

Saint Leonard of Port Maruice Parish, Boston MA

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A long time ago, a young John Peragallo, Sr., made his way up to Boston from what was then a much smaller New York City—a fraction of the size we know today. He served as an apprentice and installer with the notable Ernest M. Skinner Company and had been recommended by his superiors to go up to Boston to gain experience at the big plant.

A lot has changed in both towns since that day, but some things remain the same. The North End neighborhood in Boston is still teeming with its Italian flavor from the old days and even today is filled with many people coming directly from Italy to share in the American dream. It is common to walk down the street and hear people conversing in their native tongue, living a day, not with the American rush, but with the pace and temperament you would expect to find on the streets of Rome. This neighborhood also holds many of Boston's most historic treasures: the Old North Church, Paul Revere's home, and the infamous naval ship, the USS Constitution. These monuments lie just steps away on the Freedom Trail from the parish church of Saint Leonard of Port Maurice.

Founded by the Franciscan friars in 1873, Saint Leonard's parish had struggled through decades of stretched resources leaving the church severely impacted by the brutal Boston winters. The pastor of Saint Leonard's, Monsignor Antonio Nardoiani, was handpicked by the archbishop to restore this old church, which has been home to tens of thousands of immigrants over the generations. Monsignor went about this mission by tirelessly working along with the parishioners to raise the millions of dollars needed, dollar by dollar with a donation box right outside the church gate. Along with the local parishioners, the tourists who passed the church funded its reconstruction over many years bringing about a new connection for the visitors and this parish. The efforts of all paid off in the resulting beautifully restored Romanesque structure that once again serves the Boston faithful to its fullest potential.

The original Laws pipe organ had seen years of exposure to the leaks that were permeating the roof and compromised much of the mechanism and wood pipework. The balcony would for the short term no longer house the choir due to accessibility deficiencies, presenting a new hurdle of how the parish would have access to its organ.

After 100 years, the Peragallos found themselves back in Boston, this time building organs under a family banner that was forged in John, Sr.'s days in the old city. Father Antonio, familiar with the Peragallos' work on new organs from decades prior, asked that they come take a look at his unique circumstances and see what solutions may be considered. In the late summer and fall of 2018, Frank, John (III), Anthony, and John (IV) Peragallo made multiple visits to discuss the project in greater detail over espresso in the old Italian café next to Saint Leonard's.

The new pipe organ's tonal resources are fully encased in reciprocal cherry cabinets, reflecting the many architectural features found in and around the church. A widely scaled Trompette de Porto Maurizio is positioned en chamade at the center of the organ on a bridge that spans the two opposing cabinets. This bridge provides a solid backbone for tone to project down the center axis of the church.

The new tonal design features many of the original ranks of pipes and includes more than a dozen new ranks to fill its palette. A new soaring Harmonic Flute and Oboe are some of the featured solo stops atop

a foundation of lush and widely scaled fluework that pays homage to the early 20th-century American organ sound. The antiphonal division is specifically designed to support the liturgy from the front of the church and allows the organist to maintain pace between the gallery and chancel from the new console position on the floor of the nave.

The new French terraced keydesk is also built of cherry. This design was made to be as compact as the stoplist would allow, as its new home would be in the front of the church near the altar where there is an abundance of programmatic needs for the liturgical celebration.

From inception to completion, the project took less than a year to complete, with a promised completion by Easter of 2019. The Peragallo team brought its full complement of resources to bear, seeing the original instrument taken down and shipped back to the shops in Paterson just as the Christmas season was wrapping up. The design team simultaneously worked with the parish design team to develop the final look of the casework that would properly fit this grand architecture, and after months of designing, the final plan was completed. The factory was humming with each component of the organ being meticulously crafted and assembled in the workshops. A few months later the completed instrument was carefully disassembled, packed, and readied for transport.

The organ installation team arrived at Saint Leonard's on a cold March day and began to erect the instrument. This part of the process is a team effort, with many of the crew being away from home for weeks on end to see the instrument to completion. The crew settled into one of the homes not far from the church, with Frank Peragallo cooking a big Italian dinner each night utilizing the many great culinary resources of this neighborhood. This somewhat compensated the pain of being on the road and many hours of hard work. The final voicing occurred in late March by the Peragallo family, just in time, and as promised to Monsignor, for Holy Week to begin.

Complete with the new organ, the newly renovated space holds a tremendous range of acoustic. One's existence as an individual is noticeably distinguished upon entrance to this space from the bustling city just beyond the church doors. Making impactful music in this acoustic environment is natural and blossoms through Saint Leonard's great dome with many of the well-known organ works, but also liberates the creative genius that can see new melodies transpire. It is such a pleasure to see that Saint Leonard's is often a place where concert artists such as the notable Leonardo Ciampa find themselves. Mr. Ciampa's connection to Saint Leonard's is beyond just a great performance space but one that dates back generations. His family has been patrons of Saint Leonard's for over 100 years. Leonard's constant drive to contribute to the knowledge and upbringing of new talents in the organ world is greatly appreciated, and the Peragallo family is honored that he was one of the dedicatory recitalists of the new pipe organ.

The first dedicatory recital was performed by David Reccia Chynoweth, organist, on May 24, 2019.

The Peragallos thank everyone who made this project possible—Father Antonio Nardoiani, Carol and Nick Ferreri and family, and all who gave their time and support to the restoration of this great edifice and pipe organ. We also thank the staff of the church, the current pastor, Fr. Michael Della Penna, who was born and raised in the North End of this great city, and the current director of music, Juan Mesa, who continue the work of this parish to this day.

—John Peragallo IV