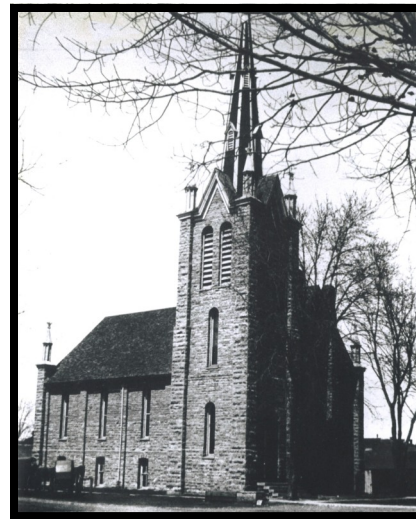


BELLS, BELLS, BELLS

The “Chime of Ten Bells”
Then and Now
1907 to 2007



Inaugural Programs for the Chime of Ten Bells

Saturday 7:00 PM—A reception in honor of John Shreffler and in memory of James Beggs followed.

<i>Doxology</i>	<i>O, Worship the King</i>
<i>Holy, Holy, Holy</i>	<i>Bluebells of Scotland</i>
<i>Shells of Ocean</i>	<i>Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep</i>
<i>Italian Hymn</i>	<i>Juanita</i>
<i>Home, Sweet Home</i>	

Sunday Morning Service—Large bell rang for 5 minutes, followed by program. Chiming began 1/2 hour before the service.

<i>Coronation</i>	<i>Nearer My God to Thee</i>
<i>Lead, Kindly Light</i>	<i>Let Every Mortal Ear Attend</i>
<i>Adeste Fideles</i>	<i>Jesus, Lover of My Soul</i>
<i>Onward, Christian Soldiers</i>	

Sunday Evening Service—Large bell rang for 5 minutes, followed by program. Chiming began 1/2 hour before service.

<i>Old Hundred</i>	<i>Savior, Breathe an Evening Blessing</i>
<i>Sweet Hour of Prayer</i>	<i>Abide with Me</i>
<i>Hark, Hark, My Soul</i>	<i>One Sweetly Solemn Thought</i>
<i>Oh, Praise Ye the Lord</i>	<i>Jerusalem the Golden</i>

Monday Evening 7:00—W.H. Head, an impersonator from Chicago was assisted by a large chorus and chimes for a popular concert. Admission was 25 cents or 15 cents for school children.

<i>Westminster Chime Quarters</i>	<i>The Wedding March</i>
<i>Lead Kindly Light</i>	<i>Home, Sweet Home</i>
<i>Thine Eyes so Blue and Tender</i>	<i>Flow Gently, Sweet Afton</i>
<i>Coronation</i>	<i>When Harvest Days are Over</i>
<i>Robin Adair</i>	<i>Intermezzo</i>
<i>The Chimes of Trinity</i>	<i>My Old Kentucky Home</i>

Tuesday 7:00—After this final, popular concert a banquet was served at the opera house.

<i>Cradle Song</i>	<i>March of the Men of Harlech</i>
<i>St. Patrick's Day</i>	<i>Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond</i>
<i>The Mareillaise</i>	<i>Wearin of the Green</i>
<i>Just Before the Battle, Mother</i>	<i>Bonnie Deon</i>
<i>Die Wacht am Rhein</i>	<i>Auld Lang Syne</i>
	<i>America</i>

In 1992, seeking to keep the bells ringing, a special songbook was compiled for those who could not read music. This made it easier for youth of the church to play the bells. Kelly Markwell, a regular bell player, contributed greatly to this effort and also did most of the scheduling for youth to play the bells.



The bells rang through 2005 when they were disabled during renovation of the church. In that renovation, the bell tower entrance to the church was restored to its original format, but the bells remained silent. Now the renovations are over, and a new project has been underway to bring the chimes back to playing order with a new playing mechanism, as well as to expand the bells from the original ten, to eighteen. A 1907 newspaper article headline proclaimed, "Chimes To Ring In Plainfield." As of December 9, 2007, they ring again!

*Researched and written by Marge Greger for the
Bell Dedication Service—11:00, Sunday, December 9, 2007*

Roy Sebby also had an interesting experience when he was working on the bells in the early 1940's. When he reached over to pull on the large, wheel mounted bell he grasped the rope and was pulled right over the top of the railing. That bell has a lot of force when it is swinging! Fortunately he was not hurt. He always claimed that others had experienced this embarrassing and frightening encounter, although to our knowledge he never named names.



From 1950 through 2000 plus, tours were given for visitors wanting to see our historic church and ending with a visit to the bell tower. It was quite a thrill to see someone play the bells. The Sunday School and Confirmation classes found this very exciting because they would be allowed to play a few strokes themselves. The bells continued to be played regularly by both youth and adults.

One congregation member surely deserves special notice. Worthy Brockway started working with the bells as a young boy and continued throughout his life. The working conditions in the bell tower were not the best and so in 1971 he built an electronic control panel so the organist could play the bells from the organ loft with the flip of a switch. Unfortunately this proved to be innovative but not very successful.

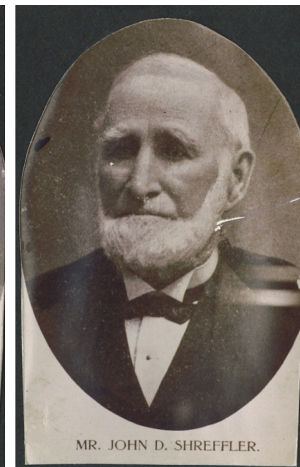
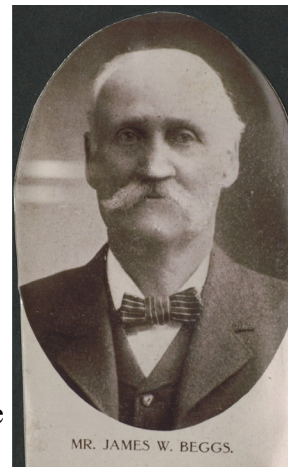


The Story and Facts of the “Chime of Ten Bells” Then and Now—1907 to 2007

This is a time to celebrate as we expand the original “Chime of Ten Bells” inaugurated in 1907, to eighteen bells in 2007. What a joy it is to hear the sound of bells ringing again after several years of silence. With a prolific hymn writer, like Charles Wesley as one of our founding fathers, it is accurate to say that Methodist and music go together! Now the expanded selections of music playable on the new bells will open our ears to the words of God and remind us to follow the teachings of Jesus in our daily lives. As we celebrate now, let us review the past delightful sounds and history of our bells.

The Plainfield United Methodist Church was formed as the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866. The story of the bells however begins in 1904 when James W. Beggs decided that he so enjoyed the sound of bells that they needed to be a part of our church. He designated a gift of \$2,000 from his Will for the church to purchase a set of chimes provided that a matching sum could be provided by another church member. John D. Shreffler, lovingly known as “Uncle John” promised the rest so the dream could come true. These two gentlemen committed a substantial amount of money considering that this was the early 1900s!

A committee was appointed to investigate the purchase and installation of the chimes. A contract was drawn up with the Old Meneely Bell Foundry of Watervliet, NY, “Manufacturer of Superior Church and School Bells.” Interestingly, the company was originally owned by the family of Abraham Lincoln’s mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln.

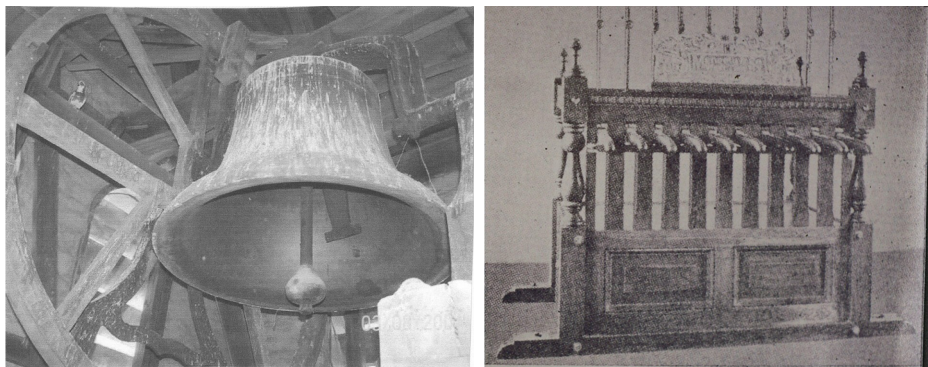


The 1907 contract calls for a chime of 10 bells, tuned to F, G, A, Bb, C, D, Eb, E, F, and G and weighing with frame, mountings, and complete appliance as specified about 10,000 pounds. The total weight of the bells alone is over 7,500 pounds.

The contract continues indicating that the bells would be “*thoroughly tone – tempered and correctly attuned to their imported standards, and composed exclusively of 77 parts Best, ALL NEW Ingot Copper to 23 parts Best Imported Block Tin, a signed WARRANT to be given with Bill of Sale, covering the aforesaid composition and guaranteeing the Bells to be free from original defects and against fracture by regular usage for FIFTEEN (15) Years from date of shipment.* We still have the original ten bells, however, if one had cracked during the initial warranty period the contract indicates that “*we will give new, correctly tuned ones in even exchange for the cracked ones.*”

The bells were situated in the bell tower, three flights of stairs above the sanctuary. They hang in a Chime Frame “*made of hard yellow pine, specifically designed to fit YOUR Tower, The Largest, Tenor, Bell we mount with the usual swinging mountings, i.e. so it can be swung when disconnected at the Chiming Stand, the same as any regular Church Bell.*”

The Chime Stand for the “*resident chimer*” was located just one flight of stairs beyond the sanctuary level. The original Chiming Stand is pictured below, composed of ten levers corresponding to the bells. The contract reads, “*The Chiming Stand is our New Improved pattern, made of Quartered Oak, finished in Light Antique with aluminum Music Holder.... There is nothing to stretch, shrink or easily get out of order and the small sum of \$10 per year will keep the whole Chime in good order forever.*” That is quite a promise in a contract!



The stand and frame held up through many years even though the chimes were played often. Playing was accomplished by a quick stroke, not just a push, to make the notes ring out clearly and promptly without jarring the tower.

In the last paragraph of the contract it is indicated that a memorial inscription would be placed on the bells and the company would provide a reasonable number of programs for the dedication services. Thus, the tenor bell is marked with the following inscription, “This Chime of Ten Bells presented by James W. Beggs and John D. Shreffler to the M.E. Church, Plainfield, Illinois A.D. 1907.” In a hand written addition to the contract it is also noted that the chimes would be, “*delivered in May 1907, if at all possible.*”

It was an exciting time when the bells were installed in 1907. There was a fantastic three-day celebration made by the Meneeley Company as they had promised. Expert carillonners were here from the Foundry demonstrating the bells. They provided a “Book of Tunes” and proper instructions to some of our own musicians to play the bells regularly. The inauguration of the bells began on Saturday night and continued through Tuesday night. People were so interested and excited, that they drove their horse and buggies from miles around to hear the numerous programs.

The original three day program was printed up as a brochure which has been on display at the church in 2007. The content of the inaugural programs can be seen on the inside front cover of this historical booklet. Attendance is said to have been huge for all of these programs. A former pastor, Rev. N.H. Axtell preached both Sunday services as guest minister.

Once the bells were installed, they could be played every Sunday. Many people enjoyed playing the bells through the years, taking their turn on Sundays, as well as playing for special events. The first to ring the chimes were a daughter of the pastor Rev. Bertram Dickens, Reinette Dickens (married name Mather), and John Morgan. Olive Gates (married name Lauer), was one the regular carillonners of the 1920’s, sometimes playing several times on a Sunday. She would play frequently requested hymns, but also added in popular tunes like, “Let Me Call You Sweetheart” or, “Whispering” from time to time. She even rang the chimes on New Year’s Eve at midnight by the light of a lantern. Many were eager to be a part of the music, including many of the pastor’s children. Jimmy Ward, the youngest son of Rev. Elias W. Ward (1935-1938) found the bells to be a part of his regular duties along with other youths at the time.

In 1938 the steeple was struck by lightning. The bells were not damaged but the steeple required repair, and ropes and pulleys were used to add a lightning rod to the top of the tower. The workmen were unable to finish the work in the narrow space of the steeple so they called a bystander, a young boy named Ralph Sebby, saying, “Boy, we could use your help crawling into this narrow space across the braces.” Ralph laughed when he recalls the incident, not thinking at the time that is was a big deal to put bolts and washers into places the workman were unable to reach. Equipment in those days was not always available to do the job at hand.