

Meeks, Watson & Company

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*Bell Founders & Carillon Builders*

August 11, 2020

Newton Community Preservation Committee  
c/o Ms. Lara Kritzer,  
Community Preservation Program Manager,  
City of Newton Planning & Development Department  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton, MA 02459

Re: Possible Restoration of the Tower,  
Grace Episcopal Church, Newton

Dear Ms. Kritzer,

I was very interested to hear from a good friend who has a particular interest in bell and chime history in New England, of the possibility of the restoration project to save the beautiful stone tower of Grace Church, Newton. I am writing you to express my support for this important project.

As a partner in a bell foundry myself, and as an active carillonneur, I have a particular interest in the preservation and continued use of historic chimes of bells such as that to be found in the Grace Church, Newton, tower. These instruments, chimes and carillons, represent much more than simply "church bells": they often sound out the time of day, and being played, their sound becomes a well-loved feature of the entire community. I am particularly sensitive on this point, as the carillon I play is in a free-standing tower in a park, in an Eastern suburb of Cincinnati: the Mary M. Emery Memorial Carillon in the suburb of Mariemont. Another example of this community connection was brought home just this morning, in a call from a church in Northern Ohio, which has a fine carillon; it is equipped to sound out the well-known "Westminster" quarter chimes, and hour strikes through each day. In their call today, we were asked to come when possible to diagnose a problem that is apparently preventing the striking at the moment...they have been fielding many calls from members of the community, asking

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why the bells are not ringing, and saying that they miss that normal sound in their daily lives!

Of course, in order to preserve and continue the service of the interesting and I am sure well-loved sound of the Grace, Newton chime, its home, the beautiful stone tower, must be capable of continuing to house it.

Though already aware of the chime in Newton, I thought it would be interesting to do a bit of research in our files, and in the materials that have been researched and compiled by my friend Carl Zimmerman, a carillonneur and bell and carillon historian, whom I have known in the Guild of Carillonneurs in North America for a great many years. The Grace Church chime was made by the firm of William Blake & Company in 1873. To fully appreciate its history, we have to look back a ways---in fact, to 1792, when the famous patriot Paul Revere began the casting of bronze tower bells in his foundry in Boston. (Yes, the Revere of the famed "one if by land, two if by sea" midnight ride, warning that "the British are coming". And the same Paul Revere who was also a noted silversmith and coppersmith. Not many now remember that he was also one of the first noted American bell founders.)

By 1801, two of Paul Revere's sons, Paul Jr. and Joseph Warren, joined him in the bell business. (Paul Jr. fairly soon left to work with George Holbrook, one of his father's early apprentices, who had started casting bells in 1797). Joseph succeeded his father when the latter retired in 1811, and continued the business with two of Paul's grandsons, Paul 3rd. and Thomas Eayres Jr. as junior partners. In 1818, Thomas died, and Paul 3rd. left to possibly work the next 5 years with Holbrook. By 1823, however, he is found in business with William Blake, in a business they called the Boston Copper Company, continued until 1830. From 1830 to 1868, this foundry became known as Henry N. Hooper & Co., after Mr. Hooper who had acted as an agent of the former firm; and evidently increased his financial position in it in this year; William Blake remained as his partner; and partnered with Mr. Hooper's son Isaac after the former's death in 1866, until 1868. In that year, the firm name became William Blake & Company, in which Mr. Blake, Sr. was joined by his son William S. Blake.

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During this period, six chimes were made...five in Massachusetts, and one in Rhode Island. (A seventh was made after the death of William Sr., when the firm was briefly continued by his son during the final decade of the 19th century.)

Of the seven Blake chimes, two have been altered by having electric, non-expressive, striking actions installed (one of these is no longer operable). Two more chimes were equipped not with lever claviers, but just with a row of pull ropes to sound their bells (one of these presently unusable).

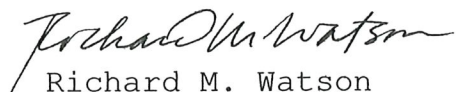
One of those originally provided with a chiming clavier has been very much altered, and a modified used manual carillon clavier substituted.

Therefore, only two of the William Blake chimes still exist with their original chime claviers, permitting direct, expressive, manual playing: the chime in the tower of Grace Church, Newton, and the chime of the same size in what is called the "Stearns Steeple" on the campus of Amherst College. (That steeple was retained, largely I gather because of its historic chime, when the church formerly connected to it was demolished to make way for an art gallery on campus in 1948; the steeple/tower has been very nicely restored, beginning I recall, in 1989.)

I believe that from this history, it will be clear why those of us in the bell and carillon field would consider it a regrettable tragedy to lose this historic tower and chime; and I am sure that many will join me in asking that your Committee seriously consider assisting with the funding of the most needed restoration of this beautiful community asset.

If there is anything I can help with, answering any questions on the history of this chime, or any related matter within my area of experience, I would be only too happy to be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Richard M. Watson  
Partner, Meeks, Watson & Company  
Carillonneur, the Mary M. Emery Memorial Carillon

## P a w s F o u r I d i o m a t i c s

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Editing and Proofreading of English, Dutch, and German Translations  
Bewerking van Nederlandse, Duitse, en Engelse vertalingen  
Bearbeitung von deutschen, niederländischen, und englischen Übersetzungen

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10 August 2020

Newton Community Preservation Committee  
ATTN Lara Kritzer, CPC Program Manager  
City of Newton Planning and Development Department  
1000 Commonwealth Ave.  
Newton MA 02459

Re: Grace Episcopal Church Tower Restoration

Dear Ms. Kritzer,

Last Friday, I became aware of the grant application regarding the restoration of the tower and chime of bells at Grace Church in Newton. Given that comments had to be received no later than the 14<sup>th</sup> of August, I immediately wrote to several others and asked them to write letters of support. I asked that all letters be sent by priority mail no later than the tenth, but given that the USPS is intentionally delaying delivery of first class mail, I hope that any letters received a day or two late will still be considered.

Restoration of the handsome stone tower of Grace Church is absolutely something I can support, but the main reason for this letter concerns the 1873 William Blake & Co. chime of nine bells in the tower. Those bells are among only a few remaining tower bell instruments by Blake.

After locating the Grace Church bells' history here ...

<http://www.towerbells.org/data/MANEWTGC.HTM>

then listening to the video on the church's Facebook page ...

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=638770753518690> ...

and locating two images of the dilapidated chimestand (keyboard) among the many photos in the Facebook profile, it was possible to get a good idea of the current status of the instrument without actually seeing it.

The bells at Grace Church constitute a *chime*, defined as a set of 8-22 *untuned* bells played from a *chimestand*; the keys resemble pump handles. The chime's big sister is called a *carillon*, which has at least 23 tuned bells (two full octaves less the first two semitones). The nine Newton bells

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have a total weight of approximately 4.4 tons. The heaviest bell weighs +/- 2,300 lb., and the lightest, about 380 lb. There is no danger to the tower from the sound generated by playing the bells because, with the exception of the heaviest bell, they are hung fixed in place. The heaviest bell, called the bourdon, also swings, but probably not more than 45 degrees in either direction. A swinging bell would only stress the structure if it were to swing more than 90 degrees.

The photos show that after nearly 150 years, the key action (transmission or connections between the keys of the chimestand the the bells' clappers) is in terrible shape, but almost completely original. Because the art of tuning bronze bells was lost in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and only rediscovered around 1900, the bells are not perfectly tuned. This is a very important point.

A basic restoration of the chime would include having the bells retuned. This is done by inverting the bell on a vertical lathe and carefully peeling metal from five different locations inside the bell while constantly monitoring the resulting frequency on a computer screen. If the bellframe, probably oak, is still solid, it would not need replacing. But because the bells are hung on long iron rods which pass through the oak frame, the tannin in the oak (and possibly rain damage) can cause the iron to rust so badly that a rod can break without warning; the bell will fall and possibly crack, making it unusable.

So in addition to tuning the bells, new stainless steel rods would be used to mount the bells to the bellframe, and a new, silent key action (transmission) connecting the chimestand's keys with the bells' clappers would be built. That would be the minimum restoration, but given that the heaviest (and by far most expensive) bells already exist, it would be desirable to add more trebles (small bells) to the chime. Even three or four more bells would greatly increase the flexibility of the instrument, which is limited to just one octave of notes. If funds were eventually available, adding 14 small bells to this chime would turn it into a full-fledged carillon. In that case, of course, a new bellframe and keyboard would be needed.

The tower of Grace Church will be restored using the correct type of stone and mortar, not concrete blocks and vinyl caulking. Similarly, the chime must be restored by a professional bell foundry, not a company that repairs bell mechanisms but specializes in the promotion of imitation electronic/digital "carillons". The Blake chime is entirely mechanical, and has held up, with minor repairs, for almost 150 years.

Grace Church should beware - and I emphasize the word *beware* - of dealing with any company that promotes imitation instruments, and above all, knows nothing about tuning bronze bells. A digital "carillon" uses the same technology as a desktop computer or washing machine, and within eight or ten years repairs would need expensive repairs (if parts could be found) or, more likely, total replacement.

The only company that should be considered for the chime's restoration is Meeks, Watson & Co. of Georgetown, Ohio. Rick Watson is the best bell tuner in North America, and his company's work is widely praised. Meeks, Watson maintains many university carillons, and among others has restored carillons and chimes at Middlebury College and Norwich University in Vermont; Our Lady of Good Voyage Church in Gloucester (the first modern tuned carillon in the U.S.);

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and Cornell University. The Meeks, Watson webpage ... <http://www.mwbells.com/> lists many other projects, and is extremely helpful for lay committees when it comes to understanding tower bells generally.

By way of background, I am a retired builder of tracker pipe organs. My interest in bells goes back to the time when I "discovered" the unused carillon at the University of Notre Dame, as a freshman in 1958, then played it on football Saturdays. Ten years ago, I offered to restore pro bono the mechanism of a ten-bell chime at Trinity Methodist Church in nearby Montpelier, so that I could play carols for a few days before Christmas. These bells had not been heard for at least 40 years.

Meanwhile, in part thanks to the enthusiastic response of the congregation and nearby businesses (the church is at the edge of the downtown commercial area), the bells are heard in at least 35 recitals every year, including carols every day for two weeks before Christmas..

In addition to playing before the Sunday services for Palm Sunday, Easter, etc., the secular recitals are a mix of patriotic, traditional, and popular music, a lot of it from earlier times. This was the original reason for these chimes being built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century - as a sort of muzak for the public, if you will.

In any event, I wholeheartedly endorse the plans for the restoration of the tower at Grace Church, and its equally historic chime.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Loris", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Loris

August 7, 2020  
Newton Community Preservation Committee  
c/o Lara Kritzer, Community Preservation Program Manager  
City of Newton Planning & Development Department  
1000 Commonwealth Avenue  
Newton MA 02459

Concerning the restoration of the Grace Church Tower and Eldredge Chime  
Dear Ms. Kritzer,

I am Margaret Angelini, a member of the Guild of Carilloners of North America and faculty advisor for the Wellesley College Guild of Carilloners, a student ensemble in the music department. I support the efforts of the Grace Church Tower Committee to restore the tower and the Eldredge Chime. This restoration effort will ensure that the tower and the historic and unique set of bells will remain a centerpiece for the community for years to come.

Chimes and carillons are similar in their use of tuned bells, but vary in their size and in the method of ringing. Instead of standing to play, the Wellesley students play the 32-bell carillon while seated at a keyboard that is similar to an organ keyboard. The carillon has been in Galen Stone Tower in the heart of the campus since 1931. The students have been responsible for playing the bells from the start. They play during passing times between classes, and also for the important moments in the college year. The music the guild plays brings comfort in times of sadness, magnifies the joy of special events, and reflects the aspirations of all who hear the bells. The students play everything from medieval chant to folk tunes from around the world to their favorite pop tunes, thus reflecting their own diversity and creating a community out of all who listen.

My role is to encourage them to play what they love as well as they can. I also connect them to the wider world of carillons and bells in order to stretch their skills and to give them performance avenues after graduation. In the past we have traveled to play the chimes at Cornell University, at the Montpelier Trinity United Methodist Church, and have visited chimes as far away as Ottawa. These instruments are at the heart of their community, just like Wellesley's carillon and the Eldredge chime in Newton Corner, which was rung to celebrate Newton's graduating seniors in June and played "Lift Every Voice and Sing" for a civic event recognizing Black Lives Matter in July.

A colleague of mine once commented that a tower is incomplete without bells; if the tower is the visual landmark of the area then the bells are the soul of the tower. In a time when live music is hard to come by, chimes and carillons give us all the opportunity to safely listen to music being played in the moment. The bells give us a chance to hear a bit of ourselves in the open air, and celebrate all that is good in our corner of the world.

Restoring the tower and the chime go hand in hand. The chime can't be heard if it is not in a well-maintained tower with adequate access for players to see and play their bells. The tower can't reach the ears and hearts of the community without its bells. By supporting this project, you will not only help to rebuild a landmark, but will also strengthen a community called together by the sound of the bells. Thank you for considering my support of the Grace Church Tower and the Eldredge Chime.

Sincerely,  
Margaret Angelini  
Music Department  
Wellesley College



George Matthew Jr.  
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To the Rector, Vestry and members of Grace Episcopal Church  
76 Eldridge Street  
Newton, MA 02458

August 8, 2020

Attn: Scott Aquilina, Tower Restoration Committee

Dear Friends in Christ,

My friend Michael Loris, campanologist and organ technician living in Montpelier, VT, notified me of your plans to restore the tower and the 1875 Blake chime of Grace Episcopal Church. I'm always gratified and reassured when I see a historical church preserving their heritage for the coming generations.

Besides my work as carillonneur of Vermont's two carillons, I'm also organist of St. Stephen's on the Green, Middlebury. Our church possesses and has maintained in top condition an 1875 Johnson pipe organ. We also possess a single Paul Revere bell. Our building dates from 1829. We have just restored the stonework of the bell tower and corrected a slight imbalance of our swinging bell. From time to time we have been approached by electronic bell salesmen but we only need refer them to the glorious harmonies of the college carillon and they disappear.

I have never heard any electronic carillon that sounds in the least authentic; they do not do a church justice.

Regarding the immediate plans and dreams of Grace Church, I feel that the only organization in the USA that can tune (and possibly expand) Grace Church's chime is Meeks, Watson & Co. of Georgetown, OH.

Their website will list a variety of restorations that they have done. For the 35 years that I have served as college carillonneur of Middlebury College and Norwich University, Meek, Watson & Co. has maintained our carillons in top condition.

The only other firm I can recommend is Les Fils Paccard Fonderie des Cloches, Annecy-le-Vieux, France. They expanded the Norwich carillon in 1956 (before my time there) and the 1918 Middlebury chime of eleven Meneely (West Troy) bells to a 48 bell carillon in 1985.

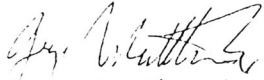
Although I would love to see Grace Church join the 183 member US carillon "family", I have great respect for the 800 plus chimes in the USA... the faithful sounding of hymns on these instruments is a characteristic American sound.



Two closing thoughts: like Grace Church, St. Stephen's is coping with Covid-19 as best we can online... how we long to meet as we have since 1829! Further, a massive railroad construction project though the center of Middlebury has disrupted everything... especially St. Stephen's... the railroad goes right past our church!

And my complements to whoever is playing, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Since the murder of George Floyd, I have been playing about 20 minutes of spirituals, ending with "Oh Freedom", "Free at last", "We shall overcome", and "Lift Every Voice and Sing" on the Middlebury College carillon almost every day.

To your chimer I say, "God Bless You."



George Matthew Jr.

Middlebury College and Norwich University Carillonneur  
Organist, St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Middlebury, VT