SMITH COLLEGE CARILLONS

As defined by the Guild of Carillonneurs in North America, a carillon is "a musical instrument consisting of at least two octaves of carillon bells arranged in chromatic series and played from a keyboard permitting control of expression through variation of touch." The earliest carillons appeared in the Low Countries toward the end of the fifteenth century and were developed from sets of bells that had been installed in clock towers to signal the time. Gradually carillon music became a familiar part of town life, particularly on market days. Familiar folk tunes and dances were the principal music played. As the ability of the bell founders to make harmonious bells increased and the inventiveness of the carillonneurs in the use of their instrument advanced, more elaborate arrangements of music were made and music expressly composed for the carillon began to appear. At the present time there are about 400 carillons in Europe, and 180 in North America.

HISTORY OF THE DOROTHEA CARLILE CARILLON

In the spring of 1919, Mr. and Mrs. W. Wilson Carlile (Florence Jeffrey '93), of Columbus, Ohio, presented to the college a chime of twelve bells as a memorial to their daughter, Dorothea Carlile '22, who had died early in her freshman year, a victim of the great influenza epidemic of 1918. To preserve the memory of a particularly joyous and buoyant personality, the Carliles had chosen the music of bells and had commissioned the twelve-note chime from a leading American bellfounder of that day, the Meneely Bell Company, of Troy, New York.

Through the years, the bells were played by successive generations of student chimers and came to be a regular part of the life of the college. A newspaper report of 1929 remarked that "a Sunday at Smith is a day of quiet. No victrolas or radios may be played, and so the chimes constitute the musical program for the day." The programs consisted largely of folk songs, hymn tunes, and old favorites, played as simple melodies without harmonization.

Between 1952 and 1957, through the further generosity of the Carlile family, the Dorothea Carlile Chime became the Dorothea Carlile Carillon.

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Under the supervision of Professor Arthur L. Bigelow, bellmaster of Princeton University, the three smallest bells were replaced with new ones of superior quality, and eleven additional bells were added, bringing the range of the instrument to two octaves and thus constituting it a carillon. The new bells were cast by the firm of Paccard, of Annecy-le-Vieux in France, well known for the fine quality and tuning of its bells.

The final stage in the development of the carillon was reached in 1975, when the remaining nine bells of 1919 were replaced and twenty-four more bells were added, resulting in a four-octave instrument of forty-seven bells, all from the Paccard foundry. The 1975 extension and renovation were made possible by the Very Reverend and Mrs. Charles U. Harris

It is of interest to note that Smith College is one of only three institutions in North America that have both a carillon and a peal of change ringing bells. The others are the University of Chicago and the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CARILLON

The Dorothea Carlile Carillon consists of forty-seven tuned bells. The bourdon, or largest bell, is a D# weighing about 2,800 pounds. The smallest bell is a D# four octaves higher, weighing about 24 pounds. The carillon is played from a baton clavier, which consists of a set of wooden keys, or batons. These are somewhat smaller than broomstick handles and arranged like the keys of a piano in two rows. They are played with the clenched hand. In addition, the two lowest octaves of bells are also connected to pedals so they may be played with the feet. To allow the carillonneur to practice in private, there is a duplicate keyboard that is attached to a set of small metal tone bars rather than to the bells in the tower.