

***THE JOURNEY OF PARISH OF THE
ASCENSION'S CHURCH BELL***



You may have noticed a bell in our church. Its history began in the 1950's when Mr. Stephen Thistle donated this bell to the family of James Walter Billard and his wife Elizabeth (Noseworthy), who also resided in Mount Pearl. The Billiards lived on Park Avenue in an area which is now known as Jubilee Place. They had two daughters, Gertie and Jean. Mr. Thistle courted and eventually married Gertie and they had 7 children. Jean married Bernard Squires and they had no children. Jean was an active long-time member of the Ascension Church Choir and was a part of other activities, including the Guiding movement. Mr. Thistle and Gertie moved to Mount Pearl and built their house on Park Avenue where they resided for 65 years. Jean was also a long-time resident until her passing. During this time, Mr. Billard had a shed on his property which was used for Sunday services by three denominations, Anglican, United Church and Salvation Army. His shed was also the root of the current school system in Mount Pearl. It was indeed a monumental part of the evolution of the church's history. Mr. Thistle took it upon himself to ask the Canadian National Railway for a train bell. His request was granted, and it was installed and used in the small shed for Sunday Services. It was noted that every time Mr. Thistle heard the bell ring, a familiar song came to his mind:

*Come to the Church in the Wildwood
Oh, Come to the Church in the Vale
No Spot is so dear to my Childhood
As the little brown Church in the Vale*

Eventually the first Church of the Ascension was built on Park Avenue and the United and Salvation Army churches followed suit. The Billard shed was returned to the Anglican Church, where it was placed behind the former Church of the Ascension on Park Avenue. The C.L.B. and other youth organizations held their meetings here until the old shed became unsafe and was demolished. The bell was taken and placed in storage in the basement of the former Anglican church on Park Avenue. In the mid seventies, a new church, our current one, was built. The previous church on Park Avenue was sold to the Odd Fellows. While undergoing renovations, the bell was discovered in the basement, and they donated it back to the Church of the Ascension on Smallwood Drive. For many years it was placed by the Bishop's chair near the altar.

Years passed and I noticed that this bell by the altar was missing. I made an inquiry, and nobody seemed to recollect it being there. After some investigation, and I guess determination, I would soon solve this mystery. Reverend Jennifer Gosse requested that the bell be removed, with

permission from Reverend Murray Randell. It then travelled to St. Andrew's church Happy Valley, Goose Bay, where Reverend Gosse was posted at the time. Upon her leaving that parish, the bell was left there in a shed until recently. As a result of my work and determination, and overcoming many obstacles, the bell has returned home. It took three years, with the help of some of my friends, along with Archdeacon Julie Brace, to make this dream a reality. It is now back home, hopefully to ring its amazing sounds again. What a journey this bell has taken! Unfortunately, Mr. Stephen Thistle passed away March 13, 2020, at the gracious age of 100. I wish he could have been here to hear the bell ring.

In Your Service – 2024

Roger Learning

On behalf of the Parish of the Ascension, we would like to express our thanks and appreciation to Roger Learning for his hard work and continued diligence in ensuring the safe return of the church bell. Also, thank you to Eric Yetman and Tasker King for their help in ensuring the bell has a permanent home here.