

Press Coverage of the Premiere Concerts of the Bells of Minneapolis City Hall and Hennepin County Courthouse

The following are transcripts of newspaper articles printed in the *Minneapolis Journal* and the *Minneapolis Tribune* the week the bells of Minneapolis City Hall and Hennepin County Courthouse were installed and first played in March 1896. The transcripts, compiled by the City Hall Carillon Committee, are courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society collections.



Minneapolis Tribune, March 11, 1896, p. 5

MUSIC IN THE AIR

MELODIOUS SOUNDS FROM THE COURT HOUSE TOWER.

The Largest Chime in the United States Introduced to the People of Minneapolis — The Bells Were Hung Sooner Than Expected — The Burst of Music Was So Unexpected as to Be Almost Startling — Several Tunes Were Played — From All Indications the Bells Are in Tune — Details for Future Ringing Still to Be Arranged.

Ring out, great bells, in purest bliss,
Ring luck to Minneapolis.
 And high o'er head a million times,
 Portray the poet's rhythmic rhymes,
 In chimes,
 Chimes,
 Chimes,
 Chimes.

While far beneath, as ceaseless flows
The living population goes
 For years to come ten thousand times,
 To listen to the pealing rhymes,
 Of chimes,
 Chimes,
 Chimes,
 Chimes.

The great chimes of the court house and city hall is now a reality. Yesterday, when everybody was quite certain that it would be a week before the bells were in condition to ring, the chime suddenly rang out at about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and the sweet burst of giant music swelled out until the air was as full of melody, as it had been with snowflakes in the morning.

Pedestrians on the street, everywhere, people in carriages, business men, everybody dropped everything to listen. That is everybody except the people at work in the court house and city hall, for strange to say, the sound was hardly heard within the massive building high over which the bells were swinging and reverberating with every stroke of the huge live oak clappers. As far as could be judged from the streets below, the chime is a great success. The tones were unusually sweet, and even the low notes where in most chimes the coarse tones kill the music of the whole chime, the notes seemed muffled and pleasant to the ear. In fact, the music was so entrancing that people who were not interested in music stopped to listen to the unique harmony wafted from the tower. It is safe to say that 10,000 eyes were directed toward that tower as the bells were ringing yesterday afternoon.

So far there have been no particular arrangements for the ringing of the chime. The trio of bells will strike in a partial chime every quarter hour, automatically, and on the full hour. It is hoped that an air can be played. It will cost considerable, however, to keep a man around to play the chime, as the bells are rung by hand with little levers, which are marked with the notes of the scale. Several applications for the position are already filed with the board of county commissioners.

A number of airs were tried yesterday, the first being "America," "The Blue Bells of Scotland," "Old Black Joe," "Home Sweet Home," and other favorites were tried, and were recognized by people many blocks

away. The wind was blowing directly away from the business center of the city, and yet the music was plainly heard in the business districts. Away over across the river at the University the music was plainly heard, and the airs were distinguishable. The success of the bells is a pleasant surprise. The only other chime in the city is that of the Church of the Redeemer, but the court house chime is as superior to that as a grand church organ is superior to an old melodian. The chimes of other American cities are obliged to take a back seat, and the St. Paul court house chime dwindles into absolute insignificance beside the giant 10 bells in the huge tower of the Minneapolis court house and city hall.

Minneapolis Journal, March 11, 1896, p. 6

CHIMES RING TONIGHT

A Free Concert to be Given on the Courthouse Bells.

A concert will be given this evening between 8 and 9 o'clock, in which Chester Meneely will be the sole performer. He will play a program on the courthouse bells to which all Minneapolis is invited to listen. The last bells were put in place yesterday afternoon, about 5 o'clock, and everything is in perfect order.

The impromptu program played yesterday afternoon was enough to convince the most skeptical that the scale of bells was singularly exact and the tones clear and sweet. The charming effect of the chime is due, however, quite as much to the excellent setting which the bells are given in the courthouse tower, being placed close under the roof, where the sound is thrown earthward through the wide interstices between the pillars which support the roof.

The program tonight is as follows, each tune to be repeated:

"Blue Bells of Scotland."
"The Harp that Once Through Tara's Halls."
" America."
"Flow Gently, Sweet Afton."
"Lauriger Horatius."
"Auld Lang Syne."
"Long, Long Ago."
"The Old Kentucky Home."
"Bonnie Doon."
"Dutch National Air."
"Swedish Folksong."
"Lorelei."
"Life Let Us Cherish"
"Home, Sweet Home"

Minneapolis Journal, March 11, 1896, p. 2

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE BELLS?

To the Musicians and Music Lovers of Minneapolis:

The chime of bells just placed in the new courthouse, will be rung Wednesday evening from 8 till 9 o'clock and on Thursday afternoon from 3 to 4 o'clock.

These bells have not been accepted by the undersigned, and will not be unless they are entirely satisfactory to the musicians and music lovers of this city.

The undersigned will be under obligations to all who will send to C.P. Preston, secretary, their opinions concerning said bells, whether said opinions are favorable or otherwise.

Unless we hear from you to the contrary, we shall assume that you are entirely pleased with the bells.

THE BOARD OF COURT HOUSE AND CITY HALL COMMISSIONERS.

Minneapolis Journal, March 12, 1896, p. 1

MUSIC AT YOUR DOOR

Delivered to Any Distance by the Court House Chime.

FIRST CONCERT LAST NIGHT

Musicians Generally Approve the Chime and Say It's in Good Tune.

The bell-ringing entertainment given by the Troy bell-ringer, Chester Meneely, last night from 8 to 9, was attended by the traditional "large and appreciative" audience. The performance itself was out of sight, in fact as the musical critics say it was far above the audience — about 290 feet. Nevertheless it was very much in evidence through the medium of the sense of hearing. It was the most popular entertainment ever given in Minneapolis, for it was the first attended by the whole city, and it is not recorded that anyone went before it was over. The suburbanites were present in full number, and a telegram from Rogers, Minn., announces that that part of the auditorium was delighted with "Bonny Doon," though the sounds were so long getting to them that they began to applaud about the time the performance had progressed to the next number.

For the benefit of the man who has not heard of the new and wonderful courthouse chime of bells, "the largest in the world and hung the highest," it may be stated that this entertainment was the first concert given by bells, and that it was in the nature of a public test of their musical quality, all kickers in the audience

being invited to air their views in a communication to the courthouse commission, or forever after hold their peace.

Another concert will be given this afternoon at 3, and this is the program: "Old Folks at Home," "Old Dog Tray," "What Fairy-like Music," "Chiming Bells," "Fair Harvard," "Bonnie Doon," "The Last Rose of Summer," "Duncan Gray," "Robin Adair," "Hail Columbia," "America," "Marching Through Georgia," "Two Roses," "Home, Sweet Home."

The first official trial of the bells took place yesterday afternoon. Thomas C. Hough, a local phonographer, being there to record the sounds, which will soon be repeated in all the principal cities of the United States. The first attempt to secure a representation of the sound on the phonograph's cylinder was not a success, for it was found that the instrument was so near the bells that the concussion prevented perfect results. At the second trial the phonograph was placed on the extreme outer edge of the stone railing, and this time "Home, Sweet Home" and other melodies were perfectly recorded.

The musicians did not respond very enthusiastically to the commission's invitation to give the courthouse chime a critical hearing yesterday. A representative of The Journal made a canvass this morning of about a dozen of the leading musicians of the city, but most of them had not even heard the chime, and those who had heard it declared that they had listened as citizens rather than critics. For that reason the opinions that are given below must not be taken as the final verdict. It is generally conceded that violinists have the best ears for musical defects and niceties, but this seemed to be the busy day with those gentlemen. In fact, Heinrich Hoevel was the only one encountered. The consensus of opinion is overwhelmingly in favor of the excellence of the bells, but musicians never agree, so it is not surprising that two such authorities as Heinrich Hoevel and A.M. Shuey should differ in opinion as much as black does from white.

"I did not listen to the bells from the standpoint of a critic," said Mr. Hoevel, "but my impression is that some of them are out of tune. Besides it struck me that the bells are either too resonant for some of the melodies that were played yesterday or else the playing was too fast. The point I wish to make is that the notes interfere with each other. It is probably that these bells are too large to be used for any melody where it is necessary for one note to follow another in quick succession."

Gustavus Johnson, the pianist, stated that he was greatly pleased with the chime, that the sound was mellow and pure, and that, as far as he had observed, there were no defects in the tones.

Thomas Taylor Drill was of the opinion that the only possible defect was that the bells are too somber, meaning by that term that their carrying power is not great. Otherwise he thought that they were perfect, being sweet, mellow, and pure in tone.

Emil Zoch, the pianist, was delighted by what he had heard in a casual hearing of the chime. He had noticed no defect, but, like the others, protested that he had not given the matter a critical examination.

A.M. Shuey was enthusiastic. He had not dreamed that the chimes would be so perfect in tune, in tone, and in fact, in all respects.

H.S. Woodruff had noticed no defect in the bells, which seemed to him sweet of tone and most agreeable in general effect.

A number of other musicians expressed themselves as being delighted with the tones, though they had been struck with the fact that the quality of the bells is not the same. However, this is not considered a defect.

Several concerts will be given before the bells are formally accepted, so that every musician in the city will have ample opportunity to hear the chimes. Arrangements are being made to secure a large room on the top floor of the Globe building where the musicians will be requested to assemble, listen to the bells and pass their final and professional opinions.

Minneapolis Tribune, March 12, 1896, p. 7

RANG IN THE NIGHT

COURT HOUSE CHIMES GIVE AN OPEN AIR CONCERT.

Streets Filled With Listeners as the Music Pours From the Belfrey — "America" Heard 15 Miles Away — First Official Test of the Bells — A Phonograph to Carry the Sound Across the Continent — The Largest Chime in the World.

The new court house and city hall was the center of absorbing interest last evening. To those who had not been apprised of the entertainment in store, the sound of chiming bells, shortly after the hour of 3, came with unexpected detonation, and listeners were roused near and far. Those who were better informed than the stay-at homes, hurried in the streets and soon Fourth street leading to the court house, and the avenues approaching, were thronged with eager pressing people. "The chimes, the chimes," was their cry and they pushed forward until they stood in the very shadow of the tower, from which high up, floated the sound of the bells. They rang out on the dark night and there were many to listen and note with pride that the courthouse chimes had become a reality, and that this flood of music, pouring from the belfry, spreading out over the housetops, dropping into distant rooms, creeping through narrow alleys, echoing in the city squares, tolling, chiming, chiming, tolling, was the signal of the accomplishment of a long expected task.

The hanging of the bells had been effected earlier in the day, and for the enjoyment of the populace, that was only too glad to hear, an open air concert was rendered for one hour, with Chester Meneely as sole performer. The people stood in groups in the shadow of lofty buildings, windows were opened to the night air to admit of the entrance of swelling music, voices were hushed while ears were turned to listen, and as the chimes sang their message, the unnumbered audience waited in pleased quiet, until the end.

The concert offered the novel charm of hearing at a far distance, and the people of Minneapolis were not the only listeners who heard the chime as it rang "The Blue Bells of Scotland," or pealed the sweeter melody of "Flow gently sweet Afton among thy green braes." As an evidence of the distance at which the bells were

heard, the following telegram came to THE TRIBUNE, even as the last notes of "Home Sweet Home" rang on the frosty air: It was dated, Rogers, Minn., "Hurrah for the chimes. We have enjoyed 'America' and 'Bonnie Doon' from this distance, congratulation, and long may they ring. Plummer and MacMullan."

Rogers lies to the Southwest of Minneapolis, a little distance beyond Osseo, something like 12 or 15 miles.

The program which occupied an hour in the ringing, was composed of song favorites, known in many lands. The tunes were repeated, so that tardy ears could grasp the second playing, should they have missed the first. The selections were:

"Blue Bells of Scotland."
"The Harp That once Through Tara's Halls."
" America."
"Flow Gently, Sweet Afton."
"Lauriger Horatius."
"Auld Lang Syne."
"Long, Long Ago."
"The Old Kentucky Home."
"Bonnie Doon."
"Dutch National Air."
"Swedish Folk Song."
"Lorelei."
"Life Let Us Cherish."
"Home, Sweet Home."

INTO THE PHONOGRAPH.

The first official trial of the court house chime took place yesterday afternoon for the special benefit of Thomas C. Hough, the local phonographer. The bells will now go on record and in a short time will be heard in the principal cities throughout the United States. To hear these bells in distant places will be of special interest, as they constitute the largest chime in the world, weighing 30,000 pounds and costing \$10,000. The chime was operated by Chester Meneely. The first piece of music recorded was, "Old Folks at Home."

The initial trial was not successful for phonograph purposes, as the instrument was not placed in a favorable position, the reproduction being too loud; this was soon remedied, however, and the recording perfected. Other numbers rendered were "Blue Bells of Scotland," "America," "Change Melody," and "Home Sweet Home." The bells are in the key of Bb. One is Ab., thereby making it possible to play in two different keys. Mr. Meneely is proud of his work and very much satisfied with the test. He says he has never seen a tower built as favorably for chimes as that of the new court house.

The bells are 10 in number, and hang at a distance of 290 feet above the street. The ascent of the tower is devious and fraught with interest, particularly at night when the city lies quiet, like a sleeping animal, with only its twinkling lights and occasional rumble of a passing car to give evidence that the creature lives and is only sleeping. At night the monster court house is deserted except for a few officials and occasional

visitors, and though the great arc lights in the marble corridors illumine the long passages, there is seldom a footfall on the tessellated floor.

The building was closed to visitors last evening, saving only a favored few, and the night watch kept guard of the door. On the rise to the tower, where the bells hang, the elevator passes four floors and stops at the fifth. Then, with the glimmering lantern going before, the way lies through the unfinished halls where the jails and dungeons lurk in the shadow, past black iron cages, of which there are 42 to serve as resting places for the criminals and felons, past the gloomy, awesome cells, in which shall be lodged the worst and most unmanageable of the miscreants, then on into the vastness of the unfinished spaces over the county side of the court house, until the foot of the tower is reached, and a narrow wooden door is the only means of ingress to the shaft.

Up the narrow, winding stairs, past the openings which look on the city below, up, up, with panting breath and labored steps, until the belfry hangs in mid air. Through its roof protrudes the bell rope, which is operated by a huge lever, and above it hangs the chime, ready to respond to the sturdy stroke of the bell ringer, for every stroke a tune, for every tune a waiting ear. The repertory of the bells is not limited and through the changing seasons will ring the merry chimes.

By request another concert will be given on the court house bells this afternoon at 3 o'clock. The following pieces will be played: "Changes," "Old Folks at Home," "Old Dog Tray," "What Fairylike Music," "Chiming Bells," "Fair Harvard," "Bonnie Doon," "The Last Rose of Summer," "Duncan Gray," "Robin Adair," "Hail Columbia," "America," "Marching Through Georgia," "Two Roses," "Home Sweet Home."

Minneapolis Tribune, March 13, 1896, p. 5

ANOTHER BELL CONCERT

**By Special Request, An Interesting Program Will Be Rendered
From the Court House and City Hall Tower This Evening.**

By special request one more concert will be given on the new court house bells this evening at 8 o'clock. The following pieces will be rendered: Westminster Clock Changes; A Poor Wayfaring Man; Long, Long Ago; Flow Gently Sweet Avon; Old Kentucky Home; March of the Men of Harleck; Bonnie Doon; The Last Rose of Summer; Duncan Gray; The Bells of London; Holland National Air; Robin Adair; Paradise Alley; Blue Bells of Scotland; Chime Again, Beautiful Bells; The Lass of Richmond Hill; America; The Harp That Once Through Tara's Halls; Home, Sweet Home.

Minneapolis Tribune, March 15, 1896, p. 7

SACRED CONCERT

The New Chimes Will Ring an Afternoon Program for All to Hear.

A sacred concert will be rung by the city hall and court house chimes this afternoon at 3 o'clock. The following pieces will be played, "Adeste Fideles," "Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God, Almighty," "Duke Street," "Nearer My God to Thee," "Wilmot," "Hark! Hark! My Soul," "Evening Hymn," "The Heavens are Telling," "Schumann." "Abide With Me," "Fleming," "Vesper Hymn," "Jewels," "Old Hundred."

Minneapolis Tribune, March 16, 1896, p. 5

GAVE A SACRED CONCERT

Court House and City Hall Chimes Entertain Thousands of Citizens on Sunday Afternoon.

The sacred concert given yesterday afternoon on the court house and city hall chime was the incentive of bringing out thousands who during the week had not been able to hear them. Hundreds thronged through the corridors of the large building in the hope of being able to ascend the tower and view the much talked-of bells. This privilege was, however, not allowed them, and they had to be satisfied with enjoying only the sense of hearing. Chester Meneely, as heretofore, manipulated the chime, and discoursed music for nearly two hours. This evening a special request concert will be given; this will be the last concert that Chester Meneely will give, as he and his father intend to return to their home in Troy, N.Y., Tuesday.
