



VANDERBURGH COUNTY

ONE N.W. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLVD.
CIVIC CENTER ROOM # 305
EVANSVILLE, INDIANA 47708

OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

CHERYL MUSGRAVE, PRESIDENT

JUSTIN ELPERS, VICE-PRESIDENT

MIKE GOEBEL, MEMBER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Commissioners' Office

(812) 435-5241

Vanderburgh County Commissioners Announce New Home for Milton Z. Tinker Organ

EVANSVILLE, IN – March 21, 2024 – The Vanderburgh County Board of Commissioners is thrilled to announce that the Milton Z. Tinker Organ has found a new home with the Lynnewood Hall Preservation Foundation.

Lynnewood Hall Preservation Foundation, a nonprofit cultural and historical preservation organization, has agreed to take the organ into their care, ensuring its preservation and continuation as a living piece of history. Finding a historical organ in need of restoration is one part of the Foundation's nearly \$100 million project, which aims to preserve historical artifacts to be used in educational programs, recitals, and for overall public enjoyment inside Lynnewood Hall, a 100,000 square foot facility located in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania. Following installation in its dedicated space within Lynnewood Hall, the Foundation's team of experts is committed to maintaining the organ in pristine condition.

Gavin McIlhinney, Lynnewood Hall Organ Project Director, states, "The legacy of such an instrument is not only an embodiment of auditory beauty, but also a testament to the craftsmanship and cultural heritage of a bygone era. At Lynnewood Hall, we have a dedicated space that is in search of such a history centerpiece that can be celebrated and shared with the community."

About the Milton Z. Tinker Organ: Originally constructed for temporary use during the Centenary Celebration of the American Methodist Missions in Columbus, Ohio, the organ was among the largest pipe organs in the world, covering 900 square feet, containing 21 miles of wire, and weighing approximately 8 tons. Upon the closure of the Centenary, the organ was purchased to be installed in the new Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Coliseum in Evansville, Indiana. After a four-month installation at the Coliseum, the organ was dedicated on November 18, 1919, in memory of Milton Z. Tinker, Evansville's first music supervisor in local public schools.

The organ was used in recitals by local organists, in performances when the Evansville Chapter of the American Guild of Organists sponsored famous players, and in harmony with the Evansville Philharmonic. Despite efforts by local organ enthusiasts to maintain the organ's playability, the organ lacked necessary financial support for essential maintenance, resulting in gradual deterioration. In 2013, the University of Evansville acquired the organ with aspirations of restoring it for placement in Neu Chapel, but unfortunately those plans never came to fruition, leading the University to return the organ to the Coliseum in 2019.

On December 31, 2023, the Vanderburgh County Commissioners assumed responsibility for the operations, repairs, and maintenance of the Coliseum. As part of their evaluation of the Coliseum and its contents, the Commissioners entered into a contractual agreement to conduct a professional assessment of the organ. An over \$4.8 million restoration cost, combined with the expense of improvements to the Coliseum, led the Commissioners to deem the organ as surplus and prompted the search for an alternative venue for its revitalization and preservation.

###