
Ringers' Roundtable

*The Newsletter of
the Manitoba Guild of English
Handbell Ringers
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CAMPANOLOGY: In Ireland many years ago, St. Patrick came upon a horde of devils from the North. He had no weapon – all he had was a small four-sided bell. He rang the bell as loudly as he could as it was believed the loud sound of bells, horns or drums would drive the demons away. No matter how hard he rang the bell, St. Patrick could not drive away the evil spirits. In desperation he threw the bell right into the midst of the devils. This clanging bell so frightened the devils that they screamed loudly and ran away. The evil spirits did not return to Ireland for seven years, seven months and seven days. The bell tossed by St. Patrick was battered and can still be seen in a museum in Dublin today. It is known as the Broken Bell of Brigid. SOURCE: Yolen, Jane, Ring Out! A Book of Bells, 1974



During the past two plus years, the global pandemic has hit the handbell world rather badly, causing many handbells groups to begin their season, only to be shut down due to provincial restrictions and remain inactive for long periods. Gradually some of these groups are beginning to emerge as restrictions are being relaxed.

Kindly let the editor know if any of your
groups have begun ringing again?
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In the meantime, let's look back on the handbell and chime groups that Manitoba has convened over the past 60 years. Some are continuing while others have ceased to exist.

If there are any errors in the information given below about handbell groups in Manitoba kindly contact m-jmorrow@shaw.ca and the next issue will publish the additions, deletions and/or corrections. *Thank you!*

HANDBELL GROUPS IN WINNIPEG CHURCHES

BROADWAY-FIRST BAPTIST: Norm Giesbrecht purchased 3 octaves of Schulmerich Handbells in 1970 or 1971. When he moved to Kitchener, Ontario with his bells, it did not take long for the church to purchase its own 3 octave set. Directors: Norm Giesbrecht, Patricia Martens, Barbara Bergstrom, Carol Anderson, Karen Walteson, Wes Elias (1990-2007), Susan Stevenson (2007 to present). Nancy Cameron and Susan Stevenson directed a children's choir for a year in the early 1990's. Three octaves of Schulmerich MelodyChimes were purchased in 2002. The 4th and 5th octave chimes were purchased by the Swan Family in memory of their parents. This memorial donation was for the 100th anniversary of the Church in 2006.

WESTWORTH UNITED: Morna-June Morrow took her 4 octave Schulmerich Handbells and later added 5 octaves of Schulmerich MelodyChimes to use with the Chapel Bells (1988-2013). Upon her retirement in 2013, sadly the bell program was discontinued. (A CKY-TV documentary called *Manitoba Moments* featured the University Women's Club Handbell Choir and the Westworth United Church Chapel Bells, both groups directed by Morna-June Morrow. This documentary came as a result of M-J's 4th octave Handbells and five octaves of MelodyChimes being stolen from her van in November, 2004.)

STURGEON CREEK UNITED (NOW PRAIRIE SPIRIT UNITED): Three octave Suzuki Hand Chimes were acquired from a school by Bert Kroeker, Principal of Fort Richmond Collegiate and long-time choral director at the church. Erica (Stewart-Hay) Fennell started a group but when she left the church in 2008, Margaret Granger became the director as well as being the organist there for 50 years. In the fall of 2016, two Canadian Mennonite students, Jane Fast and Erica Slejko became co-Directors. Klaus Froese is the current director of the Cheery Chimers, although they have not met during the pandemic.

AUGUSTINE UNITED: Early history is unknown. The two octave Schulmerich set was sold to St. Andrew's River Heights United.

ST. ANDREW'S RIVER HEIGHTS UNITED: Two octaves purchased from Augustine United and later added the 3rd octave. Directors: Olivia Arnason, Carolyn Lutes, co-directors Morna-June Morrow and Dr. Stuart Sladden. With the pandemic arrival, the group stopped abruptly in February 2020. From the fall of 2020 until June 2021, they were on loan to Linden Christian High School. Since then, the handbells are not being used.

ELMWOOD MENNONITE BRETHERN: A 3 octave Schulmerich set was used by Louise Enns. Eventually the set was sold to Fort Garry United Church.

FORT GARRY UNITED: A 3 octave Schulmerich set was bought from Louise Enns at Elmwood Mennonite Brethren Church. Current director is Helen Bergen.

ST. LUKE'S LUTHERAN: Vince Leah bought 2 octaves of Whitechapel Bells and used them here in the late 1960's. Upon his death the bells lay on shelves at his home. These bells eventually became property of Kildonan United Church. Schulmerich cases were sold by Gimli Handbell Association to house the bells in cases.

KILDONAN UNITED: Inherited the Whitechapel Bells from the estate of Vince Leah. Currently the church is about to close down, and it is unknown where these bells will go.

RIVER EAST MENNONITE BRETHERN: Frieda Duerksen purchased her own set of Schulmerich Handbells and used them with a boys' and a girls' choirs at the church. She trained John Mayba as a soloist. Her bells were sometimes used at Angus McKay and Springfield Heights Schools in the River East School Division. Upon retirement she took her bells to Calgary where she used them until she later sold them. Location now unknown.

ST. GEORGE'S ANGLICAN: A 50 year old set of Whitechapel Bells was passed down to the minister's wife. Directors: Stewart Thomson and Marg MacIver. The set was stolen by vandals and once recovered were unable to be repaired.

SPARLING UNITED: A two octave set was used by Chris Thomson in 2000. Unaware if they are being used now.

MESSIAH LUTHERAN: Larry Weckwerth directed them for several years. Unknown status currently.

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER: A set given as a memorial donation was used by Richard Appler. Current director is Heather Lewis.

WESTWOOD PRESBYTERIAN: The Men's Club at the church purchased a 2 octave set of Schulmerich Handbells around 1999. In 2000, the new handbell choir included a couple of the spouses as well as other women from the congregation. Around 2005 the church purchased the 3rd octave, primarily funded by a member of the choir. Last conductor was Tracey Wright. The handbell choir was discontinued in January 2017 and the bells are not being used at the moment.

HENDERSON HIGHWAY SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST: Three octave Schulmerich set originally from the Olga Friesen estate was bought by Agnes Dyck and later sold to current director Sheryl Sokolies.

FAITH LUTHERAN: Three octave Schulmerich Handbells and MelodyChimes purchased through donations from bequests and memorial funds. Sandra Brown Day has been director of Jubellation, Heavenly Metal and Extreme Ringers. Rheannon Blanchette became director of Heavenly Metal. Currently Sandra Brown Day conducts Jubellation.

McCLURE UNITED: When Audrey Jones retired from Tec Voc High School, she purchased the Schulmerich 4 octave set of Handbells, the first such set used in Manitoba in 1964 by Fred Merrett and Audrey. She formed the Tec Voc Alumni Ringers, the McClure United Church Ringers in November 1985. She also formed a McClure Seniors Group. One year she directed a children's group. Later Audrey donated her set to the church where they were used for a few years. Unfortunately, they were no longer being used and Morna-June Morrow was approached about servicing and selling them. That was accomplished a few years ago when the 3 octaves were sold to Red River Valley Junior Academy run by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. The 4th octave was sold to the Canadian Mennonite University where Verna Wiebe is the director. The entire catalogue of handbell music used by Fred Merrett and Audrey Jones was catalogued by Morna-June Morrow and incorporated into the Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers Lending Library.

GRACE BIBLE: In 2014, Karen Kuhl of Winkler loaned her 3 octave Schulmerich Handbells to her daughter, Andi Kuhl, who started a handbell choir at Grace Bible Church. Unknown status now.

CHURCH HANDBELL GROUPS IN RURAL MANITOBA

CARMAN UNITED: Carman, Manitoba. Deanne Mutcher used a set of Hand Chimes with the United Church and with the Carman Seniors Group. Unknown status now.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN: Brandon, Manitoba. Anne Ross, a First Presbyterian Church member, gifted to the church a three octave set of Malmark Handbells in 1976. Directors have been Dr. Elizabeth Grant, Arlene Robertson, Suzanne McIntosh, Shannon Graham, Mavis Green, Carolyn Farquharson followed by Karen Wall in 2000 with A'Cabella. There are seven core members and three additional ringers come in for bigger pieces. Angela Mullin has a kiddie/beginning group consisting of 3-5 ringers.

TRINITY LUTHERAN: Starbuck, Manitoba. Using a 3 octave set of Schulmerich Handbells and a 3 octave set of Suzuki Hand Chimes, Patsy Andrews-Vert has directed the Adult and Youth Bells at Trinity Lutheran for 31 years. Ron Vert also directed a youth group in this church while he was minister of Trinity Lutheran.

BEAUSEJOUR RURAL LUTHERAN PARISH: Three octaves of Schulmerich Handbells and five octaves of Schulmerich MelodyChimes were purchased by St. John Greenwald and Trinity Thalberg Lutheran Churches, collectively called the Beausejour Rural Lutheran Parish. St. John Lutheran later closed down and was torn down. Their members joined the Trinity Thalberg congregation. The bell group has rung under a variety of names over the years. The director of all groups is Gloria Zirk.

1. Adult Bells of Greenwald & Thalberg Lutheran Churches
2. Bells of Praise, Greenwald & Thalberg Lutheran
3. Brass Vibrations, Greenwald & Thalberg Churches
4. Joy Bells, Greenwald & Thalberg Lutheran Church
5. Bells of Praise, Trinity Thalberg Lutheran

MINNEDOSA UNITED: Minnedosa, Manitoba. A one octave set of Malmark Handbells was purchased in 1983 in honour of Mrs. Jean Stephenson by her former Junior Choir members. Eventually, through donations, two more octaves were obtained and then five more bass bells were added at a later date. When the church burned to the ground by arson in 2006, fortunately only one case was lost as well as all the bell music. The first bell director was Audrey Briese, with several others since her, and now Val Thompson directs the choir.

EMMANUEL MENNONITE: Winkler, Manitoba. Karen Kuhl purchased three octaves of Schulmerich Handbells in 1993 and has two octaves of Suzuki Hand Chimes. She directed handbells with members of her church. In addition, she had a school children's choir called Brass Angels and a community-based Southern Bells Handbell Choir.

GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN: Selkirk, Manitoba. When Ron Vert was Interim Minister at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Selkirk, he had access to a loaned set of handbells from Area VII of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (now called Handbell Musicians of America) from October 2009 to June 2010 during which time he directed a handbell group.

EVANGELICAL MENNONITE: McGregor, Manitoba. Elvera Hamm has conducted this group for many years in McGregor.

GIMLI LUTHERAN: A three octave set of Schulmerich Handbells originally owned by Marilyn Mensforth was sold to the University Women's Club Handbell Choir. When the UWC Handbell Choir decided to become an independent group the UWC asked Morna-June Morrow to sell the bells. She sold this set to Gimli Lutheran Church where a group was started by Ron Vert and later directed by Val Maier. Since the passing of Val Maier in 2021, the status is unknown.

SCHOOL GROUPS IN WINNIPEG

WINNIPEG SCHOOL DIVISION: The Division has ten sets of Schulmerich Handbells. The locations of these bells have changed over the years. Tec Voc High School had the first set in 1964. Clifton, Faraday, Fort Rouge, George V, Grosvenor, Isaac Brock, John M. King, Laura Secord, Montrose, Queenston, Robert H. Smith, Sargent Park have used bells. Not sure which schools are using the bells now.

FORT GARRY SCHOOL DIVISION – NOW CALLED PEMBINA TRAILS SCHOOL DIVISION: A two octave Schulmerich Handbell set (without cases) was purchased by Fort Garry S.D. in March 1969. Later the cases and the 3rd octave were added in 1970 and used by Morna-June Morrow at Oakenwald and Crane Elementary Schools. When she bought her own 4 octave set in 1973, the original 1969 3 octave set went to St. Avila School used by Carolyn Ritchey. Later the set went to Dalhousie School where the 4th octave was added. Sister Dolores Schneider, Karin Klassen and Dianne Sjoberg used these bells for many years. Eventually this set went to Chancellor School a few years ago and were used by Gordon Bortoluzzi until he retired. Unknown who is using this set now at Chancellor School.

Morna-June used her own bells from 1973-1988 at Oakenwald, Crane and Chancellor Schools before taking them to Westworth United Church where she directed the Chapel Bells for 25 years. In her final year before retirement, M-J brought the bells back and forth between Westworth Church and Bonnycastle School for a children's group to perform at the 1998 National Conference of Carl Orff Canada's Music for Children, Musique pour Enfants at the Winnipeg Convention Centre.

EAST KILDONAN – NOW CALLED RIVER EAST SCHOOL DIVISION: Angus McKay, Springfield Heights Schools have used handbells, probably the set owned by Frieda Duerksen.

ST. JAMES-ASSINIBOIA SCHOOL DIVISION: They have two 2 octave sets of Schulmerich Handbells that have been used at Golden Gate, Lakewood, Lincoln, Robert Browning and Strathmillan Schools.

BALMORAL HALL BELLES: A four octave set of Schulmerich Handbells was donated to this exclusive private girls' school by a parent. Past directors have included Phyllis Ilavsky, Barb Janz, with current director being Dr. Cathy Doerksen. She conducts a Grade 4/5 Ensemble and Handbell Ensembles for Middle and Senior School.

CATHERINE BOOTH BIBLE COLLEGE: "Bells of Joy" using Schulmerich Handbells were directed many years ago by Mandy Raynsford. Unknown status now.

CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY: A three octave set of Schulmerich Handbells have been directed for years by Verna Wiebe. Recently they purchased the 4th octave from McClure United Church which was originally used by pioneers Fred Merrett and Audrey Jones at Tec Voc High School.

RED RIVER VALLEY JUNIOR ACADEMY RUN BY THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH: This school purchased the three octave Schulmerich set originally used by Fred Merrett and Audrey Jones at Tec Voc High School. The director was Rubylyn Tagarao for a short while. With the addition of adding Grades 11 and 12 to the school, the school is now known as PRAIRIE CENTRAL ADVENTIST ACADEMY where Sheryl Sokolies is using the three octave set.

SCHOOL GROUPS IN RURAL MANITOBA

CARMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Cindee Broeska was director of the Carman Elementary School Handbell Ringers*. Later Melissa Cole was the director. The current music teacher at the school is Paul Cwir, however the Malmark bells are currently in storage. There is also a set of Suzuki Hand Chimes. (* Morna-June Morrow adjudicated Carman School Handbells at the Tempo Festival in April 1999)

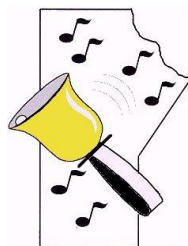
LAC DU BONNET SCHOOL: Morna-June Morrow adjudicated a group in Lac du Bonnet at the Agassiz Music Festival in May 1987. Unknown status now.

ST. PAUL'S COLLEGIATE: Patsy Andrews-Vert had a handbell group in Elie, Manitoba, using a borrowed set of Schulmerich Handbells from Area VII of the Handbell Musicians of America.

BRASS ANGELS: A children's group was directed by Karen Kuhl in Winkler, Manitoba.

STARBUCK: Morna-June Morrow adjudicated a Starbuck School Handbell group at the Meridian Music Festival in April 1999. They were using the Handbells from Trinity Lutheran Church in Starbuck.

PROVIDENCE SCHOOL: In Otterburne's Providence School the King's Ringers were directed by Judith Friesen. Unknown status now.



COMMUNITY GROUPS IN WINNIPEG

UNIVERSITY WOMEN'S CLUB HANDBELL CHOIR: A three octave set of Schulmerich Handbells originally owned by Marilyn Mensforth was sold to the University Women's Club in 1983. Directors of this group were Marilyn Mensforth (1983-1994), Rosemary Malaher (1994-1995), Louise Enns (1995-1998) and Morna-June Morrow (1999-2007). When the University Women's Club Handbell Choir decided to become an independent group in the fall of 2007, and because their motto had been "A'Pealing Bells for Your Pleasure", the group chose the name "A'PEALING BELLS" as its new name. (A CKY-TV documentary called *Manitoba Moments* featured the University Women's Club Handbell Choir and the Westworth United Church Chapel Bells, both groups directed by Morna-June Morrow. This documentary came as a result of M-J's 4th octave handbells and five octaves of MelodyChimes being stolen from her van in November, 2004.)

A'PEALING BELLS: This group formed in 2007 involved mostly ringers from the University Women's Club Handbell Choir as well as a few new members. They were directed by Morna-June Morrow using her own personal set of 4 octaves Schulmerich Handbells. By January 2010, A'Pealing Bells decided not to continue to allow director Morna-June Morrow to recover from major surgery. With an 8 month delay in recovery, the group was finally disbanded in September 2010.

TEC VOC ALUMNI RINGERS: When Audrey Jones retired from teaching her entire career at Tec Voc High School in Winnipeg, she purchased the four octave set of Schulmerich Handbells used by Manitoba's two handbell pioneers, Fred Merrett and herself. She formed a group, some of which were alumni members of Tec Voc while others were not. They performed extensively for several years.

McCLURE PLACE RINGERS: With the oldest set of Schulmerich Handbells in Manitoba Audrey continued with the Tec Voc Alumni Ringers and started two groups at McClure Place in 1985, one of which were residents of the building and the other members of McClure United Church. She continued these groups until 2007.

SMITH STREET CENTRE SENIOR BELL RINGERS: Upon receiving an Age and Opportunity Grant, this group was directed initially by Audrey Jones and later by Carolyn Buckley. Eventually the three octave set of Schulmerich Handbells was sold to the Good Neighbours Centre with Carolyn Buckley as the director.

FORT GARRY CARILLONS: Having used Schulmerich Handbells at Oakenwald School since 1969, several ringers asked if they could continue ringing bells when they entered Junior High in the fall of 1971. That is when the FORT GARRY CARILLONS under the direction of Morna-June Morrow was formed. Thus began an amazing run by this dedicated group of young teenage handbell ringers for two years.

FORT GARRY HARMONY BELLS: At the request of former Oakenwald School Handbell Ringers, the Fort Garry Carillons was formed with students now in Junior High in September 1971. Interest was generated from their many performances and finally an adult group called the Fort Garry Harmony Bells was formed in the fall of 1974. Five years later some of the group of ringers were very experienced, however there were several new members with little or no music reading ability and eventually the group was disbanded in the fall of 1979.

GOOD NEIGHBOURS HANDBELL RINGERS: Carolyn Buckley was director for a few years, then Rhonda McRorie became director. They were called Good Neighbours Golden Belles, however, when Rhonda's husband joined the group, they were now called GOLDEN BELLES PLUS. When Rhonda became ill, she asked Morna-June Morrow to take over for her temporarily. With Rhonda's passing in November 2019, Klaus Froese became the director. During the global pandemic, the group started but eventually had to close down but hopes to resume when possible.

MANITOBA GUILD CHRISTMAS HANDBELL CHOIR: The Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers Provincial Executive thought it might be a good idea to bring the art of handbell ringing to the general public by forming a Christmas Guild Choir that would perform a "marathon" of several performances all in one day. The Guild Choir was open to any bell director or ringer who could devote five consecutive Sunday afternoon rehearsals of two hours in length, plus the marathon day. Rehearsals were held in the Parlour of Westworth United Church for the first four years (1999-2003) Once established, it was decided in addition to black pants and shoes, we should order long-sleeved turtleneck T-shirts with the MBGEHR logo embroidered on them. This became the Christmas Guild Choir uniform. The program began in the morning with back-to-back performances at a shopping centre followed by an actual noon hour concert at the Winnipeg Art Gallery and concluded later in the afternoon with back-to-back performances at another shopping centre for a total of five performances each marathon day. In 2004, the Christmas Guild Choir rehearsed at Broadway-First Baptist Church until mid-November when **DISASTER STRUCK** with thieves stealing director Morna-June Morrow's fourth octave bells and all five octaves of Schulmerich MelodyChimes from her van. Fortunately, she was able to borrow the 4th octave handbells from Dalhousie School, so the marathon was able to continue. And with a telephone tip, all the stolen instruments were discovered three days later in Brookside Cemetery. With all the news media coverage concerning the theft and recovery, the largest group of listeners including many people who drove in from out of town, had both shopping centres full of people who stopped and actually listened to the entire program before continuing their Christmas shopping. Mission to inform the public about handbell ringing was accomplished! The Guild Choir ceased to exist after 2004.

ALL CHIM'IN QUARTET: Morna-June Morrow was very excited when she saw that a Handbell Trio had entered the 2009 Winnipeg Music Festival but when she saw the names listed, she thought it was a joke as the three names were personnel of the Winnipeg Music Festival and the Associated Manitoba Arts Festivals. However, they were serious and never having picked up a handbell wanted to learn another way of making music. M-J convinced them to turn the group into a quartet and she would teach them as a playing member. With their performance in the 2009 Winnipeg Music Festival, they received the Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers Trophy as the most outstanding performance by a handbell group! The group stayed together for two years before disbanding.

RING OUT! QUARTET: This quartet began in 2014 with Lori Bodner, Laura Buchan, Jewel Casselman, Susan Stevenson and later Morna-June Morrow and performed at the 2015 Spring Ring. From 2015-2019 the group consisted of Patsy Andrews-Vert, Jewel Casselman, Morna-June Morrow and Susan Stevenson and continued until the global pandemic hit. They reconvened in the fall of 2021 and played four Christmas Concerts. They are now rehearsing for the 2022 spring concert season.

ROCHESTER RINGERS: Because Winnipeg was hosting the Handbell Guilds of Canada National Ringing Link Conference in July 2014, Morna-June approached Stuart Sladden to direct a new group to perform during the banquet on July 4, 2014. Sadly, the group was disbanded right after that performance as Stuart was leaving to pursue further studies in Edmonton. Upon his return from Edmonton having achieved his Doctorate of Musical Arts, the Rochester Ringers reconvened and gave a 2019 Christmas Concert based on Charles Dicken's *A Christmas Carol*. Because of the global pandemic, this group stopped in February 2020 and as yet has not reconvened.

COMMUNITY GROUPS IN RURAL MANITOBA

SOUTHERN BELLS: An Adult group was directed by Karen Kuhl in Winkler, Manitoba using a 3 octave set of Schulmerich Handbells that she had purchased in 1993.

HAPPY HAVEN SENIORS: A senior's group in Brandon who received a Health and Welfare Government Grant for a set of Malmark Handbells. Tom and Mary Ferris were in charge. Now Happy Haven Handbell Ringers are conducted by Eileen McLachlan.

HANDBELL RINGERS OF GIMLI: A three octave set of Schulmerich Handbells originally owned by Marilyn Mensforth was sold to the University Women's Handbell Choir. When the UWC Handbell Choir decided to become an independent group the UWC asked Morna-June Morrow to sell the bells. She sold this set to Gimli Lutheran Church where a group was started by Ron Vert and later directed by Val Maier under the auspices of the Gimli Handbell Ringers Association. Unknown status since Val Maier's passing in 2021.

SENIOR'S GROUP IN CARMAN: Deanne Mutcher used a set of Hand Chimes with the Carman Seniors Group.

STONEWALL SINGING CARILLONS: Olga Friesen conducted her singing and handbell choirs while teaching in Stonewall. Upon her passing, her three octave set of Schulmerich Handbells was serviced by Morna-June Morrow and sold on behalf of the family to Agnes Dyck. Later this set was sold to Sheryl Sokolies where they are now being used by the Henderson Highway Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

STEINBACH MENNONITE HANDBELLES: The Treble Teens Choir from Steinbach, under the direction of Shirley Penner (1963-1980), sang many concerts in Canada and a few foreign destinations. A 3-octave set of Schulmerich Handbells was purchased and the first rehearsal took place in January 1970 with director Johanna Dyck followed by Diane Bairstow. One of the original ringers was Karen Siemens (later Peters) who bought the bells in 1984. She formed a children's group called Randolph Ringers which came to an abrupt end when one octave was stolen. The case surfaced in 2001 with Karen organizing ten ladies who selected the name Steinbach Mennonite Handbells. In 2019, Karen added the 4th and 5th Octave Schulmerich MelodyChimes to expand their options.

