façade pipes were repainted and original stenciling replicated by volunteers. Feeder bellows and the double-rise reservoir were completely rebuilt and releathered. Windchests are all in good original condition; action parts were replaced as needed. A new Ventus blower was installed, replacing an old Kinetic blower. The pedal tubular-pneumatic ventral windchests were releathered. Cardboard windlines and conductors were replaced with Orgaflex. Lauck praised the ambitious volunteers and the 700-plus hours of restoration work that they contributed. A grand day finally arrived in August 2008, when the Swell and Great organs were completed and a mini-concert could be played for the many volunteers.

The Pedal organ was added and the restoration completed in May 2009. A "Celebration Concert" took place August 5, filling the Keweenaw Heritage Center with glorious pipe organ music once again—a tribute to the ingenuity and musical taste of a former generation.

Guest artists Wayne Seppala of San Diego, California and Mike Maksimchuk of Calumet, Michigan performed at the celebration concert.

In December 2008, the Organ Historical Society awarded a Citation to the 1899 Barckhoff pipe organ for its historical significance. Thirteen other instruments in Michigan have received the OHS Citation, and three Barckhoff organs have received a Citation. The Keweenaw Heritage Center is very proud of this recognition and looks forward to sharing this "king of instruments" with the community.

Below are the specifications for the Barckhoff organ:

GREAT			
16'	Bourdon	wood	49
8'	Open Diapason	metal	61
8'	Viola Di Gamba	metal	61
8'	Doppel Flute	wood	61
8'	Dulciana	metal	61
4'	Principal	metal	61
3'	Twelfth	metal	61
2'	Fifteenth	metal	61

SWELL			
8'	Violin Diapason	metal	61
8'	Salicional	metal	61
8'	Stopped Diapason	wood	61
4'	Fugara	metal	61
4'	Flute Harmonic	metal & wood	61
2'	Piccolo	metal	61

PEDAL			
16'	Sub Bass	wood	27
8'	Flute Major	wood	27

Mechanical Registers

Great to Swell
Swell to Pedal
Swell to Great
Bellows Signal
Tremolo
Wind Indicator

Combination Pedals

Great Organ Forte
Great Organ Piano

Balanced Swell Pedal

Construction

The 1898 contract states:

1. All the metal flue pipes to be of a composition of tin and lead, varied according to the requirements of the tone; but in no case to have less than 40% pure tin.
2. The reed pipes to be of tin and lead as above stated, except the basses, which have zinc in the most slender parts, where stiffness is required. No zinc being used otherwise, excepting for front pipes & basses.
3. Pedals of black walnut, with naturals capped with white maple.
4. The best of ebony and ivory shall be used for the manual keyboards, which shall project and be beveled.

For more information on this pipe organ restoration project, please contact the chair of the organ committee, Anita Campbell <pdcampb@pasty.net>.

Anita Campbell is retired from the Calumet Public Schools, and has been on the Board of Directors of the Keweenaw Heritage Center at St. Anne's for several years. She enjoys promoting the history of her community—the Copper Country, located in the northernmost tip of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. She has always had a love for music and a special place in her heart for organ music, so she took on chairing the Barckhoff pipe organ restoration project with great passion and is excited to share this historic instrument with the community.



Left stop jamb (photo credit: Sharon Butera)



Right stop jamb (photo credit: Sharon Butera)



(l to r) Volunteers Paul Lehto, Jim Brooks, Mike Maksimchuk, Paul Campbell, and Paul Bracco move Barckhoff windchest (photo credit: Anita Campbell)

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