

## ST. ITA PIPE ORGAN

- The St. Ita parish community was founded on June 25, 1900.
- The current church building, designed by architect, Henry J. Schlacks, was completed and dedicated on October 9, 1927.
- The first instrument in the church was a Hammond organ.
- In 1948, in keeping with the architectural splendor of the church building, Rev. Gerard Picard and the organist at the time, William Parks, (1931-1951) took up the project of installing the first pipe organ which was entrusted to the *Wicks Pipe Organ, Co.*
- As the "King of instruments" and favored instrument for the church's worship, a magnificent organ of significant resources, suitable for both worship and performance was installed. Legend has it, Bing Crosby helped foot the bill or paid for it in its entirety.
- The *Wicks Organ Company* completed the organ in 1951. At that time, it was reputed to be the largest organ they had built. It was modeled after the four manual organ they had

installed previously in St. Mary's Cathedral in Peoria.

- In January 1951, Rene Dosonge, then dean of the Illinois Chapter of the *American Guild of Organists*, became organist and choir director at St Ita. The instrument was dedicated on Feb. 4, 1951, with Mr. Dosogne as organist, in a service of benediction with men and boys choirs.
- One recording of the organ is exists and was made by Edward Eigenschenck in 1956. A native Chicagoan, who studied organ in Paris with several well-known organist including Vierne, and Bonnet, and Frank Van Dusen in Chicago.
- Performers through the early years: Pierre Cochereau, May 1957 | Gaston Litaize, Nov. '57 | Robert Hebble, Oct. '91
- ***H.A. Howell Pipe Organ Company*** of Sterling, IL was chosen to renovate the instrument (1999-2003) as part of a larger project for the parish centenary, since electrical and wind system after fifty plus years was failing and the instrument had

been seriously damaged over the years by water and falling plaster, and corroding brick.

- **Renovation included:**

- New chests and wind regulators for the swell, choir, and solo divisions
- A new blower
- Supplying a new solid-state multi-system electrical relay (*which allowed for a player device*) and a new solid state combination action with new draw knobs and tilting tablets.
- Tonal improvements, including recomposing the mixtures, and replacing the reed swell stops which had been damaged beyond repair
- Extending the original pedal reed, known for its dramatic effect to 32' pitch using full length resonators, and also upward as a manual solo reed (*sounding like a trumpet*)
- Relocating the choir and solo divisions\*, and reworking their expression shades.

*\*-The current physical rearrangement of the divisions has all of the*

*flue trebles at the same height, helping the tuning of the instrument which is spread across the entire width of the building.*

- Installing new keyboard contacts and restoring the ivory keyboards
  - Installing a new pedal board, and rebuilding the swell shoe assemblies.
- Concerts since have included performers: **Todd Gresick** 2002 & '10, **Ray Cornils** '03, **Douglas Cleveland** '05, **David Schrader** '05 & 21, **Barbara Harbach** '10, **Yun Kim** '15, several member recitals of the *American Guild of Organists*, and in 2006 was featured in the *AGO National Convention* with performances by **Sophie-Veronique Cauchefer-Choplin**, titular organist at *St. Sulpice* in Paris.
  - Most recently David Schrader made a recording of the organ works of Leo Sowerby, released on the *Cedille* record label in June of 2021
  - Other recordings can be found at [www.organlive.com](http://www.organlive.com)