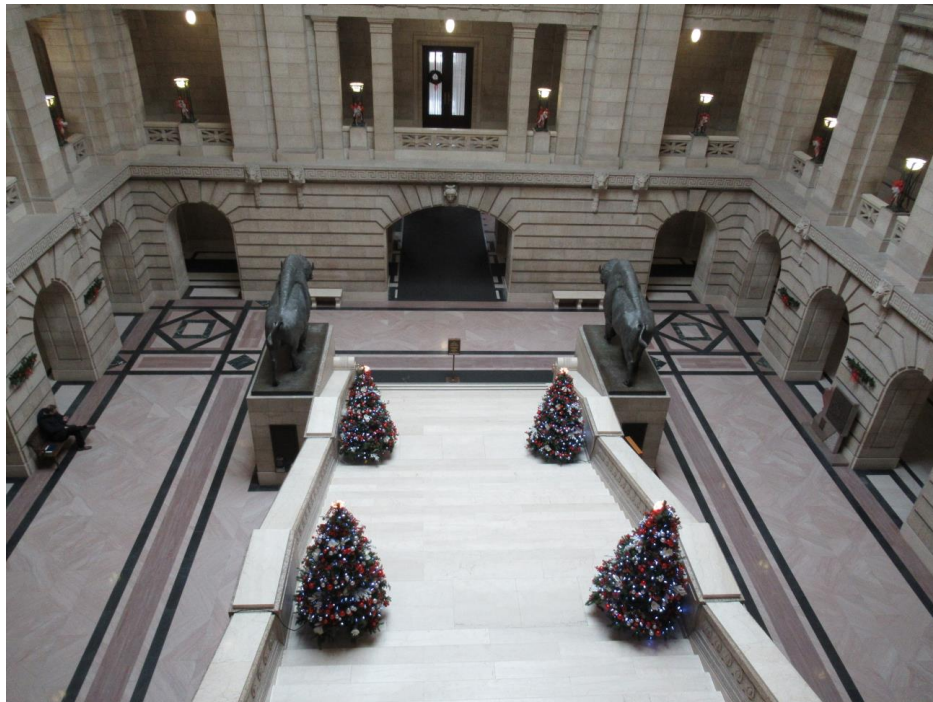

Ringers' Roundtable

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NEW YEAR'S LEVEE AT THE MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE BUILDING

*Manitoba's first Lieutenant Governor, The Honourable Adams Archibald, hosted his first New Year's Levee on January 2, 1871 at Upper Fort Garry, where he established his residence. Construction of Government House at 10 Kennedy Street was completed in the fall of 1883 and the first New Year's Levee was held there in 1884, hosted by Manitoba's fourth Lieutenant Governor, The Honourable James Aikins. * [New year's Day Levee History printed on the 2019 Levee program]*

In more recent years, the annual New Year's Day Levee, is hosted by the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba at the Manitoba Legislative Building and the public is invited to greet the Lieutenant Governor and partake in refreshments and entertainment. Complimentary sleigh rides were available on the Legislative Grounds, and a magician entertained in the Rotunda. Members of the Manitoba Living History Society and members of the United Empire Loyalists' Association appeared wearing their period costumes adding to the authenticity of this old tradition. Members of the Scouts and Guides assisted with the serving of refreshments. This year, The Honourable Janice C. Filmon and The Honourable Gary A. Filmon greeted many members of the public while the Winnipeg Police Service Choir and The Winnipeg Boys Choir entertained atop the Grand Staircase and the Ring Out Handbell Quartet performed for 40 minutes on the third floor balcony.



Chairs were set up on the main floor and in the balcony areas for audience to enjoy the entertainment



The Winnipeg Police Service Choir and The Winnipeg Boys Choir sang from the top of the Grand Staircase, while the Ring Out Handbell Quartet rang from the third floor balcony above the Grand Staircase.



RING OUT! Quartet members L-R: Jewel Casselman, Susan Stevenson, Morna-June Morrow, Patsy Andrews-Vert played from the third floor balcony. [Photo by Duncan Hasker]



RING OUT rings for the audience on the main floor and in the balconies while folks enjoyed refreshments below in the Rotunda area. [Photo by Duncan Hasker]



Members of RING OUT were greeted by Their Honours, Lieutenant Governor Janice Filmon and The Honourable Gary Filmon in the Blue Room prior to their entertaining ringing for those attending the New Year's Levee. Her Honour is holding a 400 year old crotal* hanging from a golden cord. (Photo taken by an attendant)

*During a conversation with Lt. Gov. Janice Filmon at Government House on December 6th, 2018, I related to her an episode with a former Lt. Gov. the late Peter Liba who was in attendance at a Salvation Army event in which the University Women's Club Handbell Choir was entertaining. I had been given this 400 year old crotal after directing the 800 handbell ringers in Birmingham, England in August 2000 at the 9th International Handbell Symposium. I thought as this crotal was an English bell and that he was the Queen's representative in Manitoba, he should have the honour of ringing it while we played *"Jingle Bells"*. I mentioned that I would like it back afterwards. As we finished ringing, His Honour, with a grin on his face, opened his suit jacket wide and deposited the crotal into his inside pocket. At which point I returned with a grin, leaning towards him and saying, *"Your Honour, I KNOW where you live!"* Everyone had a good chuckle. Seeing as how Her Honour had enjoyed that episode with the crotal, I took it to her on January 1st, 2019 and she was holding the crotal by its golden cord when the above photograph was taken. The crotal was the prototype for the jingle bell.



THE STORY OF HANDBELLS IN RELIGION AND HISTORY

Longfellow referred to music as the “*universal language*” and surely bells are the most universal of its instruments. According to historians, crude types of handbells were used as early as 3000 B.C., with the oldest existing bells with handles dating from 8th century B.C. Egypt where crude types of handbells were used in temple rites. A ***Sistrum*** was worn by Egyptian women to drive out evil spirits. Scoop-shaped bells were used by Confucianism by the 5th century B.C. Chinese. In Japan, the bell was adopted for temple worship, and was rather ornately decorated with gods, animals, and flowers.

The Hindu bell was more flared in shape and was dedicated to a monkey god whose image formed the handle. Buddhism adopted the Hindu type of bell in the 8th century. They would accompany prayers and sometimes the rung bells were the prayers. They felt that if a bell was properly rung, the bellringer could compel the gods, but, if improperly rung, it could destroy the bellringer! [So bell ringers, better be on your best behaviour!]

In ancient Greece and Rome, bells were used in religious ceremonies, to announce public games, and to mark the hours of the day. Greek warriors put small bells on their shields and head gear to give them courage and to startle opponents.

In the 4th century, bells announced various prayer times each day, and monks often rang bells called ***Cymbala*** with a hammer during a processional. These cup-shaped bells, suspended from a metal bar, were also used to give pitches for Psalm settings, readings and other sections of the Liturgy. As bells were considered the best instruments for expressing praise, it was concluded that the Biblical King David, a poet and musician, not only played the harp, but also the ***cymbala***.

Small bells called ***Amulets*** were used to decorate the robes of holy men who crossed central Asia, down into China, and out to eastern Siberia – eventually to Africa and Europe. St. Anthony, an early Christian father, who lived in Egypt during the latter part of the 3rd century, used a handbell as an instrument dedicated to serve Christ. One such bell has been traced back to Ireland’s St. Patrick and is in the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin. Bellringers were also used to ward off evil spirits and demons at funeral processions. This can be seen in the funeral of Edward the Confessor as depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry, and also in the “*Pardoner’s Tale*” in Chaucer’s “*Canterbury Tales*”.

William the Conqueror ordered curfew bells to be rung at eight o’clock each night as a signal to extinguish camp fires. Strangely enough, 900 years after that law was revoked, there are still some towns in England today where bells ring out at eight o’clock each night!

Various medieval manuscripts show several instances of handbells being rung to announce the birth of the Christ Child, most notably a painting, “*The Adoration of the Virgin*” by the 15th century Flemish painter, Geertgeen of St. Jans, where, in each hand of the Infant Jesus, he painted a small handbell. He also painted a hovering angel ringing two handbells downward, as if to alert the earth below of the blessed birth.

During Oliver Cromwell’s Puritan regime of 1649-1660, all handbells were banished from the church except for one in the pulpit for the preacher to ring, if anyone fell asleep during the sermon! After the Puritan regime ended, limitations on bell ringing were lifted.

When permanent Christian congregations were formed and small churches erected, the handbell was first rung at the doorway to summon the faithful to services. Later, the size of the bell was increased until it had to be fastened permanently so it could swing to and fro in large bell towers, built apart from the church. The Bishop of Nola, in Campania, Italy, was the first to place a bell tower within the church. When several bells are hung in a belfry, they can produce a clamorous effect. Such a set, known as a ***peal***, consists of 3-12 bells. Ringing these bells in various sequences or permutations is known as

change ringing.** In the 16th and 17th centuries, tower bell ringers would practice change ringing in mathematical sequences by pulling ropes attached to clappers inside very heavy steeple bells, weighing anywhere from 200 to over 2000 pounds. It was strenuous work and often very uncomfortable in winter months, so someone came up with the idea of practicing their bell changes using a small **wooden** bell held in the hand. Once learned on these smaller bells, ringers would go back to pulling the ropes of the much larger tower bells. In 1660, William and Robert Cor of the Wiltshire Foundry cast the first tuned bronze handbell. Leather pegs were used in the clapper head and a spring action was installed so that it prevented the clapper from resting on the side of the casting.

With the advent of the equally-tempered scale, that is, the division of the musical octave into 12 equal semitones or half steps, bells could now ring melodies with accompanying harmonies, sounding very much like a full choir singing, thus the term *handbell choir*.

Composers like the German opera composer, Richard Wagner, used bells in their orchestrations. In his "*Parsifal*", Wagner required such deep tones from heavy bells that the harmonics clashed with the rest of the orchestra! Eventually tubular chimes were invented for use in orchestras.

The French Impressionist composer, Claude Debussy, created a system of harmony that was partly the result of his listening to bell overtones. One piano prelude, "*The Sunken Cathedral*" is a prime example of music featuring blurred overtones.

Handbells were first brought to the United States in 1845 by P. T. Barnum of the famous Barnum and Bailey Circus. Barnum dressed the ringers in Swiss costume thinking they would be more theatrical in appearance. They were called the **Swiss Bell Ringers**, and even today, handbells are sometimes erroneously referred to as Swiss in origin.

The tower bells in Boston's Old North Church (the church made famous by Paul Revere's famous midnight ride in April 1776, to warn the colonists that the British were coming) needed repair so Margaret Shurcliffe went overseas to oversee their repair, and in doing so, brought back a set of handbells. The first handbell concert in North America was rung by the Beacon Hill Ringers in Boston on Christmas Eve, 1902. Handbells were introduced into church services in 1947 at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City. The American Guild of English Handbell Ringers was formed in 1954. This association was later renamed as the Handbell Musicians of America.

The first handbell group in Manitoba was formed in 1966 at Tec-Voc School in Winnipeg, under the direction of Fred Merrett, assisted by Audrey Jones. The first elementary school (Oakenwald) handbell group was formed in 1969 in the Fort Garry School Division by Morna-June Morrow. Frieda Duerksen formed the first church handbell group in East Kildonan. Since then, Manitoba has expanded to about three dozen handbell sets, in 2, 3, and 4 octaves. They are used in school, church and community settings in Winnipeg, Brandon, Carman, Lac du Bonnet, McGregor, Minnedosa, Starbuck, Stead, Steinbach, Thompson and Winkler, although in some cases the bells are "silent" as there is no one to direct a group.

In order to promote the art of handbell ringing in Manitoba, the Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers was formed in 1996. The Guild sponsors local workshops, Read and Ring sessions, and a Provincial Spring Ring Festival in addition to informing members of upcoming events and special features in a newsletter, "*Ringers' Roundtable*" as well as occasional monthly updates. Miscellaneous items like handbell polish, polishing clothes, gloves and easel-back binders are available from the MBGEHR Market.

**** Look in a future issue of *Ringers' Roundtable* for a more complete article on the art of change ringing.**