

Over the years the members of United First Parish Church have been fortunate to be able to listen to Norman skillfully play our historic Hook and Hastings organ every Sunday morning. Our 1666 Stone Meeting House and our 1732 Hancock Meeting House did not have organs. Church pipe organs were very expensive plus to some of our early Puritan church members pipe organs reminded them of those evil Catholic cathedrals. We did have a church choir and a group of church members playing stringed instruments in the Hancock Meeting House. One of the Quincy family wives complained that the string players always played off key. In fact there was a double stringed bass listed in the inventory of the Hancock Meeting House. In 1828 when our current Stone Temple opened, there was not an organ and the double stringed bass was still listed in the church inventory. Finally in 1837 the double bass was sold and a new pipe organ purchased and installed. The total cost in 1837 was \$1232.77, \$500 for the organ, and the remainder to pay the three men who installed it, the three men who painted and gilded it and the salaries of both the organist and the bellows blower. Mrs. Groves was hired to play the organ and Joseph Adams III to blow the air to the pipes through the bellows. Incidentally, the bellows blower got paid more than the organist. I suppose it was considered to be more strenuous work, or perhaps having the Adams name made the difference. We will never know.

This organ did not have a sub bass and to add one would cost \$1400, so it was sold and another pipe organ purchased in 1851 to replace it. It is not clear whether a new organ was purchased or if it was bought second hand from Trinity Church in Boston. At any rate it probably was a Hook and Hook organ because there was a bill from them for organ repairs in 1851. I am not sure what the organ cost, but it was insured for \$1500. At that time Hook and Hook was considered one of the best organ manufacturers in the United States. The company was founded by Elias and George Hook in 1827 and located on Tremont Street in Boston. Frank Hastings left his family farm in Weston, apprenticed with the Hooks and became a full partner in 1855. The name of the company was then changed to Hook and Hastings. Hook and Hastings became one of the world's most famous organ builders. After the Hook brothers died, Hastings took over the company and built a new factory on the old family farm in Weston. In the late 1800's and early 1900's Hook and Hastings started to experiment with electricity to power its organs. Incidentally, one of its major competitors in using electrical power for organs was a company in New York City run by Hilborne and Franklin Roosevelt, first cousins of President Theodore Roosevelt.

There was much talk of replacing our old pipe organ in the early 1900's as it was starting to need major repairs. In 1901 the Ladies Society of the church began a campaign to raise funds for a new organ and raised \$250 which was deposited into an Organ Fund. In 1909 the estate of Amanda Reed contributed another \$2000 to be used for the purchase of a new organ, and our current Hook and Hastings organ was bought for \$5,1634.10. There was actually about \$1100 left in the organ fund after the purchase was made so the Ladies Society was pretty successful in its fundraising campaign. The organ was completely rebuilt in the 1940's, again in the 1980's and is now serviced every year, and is considered to be irreplaceable, a rare example of the workmanship and quality of Hook and Hastings. Organists are always impressed with it, envious of the quality of its sound and amazed that it is still being used. Back in the 80's the man who

tuned the organ and the pianos was blind, took the subway out from Boston and found his own way over to the church, an amazing accomplishment.

There are not many Hook and Hastings organs left. The company was liquidated in 1936, a victim of the Depression and the shrinking market for church pipe organs. It tried to build theatre organs in the 1920's but couldn't compete with Wurlitzer, and then the Hammond electric organ came along which made it even more difficult to compete. Hook and Hastings built 2,614 pipe organs in the life of the company, the largest still in use being built in 1875 for the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston. It built another famous organ in 1869 for the Peace Jubilee concerts in Boston. Believe it or not, these concerts featured a chorus of 10,000 and an orchestra of 1000. A temporary building was erected in Copley Square that would seat 50,000. Pat Gilmore, a popular band director, organized the event. The jubilee ran for five days, every concert was sold out and it made a \$10,000 profit. The theme was a celebration of the end of the Civil War and the hope for world peace. Among the celebrities to attend were President Grant and Admiral Farragut. Unfortunately even though the event was successful, the next year the Franco-Prussian War broke out, a precursor of World War I.

Organs date back to the heyday of the Roman Empire and were used for special celebrations, gladiator contests and circuses. It is said that Emperor Nero played the organ and might have been playing it when Rome burned as the violin hadn't been invented yet. It wasn't until the 15th century that organs were built in churches. I guess that we could say that circus organs predated church organs. Perhaps circuses predated churches as well. Today, musicians bemoan the fact that keyboard synthesizers are replacing them in pit bands and recording orchestras. In the 20's Wurlitzer theatre organs could replicate the sounds of most brass instruments. I wonder if brass players thought of this as a potential threat to their livelihood back then. We will never know as there are not any brass players left from the 20's. The theatre organs were used to accompany the silent movies in larger movie houses and pianos used in the smaller movie houses. When talking films came along, the days of the theatre organs were over, the end of an era. It is unfortunate that not many church pipe organs are being built today because of the prohibitive cost. United First Parish Church is indeed fortunate to have such a magnificent instrument as our 1909 Hook and Hastings pipe organ, a true historic treasure.