



# Bell Piano Newsletter<sup>©</sup>

Volume 2 Issue 3

Published By: MBI Communications Ltd.

September 2006

## Homeward Bound

This past March BPN reported that one of the first Bell pianos had been found and was sitting in a garage in Picton, Ontario. The owners were looking for a good home for it and to everyone's joy one has been found. (details in Bell News March 2006)

The Royal Retirement Residence on Gordon Street in Guelph was pleased to accept this 1885 piano that was made in Guelph 121 years ago. This piano is not only a playable piece of history but as its newest and oldest resident.

Brigid Dekker, the Activity Coordinator, of the Royal was contacted by David Briant of MBI Communications to see if they would be interested in having this Bell piano. Mrs. Dekker was enthusiastic and delighted to have the piano added to the Royal. It was on display at the Royals Grand Opening on September 21, 2006 (left).



Photo By: Darren Calabrese, Guelph Mercury (09/21/06)

On Monday August 28th 2006 Bell piano 0083 was delivered to The Royal with many smiles from the residents and staff. Mr. Briant tuned the piano in preparation for its debut. See 'Tuning a piece of history' on page 4.

After leaving Guelph in 1885 Bell 0083 travelled to Montreal and remained there for many years. Later it was sold to a piano store in Sydney, Nova Scotia. It was purchased by a woman who many years later gave it to her grand daughter in Dartmouth, N.S. There it sat unplayed for a few more years until the girls great uncle Bob Norton moved it to Picton, Ontario in 2004.

Sales and give away attempts by Mr. Norton were not successful. Until an interested person in nearby Belleville contacted Mr. Briant about its history. This person did not take the piano but did give Mr. Norton's name to Mr. Briant in October of 2005. Now Bell 0083 is back in Guelph and will once again bring musical enjoyment to all.

Professional pianist Tim Louis, who performed at the Royals opening, looked at and played Bell 0083. He commented at how light and bright the play was considering its age and condition.

"Even though it was off by half a note in the bass section it was not noticeable and played well." said Mr. Louis. The bass bridge had cracked and shifted thus giving the bass notes that lower tone.

Everyone is pleased that this piece of Guelph history is alive and well as a playable piece of Canadian piano history. Finds like this are rare and are appreciated when they are found.

## The Expanding Newsletter

It is now our pleasure to announce two new publications. The Canadian Piano News and Canadian Organ News. Each will focus on Canadian made pianos and organs and their companies. A copy of all three newsletters will be sent to all existing BPN subscribers this September.

Since there will now be three publications it will give each person a chance to choose the newsletter they prefer. Email us at [pianos@mbi-communications.com](mailto:pianos@mbi-communications.com) or [mbicom@bellnet.ca](mailto:mbicom@bellnet.ca) as to which newsletter or newsletters you want.

## Is This a Bell Piano?

Recently the BPN came across a Bell piano that was not marked as a Bell piano. The usual signs of the Bell Piano and Organ Company were missing, as indicated by the large red circle in picture A. There was no company name or double Bell logo present like the one at left from Bell 5758 made in 1895. The serial number (white oval of picture A) was worn and faded yet said 12451.

Now the investigation began as to whether this was really a Bell piano or not.

From the style of piano case, the age of the strings and action this piano appears to be 80 to 100 years old. This number is too large for a Nordheimer or Sherlock-Manning and too small for a Mason & Risch or Heintzman. The two closet companies to this number is Gerhard Heintzman and Dominion. These are Toronto companies and proudly displayed their name.

No other company numbers fit so that leaves Bell.

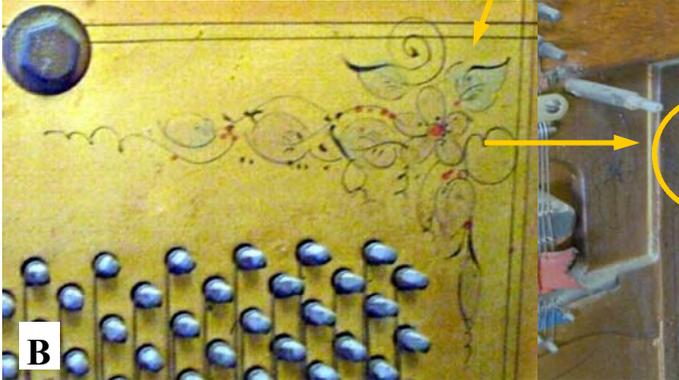
Picture B is a flower design that is in the top right corner of picture A. To the left in picture C is a similar flower design found on Bell 083. Bell often used flower designs on the sound board and sometimes on the outside front panel.

The wood pattern in picture D is similar to that in picture E. This E picture is from Bell 3811 made in 1889 (estimated year). Although it cannot be seen here the middle music desk pulls out from the bottom slightly as in other Bell models.

On the back of the piano in picture F there are eight supports the same as Bell 0083 picture G and in Bell 5758 (no picture). There is also the same cross piece on both pianos as well.

For the past 100 years. This piano has been in the same house on Woolwich Street in Guelph being passed from one home owner to the next since the home was built in 1905.

(continued pg 4)



## The Case of the Cracked Bell®

In part one Inspector James Radcliffe was told that Sir William Bell had been killed by a train. Sir William was the owner of the largest employer in the town of Galt with the organ and piano factory. However, upon the inspectors arrival at the scene he suspects murder.

### Part 2

“Well Mallory it looks like you will need more rope and yellow cloth to place around this area as well.” Said the inspector to the young constable. Mallory turned to leave.

Radcliffe was looking at the ground as Mallory was leaving. He noticed something unusual in the pile of strewn timbers and foot prints. “Oh! Mallory. Bring back one of Jenkins moulding kits he has for children.” Mallory was puzzled by this request but did as he was told.

Sergeant Higginbottom had stayed with the three men who found the body. He had finished getting the names and statements and had constable Thorndike escort the men to the factory and to make sure they were not docked any pay for lateness. He was now going to give his report to the inspector.

“Do not come any closer sergeant,” snapped the inspector. “I do not want this ground disturbed any more than necessary. Go back and remove Sir William’s shoes and bring them here.” Higginbottom was just as puzzled as Mallory at this request but did as he was ordered.

Davis had returned with Doctor Chambers and the mortician McIntyre. “Hello John, Gilbert. Sorry to bring you both out here on such a day as this. I need your assistance and I need answers by this afternoon.” Stated the inspector directly to both men.

“I want you both to quickly look at the deceased. He was struck by a train last night. It is a grizzly sight I am afraid. Gilbert tell Sergeant Higginbottom what you need to transport the body to your establishment in preparation for burial. John once the body is there examine it closely for any marks that might help us identify the body more accurately. Put anything you find on or near the body in these paper candy bags.

Have the sergeant make a list of what you find and where. Also look for anything that might indicate whether this was an accident or if he was **helped** to be in front of the train.”

All the men were surprised at this last statement. “Surely, James you do not think...”

“Murdered?” The inspector finished the thought for the doctor. “At this time I'm not ruling out anything. Let us put a name to the deceased by this afternoon. Then we can look at the real cause of death whether it be an accident or not later. The lively hood of 800 men and this town depend upon whom this man is and how he died.”

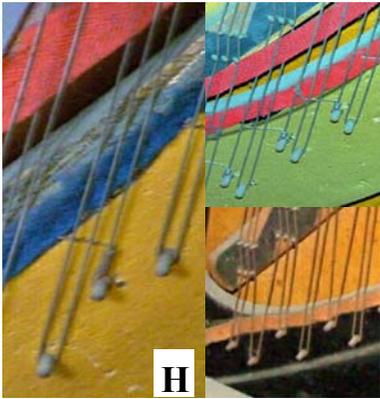
The doctor and the mortician looked at each other and then back to the inspector. They had already heard the rumours and had been asked by the crowd if it was Sir William's body. Both men nodded to the inspector and turned toward the body.

Lieutenant Kelly had arrived just moments before with Colonel George McCrea and Mr. Donald Thompson. They had heard what the inspector had told the others.

“Morning George. Mister Thompson I'm glad you brought your photographic equipment. Lieutenant I want you and Mr. Thompson to work with Colonel McCrea to photograph the body and surrounding area and bring everything to me. George this is a sorry business and I apologize for imposing upon you at this time. You were closer to Willie then I but right now I need your military experience as a soldier, engineer, and artist to give me a clearer idea of what happened.”

McCrea choked back a lump in his throat. Then Colonel George McCrea, twice decorated in the line of duty, stood up straight, threw back his head and shoulders and replied, “SIR.” and saluted smartly. The salute was returned and he marched off with both Mister Thompson and Lieutenant Kelly running along behind.

Constable Mallory had finished roping off the fallen timber pile. The inspector was walking toward him when he noticed two people in the crowd. ‘What are they doing together? Their positions do not permit them to associate like that. Why are they talking like that?’ He thought. I need to tell the inspector about this.



Bell Mystery continued from page 2

The Bell Company had many workers living in this area at the time.

Treble strings on most pianos go from one hitch pin in the bottom to a tuning pin at the top, each treble note has three separate wires. In Bell pianos there are only two bottom pins. In earlier models one was a hitch pin and the other a loop pin. The left string went down and looped at the bottom coming back up to the centre pin. Bell later used all loop pins for the treble strings and Bell 12451 has this wiring. Picture H is from Bell 0083 (left), Bell 12451 (bottom), and Bell 34276 (top) made in 1925.

From this evidence of having a Bell serial number that fits, the flower design, the front panel molding, the back wood supports in the same pattern, the string wiring, and being in the same Guelph house since 1905 points to this piano being made by the Bell Company. So why no Bell name or logos.

There is no evidence that any information had been removed. Here are some possible reasons for no name. An employee bought it and did not want the name or logo on it. The Kelly Music Store in downtown Guelph sold Bell pianos under the Kelly name and this was the case would not have the Bell name on it. The Kelly logo on the outside has since worn off. The current home on Woolwich Street was once a grocery store and this piano could have been purchased in trade from Bell.

This may not have been a high end television crime scene investigation adventure yet it was enjoyable tracking down the clues with related Bell piano material. It has also been worthwhile relating this experience as it is part of our lost history that needs to be told. In future the BPN hopes to bring other such stories to you for your enjoyment. Let BPN know what you think of why there is no Bell name.

### Tuning a Piece of History

Tuning this 121 year old piano was the oldest piano I have ever tuned. Considering it had not been tuned in years, lived half of its life in the moist salty weather of an Atlantic province, and spent over a year in a garage it was in remarkable condition. All the strings and tuning pins were original and rusty. Trying not to break them all was a real challenge.

Tuning pins were tight within the wooden frame. Steel frames were not used until years later. Each pin had to be loosened before being tightened.

One side of a looped string was two notes lower while its partner string was only half a note lower. Many treble hammers were striking two of the three strings yet the third string still had to be adjusted otherwise an off pitch echo would be heard.

A balancing act had to be maintained for each note. Each string for each note had to be tightened slowly to avoid breakage. Looped strings had to be checked a second time for accuracy. After 2.5 hours the treble strings were done with only one very rusty string breaking.

The bass strings with their tuning pins sat on a wooden bass bridge that had cracked and shifted downward. Two separate notes had now become 1.5 notes. Instead of two hammers striking two sets of two strings one hammer struck one string and the other hammer struck three strings. At best each note could only be tuned to the lower note of its neighbour, an A was a G#. Another 1.5 hours and the bass section was done. Unfortunately two bass strings didn't make it.

To me this was a once in a lifetime experience to be able to find a piece of Canadian piano history, find someone who wanted it and then to tune it was a thrill. There were some tense moments and it took 4 hours, twice the usual time, but in the end it was worth it.



By David Briant

Guelph & Wellington County (519) 837-1419  
 Kitchener & Waterloo County (519) 716-6236  
 Email: [bellnews@mbi-communications.com](mailto:bellnews@mbi-communications.com)



Serving Wellington and Waterloo counties since 1985.