

The Memorial Church Carillon



The Console

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 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.

The Grosse Pointe Memorial Church carillon contains 48 bells spanning a four-octave range (omitting the lowest C#). The heaviest bell (bourdon) is pitched to C# almost one full octave below middle C. Some statistics may be helpful to better understand the Memorial Church carillon.

	Largest Bell	Smallest Bell
Weight	4700 lbs.	15 lbs.
Diameter	4'10"	8"
Height	4'	5"
Clapper weight	50 lbs	1 lb.
Keyboard Range: 48 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 - C D 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 25th anniversary of the church building in 1952, 39 bells by Petit & Fritsen of Aarle-Rixtel, the Netherlands, were added, creating a 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.

In 2015 the instrument was completely renovated by Meeks, Watson & Company of Georgetown, Ohio. A new steel frame was constructed which allowed the bells to be arranged so



that they are all at a similar distance from the playing keyboard. Every bell was lifted from the tower and taken to Georgetown to be tuned. New clappers were provided, and an entirely new transmission action was constructed. The playing console was replaced and moved to a central location in the playing room. The new console was built according to the new North American Standard dimension.

For many years carillonists were frustrated by the lack of the low E-flat bell. A significant addition to the carillon in the 2015 renovation was the casting of a new bell to rectify that deficiency. The new bell is dedicated to long-time senior carillonist Phyllis Webb, and inscribed "The Webb Bell."

There is a practice console housed in the first level of the bell tower. This affords an opportunity for private practice and teaching. Identical 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 16th 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 19th century. These chimes were



The Webb Bell



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 169 carillons in the United States, 11 carillons in Canada and 3 in Mexico.

In addition to Memorial Church, there are smaller 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); St. Mary's, Redford (49 bells); and St. Hugo Catholic Church, Bloomfield Hills (48 bells). The newest carillon in Michigan is at Oakland University (49 bells).