

Our International Friendship Bell – a unique Oak Ridge symbol, part 2 (As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 27, 2008)

Thanks for letting me pause in this series to inject what I felt were two important historical events. The recognition of Ed Westcott and John Rice Irwin was certainly well deserved and should be documented and the upcoming Jefferson Bass novel may do more for publicizing Oak Ridge's history to a national audience than anything else we could attempt.

I also have received a number of comments from folks who were personally involved in the bell effort, both those in support of it and those who had concerns about it. That feedback sure helped me put a better perspective on the whole project. I want to express my sincere appreciation for all the e-mail and phone calls regarding the bell.

In the introductory article in this series, I introduced Ted Lollis as being a source of compiled information on the International Friendship Bell. He has helped me put the whole history into perspective. The research he has done is thorough and most valuable.

I also noted that Shigeko Uppuluri is THE key individual who, along with her late husband, Ram, initiated the idea. She also has pursued the multitude of tasks required to realize their dream, and finally saw the dream fully realized. She expressed it best when she told me that "Ram would be proud that children are often seen ringing the bell."

Bill Wilcox was also mentioned along with Pat Postma. I only introduced Dr. Alvin Weinberg's thoughts on the bell, however, we will see later how totally he was dedicated to assuring the bell idea became a reality for Oak Ridge. His is a story of deep dedication and true devotion to an ideal.

The "Committee of 50" was introduced as a driving force for Oak Ridge's 50th anniversary celebration. Finally, we included Dr. Joe Tittle who led the effort to celebrate Oak Ridge's 50th anniversary. We will pick up with the effort to identify something appropriate to commemorate this auspicious occasion.

But first let me say that the more I learn of the full scope of the extensive efforts taken to bring us to where we are now regarding the bell, the more I have come to appreciate Oak Ridgers. Only here could something so special yet so widely contemplated and even initially quite controversial have ultimately settled into a centerpiece of our community.

Now let's go back to 1990 and pick up the story.

Formal proposals for a lasting memorial were invited by Dr. Tittle and his birthday committee on January 26, 1990. What was requested was a "monument to become a visible, continuing symbol of the celebration theme: 'Born of War, Living for Peace, Growing through Science.'"

In response to this request six ideas were submitted.

1. Plans for a higher education center
2. The renovation of the Children's Museum
3. A life-size statue of "visionary" John Hendrix
4. A carillon bell tower to mark the "center" of town
5. The reconstruction of the performing arts pavilion behind the Civic Center
6. "The Japanese Bell"

An example of the excellent feedback I received on the first article is this comment from Chuck Coutant, "We also had a second big proposal from Audrey Stelson and others for a new performing pavilion for Bissell Park (as the old one was dilapidated and not useable). They also had a very professional-looking proposal. Our committee heard presentations in the board room of ORAU in support of each proposal. We were in a fix with two excellent proposals. We decided to really extend ourselves and support both.

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Audrey pressed ahead with the pavilion now currently in place in the park (mostly privately funded--see the plaque of contributors on it). Shigeko pressed ahead with the bell."

Audrey Schlafke-Stelson is a friend who worked for years with my wife, Fanny, and I will consult her regarding the Performing Arts Pavilion. Can't you just see another *Historically Speaking* story developing as I tell the history of the pavilion?

After the selection of the bell project, additional interested individuals joined the "bell committee." Ethel McDonald took over as chair (she had led the preparation of the proposal, a most professional product). Local artist Susanna Harris was asked to design panels for the bell that would incorporate influences of Japan and East Tennessee.

Jon Coddington, local architecture professor, offered to design a pavilion incorporating both eastern and western traditions. His design was influenced by the cantilevered style barns of East Tennessee and the need for massive beams to visually balance the structure with a huge bell and also for durability.

Next began the worry about funds. The Committee of 50 had formed an Oak Ridge Community Foundation. However, the ORCF did not provide funds, so the bell committee struggled to determine how to fund the project.

Ram Uppuluri, Jr. returned to Oak Ridge after graduating from Vanderbilt Law School and on October 20, 1991 held a "Friendship Bell Festival."

At about the same time that Ram, Jr. was creating the festival, a second person who would become a "champion of the bell" was visiting Hiroshima and ringing the Japanese bell there. Alvin Weinberg was contemplating the whole series of world changing events brought about by the creation of the atomic bomb during his visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Desirous that atomic bombs never again be used to kill, just as he was desirous at one time that the bomb dropped on Hiroshima be exploded first in a demonstration, he now sought some way for the "sanctification of Hiroshima" as a means to assure that never again would an atomic bomb be used to kill.

He changed his mind about the demonstration and later indicated that he felt the dropping of the atomic bomb on Japanese cities was necessary and resulted in the saving of lives by ending the war. He came to see that a demonstration would not likely have accomplished an end to the war and likely an invasion of Japan would have occurred with enormous loss of lives.

Yet, he still desired to find a way to assure atomic bombs would never be used again. He saw a ray of hope to that end in the bell as a symbol that would last a very long time. So he joined forces with the bell committee soon after his return from Japan.

In January 1992, one year after the bell was selected as one of the birthday memorials, the executive committee of the Oak Ridge Community Foundation, a group that had formed to collect funds as the Committee of 50 was intended to be discontinued after the 50th birthday celebration, informed the bell committee that funds would have to be raised.

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The amount needed was unknown, but a visit from the eventual bell maker, Sotetsu Iwazawa, established a price of \$83,000, that included a \$42,000 discount. Raising the necessary funds was ultimately accomplished through gifts from both Japanese and American sources.

The untimely death of Ethel McDonald at age 49 on September 4, 1992 led to Weinberg taking on a much more active leadership role in raising the necessary funds. He also put a significant sum of personal funding into the project.

Meanwhile, the Committee of 50's Birthday Committee succeeded in holding a successful celebration of Oak Ridge's 50th birthday. I have learned that Carol Smallridge and Patty Shelton (Loch at that time) were the two people who planned and executed the city's 50th birthday party. Can you imagine planning a birthday party for a whole city? I have contacted them both and am looking forward to sitting down with them and hearing all about that party!

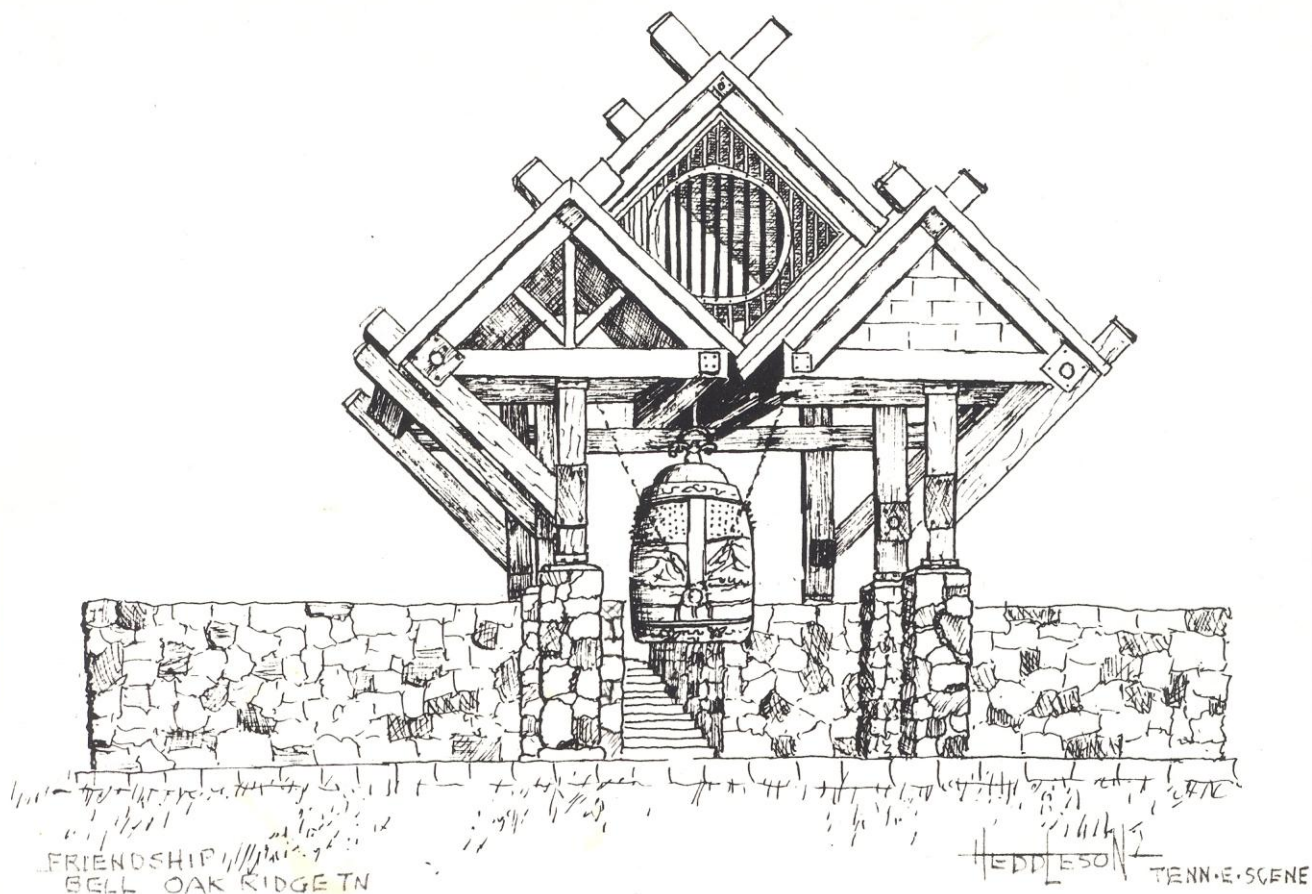
Theirs is an intriguing story...think about it, how in the world do you plan a birthday party for an entire city? I will let Carol and Patty tell their story in an upcoming installment of this series.

We will also take a closer look at Herman Postma's contribution to the story of the bell. He sustained the effort through difficult times and kept his focus fully on the primary goal of assuring the bell was prominently displayed and accessible to all. He was instrumental in every aspect of the effort once he took it on as a personal project. Nothing else would have been acceptable to him. All his engagements were wholeheartedly undertaken.

Again, I want to express my appreciation for those of you who have contacted me and provided access to your information for my research on the history of our International Friendship Bell. Please continue to contact me with information as we continue the series on the bell's colorful history.

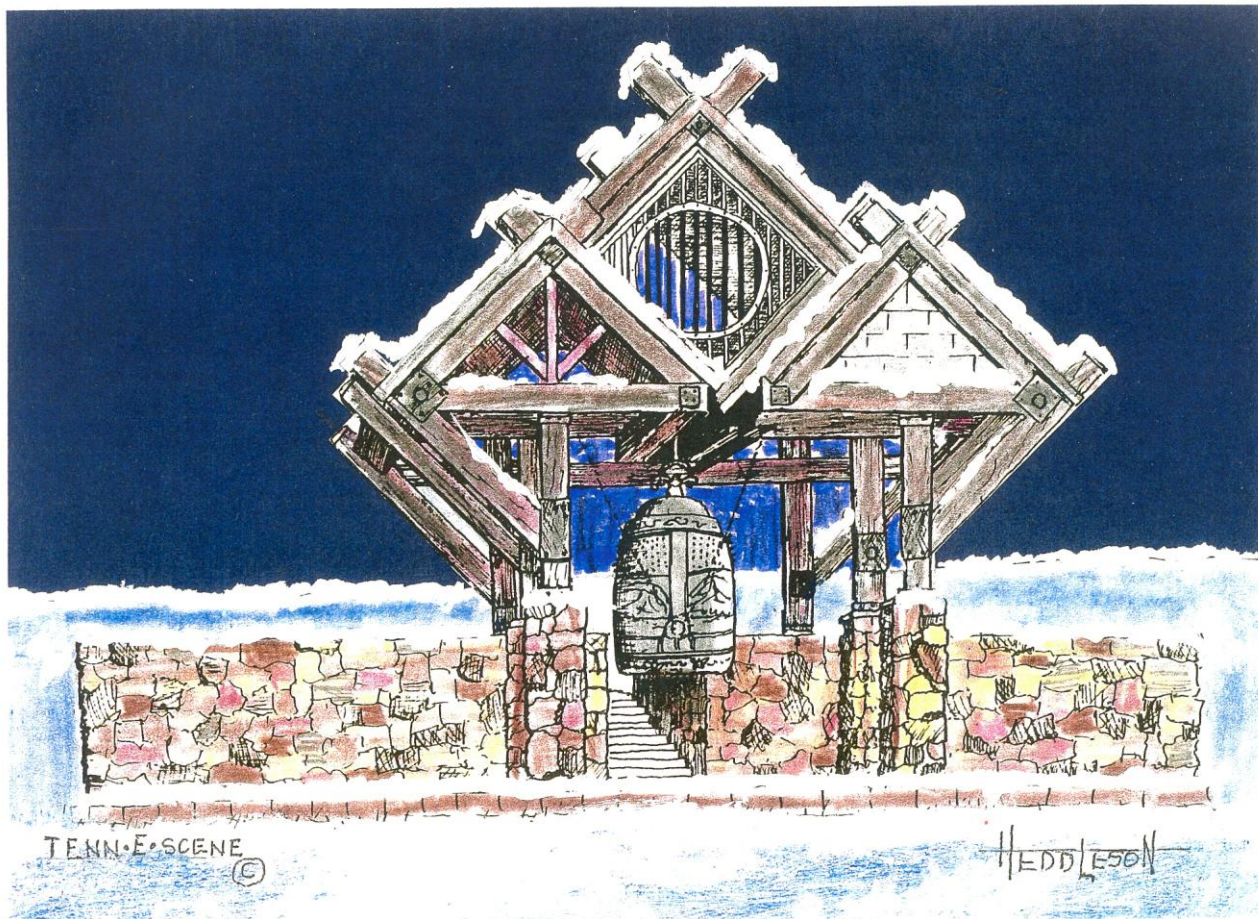
Next we will follow the bell through funding, casting, shipping, acceptance by the city to its final destination and the efforts taken to get through the concerns raised by some citizens as well as the ringing issue. We will conclude with the current situation and some interesting observations of the bell's heritage as it becomes a contributing element in Oak Ridge's history.

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Fred Heddleson's sketches of the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell are popular items at the Secret City Festival when he sets up his display along with the Oak Ridge Heritage and Preservation Association. This is one of my favorite images of the bell.

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Fred Heddleson's colored sketch with snow added was used as the 2007 Christmas Card from the Oak Ridge City Council.