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GALLERY ORGAN - ST. BONIFACE CHURCH, SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Behind the stately and imposing organ case in the gallery of St. Boniface Church rests not only a magnificent instrument but a fascinating musical history. St. Boniface's first organ built by San Francisco's pioneer organ builder, Joseph Meyer, in 1862 was destroyed by the great fire in 1906. The basis of the organ you hear today was installed after the fire to replace the original organ but actually dates back to approximately 1876 when it was built for the First Presbyterian Church of Oakland by Henry Bevington & Sons of London, England. It was a tracker action instrument employing the very finest materials and workmanship of the day and was one of the few organs ever brought to America from England. Because of its distinguished heritage, it was far more than "used organ" when it was wisely purchased by St. Boniface. Its only fault was being too small to fill the church properly with sound.

In 1923 the Austin Company of Hartford, Connecticut was engaged to build an organ of suitable size for the church. Because of the fine quality of the Bevington instrument, it was decided to incorporate as much of it as possible in the new instrument. 24 of the organ's 40 ranks including the primary Chorus stops are from the Bevington shops. This accounts for the unusual tonal structure of the instrument - quite atypical of the organs built in the early 1920's in America.

In 1978 the Austin Company built a new console to replace the original which was well worn after many years of extremely heavy use. Three features of the console are worthy of special note. First, it is of the drawknob design in keeping with traditional organ building practice. The 1923 console was of the stopkey design. Second, to pay homage to the important historic nature of the instrument, special care was taken to indicate directly on the stopknobs the origin of each rank of pipes so that future generations would be reminded of the structure of the original Bevington instrument. This makes it easily possible to register the organ as it was originally intended as well as with the 1923 Austin embellishments. Third, the console was prepared for additions to the gallery organ, particularly in the Pedal department. The console preparations will also make it possible to play the new sanctuary AEolian-Skinner organ from the gallery console.

The Schoenstein family has had a close relationship with St. Boniface Church for four generations. Felix Schoenstein, before founding his own firm in 1877, worked with Joseph Meyer who built the original St. Boniface organ. St. Boniface was the family parish of the Schoenstein family and all of its branches from the time they emigrated here from Germany. The Bevington organ was installed by Felix Schoenstein & Sons as was the later Austin organ. The new console for the gallery organ and the installation of the new sanctuary organ were under the supervision of fourth and fifth generation members of the Schoenstein family.

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