

## **A BIT OF HISTORY**

By John L. Scherer

### **Jonesville Church Bell Discovered in Charlton**

One never knows when or how you may pick up a bit of new historical knowledge. At our Mohawk Antique Auto Club Christmas party, fellow member Sue York mentioned that the Charlton Historical Society had a church bell that came from Jonesville. Sue is an active member of the Historical Society. At once I thought of the small, former Episcopal Church on Main Street in Jonesville that sits in front of the Jonesville Academy building. Could the bell have originally come from the belfry of that church?

The small Victorian church, known as Grace Church, has been converted to a house and is owned by Victor and Carol Temple. They also own the Jonesville Academy. The church was probably built some time after 1880 when the Episcopal Diocese purchased the land. The church was in use by 1883.

Sue had indicated that there was an inscription on the bell, and several days later she sent me an email with the cast inscription that confirmed the bell was indeed from Grace Church. The inscription reads:

**THE GIFT OF THE CHORISTER BOYS  
OF CHRIST CHURCH, BALLSTON SPA  
TO GRACE CHURCH, JONESVILLE**

WHITSUNDAY, MAY 13, 1883  
GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND TO  
EARTH, PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN

Cast on the reverse of the small two-foot high bell is the makers name and date:

CLINTON H. MENEELY BELL COMPANY  
TROY, NEW YORK  
A.D. 1883

Meneely bells were well known for their excellent sound quality. They were manufactured in Troy and shipped around the world. I was surprised once to see a Meneely bell in front of a church on Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. According to the records of the Meneely Bell Foundry, the Grace Church bell was cast on April 17, 1883 for Rev. Walter Delafield (probably the minister of Christ Church in Ballston Spa). It weighs 374 pounds and the cost was \$110 complete with mountings. The bell is just the right size for the small belfry of the church.

The dedication of the church in 1883 probably included a presentation of the bell by the Christ Church Chorister Boys and a tolling of the bell to celebrate the first service in the church. The church is small and the congregation was never very large. By 1968, the church was no longer in use and the Episcopal Diocese sold the building on May 13 of that year.

Rev. Cartmell, minister of the Episcopal Church in Burnt Hills acquired the bell when the Jonesville church was sold in 1968. He installed it at the Mission House in Charlton, former schoolhouse No. 8, on Maple Avenue. It is located across from St. Paul's Episcopal Church, now a museum operated by the Charlton Historical Society.

The Charlton Historical Society purchased Schoolhouse No. 8 from Rev. Cartmell in 1982 for \$800. Rev. Cartmell had since retired from his duties as minister, and the bell was lying on the ground surrounded by broken support pieces. Cement blocks and wood had supported the bell but the structure deteriorated. Torben Aabo, a former president and active member of the Historical Society rescued the bell by loading it on to a wagon that he pulled with his tractor. His children served a counter weights. It has been stored in his garage for the last 24 years.

The Charlton Historical Society is now considering a way to exhibit or make use of the bell. I suspect that Mr. Aabo would like to reclaim his garage. Whatever the outcome, the mystery of the Jonesville Bell has been solved. It's nice to know that the bell has a good home. Hopefully, it will soon be exhibited in a place where the public can see it, and perhaps even enjoy hearing it once again.

Photo Caption 1: Bell from Grace Episcopal Church, Main Street, Jonesville  
photographed by Torben Aabo

Photo Caption 2: Grace Episcopal Church, Main Street, Jonesville from a c. 1910  
postcard