

The Old Town Bell

THE FIRST BELL stood in the Anglican church, then located at the corner of King Street and Church Lane. When the church was rebuilt at its current location, the bell was moved to the Courthouse and Jail, which stood at the site of the present Town Hall. This building burned in 1874, taking the bell with it. The bell of the new firehall lasted only a short time and was replaced with the bell which, retired from its labours, now stands at Town Hall. ~

Standard

Dec. 23, 1874

The new engine house with tower is finished, and the bell recently imported has been rung for the past few days at the usual hours. In common with many others, we believe the bell to be too small. Some persons living in the town have not even heard it, and those who have think the sound a dull one. Certainly, it is neither loud nor musical, nor has it the sharp and clear sound of the one formerly used.

Beacon

Feb. 4, 1892

Ex-bell ringer Keezer lingered long and lovingly over the bell-rope on Saturday night - on the last day of the Keezer regime. The new bellman made his debut very quietly on Monday morning.

The Old Town Bell

Its Companion, the Clock, has Long Since Ceased from its Labours

The *Beacon* and one of “the oldest inhabitants” were chatting over the recent change in the town bell ringer.

“It is a good many years,” quoth the latter, “since I first heard the tuneful notes of the town bell of Saint Andrews. It did not stand where it now is, for in those days the Episcopal bell sounded the hours. The hours were different, too. In summer, the first tinkle of the bell was heard at 8 o’clock in the morning. Everybody who had

work to do was at it long before this. At that time there was no ten-hour or any other system, except to go to work at daylight and knock off when it was dark. Yes! and there was work to do in those days, for when the bell rang at 1 o'clock for dinner it was no uncommon sight to see one hundred men coming up from Rait's wharf and scores from the other wharves. After the bell had sounded for dinner, it did not give tongue again until 9 o'clock in the evening. In winter, the bell rang at 8 o'clock, instead of 9.

"The Episcopal church then stood in the Church Block, where Mr. Algar now lives. It was some time before the removal of the church from that site that the town bell was removed to the Courthouse, which then stood where the present town hall stands.

"The change in the hours of bellringing came about the time the railway was commenced.

"The first town bellringer that I remember was Michael Cronin. Mike was a native of Ireland but came here from Newfoundland. Following him, if I remember correctly, was a man named Douglas, who belonged up the St. John River. George Cole pulled the rope for a while, and then Alex. Donald rung out the hours. The latter's place was taken by David Keezer, who now gives away to Alex. Campbell. Campbell is an old soldier and a pensioner. He has been a resident of St. Andrews for many years.

"The present bell is the third, I think that has been the property of the town. The first was melted when the old courthouse was burned. [1874] The second succumbed one New Year's morning, a good many years ago, as some lively spirits were ringing the old year out and the New Year in. It was replaced by the present bell."

St. Croix Courier

Sept. 21, 1939

"Shiretown Items"

The Old Town Bell

What a kitchen is without a clock, St. Andrews is without the old town bell. Citizens have become so accustomed to its regular ringing that the day passes very unsatisfactorily without it. It is not that one any longer depends upon it for calls to labour or refreshment, but just because it is an old custom one certainly does miss it. The

wooden wheel to which the bell-rope was attached had rotted out after many years of service and broke down one day last week. A new wheel is being made by Nelson Pye, who also made the one which is being replaced. The present bell is the second one of the town, and was made by the McShane Bell Foundry of Baltimore, Md. It was bought by Mr. Foster for \$144.50 and was hung on the 17th of December, 1879. It weighs 426 lbs. The bellringers from that time on were Michael Cloney, King Coole, Sandy Donald, David Keezer, William Campbell, Daniel Byrne, John S. Magee, Fred Craig, and Herbert Greenlaw, the present ringer who has rung the old bell for twenty-nine years. The minutes of the Town Council show that for two or three weeks during the summer of 1904 the ringing of the town bell was discontinued owing to the serious illness of a guest at Kennedy's Hotel. The bell of the Anglican Church rang out the customary calls and was to serve as a fire-alarm as well, but fortunately was not needed in that capacity. In the old days the bell was rung at 6 o'clock to end the days' work, instead of at 5 o'clock as now. One of the ringers of those old but not forgotten days caused quite a commotion one bleak November night. He rang the bell as usual at six o'clock after which he went home to lie down for a nap. He awoke at 5 to 7, and because of the darkness thought he had slept the night through. He rushed down and rang the bell again for 7 o'clock, but before he got away from the premises had the whole fire department there inquiring where the fire was!

St. Croix Courier

March 12, 1942

"Shiretown Items"

The old armoury [courthouse and jail, later Market House, p. 157] destroyed by fire, had a wonderful bell. It could be heard in St. Stephen when the wind was blowing upriver. After the fire the bell was melted down everybody in town had a ring made from it, cast by Mike McMonagle at his foundry. I wonder if anybody in town has one of those old rings!

St. Croix Courier

April 9, 1942

"Shiretown Items"

Who Knows?

Reference was made in an item recently about the burning of the old armoury here and the making of rings from the armoury bell which was melted down for that purpose. I have located two or those rings and have seen one of them - formerly the property of the late Thomas Stinson. It is a signet ring with a heart shaped signet. The other ring was worn by the late Sarah Heenan and is now I am told in the possession of Mrs. Marshall. I have as yet been unable to find out where the armoury was situated or in what year it burned.

St. Croix Courier

May 14, 1942

"Shiretown Items"

The Old Town Bell

I have not only found out where the old armoury was situated but have a picture of it, belltower and all. Am going to get a copy of the picture made to send in for the *Courier*. [See p. 157] The present bell has been ringing out its calls from refreshment to labour and from labour to refreshment again since the year 1876. The ringing of the bell is one of the institutions of this quaint old town. It is doubtful if a similar custom prevails anywhere else in Canada. About 85 years ago an up-to-date Alderman proposed putting in a clock and dispensing with the bell except for fire alarms. But others on the Board with more sentiment for St. Andrews soon disposed of his well-meant but, to some, almost criminal proposal.

Following is my personal tribute to my lifelong friend, Herbert Greenlaw, the present bell-ringer:

The Bell Ringer

Have you ever thought
As you lie in your bed,
So snugly ticked in
From your toes to your head,
Of the man who turns out

Without any talk
To ring the town bell
At seven o'clock!

In all kinds of weather
Each day he must go,
In the sunshine of summer
Or winter's cold snow,
To send us a message
That all is still well,
When we hear him ringing
The old town bell.

Week in and week out
At morn, noon and night,
His message of cheer
Keeps our little world bright.
So here's to the bellringer,
Health and good cheer!
May he still ring the bell
For many a year!

St. Croix Courier
January 27, 1944
"Shiretown Items"

Lady Bell Ringer

For the first time in the history of the town we have an official lady bellringer. But whether it is Elizabeth Mallory or Wilma Halliday is difficult to determine. Do they do it separately, jointly or severally? It seems a pretty heavy job for one slight female. The only other instance of one of the fair sex ringing the old town bell that I can recall is when Edna Clinch rang it for Oby Conley's fire. Remember that Edna? Here are the present circumstances. The bellringer Herb Greenlaw is taken sick. He notifies Frank Mallory, Town Clerk, to engage a substitute as the old bell must ring out its message four times a day as usual. Norman Johnson, the Town Marshal, undertakes to do the ringing at 7 am and 1 pm if Mr. Mallory will look after 12

Engine House
with bell
tower. Built
1874. Detail
from Frances
Wren's pictorial
history of St.
Andrews



and 5 o'clock until a regular substitute can be engaged. Mr. Mallory, who is also County Secretary, gets tied up at the Council meetings so his office girls, feeling that the show must go on, try their hand at the bell rope! It all goes to show how much the old town bell means to us all and how ready the folks living in a small community are to step into the breach in times of trouble and carry on.

St. Croix Courier

August 9, 1945

"Shiretown Items"

The Town Bell

For the past few weeks the town bell has been ringing at 8 o'clock in the morning instead of at 7 as formerly. The idea has met with approval of all residents, and it seems strange that no one ever thought of it before. It is several years now since anyone has been going to work at 7 o'clock, except during the shipyard days, and that early bell has been a grievance of guests at Kennedy's Hotel for a long time. In the old days, when the workmen laboured 10 hours a day, the bell rang at 7, 12, 1 and 6. When the 9-hour day was introduced the afternoon bell was rung at 5. The eight-hour day has been in force for some years, but the bell kept ringing as usual at 7 am, acting as a sort of alarm clock. Most of us like it for that reason but nevertheless agree that the 8 o'clock ringing is more sensible as it no longer deprives our summer guests of that last delightful and restful hour's sleep.