

toward history, 'a somewhat informal method of presentation. History may be written in a stately and ponderous style, and then few but the scholar will read it. If one can keep on a more informal plane, bring in a little fun where possible, and yet adhere to the solid truth at all times, history will be much pleasanter to read. It is with that approach that I have tried to write, and I have done my best to make this book as painless to read as possible.'

J. E. M.

ALDEN PORTER JOHNSON

The death of Alden Johnson removes from the ranks of the American Antiquarian Society one of our closest friends and most influential members.

Alden Porter Johnson was born in Worcester on March 24, 1914, to Charles Warren Johnson and his wife, Ruby May Allen. Alden graduated with honors from Choate School in 1933. While there he learned to row, a sport which captivated his interest ever after. After Choate, he went with the Class of 1937 to Princeton University but ill health forced his withdrawal during his senior year. Still, he had participated in the 1936 Diamond Sculls at the Henley-Royal Regatta. Twenty-eight years later his son, Peter, entered the same event.

Alden Johnson entered the machine-tool business after he left Princeton. From 1938 until 1942 he sold products of the Norton Company, one of the founders of which was Alden's grandfather, Professor George I. Alden. In 1942 Johnson became associated with Browning Tool and Supply Company of Indianapolis, an arrangement which persisted only two years. Then, he established and presided over Johnson-DeVou, Inc., a tool supply house in Worcester. During these and the next few years, Alden was an avid race car enthusiast.

In 1949 Alden Johnson began anew by purchasing *The Barre Gazette*, a weekly newspaper, and its publishing company in Barre, Massachusetts. This was a crucial event and

was one which brought together the various threads of Alden's life to make a meaningful fabric. In this enterprise, he was able to combine his knowledge of machinery (for printing is a trade which utilizes intricate machinery) with his even stronger inclinations toward literary and artistic matters.

The publication of the newspaper absorbed Alden's energies for several years. By the late nineteen fifties he began to develop an interest in the publication of books, an inclination which may have been heightened by his election to the American Antiquarian Society in October 1955. Among the earliest books issued by the Barre Publishing Company were reprints of several articles from AAS *Proceedings* which were reset into type and printed in the Barre shop. At about the same time, he became fascinated with the problems of micro-printing early American newspapers in facsimile. Alden personally worked upon the problem of a stable printing plate which could carry the legible image of a page of type at high reduction, as well as financially supporting the efforts of Nathan Cohen and Ebenezer Gay. He and his cohorts were unable to develop an economically successful plate and their firm was sold to the Readex Microprint Corporation.

However, it was in the matter of book publication that Alden's interests were most closely engaged. More and more his attention was devoted to books while *The Barre Gazette* was left to the care of the newspaper editor. His concerns were directed away from the mechanics of printing and toward the selection of manuscripts and the design of books. Thus, the fully equipped printing office which he had developed began to trouble him when it became clear that his own shop could not produce the typographically excellent work which he desired. So, in 1967 Alden made a further break with the past by selling the newspaper and eliminating from the shop nearly all of his printing equipment.

In those ten years he laid a strong foundation for a successful regional publishing firm. Alden's knowledge and taste de-

veloped so that he was better able to select manuscripts while the appearance of the Barre books improved markedly. He published handsome and useful photographic essays on Boston and Cambridge. *In and Out of Boston* by Bernice Chesler is one of several excellent and popular guide books published by Barre. His antiquarian interests and love of printing led him to re-issue two volumes of wood engravings of views of Massachusetts towns with commentary by Ivan Sandrof. His interest in art led him to issue several annual volumes of printmakers' art, entitled *Artist's Proof*. At another level, his firm republished in facsimile the great lithographs of monuments in Yucatan by Catherwood, as well as the even more spectacular *Atlantic Neptune* by Joseph DesBarres and Jeffreys' *West India Atlas* of 1775. In an effort to provide better distribution for the publications of institutions such as AAS, he issued in 1969 a catalogue listing the available publications of seventeen institutions. He was always eager to try something useful and in that spirit offered the services of his company to AAS to distribute our books at cost or even a bit below. Beyond that, his firm paid the production costs and paid the Society royalties on the sales of books bearing the joint imprint of AAS and Barre, such as *National Index of American Imprints through 1800*, the *Angel of Bethesda* by Cotton Mather, and d'Alté Welch's *Bibliography of American Children's Books Printed Prior to 1821*.

All this led him inevitably toward the establishment in 1970 of the Imprint Society. In this enterprise Alden brought to bear the editorial skills, the knowledge of typography, and literary and artistic taste which he had developed over a period of twenty years. Through the Imprint Society he issued in handsome format such books as *Bellum* by Erasmus with powerful etchings by Otto Dix, *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, E. P. Hingston's *Genial Showman, being the Reminiscences of the Life of Artemas Ward*, and *The Playboy of the Western World* by John Millington Synge. He also used this medium to issue

books of scholarly value by reprinting useful texts with unpublished original illustrations, or unpublished manuscripts. Among those were Henry James Warre's *Sketches in North America and the Oregon Territory*, Joseph Ingraham's *Journal of a three year trading voyage in the Pacific*, *American Broad-sides*, or *Sketches of a Tour to the Lakes* by Thomas L. McKenny.

In all of this activity, the Society was closely involved. Alden was for twelve years a member of the Publications Committee. He was determined that materials from the Society should be published, just as he was eager to help in the effort. Thus, at Publications Committee meetings when he referred to 'we' or 'us' it was unclear whether he meant AAS, or Barre, or Imprint Society. But to Alden it did not matter which was which as long as the manuscript or the illustrations were published. At Council meetings, which he attended from 1958 as a Councillor and from 1965 as Vice President, he was ready with ideas to forward the work of the Society, to improve its finances, or to add helpful members to the rolls. However, he would not preside at meetings, a circumstance which was illustrative of his diffidence. His enthusiasm and his generosity were as boundless as his friendship.

Although we claim a special relationship with Alden, he had other interests which were made plain by his leadership and generosity to Clark University, Choate School, Stetson Home for Boys, the Worcester Art Museum, and Worcester Foundation for Experimental Biology. Alden was chairman of his grandfather's trust, through which he was able to spread money where it would do good. He was a member of the First Unitarian Church in Worcester, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Club of Odd Volumes, and The Grolier Club.

Alden Johnson died in the Memorial Hospital in Worcester on September 8, 1972. He was courageous to the end. He knew that he left behind good works, good friends, and a good family. He is survived by his widow, Mary Chandler Bullock Johnson, whom he married on September 17, 1938, two

daughters, Judith Lampe and Lisa, and his son, Peter, and two grandchildren.

Following his death, the Council of the Society adopted the following resolution which was read at the annual meeting.

WHEREAS Alden Porter Johnson, since October 1955 a member of the American Antiquarian Society bringing to its affairs an informed intelligence, a cultivated taste, and warm friendship, was by the grace of God taken from our midst on September 8, 1972, and because

ALDEN PORTER JOHNSON served the American Antiquarian Society since October 1958 as a worthy Councillor through which office he provided an expanded vision of the purposes of the Society and as a Vice President from October 1965 gave leadership in establishing and reaching new goals of service, and because

ALDEN PORTER JOHNSON influenced for good the publishing activities of the Society by acting for twelve years as chairman of its Publications Committee and by the exercise of his sound judgment greatly assisted the dissemination of knowledge, and because

ALDEN PORTER JOHNSON was, beyond the giving of these gifts, a true friend to his companions, a generous leader of his community, and brought knowledge and beauty through the medium of his own publications, now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the American Antiquarian Society reaffirm its commitment to the cause of humane learning by following the way marked out by their departed friend, Alden Porter Johnson, and further that the Council shall keep alive the memory of his faithfulness to the commonweal as well as his joyfulness in the work; and to his family let this resolution of unbounded appreciation and sympathetic grief be made known.

September 18, 1972

James Russell Wiggins, PRESIDENT

M. A. McC.

Copyright of Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society is the property of American Antiquarian Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.