

Lyndon Corner

Service Held At Oldest Church In Town

By HARRIET F. FISHER

The bell of the First Congregational Church in Lyndon Corner, the oldest church in the town, was ringing Sunday evening, Aug. 17, for a 7 p.m. service.

The Rev. Donald Vincent, pastor of the First Congregational Church of Lyndonville, served as the minister for the yearly occasion.

The historic church has a long history. It was organized by nine people 180 years ago on Nov. 30, 1817.

Until the church was built, the congregation met in various homes. The Rev. Samuel G. Tenney was ordained and installed on June 22, 1825, with a salary of \$400 per year.

The church building, begun in 1827, was dedicated and occupied in January 1829. It cost \$4,000 and seated 300 people.

One printed roll lists all 414 members of the church between 1817 to 1892.

When the Rev. William Scales began preaching in 1836 the pay was \$400 per year, "one-half in good merchantable grain."

In 1855 the pay was \$600 per year, "and perhaps a donation."

In 1867 it was \$800 per year, "and a house to live in."

Church societies included the Ladies' Home Missionary, the Woman's Board of Foreign Missions, Young People's Missionary Society, Children's Missionary Society, and Christian Endeavor — a young

In 1861 the Ladies Sewing Circle was making clothes for the 3rd Vermont Regiment in the Civil War.

The church observed its centennial on Aug. 15, 1917. Arthur F. Stone of St. Johnsbury, the grandson of an early deacon, Charles Stone, gave the address titled, "Faith of Our Fathers." An older resident, Mabel Hall Walter (Mrs. Charles T. Walter) was asked to prepare reminiscences.

Mrs. Walter told about the pipe organ that was built for the old North Church of St. Johnsbury and bought for the Lyndon church in 1846 for \$300. It was in the high gallery at the back of the church. The congregation stood and faced the choir in the gallery when hymns were sung.

The organ became temperamental and only Charles M. Chase, musician and publisher of the Vermont Union, "understood its whims and could draw noble strains from it." After he was gone others tried, but sometimes keys stuck and there would be squeals. Then the choir would run to the cabinet organ, an 1872 purchase, and continue singing.

When the gallery was torn down in 1881, the pipe organ was moved down to the platform where it stands today. The front section was taken out and the cabinet set in front of it, making it appear to be a pipe organ.

The brass chandelier had dangling glass prisms. "It was a gorgeous

sight when lighted," Mrs. Walter said. The prisms were later removed, perhaps they were distracting when summer breezes from the open windows sent them to "tinkling musically."

Years later the brass chandelier was wired for electricity.

Mrs. Walter also remembered two handsome colored china vases with bouquets of flowers. She recalled the robin's egg blue bookmark in the pulpit Bible. It hung from the Bible in three tiers, each one with a different cross, the beautiful handiwork of Grandma Goss and her sister, Mrs. Swan.

Sometimes there were startling moments. When the church was remodeled in 1854 the pulpit was reached by three steep steps up from the platform. The Rev. E.T. Fairbanks, then a young minister, was preaching in exchange. He startled the congregation when he fell down these steep steps as he descended from the pulpit.

Another startling moment was the time when one good deacon, after a pinch of snuff, sneezed so violently he ejected his false teeth across the aisle.

Once a pigeon flew from the belfry and through a high small window opened for ventilation. The pigeon landed on the Rev. Wells' head during prayer. Without missing a word or opening his eyes, he reached up, startling the pigeon which flew

around the room, but again it perched on Wells' head and stayed until the prayer was finished. It was awe-inspiring, making the congregation think of John the Baptist when the "spirit of the dove descended upon him."

The thriving village of Lyndon changed to a quiet place of residence after the hotel and some stores were destroyed by fire, and the Lyndon Carriage company and the Lyndon Mill company closed — all places of employment. The bank, doctors, lawyers, hardware store and others moved to Lyndonville which was flourishing because of the railroad.

Although it has been about 15 years or more since regular services were given up at the Lyndon church, a yearly service keeps its charter. Occasionally a wedding or other event takes place there. Some remember a few years ago when the pews were draped with quilts for an impressive quilt show.

The brass chandelier, though now with electricity, the ancient organ pipes behind the old cabinet organ, the pews, and the wide floor boards are some of the old-time features that give the church its reverential historic stamp. The bell in the steeple was made in Boston by Henry N. Cooper in 1855.

Eric Chester, one of several who keep tabs on the church, gives the rope a pull once in a while just to make sure the bell will still ring.