

Organ society brings past to life



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CORRESPONDENT

VALPARAISO | The melodic strains of a pipe organ filled St. Andrew's Episcopal Church on Monday morning as listeners soaked in the sound.

More than 400 members of the Organ Historical Society had come to hear the church's organ, built in 1889 and restored in 2007 by Scot Huntington, society president.

“We celebrate the culture of the American pipe organ from its origin to the present day,” Huntington said of his organization.

Originally built for the Baptist Church of West Harwich, Mass., on Cape Cod, the organ was purchased by St. Andrew's through an “organ clearing house,” Huntington said.

The oak casework, hidden under three layers of paint, was stripped and refinished, and the facade pipes were redecorated in the original earth-tone colors popular in the Victorian era.

Huntington said he used a picture of the organ taken in 1889 as his guide.

“This may well be the first modern restoration project to use the old medium of milk paint as opposed to latex,” he said. “This organ will look like this 100 years from now.”

The event at St. Andrew's Church was part of the organ society's national convention, which took place in Chicago this year.

Members are traveling to various locations in the Chicagoland area to hear organ demonstrations and lectures on topics such as the ethics of proper organ restoration.

Founded in 1956, the organization has 3,000 members worldwide, about 2,800 of whom hail from the United States. Members come from all walks of life and no musical experience is required.

“A lot of them can't play a note,” Huntington said. “They just love the sound and how it

speaks to their souls.”

The society boasts the largest organ archive in the world, and its guidelines for conservation are used by organ builders throughout the world, Huntington said.

St. Andrew's parishioners Lynn O'Neill and Constance McManus were among those attending the recital, performed by a member of the organ society.

“We're so thrilled with our organ,” O'Neill said. “We were delighted to hear it played today. This was a special treat.”

For more information about the organ historical society, visit www.organsociety.org.