

# Alumni Horae



St. Paul's School  
AUTUMN 1981

George Tracy, as always, found the right Shakespearean passage to suit the occasion. We were sitting at Sunday brunch in the middle dining room looking out the window at a perfect late spring day: clear and warm and breezy, an ideal day for a graduation or a wedding or *As You Like It*. Indeed, that very production was to be performed in the early evening on the Chapel lawn, using as a backdrop, the Lower School Pond with its eccentric coves and wooded periphery. George and I talked about his role of the Old Duke and the appropriateness of the sylvan setting for the play, until something set off ringing in my ears. Perfect weather; prepared cast; but had anyone thought to turn off the Chapel bells, or would Westminster Quarters sound through the play, disrupting the atmosphere and forcing time into the timeless Forest of Arden? I asked George if someone had arranged to silence the bells. With a ducal smile, he demanded they should ring on, distraction or not, for with luck they would cue his lines:

*True it is that we have seen better days  
And have with holy bell been knolled to church  
And sat at good men's feasts. . . .*

On many of the great and small occasions of the School the twenty-three bells in the Chapel tower complete the perfect stage for our activities. As they might have provided the finishing touch for our Shakespeareans, so at this time of the year they announce the holiday atmosphere to everyone in Millville. During the last days of the term the carillon rings out Christmas music before the Lessons and Carol Service, the Pageant, and most touchingly at the conclusion of the Last Night Service as students and faculty recess from the Chapel making their last Christmas wishes. The bidding of Christmas greetings and good-byes, accompanied by favorite carols from the carillon, creates a picturesque School scene: snow, pines, Gothic chapel, scurrying scarves and boots, all wrapped by the sound of bells.

#### A Gift of Bells

The bells were Dr. Drury's suggestion and they bear his stamp. He seemed to have a sense for things which were not always ultimately necessary for a School environment, but perhaps were more

# RING, BELLS, RING

Brian Regan



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essential and more subtly instructive than the purely curricular.

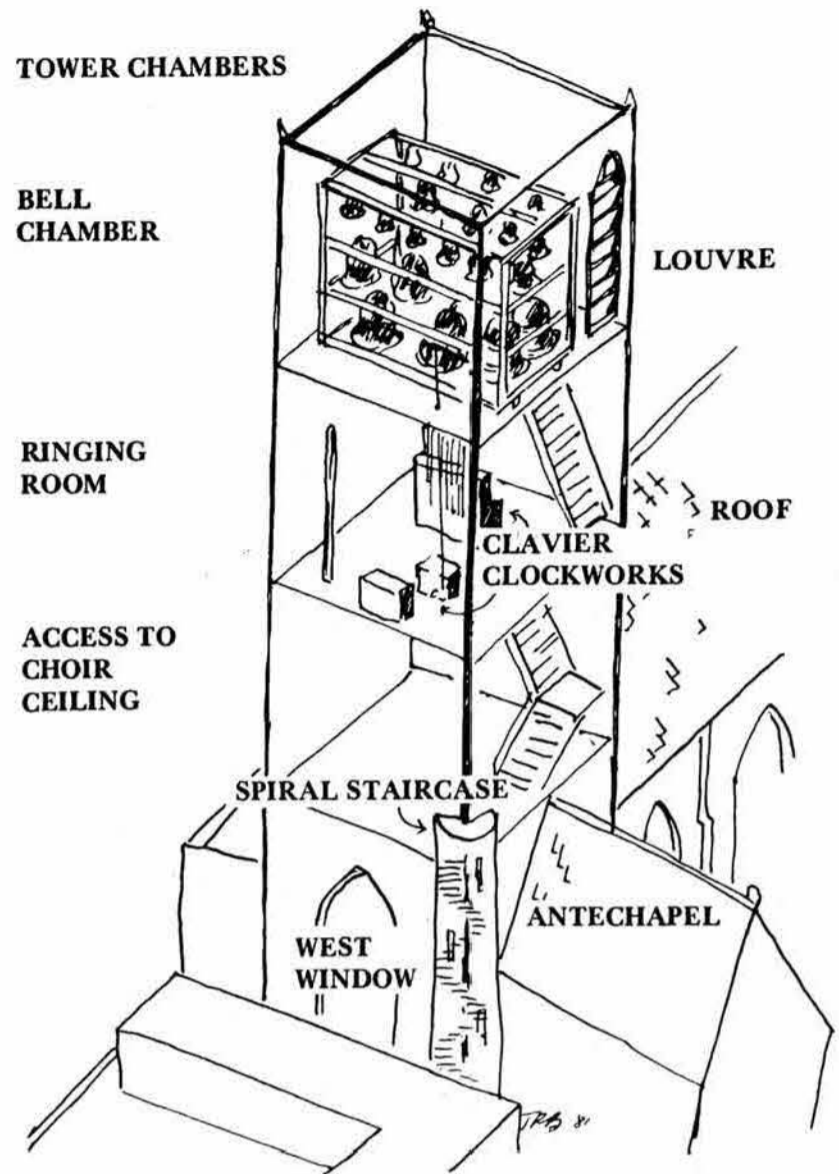
The Chapel of St. Peter and St. Paul witnessed considerable embellishment during the Drury rectorship. His deep love for the Chapel edifice and his passion for ecclesiology produced many fine additions to the building: the Chantry, choir room, Knox Memorial Organ, two additional bays in the choir area, and the Houghton Memorial Carillon in the great tower.

In late 1932, the Houghton family offered the School a gift of at least fifteen bells as a memorial to Arthur Amory Houghton '85. The family had been searching for a suitable memorial and Drury had gently guided their consideration to a gift for the Chapel and, ultimately, to bells. It was a perfectly chosen memorial to a man devoted to the School, the Chapel, and its music.

The Houghtons and the School Trustees awarded a commission to the English firm of Gillett and Johnston, a concern that specialized in bell founding and clock making, which had installed three years earlier the world's largest carillon at Riverside Church in New York City. A set of twenty-three bells was settled on, the minimum number to qualify as a proper carillon. Technically, a carillon possesses at least twenty-three bells that are playable from a mechanical, peg-like keyboard and pedal board which activate the clappers inside the bells. The bells were also to be attached to a barrel clock mechanism to trigger the ringing of the quarter hours after the fashion of the Big Ben Chimes, also known as "Westminster Quarters." The eight largest bells were to be inscribed with lines from the Last Night Hymn and the School Anthem, Knox's "O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem." The largest bell, called the tenor in campanology and weighing 2,000 pounds, would read:

*Saviour, source of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to grateful lays.*

In memory of  
Arthur Amory Houghton



#### A Medieval Ideal

Structurally the tower was well suited to housing bells. The Chapel architect, Henry Vaughan, was a master of the gothic revival style and provided not only the outward lines of an English church of the 14th century, but had carefully reproduced the sturdy design of those Petrine structures. In neo-medieval meticulousness, he included a sixty-four step circular staircase which gives access to a series of three chambers beginning at ceiling level in the ante-chapel. The staircase is an example of that excessive historical purity which today seems laughable. Vaughan was determined to make even the purely functional aspects of the building comply to the medieval ideal. Dante's circles could be no more claustrophobic than this breathlessly narrow passage, this place of receding light, this climb of endless turns. Finally the staircase spits the climber out dizzy in the first tower chamber, where an open frame wooden staircase leads to the ringing room.

When the Chapel was constructed in the late 1880s and 1890s, Vaughan had the foresight to provide detachable panels in the successive floors of the tower chambers so that, if added, bells could be hoisted up through the interior rather than requiring an awkward block and tackle arrangement on the outside of the tower.

### Clock and Carillon

The bells arrived at the School in June of 1933 accompanied by an English representative from Gillett and Johnston who was to oversee their installation, tuning and was to assemble the delicate clockworks. They were hung in a frame in the highest louvered chamber. The clock's mechanism and carillon clavier were placed in the room below.

Long-time master and School chronicler Willard Scudder recorded in his diary of July 19th, "... all bells in and ready except two clappers. Various hymns and peals tried." The following day: "Bells off and on. Lovely. Ready early next week." Five days later he wrote, "Bells off and on all day. Hear the Englishman will finish this week. Hope clock will go well and we shall have Westminster Quarters."

We can imagine the confusion and irritation in little Millville as the bells and clock were adjusted. Some of the masters and their wives here during July found the incessant ringing and experimentation to be downright annoying, but by the time students returned in September the clock was functioning properly. All too well for some. While Scudder found the bells charming, others thought differently. "Chimes clear and lovely. But many object to constant bells. Chimes seem to begin at 6:30 a.m. and end at 10:00 p.m. Good; but many find 'em too insistent." In the way one adapts to environmental noises such as ticking clocks or summer birds, the faculty and students got used to the frequent and unarguable chiming of the quarter hours. On September 11th, Scudder's last in a series of enthusiastic diary entries about the new curiosity, he echoes the community sentiment: "Find bells agreeable. No interruption."

As the self-appointed curator of St. Paul's traditions, Scudder had given the nod. They were now as much a part of School life as the sound of skates on the pond or Jimmy Knox's hymn tunes.

At a special service on Sunday, October 22nd, the bells were dedicated and blessed by Bishop Dallas and officially presented to the School by Mrs. Arthur Amory Houghton; her son, Arthur Amory Houghton, Jr. '25 and a sister, Mrs. Alan Rinehart. As part of the dedication ceremonies that weekend, Kamiel Lefevers, carillonneur of New York's Riverside Church, came to play several recitals. In blessing the bells, Bishop Dallas used a specially composed prayer:

*Ring, bells to remember Arthur Amory  
Houghton*

*Ring, bells – in the name of the Child –  
Ring, bells – He unlocks the grave – there are  
no dead*

*Ring, bells, He ascends His Throne –  
Ring, holy bells, the bread is broken and the  
wine is red*

*Ring His glory far and out –  
Ring, bells, and bless us all –  
Ring, bells, to guard all boys and homes and  
teachers and those who labor with their  
hands –*

*Ring, bells – to watch the hours  
Ring, bells, and bless the man and maid  
Toll, bells – a good man goes to rest –*

*Ring, bells, ring – in the Name of the Father  
and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.  
Amen.*

Though it is prosaic to say that school life is dominated by the bell, in 1933 the clocking of Westminster Quarters became a fixed part of life at St. Paul's. For a School which demands excellence in all things, the importunate ringing every fifteen minutes would remind all that time passes quickly, opportunities must be taken, moments seized and used well. They send a loud appeal to be diligent and responsible.

### Sound Pedagogy

Through most of the 1930s and 1940s a master, Frank Johnson, was the official School carillonneur and played before Sunday services and on



special occasions. With his departure in 1947, the carillon was without a player. As a result, Channing Lefebvre, who joined the School faculty in 1941 as organist and choirmaster, inherited Johnson's duties. This meant providing music outside as well as inside the Chapel. On Sundays this talented performer, composer, and colorful character had the exhausting task of warming up the choir, climbing the sixty-four stairs, playing several hymns on the carillon, returning down, only to ascend another staircase to the organ loft, then beginning the organ prelude followed finally by the service itself. As Lefebvre remarked, "The hurried climbing of ninety steps and running down

again and up the organ ladder doesn't make good preparation for playing." (Until 1953 the organ console was located in the gallery above the choir which explains the additional climb of the ladder to the gallery.)

With a good instinct for self-preservation and sound pedagogy, Dr. Lefebvre proposed that the School acquire a practice carillon so students could learn the instrument and play the prelude of carillon music each Sunday, leaving him to concentrate on the choir and organ music. The practice clavier is a replica of the keyboard and pedal board in the tower, but instead of connecting to tons of bells, the keys activate a chime board the size of a glockenspiel. Lefebvre's solution to his athletic musicianship assured him peace of mind on Sunday mornings and saved the Millville community from the disquieting experience of listening to novice carillonneurs at practice. The Houghton family also provided funds for the practice instrument.

#### A Voice for Death or Bridal

In the years following its installation the carillon was played on the occasion of alumni weddings. This was another Drury touch, but the practice seems not to have lasted long. American poet Richard Wilbur speaks of such a faded tradition in "Bell Speech:"

*The self-same toothless voice for death or  
bridal:  
It has been long since men would give the time  
To tell each someones change with a special  
chime. . . .  
And mostly now, above this urgent idle  
Town, the bells mark time, as they can do.*

Five years after the bells began marking time at St. Paul's, they tolled for Samuel Drury. Though they tolled for the death of a man, they also rang out in a fashion of which Drury surely would have approved. The organ recessional at his funeral service in the Chapel was Knox's "O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem." As the recessional moved out of the Chapel, the bells picked up the tune which the organ was playing and accompanied the cortege. On February 24, 1938, the *New York Herald Tribune* gave this moving account of Drury's funeral:



*At the practice clavier are Alex Wilmerding '82 and Mark Koumans '82 with Brian Regan of the music department.*

Even as Dr. Drury's body was carried away it was to the music of the School's Anthem which the well-beloved James Carter Knox composed so many years ago, "O Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem," and when, headed by Bishop Dallas in his cassock, the procession started up that rugged New Hampshire hill to the School's old burying ground, the tolling of the Chapel bells changed to this same anthem.

Bishop Dallas' words from the carillon dedication service must have echoed in the Chapel that day:

*Toll, bells—a good man goes to rest —  
Ring, bells—He unlocks the grave—there are no  
dead.*

#### **Carillon Performance Today**

Since the late 1940s carillon playing has attracted a number of students and faculty who share a passion to make acres of sound. Page Owen '81 was the loudest champion of the carillon during his three years at St. Paul's. He began playing late in his fourth form year, and in a very short time was playing intricate two and three part pieces as well as favorite hymns. We arranged a schedule so that a short recital of carillon music was held several evenings a week before dinner. Owen's enthusiasm prompted James Wood, head of the music department, to bring a carillon expert to attend to some overdue maintenance and tuning.

Page Owen's interest has been matched this year by sixth formers Mark Koumans and Alex Wilmerding. Their capacity for endless hours in the practice studio of the Music Building has produced fine results. (A faculty wag soon labeled the practice carillon the "Wilmer Ding Dong machine," much to Alex's good natured annoyance.) Last year Koumans and Wilmerding were the victims of New Hampshire's winter cruelty. They had pre-

pared months in advance to play carols before the Christmas Services. On the evening of the Christmas Pageant, when the carillon program was scheduled to begin, they discovered that the keys had frozen stuck. Frantic persistence loosened the keys and the concert went on. This is no toil for the faint of heart.

Early last December Ben Hall, a third former and son of faculty member Alan Hall, asked me to teach him some simple carols so there would be carillon music on Christmas Eve. Ben has known, in term and out, the sound of the Chapel bells. That they should be unheard on Christmas Eve was to this boy of boundless energy, unthinkable.

#### Filling the Dark and Silent Spaces

Dominating the lawn of the central mall, the Chapel tower is the essential image of St. Paul's School, a hulking mass of brick and stone, brooding on some days and jubilant on others yet always imposing. We build these high places with stones and in them hang instruments of bronze and iron. Strength in strength. Hidden in our tower, guarded by saintly gargoyles and castled parapets, hang the bells, God-like, made to speak by time itself, and expressing in unearthly resonance the range of human experience. With energy and artistry, carillonneurs make them more than tellers of mortality. They become the voices of a music washing over people and place, enveloping ponds and woods and buildings and the young and the old.

In the Rector's letter for the December 1933 issue of the *Alumni Horae*, Dr. Drury wrote,

*On Christmas Eve our chimes will ring out some merry tunes, over these silent buildings where all of you have had your youthful being. Always on Christmas Eve, wandering about the dark and silent spaces, I think with wistful interest of old boys. Won't you, however far away, stop a moment that night to see the place in fancy, and hear its Christmas Chimes.*

*Faithfully your friend,  
S. S. Drury*

This Christmas Eve, Great Arthur will chime the hours as he did nearly fifty years ago, and some carols will sound: predictable and tuneful; clock and carillon; life and art. High above the School, filling the dark and silent spaces with merry tunes, will be faithful Ben Hall.

