

Survivors

The organ at First Friends Church is a story of two remarkably durable survivors.

The organ was originally built by the Wicks Organ Company for First Presbyterian Church in Monticello, IN. Although the exact date is unknown, the organ was probably built in the period between the two world wars. Research has revealed that several sets of pipes may have actually originated as part of a 1905 Moller organ that preceeded the Wicks at First Presbyterian.



On the afternoon of April 3, 1974, the largest outbreak of tornadoes in the twentieth century hit the midwest. One of the largest of these plowed through Monticello, nearly leveling the town and inflicting heavy damage on the church.

Later that year, First Friends Church bought this organ, which had been salvaged from the wreckage.

A number of pipes were lost or badly damaged, but E.H. Holloway Corp., of Indianapolis was able to put the organ back together and to find used replacement pipes for what was missing.

The little organ survived, but was never actually completely rebuilt. The Wicks console, which was mostly made of plywood, had suffered water damage, causing the plywood to begin separating, and the old wiring harness - thousands of feet of wire with thousands of electrical contacts, was in very bad shape.



Meanwhile, the organ console you see today, now completely renewed and restored, has its own separate story of migration and survival. This doughty little console has been moved four times since it was built by Moller in its Hagerstown, MD plant in 1937. Over the years, it has been attached to three different pipe organs. Its life has included installation in a funeral home, storage time in an unfinished basement (with radioactive materials stored nearby!), service in a Lutheran church, and, yet again, storage in a garage. Still, its solid walnut frame has remained strong and square, and it still retains all its original ivory keys.



Reynolds Associates is proud to have brought these two survivors together. The console has been refinished, the keyboards have been reconditioned, and all new stop controls have been installed. The organ pipes and mechanisms have been completely cleaned, and a new wind regulation system installed.

Finally, the pipes in the organ have all been "revoiced" - each pipe carefully adjusted for tone, speech, and loudness, to give the organ a unified, cohesive voice, much like a choir that has been trained to sing together as one. A digital voice extension system has also been installed to extend the musical range and variety of this great little organ.

No matter how you look at it, this is one tough instrument!