



Kerner & Merchant Pipe Organ Builders, Ltd.

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Pastor Chuck Forbes
Minetto United Methodist Church
PO Box 217
Minetto, New York 13115-0217

Dear Chuck,

Thank you for asking to look over the pipe organ at your church. The following is our report on the instrument's condition, along with our recommendations and estimated costs for refurbishment.

The instrument was originally manufactured by Clarence E. Morey of Utica, N.Y., in 1914 as his opus 308. Morey was part of a rich history of organ building in Utica. His firm was a successor to the organ builder John G. Marklove, an English immigrant with a fine (mostly local) reputation. Morey himself was active from the early 1890s through the Depression era, and was one of the most prolific suppliers of pipe organs to upstate New York of that time.

Some research has revealed that the organ was "completely cleaned and rebuilt" by the Penfield, N.Y., firm of Bryant G. Parsons & Sons in 1973, though the specifics of their rebuilding is not documented. In more recent years the organ has been under the care of Marty Kupelian and his Majestic Organ Co.

The instrument is one of the rarer corner-installed Morey instruments. The corner installation makes the instrument more visible to the whole congregation and perhaps very slightly more audible to everyone. It also means, at least in this instance, that there is virtually *no* room for a technician to gain easy access to much of the instrument.

At some point a carpeted platform was constructed in the front of the church to raise the height of the communion rail, altar, pulpit, choir and other components. The platform affects the organ in that the organ bench is at original floor level, and makes a somewhat awkward or inelegant descent and ascent for the organist. The platform also would need extensive modifications if the organ were to be moved (more about this later).

The first thing that observers notice is the appearance of the organ. A façade of 41 gold painted

pipes creates the upper portion of the instrument's visual aspect. Many of these pipes do actually play. (The speaking pipes will all have a block of metal in their mouths, which creates the wind-way with which the tone is produced; they will also have a zinc wind line running from the main wind chest to the base of the pipes. The "dummy" pipes will be just hollow tubes designed to look like their speaking neighbors.) The paint covering these pipes is not particularly recent, though it appears to be in reasonably good condition (*i.e.*, no signs of peeling). The pipes themselves are also in good shape at least upon casual inspection. However, when each pipe is examined more thoroughly, dents and other blemishes become quite apparent. These dents (usually) do not affect the way the pipe speaks; they are just cosmetic blemishes. The façade tends to look better the farther away from it one stands.

The other thing that observers notice is the appearance of the organ's wooden case. Morey cases in general are fairly plain but extremely well crafted pieces of cabinetry. The cases are durable and—lacking a lot of fancy ornamentation—fairly easy to keep clean. The organ case at Minetto U.M.C. is unique in our experience—it is covered by light fruitwood paneling. In addition, portions of the case that do not have this panel covering have had the original finish removed and appear to have been bleached. The case almost certainly had at one time a dark hardwood finish, with the key desk interior portion with dark mahogany finish. The prevailing opinion seems to be that the organ would look better with this paneling removed, though exactly what can and/or should be done to the case in terms of repair, painting or refinishing, can not really be determined until these panels are removed.

The instrument is a "tracker" or mechanical action instrument. Except for the blower motor/fan in the basement (not original equipment), the organ operates without any electricity. All of the organ's sounds originate when the organist presses a key. The key is directly connected to the wind chest note pallets by a series of articulated linkages. When the key is depressed, a pallet valve inside the wind chest is opened. Pressurized air within the wind chest is allowed to escape into the pipe, thus creating a sound.

These mechanical linkages come in various shapes and styles, depending on the purpose for which they are intended. There are round wooden rods called "stickers" which push a portion of the action up; there are wooden strips fitted with brass, bronze or copper wires that hook into other components and are called "pull downs." There are long, light-weight wooden strips that are placed horizontally and also pull actions, known as "trackers." There are other wooden components called "squares" which pivot on an axle and transfer horizontal to vertical motion. There are heavier wooden levers which transfer vertical positive to negative motion, called "back falls." There are wooden rollers that continue motion in a single plane from one point to another called "roller boards." Many of these wooden parts are fitted with brass threaded rods at one or both ends. These threaded rods can accept a nut of some material (traditionally, leather, but recently of nylon or plastic) in order to adjust the active length of the component.

The Minetto instrument's array of mechanical action parts is largely intact. It is obvious that some of these parts have been replaced, though many are original. (Many of the parts attached to the treble Pedal chest on the right-hand side have been broken by persons attempting to squeeze behind the organ.) It is likely that the leather nuts were replaced in the past—probably by Parsons in 1973. All

leather has a finite period of usefulness, after which the leather disintegrates. Very old leather nuts tend to strip around the threaded metal and lose their grip; sometimes they disintegrate into powder. The acid in the leather often will react with the bronze threaded rods and a green corrosion will result, which weakens the metal. This corrosion often occurs when there is high humidity in the organ. It is quite obvious that many of the threaded rods of your instrument have attained a high degree of corrosion. These badly damaged threaded rods should be replaced along with the nuts. In cases where high humidity is a problem, we often recommend the use of nylon or plastic nuts which do not react in such a negative way. These are not as historically accurate as leather nuts, but they achieve the same purpose.

We recommend that the entire mechanical action system of the organ be rebuilt and adjusted. This work would include the cleaning and refurbishing of all wooden action components (repairs or replacements made as needed); the replacement of all damaged threaded rods (those unaffected by corrosion and suitable for continued use would be retained); and new nuts (we recommend vinyl) and felt washers.

Another major component of the organ is its winding system. Wind is generated in the basement blower fan by an electric motor. This wind is conducted in a trunk up to the underside of the main reservoir bellows. (Members of the church have recently moved the blower motor to a more advantageous location, and installed a new airtight PVC line to the organ; both of these actions will prove very beneficial to the organ. A further recommendation would be to construct a frame around the intake of the blower and install a furnace filter to prevent unwanted objects from entering the fan.)

The wind, provided by the blower, enters and inflates the reservoir bellows. This is a large wooden box, measuring about four feet by eight feet. The top surface of the box is attached to rest with folding sides (called "ribs") which allow the top to expand contract. The top is weighted so the air inside maintains the constant wind pressure required by the organ. The reservoir bellows provides the organ with a steady, regulated supply of wind. The ribs are hinged with leather, and the hinge leather and the leather gussets in the corners, are beginning to deteriorate. We recommend that these bellows be removed and completely releathered. We also feel that the instrument would benefit by the addition of a new curtain valve or some other type of regulating mechanism that controls the volume of wind entering the reservoir bellows. This could be inserted into the main wind line in the basement, near where the wind line enters the reservoir.

The organ's wind chests appear to be in very good condition. There do not appear to be signs of runs and cipher "repairs" made by drilling exhaust holes into the individual wind channels. We did hear some faint ciphers in the Swell wind chest, which may be the result of dirt in the pallet or action maladjustments, or may be caused by slight cracks or splits in the note channels (allowing unwanted pressurized air to bleed through and cause an uncontrollable note to sound). We would be in a better position to diagnose these problems with the chest taken apart. The pallets themselves—felt-and-leather covered wooden levers inside the wind chest that are connected by linkages to the keys, and open/close and allow/prevent pressurized air into the note channels (and thus into the pipes)—seem to have fairly new leather (old leather produces a noisy snap or knock when a key is released).

One important component of the instrument not yet addressed is the organ's eleven ranks (sets) of pipes. These all seem to be in good physical shape and working properly. Morey pipework is generally of good quality, with an appealing mellow sound; the Minetto organ is no exception. We found the individual stops as well as the ensemble to be very pleasing to listen to. We recommend no further work than a thorough cleaning and touching up the regulation of individual pipes, as necessary. However, there are several ranks of wooden stopped pipes that we did not examine closely. We do recommend that these pipes' wooden stoppers be examined, repaired/releathered/shimmed (as necessary) and lubricated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The most critical repairs the organ needs are the rebuilding of the mechanical action and the releathering of the reservoir bellows. In order to remove the reservoir for releathering, it will be necessary to dismantle the entire organ. There is really no other way without altering the organ's frame (and thereby undermining its structural integrity). In order to dismantle the instrument, it will be necessary to take apart much of the mechanical action. As there is need of this action to be rebuilt, this dismantling will actually make this rebuilding much more convenient. It is impossible to remove the reservoir without dismantling the action, and it would be extremely difficult to rebuild the action with the reservoir in place. Therefore, both items should be addressed at the same time.

Furthermore, with the organ removed from the church, a number of things could be done. The floor around the wind line coming up from the basement could be repaired and sealed. This would reduce the amount of humid air coming up from the unfinished basement crawl space during the summer months. Repairs could also be made to the wall behind the organ.

One of the biggest problems with the organ is the difficulty of gaining access to the rear of the instrument. With the organ removed for repairs this accessibility could be addressed in a couple of ways. One of these would be to actually build a door into the rear of the organ through the exterior wall. This would be an improvement over the present situation, though it might be a little impractical for winter servicing and repairs.

Another option would be to actually move the organ forward a foot or eighteen inches. This would make the rear easily accessible all seasons and actually give the technician some room to breathe behind the instrument. It would be necessary to alter the platform layout if this were to be done. (Note: any modifications to the church building itself would be the church's responsibility.)

We estimate that the above work would cost approximately \$39,500. The organ would be out of the building for approximately 2½ to 3 months. Probably the only realistic time for this project would be during the period between Easter and Fall. Our workmanship would be guaranteed for ten years.

In addition to the above, one option to consider is repairing, refinishing and repainting the façade pipes. We use high quality automobile paint, and the results are usually quite breathtaking. (You might check the organ at St. Mary Roman Catholic Church, 103 W. Seventh St., Oswego. We repainted the pipe façade there a few years back, with excellent results.) As the upper portion of the organ appears to be all façade, this would substantially improve its appearance. The cost of this

work would be an additional \$7,800.

Lastly, we feel that *something* should be done about the organ case. But until we have a better idea of what is underneath the paneling, we hesitate to quote. We would plan on retaining the pieces of paneling in case it is decided that the best thing to do is to tack them back in place. Otherwise, options include filling in nail holes and making other necessary repairs and then painting the case, or trying to approximate the original appearance of the finish. For major refinishing projects we often sub-contract to a professional wood finisher, who is better able to accommodate large pieces and has the necessary experience and skill to provide a top quality product. The pipe organ is a significant piece of *permanent* church property, and we feel that it should look as good as it sounds. In order to make the case look good will certainly cost in the four figures—\$3,500 at least and possibly the low five figures—maybe \$10,000 to \$12,000, but we should see what is involved in the project before providing specific prices.

One other point to make is that the instrument is coming up to its centenary. It is a fine sounding instrument and working well after being in service for 100 years, and fully capable of serving for another century. It was a fine piece of stewardship on the part of the clergy and laity in the 1910s, and well worth restoring in the 2010s. Its 100th birthday in 2014 would make an excellent target for fund raising as well as a fine reason for an excellent celebration with lots of music.

We hope that the above information is useful to you. Let us know if you have any questions, or if there is any way we can further serve you. Thank you for your interest in Kerner & Merchant Pipe Organ Builders.

Sincerely,



Benjamin R. Merchant
KERNER & MERCHANT PIPE ORGAN BUILDERS