

HISTORY OF PRECIOUS BLOOD CATHEDRAL

The Sound of a Beautiful Bell Can Be Heard From the Sault

“For Bells are the Voice of the Church” Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

The history of the bell in the Christian church is a very long and interesting one. Ancient legend has it that Moses brought its use to the Israelites as a result of his years spent learning the mystical rites of the Egyptian culture. Whether true or not, the bell or gong has been an essential element in most ancient religious practices and cultures throughout the world.

Over time, man learned to use the sound of bells to communicate over great distances, and following the fall of the Roman Empire, their importance and use spread steadily throughout Christendom. Romanesque and medieval architecture developed to incorporate magnificent bell towers housing massive, beautifully designed and decorated bells.

Almost all church bells were ‘named’ or dedicated in honor of Christ, The Blessed Virgin or a particular element of faith such as The Incarnation. Some were assigned to a particular saint, or to a patron responsible for the bells creation.

Many were inscribed with instructional verses such as found in Longfellow’s ‘The Golden Legend’:
“I praise the true God, I call the people, I assemble the clergy, I bewail the dead, I dispense storm clouds, I do honor to feasts, I hustle the sluggards, I ring in the Sabbaths.”

“Bells make a daily statement that the church is alive and well in the community”

The most imposing element of the Church of the Sacred Heart, its bell tower, stood empty for twenty eight years. At one time, church law distinctly set out that church bells and ropes were to be provided at the expense of the parishioners, and this would appear to be the case with the acquisition of Sacred Heart’s long anticipated and much longed for bell. There is no detail of a specific fund raising drive leading to the purchase of the bell, however the names of 45 parishioners are inscribed alongside those of the Bishop and clergy in office at the time the bell was dedicated and installed.

The bell was forged by one of the most prestigious and significant foundries in North America: **The Meneely Bell Foundry** of Troy, New York. The company was founded in 1826, and over its 144 year history, forged over 75,000 bells and carillons heard throughout the world. A Meneely Bell was forged to replace the original Liberty Bell that hangs to this day in Independence Hall in Philadelphia. Ironically, it would be wars that led eventually to the foundry’s demise. Each one, from the Civil War on through the First and Second World Wars caused difficulty in obtaining the essential raw materials such as tin and copper. It was finally The Korean War which ultimately led to the company’s closure in 1954.



The Sacred Heart Bell, “the first high grade bell heard from any tower in Sault Ste. Marie” arrived in the Sault in early August of 1904, and was installed in the tower while the weather was still mild and permissible, apparently during the week of October 8th - following the blessing ceremony.

The weight of the bell was recorded as 2,370 lbs. and it rang a ‘G’ note.

It was no doubt an exciting time for the entire community, and fortunately, the Sault Star provided news articles covering the event as follows:

Sault Star September 29, 1904 Blessing of the Bell for Sacred Heart Church

“Next Sunday will be an eventful day in the history of the Church of the Sacred Heart here.

Rt. Rev. R. A. O’Connor, Bishop of Peterborough, will administer the sacrament of confirmation at the last mass, and in the evening he will bless the new bell which will be placed in position in the tower in the following week. The ceremony of blessing the bell is very impressive and the church will be prettily decorated for the occasion. There will also be special music and singing.

The ceremony of the bell should be of interest to the whole community, because it will be the first high grade bell heard from any tower in our town, and as it will be heard from ten miles away, will soon take its place as a prominent characteristic of the town from land and water. The bell weighs 2,370 lbs. and was specially made by Messrs. Meneely and Co. of West Troy, N.Y. and cost in the neighborhood of \$1000.00.”



Sault Star October 6, 1904

“The blessing of the new bell took place Sunday last in the Sacred Heart Church. The ceremony was performed by Rt. Rev. R. A. O’connor, Bishop of Peterborough. The very impressive ceremony was witnessed by a very large number of people. Divine benediction and special music was rendered. An O’Salutaris was sung by Mrs. J. Boulaine, followed by an Ave Marie (Saint-Saens) by Miss. M. Albright. Tantum Ergo, a duet rendered by Mr. Brazeau and Miss Brazeau, organist, being accompanied by Miss Marcelle Brazeau. The sermon was preached by Rev. Father Coffee.”

Another Sault Star article in **June of 1967** references the bell and states:

“There are two clappers in the bell. One hangs inside the bell and tolls after funerals, and at the end of the Angelus. The other clapper – which is like a hammer, rings out the Angelus, rung by the *church caretaker, John Gerlach three times a day.*”

At one time, and for more than sixty years, the beautiful sound of the Angelus was rung out three times a day: 7 a.m. 12 noon 6 p.m. It was a very meaningful occurrence in the daily lives of the faithful Catholics of the Sault. In the early years it was customary for Roman Catholics to pause from their daily occupations and repeat brief prayers at the call of the Angelus.

The names of Bishop O'Connor, Rev. T. Lussier, Rev. B. J. Hazelton and 45 members of the congregation who subscribed to the bell fund are imprinted on the bell along with a representation of The Sacred Heart.

Some of the names appearing on the bell include: W. O'Brien J.J. Kehoe J. Biron C.E. Sullivan H.J. Roach M. Christopher Laura McFadden W. Hussey J. Collins T.A. Hynes T. Drury J.J. Colleton Mrs. H. Boissoneau and L.P. Tichart.

These early parishioners and clergy gave much to establish and maintain their much loved parish church throughout the years and to them we owe at least a small remembrance at the sound of the bell of Precious Blood Cathedral.

Recent Bell photos 2013

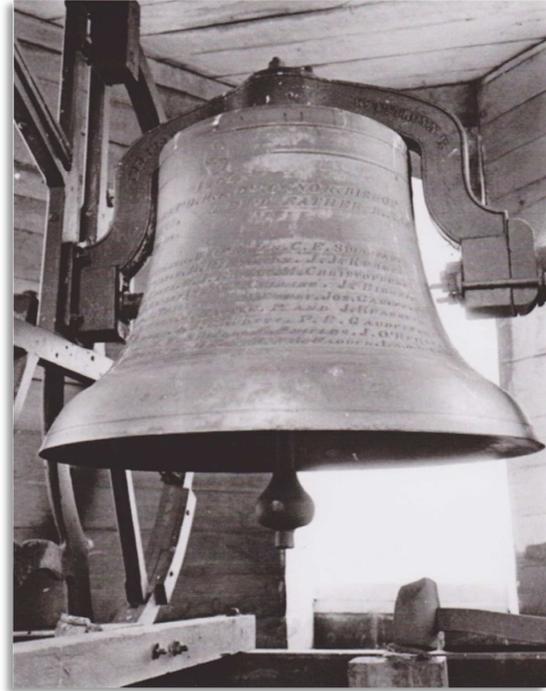


Figure 1 original installation photo

The end