

History of the Organ at First Presbyterian Church, Escanaba, Michigan



The first organ at First Presbyterian Church in Escanaba was an 1893 Felgemaker tracker. This organ must have been built in the original church building and moved to the current building, which was built in 1899. I do not have much information about the Felgemaker except that three ranks plus the facade have been incorporated into the current organ. By 1941 the Felgemaker needed major work, and the church decided to replace it rather than repair it.

In 1942 the church bought a used Hook & Hastings organ that was built in 1915 for the home of Roye M. Rogers, a lumber company executive in Wisconsin Rapids. The Rogers family mansion had a large formal dining room, where they loved to entertain and apparently the used organ for that purpose. In 1941 the Rogers family moved to Beverley Hills and put the organ up for sale. First Presbyterian bought it and hired J.H. McGaw of Green Bay, Wisconsin to move and rebuild it. At that time J.H. McGaw incorporated the Octave, Twelfth, and Fifteenth from the

old Felgemaker into the Great principal chorus. He also kept the facade, which includes the bottom 17 notes of the Great Principal. This organ served the church well for decades, but around 2005 the church began to consider some updates.

In 2007 the church hired James Lauck of Otsego, Michigan to renovate and expand the organ. Lauck's renovation included a new console with electronic switching and combination action. For the most part he kept the Hook & Hastings foundations but added a trumpet, available at 16', 8', and 4' on both the Swell and the Pedal, plus upperwork for the Great principal chorus, and a Pedal Principal. He moved the Felgemaker Octave, Twelfth, and Fifteenth to the Swell, revoiced the Twelfth to make a Nazard, and revoiced and repitched the Fifteenth to make a Tierce. He also reworked the Dolce Cornet into a Plein Jeu in the swell. The renovated organ, finished in 2009, turned out to be a versatile instrument with a variety of colors that work together well to accompany the congregation and play a variety of repertoire.

The Pedal division contains an interesting curiosity. In a 1942 letter describing the organ J.H. McGaw states, "The Rogers pedal organ contains only one set of pipes of 30 notes. However, the pedal chest is equipped with the special Hook & Hastings mechanism for obtaining a soft pedal Dolce." I had never known of a system to play one rank of pipes loud or soft, so I had to investigate. The original pedal chest is an electropneumatic slider chest with two stops. Currently there are two ranks of 16' stopped pipes on this chest, called "Subbass" and "Bourdon" in the current stoplist. The Bourdon pipes have shipping labels from from J.H. McGaw to the church, so they must have been added by J.H. McGaw. On further examination I found that the Subbass pipes each have two flues and a hole in the cap where wind would be directed to the second flue. Apparently the second flue on each of these pipes used to be supplied by the second stop on the slider chest,



so, in effect, the one rank of pipes had two different voicings. J.H. McGaw must not have been satisfied with the way this system worked, so he added another rank of pipes.

The organ in it's current for has five different types of windchests. Curiously each manual division from the 1942 installation has two different types of chests, one that appears to be a ventil chest and one that appears to be a pitman chest. The ventil chests have a diatonic layout, while the pitman chests have a chromatic layout. As I mentioned before, the original pedal chest is an electropneumatic slider chest. The facade uses an electropneumatic unit chest, and the new chests added by Lauck are direct electric. I'm guessing the 1915 organ may have been built with parts from older organs, or it may have been added to while it resided in the Rogers house.



Overall the organ is an odd mix of parts, but, in my opinion, Jim Lauck did an excellent job of putting it all together, and I enjoy playing a variety of music on it.



The author, Phil Stapert, sexton and resident organ enthusiast at First Presbyterian Church, posing in the Swell chamber