



FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
22 CHURCH STREET
GOUVERNEUR, NY 13642

FPCGH-1B
“PRESERVING THE SOUNDS OF TRADITION!”
BY BONNIE WINTERS

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“Organ Music gets more response out of a congregation. People sing more and louder,” said Max Tessmer, serving on the Presbyterian Church organ repair fund.

One of the largest pipe organs in the north country, the Presbyterian Church’s Tellers Cantor Organ has encouraged a lusty vocal response from its congregation for over 70 years.

The organ was originally installed in the church in 1920 when it was given to the church by an anonymous donor. The anonymous donor was Jenny Dean, member of a prominent Gouverneur family and ardent supporter of the church. Her generosity was revealed following her death in 1943.

Four enclosed organ chambers, five pedal organs and an echo chamber produce the full bodied sound of the massive organ.

“In the 1920s, echo organs were put in the organs to give an ethereal effect,” said Mr. Tessmer, “but they don’t do it anymore.”

There are 70 stops and 2,437 pipes built into the organ. Pipes range in size from tiny, high pitched pipes to the massive two foot square by 16 feet tall wooden pipes, producing the lowest tones. About 40 of the large pipes which are visible to the congregation do not work but are for show, according to Mr. Tessmer.

These pipes must be tuned semi-annually by adjusting small metal reeds at the opening on the pipes. It usually takes an entire afternoon to make the adjustments.

“They’re like a violin. As they age the sound gets mellower,” he said. Mr. Tessmer felt the sound coming out of an older organ could be better than the tones on a brand new organ.

Maintaining an old organ, however, is not an easy task. Since it was installed, the organ has been worked on several times. In the 60s, all the leathers on the pipes were completely replaced. Because they dry out with age, the leathers need to be

replaced every 40 to 50 years. The committee estimates it will need to be done early in the 21st century.

When it was done the first time, all the pipes had to be taken out to replace the leathers. However, when they did it then, the workmen fixed it so all the leathers were accessible without removing the pipes. It makes the job easier and much less expensive this time, said Mr. Tessmer.

The organ's tubing was also replaced in the 60s, according to Mr. Tessmer, with neoprene tubing which will not oxidize causing it to age and rot like the old tubing.

Repairs were made to the organ in the early 1980s and again in 1992. The organ has been "kept up," according to Mr. Tessmer, however, it is at the point now where it will need some extensive repairs again.

In the room below the organ, there is a pump which serves air to the organ. The leathers on the pump need to be replaced. The leathers on the echo organ also are in poor condition. One repairman who was giving an estimate on work to be done indicated the echo organ was leaking air so badly it should be shut off to prevent damage.

The original cotton covered wiring needs to be replaced. The electrical current in the organ is only 12 volts and the circuits are protected by breakers, so danger from a fire in the organ is relatively slim.

Though it will be an expensive task to refurbish the old organ, it is estimated the replacement cost for such an organ could be up to \$1 million.

At the present time, the Presbyterian Church committee is working with the other village churches which also have pipe organs like the Methodist and Episcopal churches to bring someone in to do all the work at once on all the organs.

"If we don't keep it going, we won't have it anymore," Mr. Tessmer said. He indicated the older members of the congregation especially appreciate the organ since they have been listening to it for years.

First Presbyterian Church, Gouverneur NY. Organ built c.1920 as the Opus 334 of the Tellers-Kent Organ Company, Erie, PA. Rebuilt 1998-1999 by the Carey Organ Company, Troy, NY as their Opus 40R. ... In addition to the tonal revisions outlined above, a new solid state relay was installed in the organ. A new console,

equipped with an 8-level solid state combination action was constructed and installed. The static and Echo reservoirs were releathered, as were the façade windchests. The 16' Clarinet windchest was modified to allow its use as a unit stop. New wiring was installed throughout the instrument.

Organ Dedication Program - First Presbyterian Church
Gouverneur NY. Sunday, October 24 1999 at 4:00

James Autenrith, Kathleen Buell, and Keith Williams, organists
Hymn 264 When In Our Music God Is Glorified Engelberg
A selection of pieces to demonstrate the newly added and rebuilt stops in the organ.

Chorale Prelude – Now Rejoice, Beloved Christians
Johann Sebastian Bach
Swell & Choir Flutes & Pedal Principal
Voix Humaine Jacques Boyvin Vox Humana
Recit Boyvin Swell Flutes & 2-2/3'
Duo Boyvin Clarinet, English Horn & Swell Principals
Air, from Suite in D Bach Swell strings, & Great & Echo Flutes
Tocatta & Fugue in D minor Johann Sebastian Bach
Mr. Williams
Organ Concerto in F major “The Cuckoo & the Nightingale”
George Frederic Handel
Mr. Autenrith
Ciacona In D minor Johann Pachelbel
Suite Gothique, Op. 25 Leon Boellmann

Introduction-Choral Menuet gothique Priere a Notre Dame Tocatta
Ms. Buell

First Presbyterian Church Pipe Organ. 1955

This pipe organ was given anonymously in 1920. The name of the donor, Miss Jennie Dean, was revealed after her death in 1943. It was built by Tellers Kent in 1920. This is a very large instrument having four inclosed organ chambers: namely, swell, great, choir and echo with five pedal organs – open diapason, bourdon, lieblich gedeckt, dolce-flute and violin chello.

All of these organ chambers have two inch chestnut shades which swing open or close as organist wishes to have loud or soft expression.

In rebuilding this organ all engines which open and close these shades were replaced with new, as well as all other working parts; such as, switches, relays, primaries, secondaries, wiring with new cables and thousands of other items which make up the King of All Instruments, the pipe organ, which is played by wind and electricity and is the true orchestral tone.

At the start of rebuilding which was in 1955, it was decided to do only a little at a time and we started at the console or keyboards, keys, pistons etc. There are 70 tablets or stops on this large console and many wires, switches, pneumatics etc., 34 ranks.

We rebuilt this console and we also removed 36 sugar pine bottom boards from the main organ chest and shipped these to the Organ Supply Corporation, Erie, Pa., from whom I have purchased organ parts for 48 years.

They made up new bottom boards using laminated hard wood to guarantee no swelling or warping. This was a modern and skilled job of fine workmanship, and when we installed these new bottom boards we used longer screws with pressure springs. We have used this method of security throughout the whole organ.

All this we did in a very short time in 1955.

The organ has 2,437 pipes form one-half the size of a lead pencil six inches long to large pipes two feet square and sixteen feet high.

There are 40 pipes in the center section that you see as you look at the organ that are speaking pipes. Left and right ends are displa pipeand do not play. In 1956 we were advised to proceed with a little more replacing of worn-out parts.

As the organ has 2,437 pipes, we were faced with a tremendous job of relacing all old pneumatics or valves underneath each pipe as these were rotted out, leaking, etc.

It was possible to take these old pneumatics out and recover them in the church; but as all top boards of the chests were leaking due to worn-out packing, it was necessary to remove all pipes, racks etc. We shipped the top-boards to the factory and they installed new-type pneumatics and at less expense than if we had used the obsolete pneumatics. These top-boards were not all shipped at one time but as we rebuilt one organ at a time.

In 1056 we started one-half of the swell organ which had eleven tablets or stops and 803 pipes. When ready to install the new pneumatics, we used neoprene tubing – over 2000 feet of it. This tubing will not oxidize or rot; another new in organ building.

After this work in 1956 we did not do too much until last year (1960) on the organ. After the trustees had decided this organ would be good as the best in a new organ; and as the pipes which were made in 1920 due to 40 years of seasoning would be tonally beautiful and by putting in modern parts, they would have a new organ.

When we contacted Rev. Mr. Updyke in regard to working on this organ, I was impressed by his keen knowledge of the organ and presumed he had come in contact with other organ builders. As we talked, I could see that he was interested in having a good job done on the organ, but was thinking of the people, the trustees, and saving as much as possible.

We have consulted with him from time to time and found his judgment to be excellent.

I would like to say at this time, due to the good judgment and business-like way in which the pastor and trustees of this church acted, they should be thanked by all the members of the First Presbyterian Church of Gouverneur, and also by the Presbytery of St. Lawrence for saving this beautiful organ.

The parts, leathers and materials are of the finest that I can buy; as poor material makes for a poor job.

The chimes were rebuilt with an all-electric action. The old chime bars were sent in and new bars added and tuned to the standard pitch, A 440. This was done at the Deagon factory in Chicago. Anyone wishing to know any of the technical things we did or are now doing, we would be pleased to see them. We are at this time voicing and tuning and replacing damaged pipes.

After many years of organ work, I can tell any pip organ company and service men ways to make work much easier to get to, or make adjustments; and we have kept this in mind when rebuilding. This organ could have new valves or pneumatics installed in 40 or 50 years without tearing down the organ as we have had to do.

I will not bore the reader any more but just say Mrs. Belknap, my assistant, and myself have worked many long hours at the work we love and have installed

thousands of new parts – large and small;- some we made up here in the church and some came from the factory.

E. G. and C. H. Belknap