

# Ringing the Bell

By Christine Comiskey

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From church bells and bell choirs, to jingle bells and “ringing out the old and ringing in the new,” bells have long been associated with the holiday season.

When we first acquired our Revere & Son bell in 1815, “Bell Ringer” was a paid position, and for good reason – it was a much bigger job than it is today. Along with ringing it to call people to church and meetings, he also had to ring the bell daily at noon and other times. It was used as an alarm; it tolled for the dead and rang out in celebration of such events as the end of the Civil War, when it joined church bells throughout the land in ringing from dawn until dusk.

On December 13, 2009, our bell once again joined with many others in this country and around the world. Young and old gathered in the balcony after church to ring the bell 350 times for Planet Earth in support of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen (350 is said to be the number of carbon parts per million needed for a sustainable planet).

However, much has been lost in the “art” of bell ringing. The following article was published in the January 1925 edition of *The Georgetown Advocate* magazine, published by the First Congregational Church, about how it was done in the “old days.”

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## CHURCH BELL MANY YEARS AGO

How Deacon Jewett rang the church bell during part of the pastorate of Rev. Isaac Braman, during the entire pastorate of Prince, Pond, Beecher, and a part of the stay of Mr. Beeber, is an interesting recollection of an older resident.

At 9 a.m. on Sunday mornings there was a “first Bell” of about fifteen minutes, vigorous peels with occasional but quite brief pauses. The second bell began at 10:15 o’clock and was in three different forms of four or five minutes each, there being a distinct pause between the forms. First, there was a loud peel, rapid and continuous to the first pause. Then came a short, loud peel as at first, followed by a moderately-timed tolling, quite firm, with occasional “setting” of the bell. Setting the bell was done by checking its full overturn and holding its mouth up, which caused its tongue to fall, rattling and clanking down and resting on its inner wall, turning all music into harsh discord. Before this din was quite gone, the bell was released from its unnatural position and music restored. The third form was called “ringing down.” There would be a loud peel of a few strokes, which gradually passed into a perfect diminuendo of time and force. Finally there was a soft tone at 10:30 o’clock and the service began.

There were other parishes scattered over New England in those days where this or quite similar modes of bell ringing obtained. Were those forms for time schedules only? They well served that purpose for parishioners from “next door” to miles away. But is it not possible that to the originators for those forms, the bells also voiced a higher theme?

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