

## *Museum Musings: Bells In The Museum*

For three years in a row in the early 1980s, the Historical Society had a day during which individuals would be invited to ring one of the bells on display in the Historical Museum. Who instituted this practice, and why it was done, is unknown to me. I do wonder, however, if Arnold Agnew might have played a role in this tradition.

Arnold Agnew was born in the family home in Prince Albert to Thomas James and Ida Mary Agnew. The house, which is the oldest in the city, still stands on the west hill, although it has been renovated to such an extent that I doubt Arnold would recognise it were he to look for it today.



I have found documentation which suggests that Mr. Agnew was very much interested in the bells of Prince Albert. One letter about bells, existent in the Bill Smiley Archives and dated 27 August 1960, is a copy of correspondence which he sent to Jack Smith in Toronto, Ontario, asking Jack for information regarding the history of some of the city's bells. Another item, which I found in files my father had saved, was dated 15 April 1981. The note from Mr. Agnew contained information on a few local bells, saved from newspaper accounts and jottings which he had made, and which he planned to file with 'the Heritage Archives etc.'

One of the bells rung during the early 1980s was a desk bell from Connaught School. The bell was donated by the Prince Albert School Board and described as having sat on the teacher's desk and having been used to bring the class to attention or to order. Connaught School was built in 1912 and demolished in 1978.

Another bell, which is still on display in the Historical Museum, was the door bell from Emmanuel College. The information provided about the bell dated it from 1877, although the College did not open until 01 November 1877.

A bell from the second Presbyterian Church, which stood on the corner of what is now Central avenue and 10th Street West, was also rung. This bell was carted overland from Qu'Appelle in the early 1880s. Mr. Agnew's note to my father references a City Council item from February 1906 indicating a new fire bell order (had been) placed". He points out that this bell was to replace the original Presbyterian church bell which was damaged following its "toppling". The church bell had been bought by the City for use as a fire bell, likely at the time that the City purchased the property which was the site of the second Presbyterian church. The City bought the property in order to allow Central Avenue to run straight through from its southerly point to River Street on the north.

Another fire-related bell rung as part of the bell ringing during the early 1980s was that of the bell off the first gasoline powered fire engine, purchased in 1904. Today's youngsters still enjoy ringing that bell when they visit the Museum.

F.M. Sheldon donated the bell from the River Boat Marquis, which stood on a stand built by P.A. Peterson. The Marquis was built in Winnipeg in the spring of 1882 at a cost of \$55,000. Its hull was floated to and over the Grand Rapids, after which its motor was installed. The Marquis was beached in the autumn of 1887.

Other bells rung at the time included a cow bell, a goat bell, a four-bell string of Swedish horse bells, and the bell from the World War II Canadian frigate "Waskesiu".

This tradition of bell ringing was discontinued by the mid-1980s, but we still have many bells on display in the museum, including a bell from a steam locomotive which was in the collection of poet J.V. Hicks, who had an interest in all things railway. Although its provenance is unknown, there was a similar bell in the photograph of the first railway engine to arrive in Prince Albert in 1890, as well as on an engine which derailed at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue West in the 1890s.

If you have an interest in campanology, I would encourage you to stop by the Museum and have a look at all of our bells.

And don't forget to visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/PrinceAlbertHistoricalSociety/> and our website at [historypa.com](http://historypa.com).

Fred Payton  
Prince Albert Historical Society  
March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020