

MULLER PIPE ORGAN COMPANY

PO Box 353 • Croton, Ohio 43013 • 800.543.0167 • www.mullerpipeorgan.com

Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania

**Four manuals, 38 stops, 46 ranks
1954 Aeolian-Skinner (Opus 1253)
Restored 2009**

Mt. Lebanon United Methodist Church was founded in 1911. The church building was expanded and renovated several times over the next few decades. In 1954, an enlarged collegiate style chancel was erected, complete with a stunning marble floor and stained glass window. As part of this project, a new forty-five rank, three manual pipe organ, built by the famed Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company, was installed.

In the 1980s, an attempt was made to brighten the organ by replacing the Great Fourniture and repitching the Swell Plein Jeu. Other additions were made to the Swell division on a windchest placed above the treble end of the chromatic chest, making it impossible to access the bass pipes behind for tuning and the new windchest for mechanical repairs. The Great 8' Trumpet was replaced with a smaller scale 8' Military Trumpet, its winding rerouted from the static wind supply. The original Aeolian-Skinner console was replaced with a new four manual drawknob console built by Austin (the fourth manual was home to a small Antiphonal division retained from the church's previous instrument.)

By the mid-2000s, the organ was quickly deteriorating. While still in working condition, there were some unplayable stops, plus dead notes and ciphers were common. The Austin console was also becoming problematic.

After examining the instrument, it was obvious that the heart of Opus 1253 remained essentially intact, although it was covered with more than fifty years of dirt from the industrial businesses of nearby Pittsburgh. We soon discovered that Aeolian-Skinner had made several changes from the original contract. The full compass, wide-mouthed 8' Principal found in the Great was stamped "4' Octave." The 4' Octave was clearly Aeolian-Skinner, but was labeled with an earlier opus number, and its voicing approach was different from anything else in the instrument. In the Swell, it was apparent that the 8' chorus trumpet was intended to be English style and that the 4' chorus trumpet was intended to be French. At some point, Aeolian-Skinner made a switch, and 1-12 of the 8' Trompette is larger scaled than 13-73 of the same rank, and is marked "Trumpet".

Muller Pipe Organ Company was commissioned to mechanically restore the instrument and update the Austin console to solid-state control, and to restore the signature Aeolian-Skinner sound. The organ was completely releathered and cleaned. Reed stops were cleaned and restored, and the additions to the Swell divisions were removed. To address the loss of these additions, two stops were converted to unit action, the Hautbois and the Rohrflote. The Hautbois now plays at 16' and 8' pitches, and the Rohrflote is extended to play at 16', 8' and 2' pitches (the 16' pipes were part of the 1980s additions).

When we began tonal work with the instrument, it was a loud colorless instrument, hardly what one would expect from an Aeolian-Skinner organ of the G. Donald Harrison era. We sought to restore its original voice, and discovered that many stops had been made louder, especially in the bass range. As we continued our work on the instrument, we found the “sweet” spot for most ranks, and we typically set volumes in this range. The Great Fourniture, while not original (and probably a scale or two smaller), was revoiced in a manner consistent with other Aeolian-Skinner organs of the era. The Swell Plein Jeu was thoroughly regulated, but awaits restoration to its original pitch.

Once again a centerpiece of worship at this church, Opus 1253 now stands ready to serve the Mt. Lebanon church for decades to come. An example of a truly American organ builder, the tradition of quality has been restored to this instrument.