

MULLER PIPE ORGAN COMPANY

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First (Park) Congregational United Church of Christ Grand Rapids, Michigan

**Four manuals, 62 stops, 80 ranks
Muller 2005**

Purchased in 1855, the original pipe organ at First (Park) Congregational Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan was built by an unknown firm. It was replaced by a water-driven Johnson organ in 1885. In 1930, the E.M. Skinner Organ Company of Boston, Massachusetts installed Opus 784, which consisted of four manuals and 53 ranks of pipes. A typical instrument of the era, it contained many individual solo stops and paid little attention to the development of choruses.

In 1969, the M.P. Möller Organ Company of Hagerstown, Maryland significantly renovated the organ (R-806). The instrument was redesigned tonally, with much of the Skinner pipework replaced. The instrument grew to 79 ranks, the Solo organ was eliminated, and a Positiv organ was added. A new console was constructed, and much of the Skinner mechanism remained intact.

In August of 1988, a fire seriously damaged the instrument, destroying the console. Other components were damaged by smoke. The organ was again redesigned and rebuilt by the M.P. Möller Company, this time increasing the organ to 103 ranks, and now designated as Opus 11810. New Antiphonal and Solo divisions were installed, along with significant increases to other divisions. A new console with modern solid-state components was installed. Much of the 1930 Skinner mechanism was again retained, causing overly crowded chambers that were now difficult to access due to the additions and changes.

In recent years, the instrument began experiencing problems with the console and solid-state controls. Even more problematic was the difficulty of accessing components for maintenance and repairs.

To rectify these problems, Muller Pipe Organ Company designed and constructed a new instrument of 80 ranks, playable across 4 manuals and pedal. Mechanically and tonally, the instrument is virtually new, except the Solo and Antiphonal Organs, which remain nearly unchanged since they were newly installed in the 1988 renovation. The original Skinner stops were restored and retained, as well as several ranks by Möller. A new Aeolian-Skinner replica console was constructed and finished to match the church furnishings.

Most of the Great Organ is exposed on the front wall of the chancel. This division features a broadly voiced principal chorus, a complement of flutes, and an 8' Trompette. A grand, principal-based cornet is available by drawing the 1-3/5' Tierce with the rest of the principal chorus.

The Swell Organ features an independent principal chorus, a full complement of flutes, and a battery of chorus reeds. A secondary cornet decomposéé plays against the Baroque reeds of the Choir organ, in contrast to the larger Great cornet. The Skinner Flauto Dolce and Flute Celeste have returned to their original role, as has the Skinner Vox Humana. The new Trompette and Clairon, constructed with domed French shallots, add fire to the entire instrument, and with the Basson/Hautbois give a French flair to this division.

A dual use division, the Choir Organ features both a principal chorus that is more English in character, and Baroque style reeds that are more Germanic in character than the other divisions. The Skinner Dulciana and Unda Maris are restored to their original positions, as are the robust Trompette Harmonique and Clairon. The 1-1/3' Larigot and III Mixture enable the instrument to render Baroque music extremely effectively, allowing the Choir to assume the additional role of a Positiv Organ.

Enjoying a unique setting, the Solo Organ sits high above the nave in the church attic. The colorful solo voices interplay with their accompaniment coming from the chancel organ, literally surrounding the listener with sound. This division, installed in 1988, remains unchanged except for the new 8' Flauto Mirabilis that was installed to eliminate undesirable speech problems with the former rank.

Also retained from the previous instrument, the Antiphonal Organ sits high on the rear wall of the nave in the balcony. This division possesses its own principal chorus and a small 8' Flute that can serve in a solo capacity. It is home to the triumphant 8' Trompette en Chamade, which is the definitive solo voice of the instrument. This division's primary role is to support hymn singing for worshippers sitting in the back of the sanctuary.

A large scaled 16' Diapason is the foundation for the grand Pedal Organ. The chorus is completed by a 4' Choral Bass and IV Mixture, which serve to clarify the bass line for the instrument. It also contains independent flutes at 16' and 8', as well as a large 16' Bombarde. Judicious borrowing makes the division extremely flexible, allowing for solo voices at 4', and five 16' stops. Due to space restrictions, the division is complemented by digital 32' stops, which are essentially desired on an instrument of this size.

The organ is tonally designed in the American Classic style, as developed by G. Donald Harrison of the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company. The organ has broad and clear principal choruses, and each division plays a clear role in the overall sound of the instrument. The instrument is well suited to play all types of organ literature, choral accompaniment, and church hymnody. The new instrument is a source of pride for the music ministry of Park Church and serves as consistently inspiring element of worship.