

St Mary of the Annunciation, Charleston, SC - Organ History (July 2023)

Since its founding in 1789, St Mary's has had many organs. Only minimal records have been found describing many of the instruments, as well as the circumstances surrounding their installation and replacement. Much has been lost to time, though educated guesses may be made when examining St Mary's long history.

The first three organs were extraordinarily unlucky - they are all known to have been destroyed. The first was probably installed around 1806, when the second church building was completed. It is unknown who the maker was. It burned in the [Great Fire of 1838](#), along with the church building and much of the surrounding city. The second was installed around 1839, after the completion of the third (current) church building. It was destroyed by shelling from the Civil War [Siege of Charleston](#), which began in 1863 and lasted for two years. Although the building and grounds were only minimally damaged during this time, one shell came through the south wall and hit the organ directly. The third organ, a beautiful instrument by world-renowned organ-builder Henry Erben of New York, was installed in 1867. It was destroyed in the [Earthquake of 1886](#).

The fourth organ was installed in 1897, during the first major renovation of the building. It was built by [Hook and Hastings](#) of Boston. There have not been any records found to indicate why this instrument necessitated replacement, but sometime around 1950 yet another organ was purchased, built by T Howard Sheehan of Charleston. Unfortunately, it was not a high-quality instrument and St Mary's yet again replaced an organ with the sixth and current instrument.

The current organ at St Mary's was built in 1874 by George Jardine & Son of New York, NY for Gravesend Dutch Reformed Church in Brooklyn. It was rebuilt by Jardine in 1893 while still at Gravesend. It was then restored in 1979 by Mann & Trupiano of New York, NY in preparation for installation at St Mary's. It has 2 manuals (keyboards) and 13 ranks (sounds), for a total of about 800

pipes, and uses the original mechanical [‘tracker action’](#) to open and close the pipes. It now has many parts that are unable to be properly repaired.

The organ which will be replacing this current organ as a part of our [Bicentennial Campaign](#) renovation project will be a rebuild of an A. Zimmer instrument, which will be undertaken by [Cornel Zimmer Organ Builders](#) of Denver, NC. The company is currently run by the grandson of the original builder. The core of the new organ will be an instrument very generously gifted to St Mary’s from Advent Lutheran Church in North Charleston. The organ has been disassembled and is currently in a storage facility near the builder’s workshop.

Because it was originally built for a much taller space, the new design will accommodate St Mary’s lower ceiling height. It will also include additional pipes from St Mary’s current organ and C. Zimmer’s inventory, for a final layout of 2 manuals and 35 ranks, about 1700 pipes in all. All parts will be cleaned, restored, and replaced as needed. A new case will be designed and decorated to match the interior woodwork of the church. The upstairs gallery area will be rearranged in order to make room for this larger instrument, which will serve the needs of St Mary’s for years to come.