



# Grosse Pointe Memorial Church

*A light by the lakeshore*



## The Memorial Church Carillon

A carillon is a musical instrument consisting of 23 or more cast bronze bells that have been precisely tuned so that many bells can be sounded together to produce an harmonious effect and played from an expressive keyboard that provides variation of touch. Carillon bells are suspended stationary; only the clappers move. The clapper of each bell is connected by a simple horizontal and vertical linkage to the keyboards. The keys are arranged in the same pattern as are the keys of a piano. The pedalboard duplicates the lower half of the instrument so that two hands and two feet can be used to play the carillon.

This carillon contains 47 bells spanning a four-octave range (omitting the lowest C# and D#). The heaviest bell (bourdon) is pitched to C# almost one full octave below middle C. Some statistics may be helpful in better understanding the Memorial Church carillon.

	<u>Largest Bell</u>	<u>Smallest Bell</u>
Weight	4700 lbs.	15 lbs.
Diameter	4' 10"	8"
Height	4'	5"
Clapper weight	50 lbs	1 lb.
Keyboard Range:	47 keys	
Pedalboard Range:	23 pedal keys	
Total instrument weight:	more than 11 tons	

When the church was completed in 1927 a chime of 8 heavy and low pitched bells - D C E F G A B C – by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon, England, was installed. It was dedicated “To the Memory of Those Who Have Died in the Service of Our Country.” Hymn tunes were played electrically from the organ console in the sanctuary. A clock mechanism was also installed for sounding the “Westminster Quarters” and striking the hours.

For the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church building in 1952, 39 bells by Petit & Fritsen of Aarle-Rixtel, The Netherlands, were added, creating the present 47-bell carillon. A bronze plaque in the church narthex lists the names of individuals in whose memory the bells were given. In addition to the new bells, a playing console was installed which afforded a great expansion of musical possibilities in the hands of a competent carillonneur. The carillon was formally dedicated on May 25, 1952, by the eminent Percival Price, Carillonneur of the University of Michigan.

Students provided carillon music for church services, weddings, funerals and special events using scholarships to study at Michigan State University, the University of Michigan and Christ Church Cranbrook. When William DeTurk, professional carillonneur, became Director of Music in 1977 (through 1993), he continued with the student program and recruited several adults who form the nucleus of the present program.



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In 1976 a new American Standard playing console was installed and a renovation of the mechanism was undertaken. Today the carillon is played only by a musician at this mechanical-action keyboard. There are no electric components. The original clock mechanism is intact but inoperable. The practice console is housed in the first level of the bell tower. This affords an opportunity for private practice and teaching. Similar in design to the carillon's playing keyboard, it differs in that tuned metal bars are struck instead of bells.

The history of the carillon began in the Low Countries of Europe: The Netherlands, Belgium and northern France. Documents as early as 1370 indicate that many towers were equipped with clocks that automatically sounded bells. Some were of considerable size and replete with automatic "jacks" or puppets that struck the hours and their subdivisions in full view of delighted spectators. Some towers contained enough bells to permit the playing of familiar tunes by means of large automatic chiming barrels. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century the first rudimentary keyboard was developed. This made possible truly musical renditions rather than merely mechanical ones. In North America the carillon really evolved from the chime that was prevalent in hundreds of towers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These chimes were generally of a range of eight to twelve bells and were meant for playing melodies only. Gradually their range was extended and with the influence of the European carillon, North America began acquiring carillons of considerable size and weight in the 1920s and 1930s. North America has by far the most grandiose carillons in the world; the largest instruments by size, weight and number of bells. Today there are approximately 155 carillons in the United States, 14 carillons in Canada and 1 in Mexico City.

In addition to Memorial Church, there are small carillons at Christ Church Grosse Pointe (35 bells) and Jefferson Avenue Presbyterian Church, Detroit (23 bells). Large carillons are housed at Kirk in the Hills, Bloomfield Hills (77 bells) Christ Church Cranbrook, Bloomfield Hills (50 bells); Michigan State University, East Lansing (49 bells); The University of Michigan, Burton Tower (55 bells), and on North Campus (60 bells). The newest carillon in Michigan is at St. Hugo Catholic Church, Bloomfield Hills (48 bells).

## Related links

World Carillon Federation = [www.carillon.org](http://www.carillon.org)

Guild of Carillonneurs in North America = [www.gcna.org](http://www.gcna.org)

University of Michigan carillons: North Campus = <http://carillon.engin.umich.edu/lurie/index.html>

University of Michigan Main Campus = [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burton\\_Tower](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burton_Tower)

Michigan State carillon = <http://www.msu.edu/~carillon/>

Kirk in the Hills carillon =

<http://www.kirkinthehills.org/templates/cuskirkinthehills/details.asp?id=25103&PID=101280&Style=>

<http://www.christchurchcranbrook.org/instruments.html>

St. Hugo Catholic Church = <http://www.sthugo.org/carillon.htm>