

The Bell Tolls Again at Weatherford College

[Photo: Dr. Farmer.jpg] **3/18/19** — The bell has become an important symbol of the history and heritage of Weatherford College. The interaction of human beings and bells is an interesting facet of world history. First invented in China around 4,000 years ago, bells have played a significant role in both religion and politics. Early bells were used to symbolize wealth, power, and influence. Later, bells were used to communicate the time, to call citizens to church services, to call soldiers to arms, to honor the dead, or even to rally citizens to fight fires. In many cultures, the sound of ringing bells eventually came to represent love and joy, and the practice of ringing wedding bells spread across the globe.

The Liberty Bell is one of the most iconic bells in the world. It is viewed internationally as a symbol of freedom and liberty. Tradition holds that the Liberty Bell rang on July 8, 1776 from the tower of Independence Hall in Philadelphia to summon citizens to the first public reading of the Declaration of Independence by Colonel John Nixon. Pennsylvania Assembly Speaker Isaac Norris had previously ordered the Liberty Bell in 1751 from the Whitechapel Foundry in London. The inscription on the Liberty Bell quoted from Leviticus 25:10 declared, "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants thereof." Once installed in the tower of the Pennsylvania State House, the Liberty Bell cracked during the first test ring on March 10, 1753. The Liberty Bell was locally melted and recast in 1753, but eventually cracked again in the 1840s and its use as a functional bell was discontinued. Although no one alive has ever heard the Liberty Bell ring, it remains a powerful symbol of liberty and is viewed as a national treasure.

Like the Liberty Bell, Weatherford College has two bells that hold symbolic value and are deeply ingrained in WC culture. The first bell is the original bell from the "Old Main" campus. The original WC bell had been cast in 1879 by the Henry McShane Foundry and was mounted in the bell tower in 1895. When the campus was moved from the original location to "The Hill" in 1967, plans were made to relocate some of the original stones and the bell to the new campus in time for classes to begin in 1968. Four members of the Junior Chamber of Commerce assisted with the lowering of the 2,000 pound bell from the bell tower. The original bell was successfully moved to the new campus in 1968, and mounted on a foundation of "Old Main" stones. Now located in the Roy and Jeanne Grogan Historic Plaza, the original bell and stones remain powerful symbols of the rich institutional history of Weatherford College.

The second bell on the Weatherford College campus was added as a result of an ambitious fund raising campaign commemorating the 125th anniversary of WC. Lin Bearden, former WC President Jim Boyd, and others led the effort to raise funds for the construction of the Memorial Plaza amphitheater and the addition of a ringing bell. On October 15, 1994, the WC Foundation hosted the "The Bell-Ringer's Ball" at Ridglea Country Club in Fort Worth. The funds raised from the event were used to construct Memorial Plaza, to install a replica of the "Old Main" bell, and to support student scholarships. The new 1,060 pound replica bell had been cast in 1894 by the Buckeye Bell Foundry. It was hoisted to its perch 14 feet above the ground in 1995 in memory of the former WC Director of Development Carlos Hartnett and his wife Eurith. Then, on September 30, 1995, fireworks were displayed, a Texas Wind Symphony concert was held on Memorial Plaza, and the bell formally rang for the first time. It was a night to remember!

Unfortunately, electronic control panels in the late 1990's were not what they are today. The control panel soon started malfunctioning and caused the Memorial Plaza bell to start ringing at random times.

At some unknown point, the decision was made to shut off the panel, and the bell was silenced. Regretfully, the Memorial Plaza bell sat in disrepair and silence for approximately two decades.

January of 2019 marked the formal beginning of the sesquicentennial year of Weatherford College. I am very proud to announce that in honor of the 150th anniversary of the college, the bell tolls again! I am even more proud to announce that in addition to the noble tones that now emanate once again from the Memorial Plaza bell, the spirit of this noble institution continues to permeate our culture. The toll of the bell reminds us of who we are, where we came from, and why we are here. Just as the Liberty Bell reminds us of freedom and liberty, the institutional toll of the Weatherford College bell reminds us of a hallowed place dedicated to improving the human condition. I invite you to join us in celebrating the sesquicentennial year of Weatherford College. I invite you to support our noble mission in your own unique way. The bell tolls again at Weatherford College. In the famous words of John Donne, “. . . For I am involved in mankind. Therefore, send not to know for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee.”

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