



## President's Message

I want to thank everyone who attended our October Quarterly Meeting, and I hope those three dozen or so members who were able to take the time to also travel to Methuen to visit the Music Hall agree that the trip was well worthwhile. Both the building and the organ are awesome, and I'm glad you were able to enjoy them. At the meeting we were able to distribute our new lapel pins, and I hope you are pleased with the result and will wear them proudly. Lastly, it is that time of year again where we must ask all members to consider a donation to help support MCMA. Donations are tax-deductible, and they are important to us, so please do what you can.

I cannot believe my first year as President is almost over. It has been very enjoyable and I am enthused about the future. I would like to thank all those that have helped me and all those that have given me their support.

Bill Anderson

## Recent Happenings

Our October Quarterly was, as promised, held at the China Blossom Restaurant in North Andover, where we enjoyed a very good (and very diverse) buffet meal. In addition to our normal business items, President Anderson distributed the new MCMA lapel pins to all members attending. *[We thank President Anderson, Vice President Rich Adams, Past President Bill Jutila and Trustees Arthur Anthony and Chuck Sulkala for their work in coordinating the design and production of these pins.]* Membership Committee Chairman Joseph Bellomo reported that his committee, having reviewed the application of Mr. George Milley, and having interviewed Mr. Milley, recommended approval of his application for Associate Membership, and it was so voted. Our newest Associate Member Barry Williams was introduced and welcomed, and he gave us a short history of himself. Member Tom Crowdis III was asked to give everyone an update on his father's condition, and reported that Tom in recent weeks had to undergo two more procedures related to his heart bypass operation earlier this year, but was now back home and recovering. And President Anderson appointed a Nominations Committee to consist of Vice President Rich Adams, Past President Bill Jutila and Trustee Tony Scalse, with Trustee Bill Scott as an alternate.



Following our meeting, we travelled to the Methuen Memorial Music Hall, which houses the "Great Organ", which was the first concert organ in the country and was originally located (from 1863 through 1884) in the Boston Music Hall. In addition to time spent in viewing both the very impressive organ and the equally impressive building that was constructed specifically to house it, we were treated to an extensive medley by organist Chandler Noyes that clearly demonstrated why this instrument was and is so admired. *[We were surprised but pleased to learn that the elaborate organ case was built from a design originally drawn by Hammatt Billings, who was of course a member of MCMA.]*

We have also learned that Member Dave Dalzell continues to suffer lingering and serious complications from the heart surgery he underwent many months ago. Dave is currently in the rehabilitation facility at Newbridge on the Charles in Dedham, and if you know Dave we're sure he would be pleased to hear from you.

Lastly, our Board of Government met in November with Marco Consulting Group to hear the results of MCG's review and assessment of the job SSGA is doing with our investment portfolio. MCG did have some areas for which they suggest further discussion with SSGA, but overall they were in agreement that the asset classes in which we are invested, and our weightings in those classes, were appropriate, that SSGA's expectations for future returns in those asset classes were generally in line with their own, and that SSGA has been performing well. We were pleased with this confirmation, especially in view of the investment volatility of the past few years.

### Helping Others

One of the very worthy organizations to have received past support from MCMA is the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton MA. It was founded in 1867 by Gardiner Green Hubbard, whose four-year-old daughter



became deaf from scarlet fever. The attitude in the country at the time was that deaf children were destined to become deaf mutes, but Hubbard believed his daughter could be taught to speak and learn like other children, so he hired a teacher who was to prove him correct in his assumption: by age 10, his daughter had learned to listen and speak and did as well in the classroom as any of her hearing peers. With the help of philanthropist John Clarke, Hubbard started Clarke School to help other deaf children learn to listen, speak and succeed. Clarke became the first school in the country to teach deaf

students using the auditory/oral method and the first to recognize the importance of successfully mainstreaming deaf students into their neighborhood schools. Through a partnership with Smith College, Clarke was also the first to train teachers in oral/auditory education. Today, Clarke's innovative early childhood and early intervention programs are offered at five locations along the east coast, and their methods work: ninety-eight percent of Clarke students graduate high school and more than seventy-five percent pursue college and post-secondary education.

At Clarke, it is felt that the best way to educate deaf and hard of hearing students is to teach them to listen and talk. Advances in technologies like digital hearing aids and cochlear implants now make it possible for even profoundly deaf children to have greater access to sound than ever before. All of Clarke's students are fitted with hearing technology, roughly half with hearing aids and half with cochlear implants; some use these technologies for one ear, while others require them for both ears. While these technologies don't restore normal hearing, they provide a first step. Clarke's teaching techniques, and their skilled teachers and specialists, help the child learn how to recognize and identify sounds, process and interpret them as meaningful language, and develop spoken language and speaking skills.

MCMA was asked to help support Clarke's work with the gift of specialized amplification devices called FM systems that help children with both hearing aids and cochlear implants listen better in the classroom. FM systems do this by helping make the teacher's voice clearer and louder than background noise, enabling the student to recognize and focus on the right sounds. *[The FM transmitter, with its built-in microphone, is hung around the teacher's neck by a cord. The device picks up the teacher's voice and transmits it by means of radio*

waves to a tiny receiver, which sends it directly into the hearing aid or cochlear implant system to which it is attached.] Our gift of \$8,327 was used specifically to purchase FM equipment for Clarke's Grade 5 classroom. Some 12,000 babies are born deaf in this country each year, and there are far too few organizations like the Clarke School available to help them. We are glad to be able to help in at least a small way.

## MCMA History



We've just come through another New England Fall season, and no doubt you have seen pictures or write-ups of, and perhaps even visited, some of the picturesque towns for which this region is so noted. The towns and villages of Vermont or New Hampshire seem to get the most attention, though Massachusetts can certainly hold its own, and one national magazine this year chose a town in Connecticut as the most picturesque in New England. In reality, it's quite difficult to choose between so many towns across the region for the very simple reason that *they look so much alike!* Aside from Fall foliage and Winter snow cover, it is the architecture of these towns that makes them almost difficult to distinguish from one another, and the man largely responsible for that architecture is our own **Asher Benjamin**, who joined MCMA in 1803. *[The names of other MCMA members appearing in this article will be similarly **bolded**.]*



Old South Congregational Church

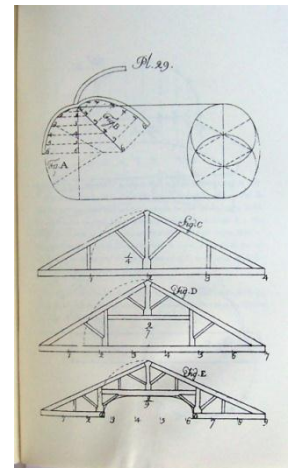
Born in 1773 in Greenfield CT, Benjamin trained under a local builder (his father, a carpenter, had died shortly after Asher's birth) and worked mainly in the Connecticut River Valley, especially Greenfield CT and Windsor VT, until his move to Boston in 1803. He showed an early aptitude for architecture, and in 1795-96 designed and built a stone spiral staircase in Hartford's Old State House, which had been designed by Charles Bulfinch. Benjamin was greatly influenced by Bulfinch's work, including his use of overall symmetry, blind arches, fanlights and smooth brick, and he was to help spread that urbane Federal Style throughout the countryside. Benjamin first settled in Greenfield, MA, where he built two large houses including the Leavitt House, which is today the Greenfield Public Library. In 1797 he married Achsah Hitchcock, who was to bear him four children, and in the same year published his first handbook, *The Country Builder's Assistant*. He later moved to Windsor VT, where he built three large houses and the Old South Congregational Church.

Relocating to Boston in 1803, where he was listed as a housewright in the City Directory, Benjamin built numerous churches and houses, several of which, such as Colburn House, Old West Church and the Charles Street Meeting House, remain with us today. In addition to his design work, Benjamin appears also to own the distinction of having conducted the country's first architectural school, and is specifically credited with teaching Robert Henry Eddy, Elias Carter, Samuel Shepherd, **Solomon Willard** and **Ithiel Town**. *[Solomon Willard, of course, is best remembered as the designer of the Bunker Hill Monument, while Ithiel Town's work is concentrated in his home state of Connecticut, though his Asa Gray House in Cambridge is a National Historic Landmark.]* Others, such as **Hammatt Billings**, would learn from Benjamin by being apprenticed to him.

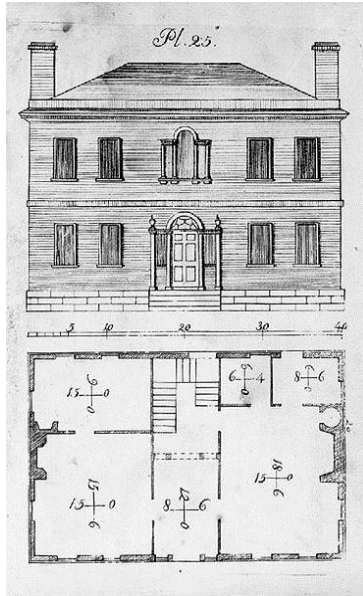


But Benjamin's greatest influence was due to his pattern books, the first written by an American architect, as they brought architectural history, style and geometry to ordinary builders in the field. He adopted many designs by British architects and adapted them to fit the scale and finances of New England communities.

Recognizing that the styles and materials of huge English country houses were not appropriate for rural America, Benjamin created a strictly American guide. New England abounded in ship builders, wood carvers and other craftsmen, but almost no trained architects, so he wrote his handbooks for the rural carpenter. His own experience, as well as his own limited education, gave him a good understanding of what was needed, and the publications were immediately popular. These handbooks (seven, in all, several of which are still in print) provided superb drawings and practical



advice for full house plans, including plates with measured drawings and instruction, identifying-terms for various parts of buildings, columns, mouldings, etc., and details such as doorways, fireplace mantels, circular staircases, dormer windows, pilasters, ballusters and fences. He sketched dwellings and churches, and even a courthouse, and his architectural sources were scrupulously cited. Other architects, including Elias Carter, **Ithiel Town** and **Ammi B. Young** freely assimilated his plans, as did numerous carpenters throughout New England. Benjamin is responsible for much of the charm of early New England towns, and even today the layout and details of many houses, churches and town halls can be matched to the pages of one or another of his handbooks. The architectural historian Talbot Hamlin wrote of Asher Benjamin, "... he, more than any other person is responsible for the character we roughly call "Late Colonial"; his mouldings, his doors and windows and his mantels and cornices decorate or at least inspire the decorations of numberless houses up and down the New England coast and in the New England river valleys."



Benjamin was elected Alderman of Boston in 1823 and 1824. He was a strong supporter of Josiah Quincy for mayor, and later helped Mayor Quincy and **Alexander Parris** plan the Quincy Market. But his life was not without hardship. In addition to the early death of his father, his wife died in 1805, though he did remarry, with his second wife (Nancy Bryant) bearing him four more children. Financial problems led to bankruptcy in 1825, and he left Boston from 1825-27 to supervise construction of locks, canals and mill buildings in Nashua NH, where he also designed two churches before returning to Boston. He published his last handbook, *The Architect, or, Practical House Carpenter*, in 1830, and this book had an enormous influence in redirecting American taste toward the Greek Revival style. Benjamin's books deeply influenced the look of cities and towns throughout New England until the Civil War, and builders copied his designs in both the Midwest and the South. [*Houses and churches built from his books have been traced as far west as Ohio.*] He died in 1845.



First Parish Church, 1809, Ashby, MA

Gideon Granger [*Postmaster General under Presidents Jefferson and Madison*], who was very familiar with Benjamin's work in Connecticut, said of him in a letter of endorsement for a Federal project, "From a poor boy unaided by friends, by his indefatigable industry and talents in a few years he has raised himself to the first rank of his profession." Amazingly enough, that doesn't make him unique in the annals of MCMA, but next time you hear of, read about, or get to enjoy in person that "typical" New England town, remember that it was our own Asher Benjamin who gave it to us.