

Our International Friendship Bell – a unique Oak Ridge symbol, part 4 *Fundraising and casting of the bell*

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on June 24, 2008)

Wow, Ted Lollis has sure put up a really great web site on our International Friendship Bell! You can see it at <http://bell.maripo.com/>. As usual, he has done a most thorough job of publishing a most helpful chronology of events surrounding the history of the bell. I was already using much of his research he had provided me in hard copy as resource material for these articles, but this web site is even more complete.

In last week's *Historically Speaking*, the focus was on the Oak Ridge Community Foundation. As is usually the case when I write about something primarily from one or two people's input, there are other perceptions. In the case of this early Oak Ridge Community Foundation, the reason that it did not continue as the originators intended and hoped for is not understood the same way by all.

Yet everyone I spoke with agreed that it formed an early example of successful effort to raise private funds. These early pioneers in local fundraising efforts are to be commended for their willingness to take a chance on the community and to personally invest their time, money and reputation to help the community accomplish a worthwhile project.

Now let's again pick up the history of the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell. Let's now look at the fundraising that was needed to actually cast a bell, transport it from Kyoto, Japan to Oak Ridge, Tennessee and to build a structure in which to house the bell.

The fundraising which had begun much earlier increased in intensity after January, 1992. Recall that the Oak Ridge Friendship Bell Committee was formed much earlier, in 1987. Shigeko Uppuluri was the chairperson. An Advisory Committee consisted of James (Buzz) Elkins, Eugene L. Joyce, Marilyn Lloyd, Elaine Trauger and Ram Uppuluri.

This committee's efforts to bring a bell to Oak Ridge resulted in a strong vision for the project. This strong vision led to the excellent presentation that enabled the bell to be seen by the Committee of 50 as an appropriate symbol of Oak Ridge's 50th birthday celebration. However, no fundraising was attempted.

In February 1990, Shigeko Uppuluri wrote, "The giant peace bell in our proposal would ring for peace. Its deep resonance would pour over the hills like summer's thick morning fog. Soothing and beautiful would be the sound. It would be the sound of peace and contentment, a sound that transcends political opinion or nationality."

Several other things happened to increase public awareness and to bring attention to the bell project. It was a time of increased interest in Oak Ridge's Manhattan Project history. A 50th birthday was upon the city. Many people were engaged in planning and executing the extended celebration.

Oak Ridge's sister city of Naka-shi, Ibaraki-ken, Japan provided \$14,000. The two cities became "sister cities" by proclamation on October 29, 1990. Shigeko visited the sister city of Naka-shi and the donation was the result of her telling the leaders there of the project. The Atomic Energy Society of Japan contributed a little over \$23,000. There were more contributions from Japan.

Recall also that in an earlier article in this series, I mentioned that Ram Uppuluri, Jr. returned to Oak Ridge after graduating from Vanderbilt Law School and on October 20, 1991 and held a "Friendship Bell Festival." This festival was an attempt to raise funds and awareness for the effort to provide a bell for Oak Ridge. It succeeded in raising awareness, but did not bring in any appreciable funds.

Frustration must have been growing as the time drew near for the project to be completed if it was to be available during the actual 50th birthday celebration. This celebration was set to begin on September 19, 1992 as that was the date in 1942, 50 years earlier, that General Groves traveled to this area and issued the orders to buy the land. The celebration lasted until December, 1993.

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

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contemplating the whole series of world changing events brought about by the creation of the atomic bomb during his visit to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

When Weinberg returned to Oak Ridge he agreed to be the co-chairman of the Bell Committee. On October 18, 1991, he wrote a guest column in *The Oak Ridger* where he stated his impressions upon visiting Japan's two cities devastated by atomic bombs – Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

As a part of his experience at Hiroshima he saw the large Japanese bell where visitors used a 10-foot horizontal wooden pole suspended by ropes to ring the huge bell. It made a strong impression on him.

He concluded his guest column with, "The oak Ridge Friendship Bell ought to acquire the same kind of transcendent, religious character as has the Hiroshima Bell. It will forever be Oak Ridge's recognition that the nuclear holocaust of Hiroshima should never be repeated. "

Ultimately, Weinberg would contribute \$10,000 personally to the effort. His commitment was strong. His desire to leave a lasting monument that would stand for peace and for non-use of nuclear weapons was strong. He dedicated himself to this project.

Over the next few years controversy would arise regarding the bell. Weinberg and others would attempt to remind the public of the original idea of a "friendship bell" through newspaper articles. Funding was not coming in quickly.

An insight was gained into the difficulties being experienced by the Oak Ridge Community Foundation and the Oak Ridge Friendship Bell Committee when Shigeko recently presented information about how all the funding for the various aspects of the bell project actually came to be raised. It is a most interesting story.

She told the employees of Wackenhut at their Asian/Pacific American Heritage Month Celebration on Thursday, 6/19/08, that the bell came to be in Oak Ridge through a series of unusual events. As I have said earlier, she was the key element in all these events.

Here is how she tells the story. She begins by noting that the idea of a bell grew from an original thought she and her husband, Ram, had regarding the value of a huge bell that could be a central element in a park in Oak Ridge.

She goes on to say that the events to make that happen just seemed to fall into place. First the funding was hard to raise, but substantial funds did come from Japan, local industries and individuals. Yet, there were things that were never funded. They were donated. Those actions by groups and individuals form a key part of the story of our bell.

First, the bell maker, Sotetsu Iwanzawa, discounted the bell substantially reducing the cost some \$42,000. When he visited Oak Ridge in April of 1993, very little funding had been raised even then. He had earlier outlined a plan for payment when he visited Oak Ridge in 1991 - one third at the time of the order, one third at the casting of the bell and one third when delivered.

In discussion with Ram and Shigeko, it became apparent that Ram was willing to put his savings into the bell. This impressed Iwanzawa and he dropped the payment order and told the Uppuluri's they could just pay for the bell when they raised the money.

He also cast 500 miniature bells to be sold for \$250 and shipped 400 of them with the bell. He kept 100 of them to sell in Japan and recoup his cost to cast them. He later took another 100 bells to sell and provided the money raised to help fund the project.

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Another example is the packing of the bell. Iwanzawa knew a packing company that he felt would be glad to donate the packaging of the huge bell and also the small miniatures. That was done free of charge.

Then there was the shipping. Shigeko told of thinking how in the world were they going to be able to get a four ton bell shipped. She said a newspaper reporter in Japan said to her, "I know how to do that" and proceeded to approach Honda to help. They agreed and just sent a bell instead of one Honda car – at no cost.

That got the bell to Savannah, GA. Getting it to Oak Ridge was accomplished by Herman Postma. That is yet another interesting story. A trucking company that routinely made trips for the Oak Ridge National Laboratory to Savannah was also coming back to Oak Ridge empty. So, one of those "empty" returns included a large wooden crate weighing over four tons – our bell!

When a large group of individuals went to Japan to see the bell maker cast the bell, Herman Postma accompanied his wife, Pat, on the trip. Having him along made Shigeko wonder how she would make the trip enjoyable for him.

She need not have worried, he very much enjoyed the trip. Like the visit Weinberg made in 1991, this trip Postma made in 1993 caused him to see the potential of having a large Japanese bell in Oak Ridge.

The bell was cast by Japanese master bell maker, Sotetsu Iwazawa on July 14, 1993 at his Kyoto foundry. The design includes two vertical panels urging international friendship and peace. That design was created by Oak Ridge artist Susanna Harris.

The casting ceremony was traditional Japanese. The bronze material is 85 percent copper and 15 percent tin. This mixture is known to make the bell's tone rich and also is a lasting material that requires little upkeep. It is the material of choice for bells.

For the American delegation some of the activities surrounding the casting must have been unusual. Herman Postma captured much of the casting in photographs and even made a video of the event.

The casting of the bell made strong impressions on all who participated. In attendance were Mayor Ed Nephew, Marese Nephew, Dr. Ram Uppuluri, Shigeko Uppuluri, Ram Uppuluri Jr., a friend of Shigeko (Yuko Fukuda), and a group from the University of Tennessee (Wendell Barnes, Patricia Davis-Wiley, Marie Griffin, Dennie Ruth Kelly, Sook-Hyun Kim, Ann Lester, Martha Osborne, Prof. Pat Postma, Prof. Carl J. Remenyki, Dr. C. Glennon Rowell, and Prof. J. Paul Watkins). Dr. Herman Postma accompanied his wife Pat. (Thanks to Ted Lollis for this accurate accounting of who attended the ceremony.)

The bell arrived in Oak Ridge in October 1993 and was placed in the atrium of the Municipal Building. Next we will look at the design and construction of the pavilion. Shigeko tells of asking the University of Tennessee's Architect Department who they would suggest to design the pavilion for the bell. The person she was talking to immediately thought of Jon Coddington, who agreed.

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The delegation who attended the casting of the bell are standing with the bell maker and others from the impressive bell casting ceremony