

History of the Church and Organ - Condition of Organ in 2017

Heavenly Rest Episcopal Church in Springfield, Ohio

(Previously entered in the 'Notes' section of the Database account)

Database Manager on May 24, 2017:

Updated by J. A. Hefner, who gave this as the source of the information: personal inspection of organ with Mark Stickford.

Mark Stickford and I personally inspected the organ in May 2017. The church had been refurbished extensively by Changing Lives Now, and a great deal of history had been plastered over [quite literally] during the previous years, and the organ had names of previous organists [and possibly inspectors] penciled inside the panels. I'm waiting on the specific sources, but supposedly the history of the organ [including the installation technicians] was published in a 1910 newspaper article, when the organ was dedicated with a concert from a touring professional organist. Once that arrives, as well as the opus number from Aaron Tellers, I'll add it.

The organ also is in the memory of many longtime local residents, who attended church and heard it, who heard it for weddings, or just sitting on the porch while the organist practiced.

The church operated as Heavenly Rest Episcopal until 1939, and in 1940 it was sold to the Nazarenes. It functioned as Springfield First Nazarene, then Springfield Central Nazarene until the early 2000s, when it was abandoned, then purchased and renovated to host My Church Ohio/Changing Lives Now [the two are connected].

Unfortunately, the organ didn't improve with the building. We didn't attempt to play it, but it may not have made much sound at all. The decorative towers were partly broken, and the entire thing didn't seem like it had been touched in months, much less played...perhaps Mr. Conyers was one of the last people to play it.

The façade pipes' paint was flaking, and several were missing. On several occasions, the pipes were stolen, then recovered and put in the basement for safekeeping. The ivory pieces on the keys were broken, flaking off, and the keys were often stiff and didn't move. There is a door on the side of the case, below the bass pipes facing the congregation. This opened to reveal the bellows-pump handle and what seemed to be the tracker-linkages to the bass pipes.

The bellows supposedly had a split, but could be pumped [there were historic Foos-made wrought iron fixtures outside, and to prevent theft, they had been placed inside the organ case on top of the bellows].

On the floor in front of the organ side-access door, there is a trapdoor, leading to a shallow crawlspace where the blower is located [directly below the bellows]. The electricity to the blower was disconnected due to potential fire hazard, though I didn't try to examine it closely.

The stops were stiff [mechanical but not sure if pneumatically-assisted], and some got stuck or seemed disconnected/broken. Ironically, the Great-Swell coupler seemed to work when the keys were depressed, though some didn't move at all [I don't know if the organ had Barker-levers]. The Tremolo stop is next to the couplers and wind indicator, and on the ledge below is the gold-paint, stenciled "A. B. Felgemaker / Erie, Pa." name. Interestingly, early 1880s ABFs had the name on a small ivory diamond, hard to read. This is still facing the ceiling, perhaps not immediately obvious, but it predates the version where the nameplate is on the fallboard/backsplash, easily visible.

We didn't try to press any pedals [random items were sitting on them, as the organ/bench were used as side tables, since the instrument wasn't usable], but the pedalboard is the ABF type where the pedals are not flat-flush to the case, but rather are in an arc [not radiating, as the pedals are parallel, but not equal lengths].

Recently, the instrument was professionally appraised/inspected for usability, and it was deemed unrestorable [save for a complete gutting and expensive rebuild]. Once some other projects are finished, the instrument will be disassembled and removed, and the usable parts sold.

It's a sad ending to the instrument's life, though perhaps it will be heard again in another organ.

We received the most recent update for this note from Database Manager on February 11, 2019.