

*For Donor*

## THE DONATION OF THE ORGAN

The minister, Mr. Perrin Fisk, resigned on June 12, 1870. By a vote of 29 to 1, they refused to accept his resignation. A split was taking place in the church and affairs had not gone well during his ministry. The conditions which Oliver Johnson attached to his offer of the organ are outlined in his address to the congregation in 1870:

"And now, dear friends, let me be perfectly frank with you. I could not have the heart to bestow such a gift upon a divided and distracted church and society. An organ implies harmony, and it would be shamed and dishonored by discord. I offer my gift not to a party but to the whole congregation, old and young; and I must make it an inexorable condition that you shall bury all your differences, letting by-gones be by-gones, acting together in a spirit of mutual good will. If you will notify me within a reasonable time of your acceptance of my proposed gift and of your assent to these conditions--in other words, if you will let the dead past bury its dead; if you will one and all forgive and, so far as possible, forget the things by which you have been heretofore divided; if you will at once address yourselves harmoniously, unitedly, and liberally to the work of altering and repairing your house of worship so as to make it alike tasteful and convenient, a credit to yourselves and the town."

and if in a spirit of mutual condescension and brotherly love you will seek for another pastor to supply the place of one just dismissed--I will immediately order the instrument to be made and placed at your disposal."

This offer, with all its conditions, was accepted by the church and adopted September 18, 1871. They thanked Mr. Johnson, wished him long life, and pledged themselves "to the practice of patience, forbearance and charity to one another."

In September, the organ, which cost \$1350, was shipped from New York in a special freight car and installed. Finally, on September 28, the renovated church was reopened and the occasion fittingly recognized by an address by Oliver Johnson and other exercises, including the playing of the organ by Edward Howe, Jr., who accompanied Mr. Johnson from New York and who showed the power and tone of the instrument. In this connection, an account of the organ which appeared in a New York paper is of interest:

"On Saturday last (August 19) a number of well-known ladies and gentlemen, friends of Mr. Oliver Johnson, assembled at the organ manufactory in Forty-Second Street to examine and listen to an organ which that gentleman has just had built as a gift to the Congregational Church at Peacham, Vermont, his native town. The instrument is of moderate size and of plain exterior to be in keeping with the simplicity of the meeting house in which it is to stand.

Its makers are Messrs. J. H. and C. S. Odell. Mr. Edward Howe, Jr., organist of the Church of the Messiah, performed on it a variety of church music, and pronounced the instrument of a very superior quality. It contains a peculiar and ingenious contrivance for opening and shutting the swell."

The following history of the church building may be of interest:

The Congregational Church was often called the "Bellhouse," whereas the Methodist Church was referred to as the "Chapel." In 1870, following its reconstruction, the interior of the Congregational Church appeared as follows: The pulpit stood on a small platform flanked by wing pews, and along the side walls were others. The gallery for the choir was at the opposite end of the church from the pulpit. The aisles and pulpit platform were covered with red carpets, as were some of the pews; but some showed their individuality by using other colors! In not a few pews were boxes of sawdust or sand for the convenience of tobacco-chewing deacons. The contribution boxes were square affairs with long handles like corn poppers, and the children listened to hear the click of coins.

In December 1876 a small annex to house a toilet for the women was built, while for the men one was constructed between the horse sheds. (Leaning horse sheds beside the church were privately owned and built, so the ownership of

each one had to be traced and established before they could be torn down.) In 1884 the audience room was frescoed and in 1892 an iron roof installed on the church. New pews and carpeting were added in 1902. Electric lights were installed in 1913 and in 1924 the lower rooms in the church redecorated. However, it was not until 1927 that water was piped into the church building. In 1931 a motor was added to the organ through contributions, and in 1943 a service flag was hung in the church.

#### OLIVER JOHNSON

Oliver Johnson was born in Peacham in 1809 and educated in the local schools and Peacham Academy. At 16 he left the farm to enter the newspaper office of The Watchman at Montpelier. In 1831 he began the publication of the Christian Soldier, and a year later was one of twelve organizers of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

For many years he was editor of the Standard, the Christian Union, and the New York Tribune. Horace Greeley characterized him as "one of the greatest editors I have ever known." He brought Garrison and George Thompson to Peacham as lecturers.

In 1881, Oliver Johnson wrote, "I doubt if there is another rural town in all New England which takes a larger number of newspapers and magazines in proportion to its population than this." The Boston Journal was the main reliance for news and political opinions.