



July 16, 2025

July Update:

Abbey Organ Builders, Opus 1

Saint Michael the Archangel Parish

Leawood, Kansas

One of the more common questions we get on shop tours is how the wind for the organ is created.

While it's fun to talk about the days before electricity when a calcant (or "blower boy") manually pumped the bellows by hand or foot to generate wind, today that job has been replaced by electric blowers. Yet another manual labor role lost to the modern age!

Once the wind is produced by the electric blower, it flows to the bellows, which both store and regulate the air pressure using weights. This pressure regulation is essential as it ensures a steady tone quality for the pipes, no matter how many notes are played. From the bellows, the pressurized air travels through wind trunks to the various windchests placed throughout the different sections of the organ, where it is finally distributed to the pipes as they are played.

Because of this vital role, the bellows are often called the "lungs of the organ" because they generate, regulate, and deliver the air that brings the pipes to life when keys are pressed.

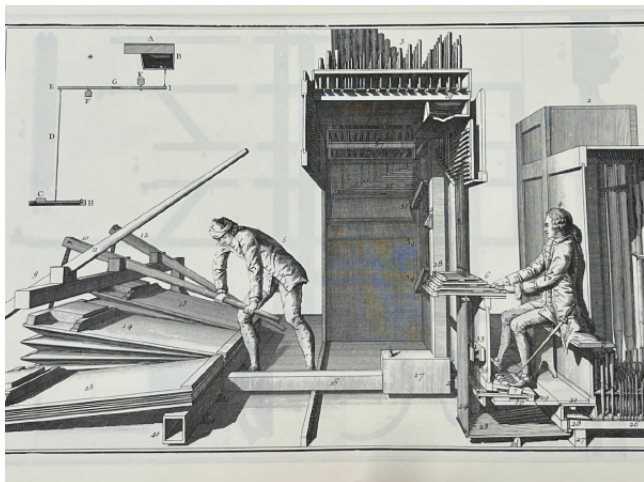
This past month, Maurine Pasi visited the shop to construct the bellows. As you can see in the photos, it's a unique blend of woodworking and leatherwork. Like lungs, the bellows must be flexible, durable, and airtight. That's why leather is used as it doesn't easily become brittle, it forms an airtight seal, it's repairable, and when properly maintained, it can last for 50 years or more.

Most people will never see the bellows in action but without them, the organ wouldn't make a sound!

Peace,

Fr. Lew Grobe, O.S.B.

Director, Saint John's Abbey Woodworking and Organ Builders



Folio from Dom Bedos demonstrating manual pumping of bellows.



Maurine gluing the tabs onto the belows.



Apprentice Zaida scribing the leather for application.



A sealed bellow.



Some of the tools used in bellow making.
Note the pot of hide glue!



A half cow hide held by yours truly.



Glueing felt into the bleeder holes of the windchests.



Completed pallets ready to be placed in the windchests.



David working on the sharps of the pedal board.



Steven laying out the lead sheets that will be used for the facade



The console adorned with recently completed inlay.