

OLD SAINT JAMES'S CHURCH BELL

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

Ring out, O bell! of old Saint James,
Across thy ancient years;
May many heed thy call, and come
With penitential prayers;
And when with holy love they kneel,
May grateful thanks be given
To God, for country, church and friends,
And for the hope of heaven!

Among the sweet sounds from church spires of Lancaster that each recurring Sunday fill the air with calls to worship, none, perhaps, possesses the distinctively musical quality to a greater degree than those which fall from the ancient bell in the tower of old Saint James. Its softly modulated alto bears the impress of a century and a half of faithful service; and this fine old treasure, which the good people of Saint James's church have for generations held in deep affection, is among the most highly-prized relics of the parish.

The impression long existed that the bell was presented by Queen Anne; and it is not presumptuous to assume that had she been alive at the time she would willingly have signified, by such a gift, the favor with which she regarded her loyal and pious subjects. Good Queen Anne, doubtless, in her day, made gifts of bells to more than one parish in the new world; most assuredly, however, she did not give the bell which to-day peals forth its summons from the steeple of old Saint James, because she died in 1714—sixteen years before Lancaster was surveyed, and thirty years before the parish was founded. This statement should effectually dispose of the story that the last of the Stuarts, and the immediate predecessor of the Georges, was the donor of Saint James's bell. Dead queens do not make gifts, however much they may, in spirit, be inclined to smile benignly upon the children of the Church. As a matter of fact, this valued bell, which does not fail to charm the ear with its melody whenever heard, was bought and paid for by the congregation of Saint James's church, with the aid of liberal contributions from Christians of other denominations.

The story of how Saint James's church obtained its bell is as follows:

On October 16th, 1762, the wardens and vestrymen addressed a communication to the Rev. Dr. Daniel Burton, secretary of The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, which had its headquarters in London, England, stating that the congregation which they represented, had, by a generous private subscription among themselves, though few in number, erected a handsome stone church in Lancaster, which they dedicated to Saint James the Apostle. In order that they might be enabled to leave the church to "posterity in as *complete* and decent order as possible" they had, with the assistance of a small lottery, built a steeple to it which was, as stated in the letter, a "regular, good piece of architecture."

They also informed the Venerable Society that the expense incurred by the undertaking, together with that of inclosing the church yard with a neat stone wall, had fallen so heavily upon a few individuals that they were unable to provide two things which they needed most: a gallery and a bell, which, as stated in the communication, "we alone of the many societies in this populous place are destitute of."¹

At a parish meeting on Easter Monday, April 4th, 1763, George Ross was requested when next in Philadelphia to arrange with Mr. West or some other person to import two bells, the cost of which was not to exceed one hundred pounds sterling. The bells were to be insured at the expense of the congregation and payment was to be made on their arrival. Mr. Ross was given permission to use his discretion in the matter, and order a size suitable to the church building.

At a meeting of the vestry on Monday, September 19th, 1763, Mr. Ross informed the members that he had not spoken to Mr. West about the bells because the latter had left Philadelphia before he had had an opportunity to do so. The vestry then decided to order Simon and Henry, of Lancaster, to import one bell, diameter

¹ It is difficult to reconcile this statement with that which appears in the old minute book of the parish, under date of December 29th, 1754, wherein it was "Agreed by ye Vestry that John Morris be allowed Forty shillings per annum for *ringing ye bell* and taking care of ye church."

two feet and six inches at the base; and that it be insured at the expense of the parish. Mr. William Atlee was appointed to collect the subscriptions for this purpose.

Nothing, apparently, was done about the matter until seven years later. At a meeting of the wardens and vestry on Monday, April 9th, 1770, it was stated that Jasper Yeates had collected £63, 17s, 6d, and George Ross £20, 1s, 6d, for the purchase of a bell. It was also expected that they would soon be able to obtain from good subscribers the sum of £16, 15s. This would bring the amount up to £100, 14s. The vestry voted that Jasper Yeates and George Ross be a committee to import, through Joseph Swift, merchant in Philadelphia, one bell, 5, 2, 0, in weight with its appurtenances. Whatever funds remained after the large bell was received, was to be used for the purchase of a small bell, with appurtenances. The bell was to be cast with this inscription: "Saint James's church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1770." The committee was instructed to forward to Mr. Swift, with expedition, the monies collected for the purchase of a bill of exchange for the use of Saint James's parish.

The original invoice for the bell is in possession of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and was obtained in the following manner:

The late George M. Steinman, president of The Lancaster County Historical Society from its reorganization in 1896 to 1917, was an antiquarian of note, and it is due to his commendable efforts that so much valuable data concerning Lancaster and vicinity, has been preserved. Mr. Steinman illustrated Christopher Marshall's Diary with original letters, legal papers, photographs, autographs, etc. He secured the original invoice for the bell of Saint James's church, which he inserted in Vol. 3, p. 184. At his death, this invaluable work was presented to The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. This explains why the latter Society has in its possession this precious invoice which should properly belong to Saint James's parish.

The invoice—though aged and time-stained—is in an excellent state of preservation. The penmanship in which it is made out is neat and legible, though rather small, and bears the signs of having been executed by a careful scrivener.

We reproduce here a facsimile of the invoice:

London 31st Dec 1771

Received of the said Messrs. Hill & Roberts in full
 of the sum of £1000 Sterling on the 24th of Decr
 1771 by Messrs. Hill & Roberts in full

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Mr. Steinman also secured a list of the contributors to the bell fund, which he inserted in Marshall's Diary. It was written in a distinct and legible hand and bears the mark of age. Probably the list is not complete, other subscriptions, doubtless, having been made subsequently. Among the contributors are the names of some of the leading families of Lancaster borough at that time. It is as follows:

A list of the several sums paid to J. Yeates by the Contributors to the Bell for St. James's Church.

1770		£	s	d
Jan. 5th.	To cash receiv'd of Wm. Atlee, Esq	5	0	0
" "	" " " Mr. Joseph Simon	2	10	0
" "	" " " Mr. Michael Hubley	0	7	6
" "	" " " J. Yeates	5	0	0
" "	" " " Edward Shippen, Esq.	5	0	0
Jan. 6th.	Mr. Marcus Young	1	2	6
" "	Mr. William Bausman	1	2	6
" 8th.	James Webb, Jr. Esq.	1	10	0
" "	Christian Voight, Esq.	1	0	0
" "	Mr. Adam Reigart	0	7	6
" "	Mr. Michael Diffedorfer	0	7	6
" "	Mr. John Henry	2	10	0
" "	Mr. William Henry	1	0	0
" 10th.	Mr. Christian Wirtz	1	0	0
" "	Mr. Paul Weitzell	1	0	0
" "	Mr. George Mayer	0	15	0
" 14th.	Mr. James Old	1	10	0
Jan. 17th.	Mr. James Ralfe	5	0	0
" 20th.	Dr. Henry Stuber	1	0	0
" 27th.	Robert Magaw, Esq.	1	10	0
Feb. 16th.	Mr. George Moore	2	0	0
March 19th.	Mr. Matthias Slough	5	0	0
" "	To cash rec'd. of Mr. Peter Turner, Jr.	5	0	0
" "	" " " Mr. Mark Bird	2	0	0
" 24th.	" " " Mr. Michael Gross	1	10	0
" 24th.	" " " Mr. Ludwig Lauman	1	0	0
		£55	2	6

It is evident that the following also subscribed to the bell fund:

George Sanderson	£ 5	0	0
Paul Zantzinger	3	0	0
Francis Sanderson	1	7	0
First part cash	2	18	0
Bernard Hubley	0	15	0
April 30, 1770.			
Subscription of Mr. Neaves & Wm. West	4	0	0

The bell is said to have arrived in Lancaster in May, 1771.

At a meeting of the vestry on December 31st, 1771, Jasper Yeates stated that on April 9th, 1770, he had on hand £63, 17s, 6d, and that since that time he had received £18, 17s, bringing the total fund for the bell up to £82, 14s, 6d. He also produced the original invoice of Mildred and Roberts, who shipped the bell, for £43, 17s, sterling. Mr. Joseph Swift presented a bill of £4, 8s, 10¼d, sterling "for freight and portorage." The sums paid into Mr. Yeates's hands having been invested in two bills of exchange amounting to £54, 7s, 3d, sterling, the balance in his possession amounting to £6, 1s, 5¾d, sterling, which at 65% was £10, 1s, 1¼d, Pennsylvania currency.

When the bell was hung in the belfry the expense was taken out of the collections. The vestry voted that Mr. Yeates should reimburse the church collections from the balance of the bell fund in his possession. The records do not show that George Ross made any report of the funds he had collected.² The bell was paid for in two drafts; the first dated April 10th, 1770, to Joseph Swift; and the second on September 10th, 1770, to the same merchant. At a meeting of the vestry on Monday, March 20th, 1775, it was ordered that the balance of the bell fund in Mr. Yeates's possession, which amounted to £5, 12s, ¼d, be turned over to William Atlee, and used for repairing the belfry.

In addition to the subscribers already mentioned, James Bickham, a liquor dealer and chief burgess of the borough, presented a receipted bill for spirits furnished at the raising of the steeple, which antedated the purchase of the bell by some years, but was unpaid. These articles were in various quantities and on different dates in March, 1762. Along with the spirits were considerable quantities of loaf sugar. Three gallons of the spirits are specifically designated as having been "taken to the creek," for what purpose is not clear.

² It is not to be inferred that George Ross failed to make a report of the funds collected by him. It is reasonably certain that he did so, although it was not recorded in the minute book of the vestry, which to all appearances was not accurately kept. George Ross was a devoted member of Saint James's parish; and as a vestryman and member of the committee appointed to purchase a bell he obtained for this purpose the sum of £20, 1s, 6d, as recorded in the minutes of the vestry of April 9th, 1770. It is somewhat singular, however, that his name does not appear on the list of contributors to the bell

The bill is as follows:

March 22d, 1762.

Dr.

The Trustees of St. James's Church

To J. Bickham

March 22d, 1762.	To 9 qts. Spirits at 1/6 per			
	Raising the Steeple	£	0	13
	To Loaf Sugar		0	1
" 23d	To 10 qts. do @ 1/6 per		0	15
" 26th	To 6 qts. " "		0	9
" "	To 4 qts. " "		0	6
" 27th	To 13 qts. " "		0	19
	To loaf sugar		0	4
	To 3 gall. taken to the creek		0	18
		£	4	6
				7

I agree that the Above Account be Considered as part of my subscription towards the Bell to be bought for St. James's Church.

7th March 1770.

Ja. Bickham

fund published in connection with this article. It is reasonable to suppose that inasmuch as he assisted in the collection of funds he naturally made a personal contribution to this laudable object. At a meeting of the vestry on December 31st, 1771, Jasper Yeates reported that up until that time he had received for the bell fund a total of £82, 14s, 6d. This is £10, 12s, more than appears on the list of contributors to the fund. As previously stated in this article, it is generally supposed that subscriptions were also received from persons whose names do not appear in the list of contributors and George Ross may have been one of these.

In the treasurer's book of Saint James's parish, kept by Jasper Yeates, who was treasurer from December 25th, 1771, to December 12th, 1816, appears the following:

J. YEATES TO ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, LANCASTER,
FOR BELL MONEY.

1771	DR.	£	s	d
Dec. 31st.	To Cash remaining in my Hands of the Bell Money agreeable to a Settlement made this Day, in Vestry,	10	1	1½
1771	CR.	£	s	d
Dec. 31st.	By Cash replaced in the Collection Box the following Sums paid throughout towards Hanging the Bell, by Order of Vestry,			
	Pd. Frick's Acco.,	2	8	1
	Cash paid for Carriage of the Bell,	1	0	0
	" Rum for the Workmen,	0	2	0
	" George Burghart's Acco.,	0	12	0
	" Simon & Henry "	0	7	0
	Ballance paid by Order of Vestry, in presence of John Henry,	5	12	0½
		£10	1	1½

So for a century and a half, with but one brief period during the Revolutionary War, the old bell of Saint James's church has faithfully performed the work for which it was purchased in colonial days. It has tolled the knell for the dead, pealed forth the glad salutation to the wedded, clanged the paens of triumph and sobbed the story of the stricken and sorrowing. In all seasons, it has sent its tuneful voice into the air, calling the pious to their devotions and reminding the worldly of things of eternity. Its tongue has never been silent when called upon to speak.

In 1858 the bell cracked while it was being rung for a Sunday morning service. This accident made necessary its recasting, and the inscription it originally bore was destroyed.³ No change was made in the composition of the venerable and sacred relic, however, and the voice which to-day calls to worship in the sanctuary is the same that called our grandparents and great-grandparents to the shrine of historic old Saint James.

The following lines were written by a priest who ministered in Lancaster in 1880. They refer to the old bell in Saint James's tower:

They tell me all is changed. And yet, not all!
The silver tones of the old bell yet fall
Upon the list'ning ear. From o'er the sea,
Ere yet this land of setting sun was free,
It came by friendly wind and rolling wave,
With peals for font, for altar, and the grave.
Sweet bell! O, listen, whilst I tell
The thoughts that with me present dwell:
Whene'er my priestly work is done—
And e'en through death, life's but begun—
Whene'er for body rest is found,
'Neath sunny wave or grassy mound;
No silver tongue of tolling bell
May sweeter sound my funeral knell
Than iron tongue of thine, sweet bell—
Bell of Saint James, I wish thee well!

REV. THOMAS JEFFERSON DANNER.

³ The inscription on it at present is as follows:

PACK & CHAPMAN OF LONDON
FECIT 1770. ST. JAMES'S CHURCH
LANCASTER, PENNSYLVANIA
RECAST BY JOS BERNHARD & CO

No. 120 Nth 6 St.

PHILA

1858