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Young Organist Plays Maine’s Oldest Organ

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“THIS ORGAN IS 188 years old,” exclaimed 15-year-old Trevor Livezey as he sat down before what is presumed to be the oldest playable pipe organ in the state of Maine. The 19th-century instrument sits in the classic white clapboard Congregational Church in Solon, a small town on the banks of the Kennebec River 100 miles northwest of Portland. Trevor was given church access on an August afternoon last summer where he spent three hours enjoying the unique sound and playability of this vintage organ.

Church archives reference a 1980 letter from Donald H. Olson of Andover Organ Company. On the basis of construction techniques in the pipes and windchests, the organ was presumed built in 1839 by Paine & Sparrow of Portland, Maine. John K.H. Paine built one of the first organs in Maine and later partnered with Thomas J. Sparrow to manufacture organs. Sparrow was conciliar of the Portland Sacred Music Society and is thought to have been the business financier, with Paine being the working partner. Paine was the grandfather of the famed American composer and organist John Knowles Paine.

Some Paine & Sparrow organs were lost in the great Portland fire of 1866, and only three are known to be in existence today. Of those three, the one-manual, eight-rank Solon organ is the largest. First installed with a Gothic case in Portland’s Pleasant Street Methodist Church, the organ was moved in 1859 to its current home in Solon, where it received a new case to match the church building’s style.

In his letter, Olson stated that the Solon organ never had a pedalboard. At its base on the front right side is a hitch-down pedal to control the swell shades, which, however, have been removed. It is not known whether there was a pedal to pump the bellows, which has since been replaced. Spaces at the lower left indicate where two pedals once existed—the unique combination action of Paine & Sparrow. One pedal would have turned off all principal stops (8’, 4’, and 2’) via duplicate sliders in the windchest. While these stops were off, the other stops could be used while changing registration. The second pedal would then have been depressed to turn the principal stops back on with the new stop combination. The eight stops on the Solon organ are:

- 8 Open Diapason
- 8 Stopped Diapason Bass
- 8 Stopped Diapason Treble
- 8 Dulciana
- 4 Principal
- ? Flute
- 2 Fifteenth
- 8 Hautboy



Olson, an organbuilder and former president of Andover Organ Company, informed Solon Congregational Church in his letter that at one time the Organ Historical Society offered \$100 toward “maintenance of the organ by sponsoring a historic organ recital.” He also mentioned that his company made quarterly maintenance visits to Maine. The OHS has since discontinued the program mentioned, but Andover Organ Company, which maintains more than 300 organs from Maine to Florida and beyond, continues to ser-

vice the organ. Craig Seaman, general manager of Andover Organ Company, has tuned the Solon organ in the past. "The 1830s is pretty much when they started building organs in this country," he said. "The old organs are well-built and hold up." Andover employee Matthew Bellocchio confirmed that the Solon organ may be the oldest playable organ in Maine, adding that his company also maintains on Cape Cod a one-manual organ built by John Snetzler in England in 1762.

Trevor Livezey travels annually to Solon, Maine, to stay at a family property on a nearby pond. Despite regular visits to the area, he only learned this year of the Solon organ through a local friend who knows Tim Curtis, pastor of Solon Congregation Church. "It's a very special piece to the long-time members of the church," said Curtis. "We've got family members who trace their history back many generations here. It's been about 30 years since we had a church member who plays the organ." Curtis said that a guest minister from a church in Vassalboro, Maine, has visited several times in the past year, bringing an organist friend to accompany hymn singing, thus bring the organ to life. Curtis didn't grow up hearing an organ in church but said he has learned that the organ, if played correctly, can allow for a very worshipful experience.

He spoke of the upkeep involved. "In 2022, we paid \$1,000 for one maintenance visit by a company in Massachusetts [Andover]. In the four years that I've been involved with the church, we've done that twice." Andover's records show that the Solon organ received renovation and restorative repairs in 1972.

Having been given access to this unique organ, Trevor thoroughly enjoyed himself for an entire afternoon. He played personal favorites as well as some pieces assigned by his organ teacher, Rebecca Ostermann, DMA, music director at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in Philadelphia and artistic director of Musica Tevere (musicatevere.com). Concluding his time with the Solon organ, Trevor remarked, "The organ was more fun to play than I thought it would be. I was expecting just one or two sounds!"



LISA LIVEZEY is a freelance writer and spiritual blogger who lives in the Philadelphia area. Through her son's enthusiasm for playing the organ, Lisa has discovered the beauty, grandeur, and history of the instrument. Check out Lisa's weekly photo devotion at livalivezey.com/olivetrete.