BROMBAUGH PIPE ORGAN

An Instrument of Exceptional Historic Merit

First Lutheran was home to a magnificent and historic pipe organ, John Brombaugh's Opus 4. In 2011, it received a Historic Organ Citation from the Organ Historical Society, recognizing it as "an instrument of exceptional historic merit." This instrument was the fifth youngest organ to ever receive such an honor, and at the time was one of only nine such organs in Ohio. In 2014, it was destroyed in a fire.

The site of the organ after the fire. A few of the large copper pipes from the trompes tower are visible at the top of the picture. A collection of the slider motors is visible in the center of the picture. Directly to the left of the slider motors is the left side of the bottom part of the case, with some of the pipes from the Great 16' Bourdon still attached. Just to the left of that is a single pipe, probably from the Positive facade, crossed with another piece of debris. The triangle-shaped piece in the right center of the picture was a decorative part of the case.
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Significance

First Lutheran's Brombaugh pipe organ was significant largely because of its firsts: the first to re-employ in America historical techniques such as flexible winding, unequal temperament and hammered pipes, and the first large instrument that John Brombaugh built. On Brombaugh's significance as an organ builder, Homer Ferguson's 2008 dissertation on Brombaugh's life and work states:

His methods of construction revolutionized American organ building in the twentieth century, and his instruments were installed internationally, as far as Sweden and Japan. Brombaugh organs have been influential to both organ builders and organists, defining many aspects of the historically informed American organ in the late twentieth century.

Surprisingly, the salient characteristics of Brombaugh's organs were developed over a few short years and are demonstrated in his early instruments at Lorain and Ashland Avenue [in Toledo]. His distinct preferences—the use of unequal temperaments, the hammering of pipe metal, his voicing in "vocale" style, mechanical action, organ cases built on historic principles, the use of solid wood in the construction of the slider windchests as well as other elements of the organ, and the employment of wedge bellows—would persist for the duration of his career.

Despite the relatively small number of instruments by Brombaugh, his impact on the field has been enormous. He directly worked with and trained many of the leading organ builders in America, including George Taylor, John Boody, and Michael Bigelow. Countless others have consulted his instruments and been inspired by his example to study the organs by the European master builders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In addition, the qualities of Brombaugh's organs have influenced a new generation of performers, informing them about the pipe speech, winding, tuning, and touch appropriate to most of the organ repertoire.

*John Brombaugh: The Development of America's Master Organ Builder. Homer Ashton Ferguson III. Arizona State University, 2008*

Michael Barone, the host of the national radio show *Pipedreams*, remembers hearing this organ for the first time: "My memory of Opus 4 was 'wow.' The sound was vivid, live, colorful, exciting. The action was amazingly fluid, communicative and light. Anyone who heard or played that organ understood that something important was happening at First Lutheran."

People came from all over to see and hear the organ. David Boe remembers that, "A lot of builders and players stopped by over the years, and I think it influenced their thinking, to some degree." Through these visits, and through Brombaugh's other instruments and the organ builders he influenced, Brombaugh's ideas have spread widely. Many of the technical details that were first tried out at First Lutheran are now relatively common. At the time it was built, this was quite an experimental organ, but now you can find similar instruments throughout the United States.
When First Lutheran's current building was built in 1924, a Möller organ was installed in chambers in the front of the church. By 1962, when 26-year-old David Boe was hired as Organist and Choir Director, the organ was failing. He started thinking about a new organ right away, and talked with people about starting an organ fund. It wasn't practical at the time, however, because the congregation was in the middle of building and paying for the new education wing of the building, which was dedicated in March of 1963, and cost almost $1.2 million dollars in 2010 money. But by the beginning of 1967, that debt was almost fully paid off, and the congregation needed to decide what to do next.

In February 1967, a Decision Committee was formed to "discuss the options available to the congregation after the debt is eliminated." Meanwhile, John Brombaugh was apprenticing with organ builder Fritz Noack, and had built a small one-manual organ in his spare time for Trinity Lutheran Church in Ithaca, New York. His younger brother was studying organ at Oberlin with David Boe, who played the dedication recital for that organ, Brombaugh Opus 2, in November 1966. Mr. Boe said of that experience, "I was very impressed with that organ. It was only five or six stops, but the voicing was so beautiful on it. We found ourselves on the same wavelength with regards to where instrument building should be going." Two months later, in January 1967, Mr. Boe and Mr. Brombaugh were discussing plans for an organ for First Lutheran. Back at the church, the Decision Committee made its final recommendations: a new organ, paying full benevolence to the Synod, purchasing the remaining property on the block, and planning for a new sanctuary. The congregation voted unanimously in favor of the recommendations in September 1967.

The contract for the new organ was signed in December 1967. It was to be installed within 2 years at a cost of $52,000 in 9 installments plus transportation and lodging. At the time the contract was signed, in December 1967, the balance in the organ fund was only $1,715. Just two months later, in February 1968, Thelma Melin Schumann of Cleveland visited the church unannounced and asked to speak with Pastor Boettger. Her parents had been members of First Lutheran many years earlier and she wanted to give some money in memory of them. When Pastor Boettger told her about the new organ, she immediately pledged $30,000, more than half of the total cost. This seemingly miraculous gift buoyed the spirits of the congregation and gave them confidence in their decision.

Mr. Brombaugh was in Germany at the time the contract was signed, studying with the Beckerath organ building company in Hamburg. He returned in April 1968, and set up his shop in Germantown, OH, near Dayton. By early 1969, contractors were working in the back of the church, removing a balcony and readying the space for the new organ. The completion date, contracted for late 1969, kept getting pushed back. Finally, Pastor Charles Springer, impatient with the delay, wrote a letter to Mr. Brombaugh asking him to release the instrument to the congregation. In April 1970, the organ was finally shipped to Lorain, and began to be constructed in the back of the sanctuary.

The dedication service and recital were held on June 21, 1970. The church newsletter called it "one of the most joyous days in the history of First Lutheran Church." The organ was not fully finished until the second dedication recital, held on October 12, with William Porter playing. The third and final dedication concert was on February 21, 1971, with David Boe and the church choir.