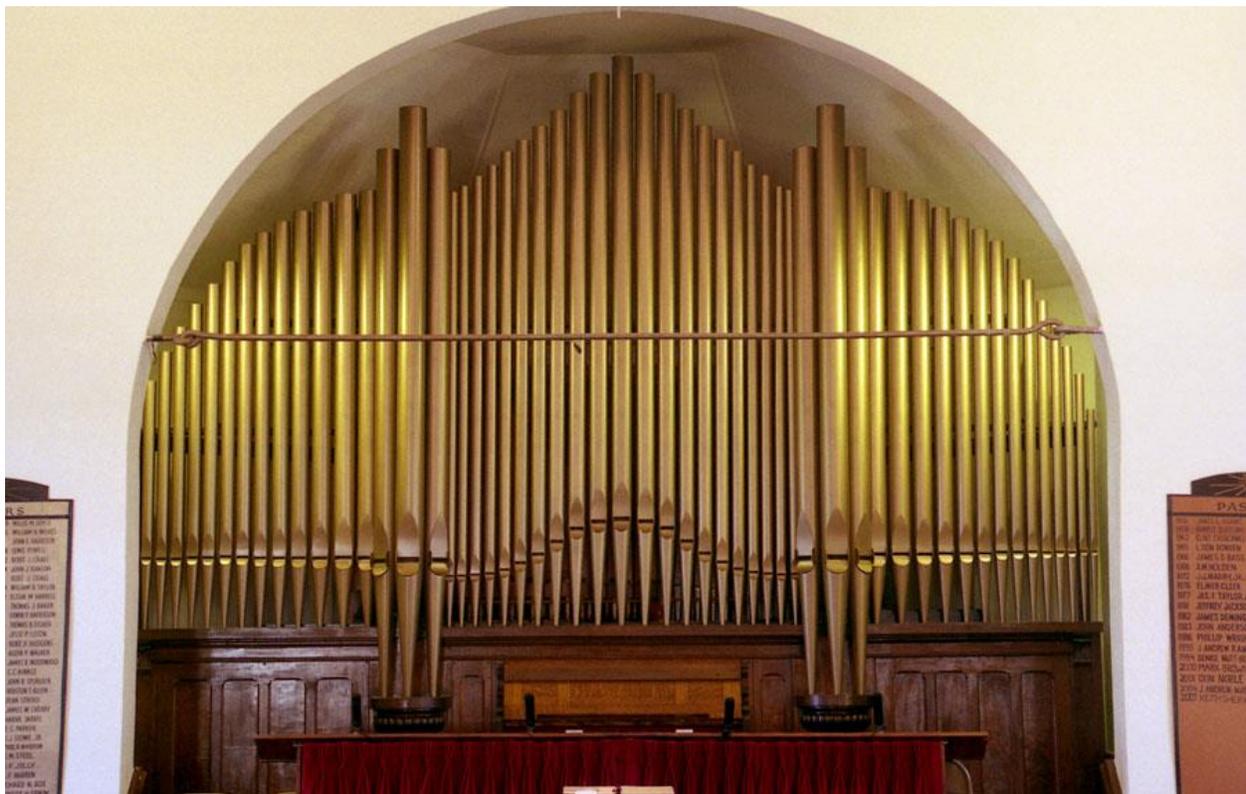


The Daily Herald, Columbia, TN

100-year-old pipe organ restored to former grandeur

After a silence of more than 40 years, when church organist Debbie Evenson strikes the first chord on the newly refurbished pipe organ at Spring Hill United Methodist Church, its majestic music will resonate throughout the sanctuary and beyond. The Hinners pipe organ was originally installed before the turn of the 19th century. When this pipe organ was built in the early 1900s, there was no massive assembly line — everything was done by hand, and the organ was aesthetically designed to fit the sanctuary. A representative of the Hinners Company came by rail, and the organ was assembled right on the spot.



“We have been restoring the organ since we removed it in February,” said Dennis Milnar, who owns and operates Milnar Organ Company in Eagleville along with his four sons. The installation of the newly refurbished pipe organ began in mid-July and is now complete. “As far as I know, this is the only Hinners pipe organ in Tennessee and one of four in the U.S.,” Dennis Milnar said.

“The organ features extremely fine hand-carved woodworking, and there is no limit to its life — it should last for another 80-100 years,” added Derek Milner, who, along with his three brothers, installed the organ. “My family and I started attending the church in 2007, and I was concerned that nobody played the organ — it just sat there. I was told that it didn’t work or it sounded bad, so I started investigating,” said Larry Strack, who has spearheaded the restoration project. “I learned that a person had donated \$10,000 for the organ restoration, and for many years it had been collecting interest.”

Strack said that in 2006 church members met with Milner representatives about the organ restoration, and after getting a quote on price they were not ready to undertake the project at that time. “When we met with Milner this time, we had 25 in attendance who were interested in hearing about the restoration,” he said. “They gave us a lot of good news — the organ was in amazing shape internally, and they quoted us a price of \$66,000. With pledges from members, the church has come within \$10,000-\$15,000 of its goal. This has been a great experience for many people.”

Strack said he believes the organ restoration is the tipping point for his church, which averages around 150 in attendance each Sunday morning. The church celebrated its 200th anniversary in 2012. “I believe in the statement, ‘Build it and they will come,’ (from ‘Field of Dreams.’) I believe when people learn about the newly refurbished organ, they will be lining up to play it,” he said. “I can hardly wait to hear the beautiful Christmas music on the organ as well as during special times of the year. I can visualize having organ concerts and making them a community event. Music reaches people on a level that words cannot — it infiltrates your body.

“We have a very generous congregation and almost everyone has contributed something,” he added. A special service of dedication is being planned at a future date to which the community will be invited. In addition to the Sunday morning worship service, the church also has children’s church and four Sunday schools. Disciple classes are offered on Tuesday mornings and Wednesday nights. Spring Hill United Methodist Church is located at 5286 Main St. The Rev. Keith Sherwood is the church pastor.

ABOUT THE HINNERS ORGAN

John L. Hinnners (1846-1906) is a unique figure in the story of American organs. Robert Colebred likened Hinnners to Henry Ford in that “Ford brought the passenger car to the common man while Hinnners brought the pipe organ.” If Hinnners was similar to Ford in his product philosophy, he more resembled Montgomery Ward & Co. in his methodology. Just as Montgomery Ward successfully reached the isolated Midwestern farm house when it

opened the first mail-order house in 1872, Hinnners reached out to the isolated Midwestern country church with his mail-order pipe organ business.

Although Hinnners was not the only company to use the mail-order idea, he seems to have been the most successful. A unique facet of the Hinnners Organ Company is that it never extensively employed outside salesmen. All of the preliminary business was conducted by catalog and letter, and the first time the buyer had any real contact with the company was when an employee, whose expenses were included in the contract, turned up to install the new instrument.