

## Skinner Organ Opus 401 Rebuild

# Case Statement

First Presbyterian Church, 505 Franklin St., Waterloo, IA 50703

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## The Organ Task Force Members

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## The Organ Task Force Time Line

April 13	Distribute Case Statement to the congregation and beyond
April 27	Discussion and Q & A after Worship
May 1-19	Receive pledges and commitments
May 20	Make a recommendation to the Session

## Introduction

At First Presbyterian Church, worship has been central to our life since 1854. It is at the heart of our mission. This was also true for biblical Israel. The Psalms portray worship in the Jerusalem temple as filled with music. Consider these verses from Psalm 150:3-5.

*Praise the Lord with trumpet sound;  
Praise him with lute and harp  
Praise him with tambourine and dance;  
Praise him with strings and pipe!  
Praise him with clanging cymbals;  
Praise him with loud clashing cymbals!*

Since 1923, we have worshipped in a spacious Gothic style sanctuary with beautiful stained-glass windows. The Skinner organ (Opus 401, now the oldest surviving Skinner organ in Iowa) has been a key partner in our praise of God all those years. The organ enables us to enjoy traditional worship that is vibrant and inspiring. Our organ is portrayed in the words of stanza 2 in Hymn #371 Glory to God:

*Joyfully, heartily resounding,  
let every instrument and voice peal out the praise of grace abounding,  
calling the whole world to rejoice.  
Trumpets and organs, set in motion such sounds as make the heavens ring;  
all things that live in earth and ocean, sound forth the song; your praises bring.*

As true as this has been, our historic organ is once again starting to show signs of its age. It is in need of a rebuild. In the following pages, we invite you to look at the history of repairs done to the organ, the rationale for a rebuild, some photos of our ailing instrument, the proposal from the P. J. Swartz Pipe Organ Company, and a funding scenario.

Phil Swartz and VP Nick Schroeder rebuilt the pipe organ at First Presbyterian Church in Green Bay, WI, one of several of their rebuilds in the upper Midwest. They are currently working in Caledonia, WI and Fargo, ND. They speak highly of Skinner organs.

## History of Repairs to the E.M. Skinner Organ

- 1923 – James Black Dry Goods Co. donates the Skinner organ in memory of Mr. Black. The cost was in the neighborhood of \$18,000. It is the oldest Skinner organ (of 15) still in existence in Iowa.
- 1958 – Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company. Skinner was still living, but no longer working. The  
59 original pipes of the Cornopean stop in the “Swell” division were removed. A new rank of Trumpet pipes took their place. A new three-rank Mixture on its own small windchest was also added—183 high-pitched pipes. A new set of Principal pipes on the “Great” division replaced the old original Diapason pipes. Some of the old pipes are in the façade and were not removed though they no longer sound.
- 1980 – Freeport Organ Co (Larry Krusie). A major rebuild. Six of the original Skinner ranks of  
82 pipes were removed and placed in storage. 15 new ranks of pipes were added. The organ was completely rewired, new leathers, all pipes completed cleaned. The Echo organ was moved from the rear of the church to the front. The cost was \$72-73,000. The organ now has 29 stops, 34 ranks, and 2,232 pipes.
- 2008 – Freeport Organ Co. 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the organ celebrated with a concert. The church did a “Pennies for Pipes” campaign to raise funds for some work to prepare for this event. The work involved wind pressure regulation, installing new tremolos on the Swell and Choir, and installing new strikers on the chimes. It was described as “Phase One” of a complete restoration project.
- 2010 – Levsen Organ Co, Buffalo, IA. Sent a mailing and offered a free assessment and proposal.  
12 Architecturally redesign the front of the church. Cost hard to estimate. Restore and enhance the pipe organ. \$500-600,000. The pipe façade would be moved out toward the congregation 1.5 feet to allow for additional ranks of pipe and new solid-state key and stop action. There are 3 pages of proposed changes to pipes, involving removal and installation. 3 different options are presented. Apparently, the church decided not to proceed with “Phase Two.”
- 2017 - Reuter Organ Co, Lawrence, Kansas. Repairs included: install new electric motors for  
18 Swell and Choir expression. Modify linkages to allow shades to open nearer to 90. Install new contacts on Swell and Choir expression shoes in console. Remove choir direct electric chest to make room for proper tuning of division. Re-pitch and tune entire organ. Cost: \$36, 261. In 2018, a new 5 HP Zephyr motor and blower assembly was purchased from Reuter Organ for \$22,133.
- 2024 – R Karstens Organ Works, Iowa City. Fixed several ciphers and dead notes in the Swell, Great, and Choir Division. Said there were more issues but stopped with these remedies.
- 2025 – P.J. Swartz Organ Co. (pjswartz.com). Philip Swartz and Nick Schroeder rebuilt the Wangerin Organ at First Presbyterian, Green Bay (as well as several other organs in the upper Midwest and around the country). Pastor Randy contacted Nick and asked when they would be in the area. Nick said they would like to visit the instrument. They came on January 8 and submitted a proposal.

## Rationale for the Organ Rebuild

(Comments in red by organist Linda Wiles)

- The organ will not tune and so for several years nobody has been willing to even try.

*Parts on the pipes themselves are old and will not stay in place when tuning is attempted. You can look at a YouTube video: Search for "Pipe Organ Maintenance" and select "cnagorka" to see some tuning processes up close.*

- The stop control at the console allows the organist to select which ranks of pipes will sound when a key is pressed. 3 stops are so out of tune, they cannot be used. The pipes associated with those stops need to be repacked. 1 stop plays every other note which makes it unusable.

*"Stops" are those white knobs on both sides of the organ console. We pull those out to turn on different sounds. Some combinations are no longer usable because the notes will no longer tune. Many have single notes on the keyboard that are missing from the scales. The one with every other note is because air is only reaching half of the notes.*

- 6 pull knobs no longer have identifiers on them and cannot be used.

*These were likely disconnected during previous work.*

- The organ has really old electronics, including cotton covered wire. We cannot buy parts for the relay switches. Some were recently resoldered but have since broken.

*The general pistons (used to easily pull multiple stops at one time) also have electronic relay issues and do not always pull what you expect. This often gives us surprise sounds during worship.*

- The crescendo pedal is unusable.

*The crescendo pedal is the far right lever above the footboard. It adds groups of stops as it is depressed until the full organ is on. Ours adds stops that are so out of tune that we aren't using them. Additionally, it is often "ciphered", meaning notes not in your chord randomly play and will not stop until the organ is completely shut down.*

- The rohr flute is unusable.

*This is a commonly used stop that is a gentle flute. Ours will no longer tune.*

- The zinc is degraded on the trompette, affecting the tonal quality.

*Similar to glass in an old window, this metal is soft and is not as stable as newer alloys. This causes unevenness of sound and problems tuning.*

- Several damaged pipes need to be repaired and supported with new racking. This requires that the pipes be removed and sent to a pipe shop.

*Our trumpets have fallen on top of each other. As metal touches metal it causes sound problems and tuning problems.*

- We cannot host organ concerts in its current state. The last spring concert was in 2018. It will become increasingly difficult to find substitute organists given its deteriorating condition.

*I currently leave post-it notes for substitute organists to warn them about certain organ surprises. And we lack the variety of stops for concert playing, consistency of general pistons, and the crescendo pedal that are needed for a concert.*

- The proposed rebuild is less than the cost of a new pipe organ or a comparable digital organ.

*Other proposals have suggested that we limit ourselves to only 2 keyboards and simply remove 30% of our stops.*

If we do nothing . . .

- The organ will continue to go downhill. It is only a matter of time before it becomes unplayable. The last repair was a band aid.

*We no longer have organ technicians who will attempt to tune the organ because it will not "hold".*

- We would eventually be limited to piano accompaniment.



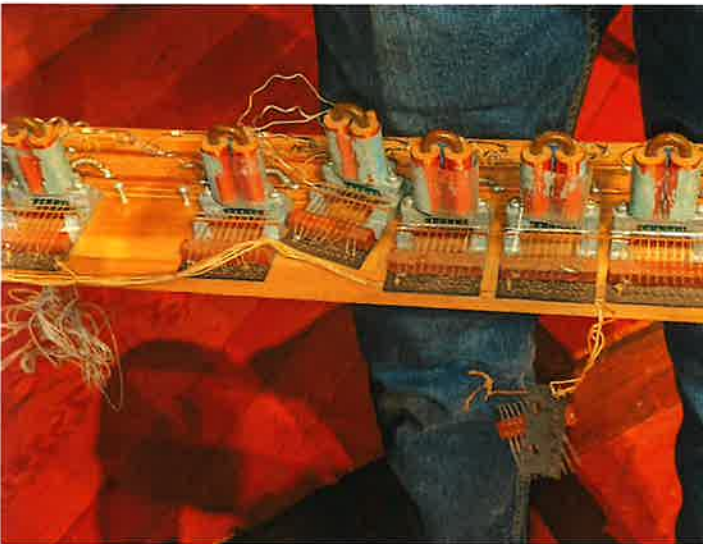
## Photos Illustrating the Need for a Rebuild



Various post-it notes on the organ console and stops warn the organist of problem areas.



A peek inside the organ console at the aging electronics.



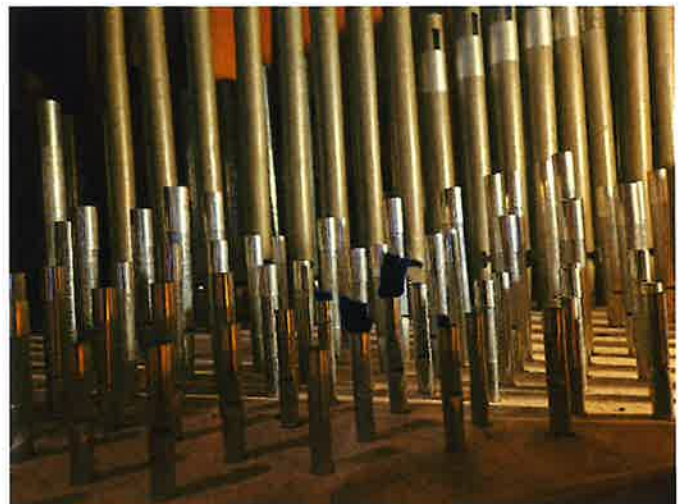
A look at an old relay switch board that was removed from the pipe chamber.



A close up view of an outdated relay switch showing the cotton covered wiring and some soldering.



The pipes should not be leaning and touching.



The tape on the pipes was probably for tuning.



# **P.J. SWARTZ, INC.**

## **PIPE ORGAN SERVICES**

**6350 Lake Oconee Parkway**

**Suite 110 PMB 37**

**Greensboro, GA 30642**

**PHONE: 706-486-3041**

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Pastor Randy Argall  
First Presbyterian Church  
505 Franklin St.  
Waterloo, IA 50703

Pastor Argall,

Thank you for the opportunity to inspect your pipe organ. The major issue you're having at this point is the pipe organ control system. The current system utilizes open contact relays to send the electrical current to the pipe organ magnets. Over time these relays begin to fail from years of use. The current relays are no longer serviceable or replaceable.

The console operating system is also showing signs of trouble. When the organist programs pistons for stop registration, the presets don't always register correctly. It is our recommendation that a new computer-based relay be installed to correct both console issues and chamber side relay issues.

In order to accomplish this, the console would need to be entirely rebuilt. This would include new pistons and draw knobs compatible with a new system. The current chamber side relay also incorporates cotton covered wiring. To follow the electrical code all of this cabling would be replaced with modern plastic-coated wire. The cost for the new system and console rebuilds is \$59,801.15.

During our inspection we also noticed that several pipes have been damaged over the years. To repair these pipes, they would need to be sent to a pipe shop and additional racking added to stop this from happening again. There is also a capped flute that needs repacking as it doesn't stay in tune. The cost for the pipe repairs is \$9,475.88.

The majority of the organ appears to be in good working condition. The chest leathers were replaced in the 1980's and should give thirty to forty years more service. Should you sign a contract with our firm the inspection price will be deducted from the down payment. Please let us know if you have any questions, comments or concerns.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Schroeder  
Vice President  
P.J. Swartz Inc.



## **Funding Scenario**

The proposed rebuild from P. J. Swartz comes to a total of about \$70,000. The fundraising goal should probably exceed that amount to cover any contingencies that may arise.

Is the congregation willing to raise \$70,000 dollars to give new life to the historic Skinner organ? Only the congregation can answer that question. The Task Force knows that the congregation highly values the contribution the organ makes to worship. Therefore, it might be helpful to illustrate one possible funding scenario for how this amount could be raised.

A “Gift Range Table” for this project, approximating the “rule of thirds,” is provided below. This is merely an example of how the goal might be reached. Our results may end up looking very different.

<b>Gift Amount</b>	<b>Number of Gifts</b>	<b>Raw Total</b>	<b>Cumulative Total</b>
25,000	1	25,000	25,000
10,000	2	20,000	45,000
5,000	3	15,000	60,000
1,000	5	5,000	65,000
500	8	4,000	69,000
100	10	1,000	70,000

On April 27, after the Task Force presentation and Q & A, organ commitment cards will be distributed and widely circulated. The cards will provide the opportunity for each person/family to state their level of commitment in 2025. The donations may be spread out over the remaining months or quarters of 2025. The Task Force will collect these cards over the following 2-3 weeks and use them to make a recommendation to Session.

If the goal is reached, the hope is that work can begin on the organ this summer.