The 1897 Pfeffer Pipe Organ at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish

 “In the Latin Church, the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem, for it is the traditional musical instrument which adds a wonderful splendor to the Church’s ceremonies and powerfully lifts up man’s mind to God and to higher things.”

(§120, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium)

Johann Georg Pfeffer immigrated to the United States in 1854 from Sigmaringen - present day southwestern Germany - where he had learned the pipe organ building trade. Having settled in St. Louis, Missouri in 1859, Mr. Pfeffer rather quickly established himself as a prominent organ builder. In 1897, a pipe organ was constructed for St. Thomas the Apostle Parish by the J.G. Pfeffer Company. The steam-powered paddleboat “Frederick” carried the pipe organ up the Osage River to its new home in St. Thomas, where it was proudly installed in the loft of the parish church constructed in 1883. Even with the collapse of the bell tower during the 1948 tornado, the pipe organ survived relatively unscathed.

Having served for many decades, the venerable Pfeffer was gradually retired in the 1970’s, as the immerging technology of the day proposed an alternative to accompany the Sacred Rites. In 1983, celebrating the centennial of the construction of the parish church, the electric organ was removed and three ranks of actual pipes were placed behind the Pfeffer instrument. Controlled by a second-hand console placed near the sanctuary and plastic dryer hoses providing wind to the windchests, this arrangement provided for the musical needs of the parish. In more recent years, however, certain components had begun to fail.

With the intercession of some holy helpers, most particularly St. Thérèse of Lisieux, whose death in 1897 coincides with the Pfeffer instrument’s construction - and whose intercession has always been indicated by some sign of roses, certain prayers were answered for the restoration of the forgotten Pfeffer instrument. In 2015, a bequest from the estate of *Rose* Schmidt was made specifically for the restoration of the Pfeffer pipe organ. That initial bequest, along with other donations, have provided the means for the Quimby Pipe Organ Company from Warrensburg, Missouri to begin a careful and historically-sensitive restoration of the instrument according the Organ Historical Society conservation guidelines.

A comprehensive list of all Pfeffer instruments is not known to exist, but it is estimated that his company constructed nearly 600 instruments around the country. At this point in history, fewer than 50 are known to exist anywhere; even fewer in a totally unaltered condition. The Pfeffer at St. Thomas is, however, one of those very few.

Unenclosed manual (58 notes)

8' Open Diapason

8' Stopped Diapason

8' Gamba

8' Dulciana

4' Rohrflute

4' Octave

2 2/3' Twelfth

2' Fifteenth

Pedal (25 notes)

16' Subbass - 25 pipes

Pedal coupler

Tremulant

Two single-acting fixed mechanical combinations – Piano & Forte

Although an electric blower was added at some point in the early 20th century, the pipes speak most comfortably at about 2 ¾” of wind, tuning at A-440. The original double-rise feeder bellows are extant and will be restored to full operation by hand-pump or alternatively, a new ½ horsepower blower.

The restoration of the stenciled façade pipes and casework is not yet funded. Your contributions for this historic instrument are greatly appreciated. Reinstallation of the instrument is to occur during the summer of 2016.