

# CARILLON TOWER



Fig. 1. The carillon tower c. 1938. [Series 9/1, Carillon, jf-57]

*The carillon tower was built with donated funds in 1936, with a set of 35 bells. The bells have been added to twice, in 1963 and 1973. More than any other campus building, the carillon tower symbolizes the Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin.*

The original plan of the class of 1917 was to collect money to help replace the burned dome on Bascom Hall, and to install in the dome a set of chimes. As this fund-raiser gradually took shape, succeeding classes (1917 through 1926) donated to that fund, rather than set up and define their own projects. In 1931 after consultation with state architect Arthur Peabody, it was found that both structurally and aesthetically, it was very unlikely that the dome would ever be rebuilt.<sup>1</sup>

The fund-raising had been so successful that the committee decided in the spring of 1932 that they could buy not only carillon bells, but a structure in which to hang them. Throughout the fund-raising period, the chairman of the "chimes committee" was Norris Wentworth. By the end of 1932 the regents had authorized final design and bids. The location was set

as the knoll northwest of Bascom Hall near the Blackhawk marker.<sup>2</sup>

State architect Arthur Peabody submitted a design for the Carillon tower to the chimes fund on June 9, 1933. The tower was eighty five feet high, twenty feet square, with a steel frame and stone walls; it had a stone parapet above the cornice and a flat roof. The iron stairs lead steeply to the third level playing floor, and upwards to the bell chamber, with its arched openings. The Madison rubble stone walls and the balustrade with turned stone balusters deliberately mirrored the design of Bascom Hall. Estimates indicated that the project would cost about \$30,000.<sup>3</sup>

When bids for construction were received, prices had risen and there was little money left for the bells. The committee appealed to the Public Works Administration and the Public Works Administration (PWA) responded with a grant of \$8700-\$11,600. On October 10, 1934 the regents approved the lowest bid of \$28,200 of Maas Brothers of Watertown Wisconsin. Ground was broken the next day. The cornerstone ceremony featuring a dedication speech by president Glenn Frank (see Fig. 2) was held December 5, 1934. The tower construction was completed in June 1935.<sup>4</sup>

The committee had decided through investigation of existing carillons, that a set of thirty five bells would be suitable. They made contact with several bell manufacturers before deciding on Gillett



Fig. 2. December 5, 1936, the cornerstone ceremony, with president Glenn Frank. [Series 9/1, Carillon, ns-895]



Fig. 3. The carillon keyboard in use (Ralph Ehlert). [Series 9/1, Carillon, jf-58]

and Johnston Ltd. of Croydon England. Funds were not sufficient to buy all thirty five bells at once so the committee settled upon twenty five bells, but the framework and playing console were built to accommodate thirty six bells, the set to be completed by adding five lighter and six heavier bells at a later date. The dedication concert was held on June 20, 1936. The music included "On Wisconsin" and "Drink to Me Only With Thine Eyes"; the carillonneur was Professor Ira Schroeder of Iowa State. Persons in automobiles were requested to refrain from sounding the horn or starting the engines during the recital. In 1937 the five smaller bells were added to the carillon. This configuration of thirty bells was suitable for about twenty five years.

In 1963 a major renovation took place. Twenty seven small bells were installed, six to replace old ones that had proved unsatisfactory (the new bells were cast by the French firm Georges Paccard). This brought the total to fifty one bells. The playing console was changed, and a practice console installed on the second level. The rededication was on September 22, 1963 and again featured Ira Schroeder as carillonneur. At this time, too, the UW Foundation which had collected the \$10,500 for this renovation, began to accept gifts for five large bells which would complete the set. Calculations indicated that the tower could accommodate the additional ten thousand pounds.<sup>5</sup>

This set of bells (from the Eisjsbouts foundry in Holland) was ready in the summer of 1973. Besides the new bells the regents installed a mechanical player which can ring the hours, and play 30-second prepared melodies. Other changes included the installation of heat, and a new staircase. These changes brought the carillon to a total of fifty six bells in four and one half octaves, one of the largest carillons in the country. The second rededication of the carillon took place on May 13, 1973, and again featured Ira Schroeder. The public is welcome to visit the carillon tower during the regular Sunday concerts.<sup>6</sup>

1) The idea came from Belle Fligelman '13 according to Norris Wentworth the chairman of the fund committee. *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, November 1934, *Daily Cardinal*, December 13, 1966.

2) Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Regents, May 8, 1933, December 13, 1932, September 11, 1933, April 4, 1934, *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 2, 1935,

3) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, May, 1957, May, 1947, files of the department of planning and construction.

4) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, January 1935, July 1935, *Milwaukee Journal*, January 23, 1936, *Capital Times*, January 26, 1936, Dedication Program, Carillon subject folder, University Archives.

5) *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, July, 1963; *Capital Times*, September 4, 1964; *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 23, 1963.

6) *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 25, 1972, May 13, 1973; *Wisconsin Alumni Magazine*, July, 1973; *Capital Times*, March 2, 1973;