

The Friends' Quarterly

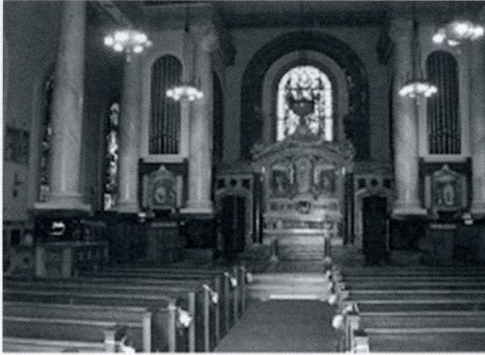


A Newsletter from the Enfield Shaker Museum

Mary Keane Chapel and the Casavant Organ

Personal Reflections By George Butler

Our beloved Mary Keane Chapel was not so-called in the beginning – it was first known as the La Salette Chapel. The cornerstone, visible at the extreme south corner of the portico, is inscribed 1929, although written histories round out the years of construction to 1930-1932. It is said there was to be an additional bay behind the high altar, but that dream vanished when the Great Depression left the Chapel's benefactress, Mary Keane, penniless.



Mary Keane Chapel, interior, looking east, 2007.
Collection of Enfield Shaker Museum.

Mary Keane was the only woman taken in by the Missionaries of Our Lady of La Salette in Hartford, Connecticut, when the Order first immigrated to this country from Canada in 1892. Mary Keane, an orphan, was adopted by her ailing uncle, who was devoted to the La Salettes. His only surviving relative, she inherited his immense fortune. It was she who helped purchase the Enfield Shaker land and buildings in 1927 to be used as a seminary where young men would be trained as missionaries. It was her money that funded the chapel in gratitude to the Order. Her uncle's name, "Mulcahey," appears on a plaque with her name on the left panel of the organ console: *In Memoriam/Margaritae Mulcabey Keane/1831-1889*.

She died in 1932 and is the first person as well as the only woman to be buried in the La Salette cemetery adjacent to the Museum's herb garden. Her grave is located at the edge of the Shaker burial mound.

A new focus was introduced in 1951 with the opening of the La Salette Shrine and the construction of the Shrine Chapel across the street. The new parish church was open to the community and the public at large. The La Salette Chapel was then used less frequently. However, numerous Brothers did penance by keeping the building immaculate. All this came to an end when, facing financial difficulties, the Order sold the core of the Shaker village property to a group of private investors in March of 1985. The group later filed bankruptcy, which led to an auction. Eventually, the Museum became the owner of the La Salette Chapel, although the

Order still owns the brass doors, altar, stained glass windows and the organ. This was no overnight deal. As a matter-of-fact, some of us regard it marvelously - as a modern-day miracle: God's Will!

When I organized the "Organ Vespers on Mascoma Lake" at the La Salette Chapel in 1984, confusion struck! Which Chapel was which? In 1999 we adopted the lesser known name of the building, the Mary Keane Chapel. The "new"

name continues to be seen in print, recognized and perpetuated to this day.

One plaque is located to the left of the great bronze doors: *Chapel/Gift of our/illustrious benefactress/Mary A. Keane/God Bless Her*. This is the only English inscription throughout the building. Another plaque, in French, refers to the stained glass window that is in the furthest corner behind the High Altar on the North Wall: *En memoire de Mlle. M.A.Keane/et de nos bienfaiteurs*.

The Latin inscription over the portico reads "EUNTES ERGO DOCETE OMNES GENTES," which literally means "GO THEREFORE TEACH ALL NATIONS." For the musicians who have brought Mary Keane Chapel to the foreground this phrase might mean, "Make Music That All People May Hear."

Today, visitors to the Museum have a far richer experience because of the Mary Keane Chapel and the musical programs offered there. Mary Keane's gift of the Chapel to the Order of Our Missionaries of La Salette has become THE GIFT OUTRIGHT to us today.

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George Butler held his first church organist position at age 15. He studied at the Eastman School of Music, then transferred to New England Conservatory, graduating cum laude. He retired after 60 years as church organist and choir director in Boston, Pawtucket and Meriden, NH. His mission is to acquaint the public with virtuoso organ literature, emancipating the organ from being solely a church instrument. He has been connected with Mary Keane Chapel since 1958. He and his wife Donna have been caretakers of the Casavant organ since 1984.

