



Festival 2024 Updates

by Chris Peck, Area 8 Chair

Things are “Scooting” right along.

Our Area 8 Festival will take place June 20–22, 2024, in Columbia, Missouri. Fun facts: Columbia is Missouri’s fastest growing city with 128,500 residents in 2022. Its average low/high temperature for June is 65°/85°, respectively. Columbia College’s mascot is “Scooter the Cougar.”

Holiday Inn Executive Center will be our host site. It is conveniently located along I-70 and is located very near to walking trails, an indoor shopping mall (remember the 80s?), and wineries. The hotel event rooms are all on one level and most are larger than in the past.

Our main clinicians will be Stevie Berryman and Greig Ashurst, whose biographies are on page 2.

Our schedule will be very similar to 2022. Thursday will include focused Seminar sessions for ringers and directors with Stevie and Greig (topics are to be determined), while the mass ringing and classes will take place Friday and Saturday. There will be reading sessions throughout the two days and BronzeFest will begin rehearsals on Thursday evening.

I hope to have a repertoire list for all divisions in the next month, as well as more detailed information about the festival, the hotel, and the registration process soon. Keep checking the Area 8 website for more information.

Oh, and did I mention Scholarships? New this year, as a result of the fundraising efforts from the 2022 Festival in Kansas City, we’re able to offer a limited number of scholarships for individuals that have not been to an Area 8 Festival before, but who could benefit greatly by attending.

I’m looking forward to the increasing amount of momentum as we “scoot” with you toward Columbia, Missouri, in 2024!

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Festival Clinicians

Stevie Berryman can't whistle. But she makes fantastic pesto, and she can fold a fitted sheet. Likewise, her skills as music director and teacher have also been acquired through long hours of arduous and dedicated practice. For much of her career Stevie has directed seven or more ensembles each week, meaning she has 114 years of experience (in dog years). Her effusive energy and wild creativity found a perfect setting in 2013 when she became the Artistic Director of the Houston Chamber Ringers, which has let her smash together her love for music, laughter, and tacos in a truly remarkable way. She has a particular passion for teaching beginners how to ring, and her innovative, play-based methods have made her a sought-after educator and clinician at area and national handbell festivals. Stevie serves as the handbell director at First Congregational Church Houston, and loves helping other choirs as a private clinician or planning epic concerts for them as a creative consultant. She and her husband Paul are co-owners of Truly Horrible Things, a snarky card game company, even though her mother always told her that no one would ever pay her to be sarcastic.

For over thirty years, **Greig Ashurst** has developed an impressive conducting and teaching career in many facets of music, technology, and educational philosophy across the United States. A native of Lafayette, Louisiana, he served as a music educator in Louisiana, North Carolina, and Texas. Currently, Mr. Ashurst is director of bands and director of technology at Cathedral-Carmel School, where he was selected as the 2016-2017 Teacher of the Year, an honor for which he was selected twice previously in Louisiana and North Carolina. He is a published composer and arranger and has two lines of mallets that he designed specifically for playing on handbells. These mallets, sold by Schulmerich Bells, have changed the timbral landscape of handbell music throughout the world. He currently serves as president-elect of the Handbell Musicians of America and is an advocate for getting handbells into schools throughout the United States.



Stevie Berryman



Greig Ashurst

Area 8 Festival • June 20–22, 2024
Columbia, Missouri

Ringling!
Classes!
Concerts!
Shopping!
Networking!

Save the Date!

Check the Area 8 website for more information: area8.handbellmusicians.org

What Do These Four People Have in Common?



They said “Yes!” when asked to run for an Area 8 office. And like all of the Area 8 board, they are passionate about handbells, enjoy having fun in the handbell community, are organized, like to communicate, seek out new ways of doing things, and are willing to be leaders.

Have you enjoyed reading the Quavers, meeting new handbell friends at an area festival or a state event, or watching one of the Fourth Friday Focus sessions? The Area 8 Board strives to present these opportunities and so much more to our members and we need your help to continue to do so in the future.

Every two years, members of the area elect officers for the next two years. In spring of 2024, we’ll elect a secretary, a treasurer, and a chair-elect (who will go on to serve as chair for a two-year term.) These officers plus the chair and the past-chair make up the Area 8 Executive Committee, which is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the Area.

In the next six months, we’ll search for and contact individuals to share their talents on the Area 8 Board. Are you one of those people, or do you know someone who could be? If so, please contact me.

Sharon Schmidt, Past Chair
pastchair.area8@handbellmusicians.org

Area 8 Board

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Chime Loan Program

by Nancy Youngman, Area 8 Chime Chair

Do you have a church choir that would like to try out a set of hand chimes before purchasing them? Are you starting up a children's choir? Do you have a group of seniors in a nursing home that may benefit from learning music? Would you like special instruments to enhance your Bible School? Does your community choir need an extra set of chimes to play an especially difficult piece? Well, Area 8 has the answer for you! We have acquired two sets of hand chimes that are not tied to the school loan program. These sets can be on loan for 4-month periods during the year: from January- April (spring concerts?), May – August (Bible School or summer camps?) or September – December (Christmas programs?) and can be used by any group.

From January through April of 2023, Aniello Barone of St. Peter's Parish in Kansas City used a set with his children's choir in the church. Aniello wrote: "St. Peter's Parish in Kansas City was blessed to be a recipient of HMA's Area 8 hand chimes loan program. We utilized these chimes to help kick-start a children's handbell ministry. This past semester we focused on the basic techniques of ringing chimes as well as teaching fundamental ensemble and sight reading skills. We even made some music and had a little fun while we were at it!!

My colleague, Dr. Helena Vasconcellos, did a stellar job creating arrangements from scratch that were appropriate for our little ensemble to play and to meet the students at their appropriate readiness. This was no small task, as our growing children's choir currently encompasses third-graders all the way up to middle schoolers! Our students, however, were ready for the challenge. Most importantly, we were able to enhance the Mass in a special way, bringing our musical offerings to the Lord at several Masses over the course of the semester. Our choir capped off the year with playing for our Women's Society's Spring Luncheon, and the students also gave a short performance for their peers at St. Peter's School, demonstrating communal ringing to our next generation of young liturgical musicians! "

This shows perfectly what can be done with this loan program!! Right now, I am taking applications for the fall term. We hope to have a registration jot form on the Area 8 web site soon, but applications are available directly from me, Nancy Youngman, your Area 8 Chimes Chair. Please contact me at: chimes.area8@handbellmusicians.org or my personal email: youngmannk@gmail.com. I will answer your inquiries immediately and you will be on your way to creating wonderful music!!

And, for those of you who are educators, ALL of the state Chimes Chairs are taking applications now to use the hand chimes in the School Chime Loan program. Look up your chair on the state's web site to begin the process, or you can contact me and I will get you the appropriate information.



*Nancy Youngman
Chime Chair*

Ringer Spotlight: Carol Fleeger

Tell us a little bit about yourself. Where do you ring? How long have you been ringing?

Currently directing/ringing at First Presbyterian Church in Lawrence, KS. Retired from Lawrence Community Handbell Choir in May. First began ringing at St. John's UMC, Baton Rouge, LA in 1983.

What is your favorite handbell ringing position?

F-G/5

What is your favorite piece to ring?

Kevin McChesney's *Now the Green Blade Riseth*, Cathy Moglebust's *Meditation on Beautiful Savior*, Martha Lynn Thompson's *The Heavens Are Telling*

Describe one of your most memorable handbell events or road trips.

Wow, too many to list! For me personally, the most memorable event was ringing with the Baton Rouge Symphony on their Christmas Pops concerts with the Red Stick Ringers, which I was directing. We rang during their Baton Rouge concert and traveled with them to Natchez, Mississippi, for a concert there as well.

Any additional information or stories you would you like to share with your Area 8 friends?

The first AGEHR festival I attended was in 1987 in Mobile, Alabama, with directors Cynthia Dobrinski and Hart Morris. Felix and Martha Lynn Thompson brought several of their youth choirs, all of whom rang in the solo concerts that weekend. What an eye-opening experience for a new bell director! Since I had just "graduated" from being a ringer to a director, I will always be grateful to my church music director who pretty much insisted that I attend that event. That festival was my introduction to bell choirs ringing such titles as "Sabre Dance" and Handel's "Passacaglia".

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Quick Quavers Eight:

1. Schullies or Malmarks?
2. Marts or mallets?
3. Gramann or Payn?
4. Clothespins or dogears?
5. Raleigh Ringers or Sonos?
6. Hard copy or tablet?
7. Polo shirt or anything but?
8. One assignment, or move around?



Carol Fleeger

Ringling and directing handbells over the last 40 or so years has been such a wonderful way for me to express my love of music. Each and every group with whom I have been associated has been my "favorite" group! Watching the handbell world expand from mostly church choirs to now include many community groups, with the possibility of attracting even more people to our art, has been so exciting. Keep on ringing, everyone.

Spotlight your A8 Friends!

Nominate a ringer for our next Ringer Spotlight, or nominate yourself! For more information, visit the Area 8 home page [here](#), and click on the link for Ringer Spotlight. To access the form directly, [click here](#).

Traveling to and attending bell festivals/conferences have (almost!) always included exciting, or startling, or scary, or disappointing or inspiring happenings. Exciting because I've been able to meet and interact with wonderful clinicians, top names in the world of handbells; ringing great music with LOTS of other ringers (around 800-900 in Gatlinburg); finding inspiration for new music for my own groups; learning so many new ideas from classes offered; and mostly spending time with and making beautiful music with some of my best friends. Startling because I've met new people from other parts of the country who actually have deep family roots in my very small hometown in Pennsylvania, far from any festivals. Scary as in wild traffic in Dallas; seeing a dead body in front of my car at the Alabama Welcome Center while transporting my youth ringers to our first festival (no, the body had nothing to do with us, thank goodness!); getting lost on the way home from a festival and being pulled over by a policewoman for my "erratic driving" at 1 am (no ticket!). Disappointing because I spent too much time shopping at the bell vendors' booths, which was NOT disappointing, and missed going with friends to a free Righteous Brothers concert.

Inspiring while listening to other groups ringing music I might never have chosen for my own groups; and understanding that if other areas can establish community groups, perhaps I could do the same.



Nancy Youngman
(Professor Bell)

Hello all. This is Professor Bell. You may have caught my lessons on handbell technique with my wonderful and eager student, Clapper on our Area 8 Fourth Friday online classes in 2021. Clapper was kind enough to ask me to share with all our ringers, as he learned so much!

Technique Class: *Ring Touch* by Professor Bell

Professor Bell's technique lesson for this issue is a relatively easy stopped sound, the Ring Touch, designated in our music with the simple abbreviation RT. This often involves an eighth or quarter note followed by a rest or a note at the end of the piece. It is exactly what it says: Ring, then touch. Its purpose is to make the note as short as

possible, so the bell should be rung close to the shoulder with a damp immediately after the ring. Lower bass bells can also play the Ring Touch, but it is often easier to ring

close to the waist and damp in the curve of the bell there, to totally stop the sound of the ring. Most of the time, everyone playing a note has the ring touch together, so it is important (as always!!) for the note to be rung exactly on the beat, to create the effect together. Please watch as Professor Bell works with the wonderful student Clapper to develop a correct ring touch, along with working on his thumb damp technique.

The video on ring touch can be found [here](#).

Bell Tree Event

Julie Assel, Kansas Co-Chair

In June, I had the opportunity to attend Into the Forest, a three-day bell tree conference in Lakeview, Minnesota, near the Twin Cities. The conference organizers were completely prepared for beginners like me (there were three of us there who had never done ANYTHING with them!), but also had a great selection of classes that exposed us to other topics like arranging and composing for bell trees and teaching others how to play bell trees. I have been playing handbells for over 35 years, so I was a little bit nervous to be starting from scratch on this topic.

There are many reasons I signed up to attend this conference, but the primary one was the fact that I didn't know anything about bell trees at all, despite the fact that my church owns a bell tree stand. I learned about different kinds of stands: ones with multiple arms, ones that could sit on a table, and ones you could fasten with a strap and WALK with! I learned from people who made their own stands due to cost constraints, creative situations, and just some incredibly creative people.

Despite the fact that I had strung bells together to easily transport them, this conference didn't make any assumptions. It turned out to be perfect because I would have hung some of them completely upside down and others would have been strung in a way that would have been potentially more work than was really necessary. While bell trees are a relatively young technique for our instrument, I was so thankful to be learning from people who were both experts and individuals who encouraged experimentation and creativity from attendees.

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Julie Assel

*Have you rung
a bell tree?
Learn about
my visit "Into
the Forest"...*



Bell Tree Event, continued

Another reason I attended this conference was to learn if and how bell trees could be used to expand the range of my bell choirs. Like many youth handbell directors, there are years when my bell choir does not use a full five-octave set of bells – this might be because there are five students or because we have an odd number of students who can play two and a half octaves. I know I'm not the only one with this challenge, so it was great to get ideas about how to integrate bell trees with existing literature and music specifically for bell trees.

In addition to expanding my bell choirs' range, I love being able to expose them to new techniques. For example, over the years, I have taught my youth to play four-in-hand, weaving, and other techniques that they never saw as "hard" because I didn't tell them it was hard. It was just a new technique to learn. It was incredibly helpful to learn teaching techniques, so I can teach bell trees in a logical way that isn't overwhelming to them. This will not only be helpful with my youth players, but also with adults who, like me, have played for years, but never played bells in this way.

In fact, one of the first people I look forward to teaching about bell trees is a player who had to stop playing in the last year because of pain in her hands. She has played handbells for many years and missed the music and camaraderie of the ensemble. Now I will be able to help bring handbells back to life for her.

If you ever have a chance to attend one or more classes on bell trees, I encourage you to do so. In addition, I hope to bring what I have learned to players and directors in our region in the future. In fact, I hope to see YOU there!





Janelle Flory Schrock

Is your choir struggling with absences during rehearsals and/or performances? If you are located in Kansas and are desperately needing a substitute, please reach out to me at ks.area8@handbellmusicians.com. I'd love to help out (as schedule allows) and get to know your choir in the process!

Are you a ringer without a choir? I'd love to hear from you too!

Traveling Handbell Choirs

Janelle Flory Schrock, Kansas State Co-Chair

The Lawrence Community Handbell Choir took its first road trip beyond eastern Kansas with a concert May 5 in Mason City, Iowa.

The choir performed at Trinity Lutheran Church at the invitation of Matt Gender, the church's music director and a former member of the Lawrence bell choir while he was attending graduate school at the University of Kansas. The set list for the choir's spring concert series included "Sonata for Handbells," a piece Gender wrote for the choir while he participated in the group. He directed the piece that evening.

Other components of the bell choir's performance included Julie Turner's rendition of the Beatles hit *Here Comes the Sun*; the poignant *Resilience* by Dr. William Payn, written as a gift to the State College, Pennsylvania, community following a mass shooting; and concluded with the fast-paced *William Bell's Overture*, by Scott Pfitzinger, which had the audience tapping their toes while visualizing the *Lone Ranger*.

The spring series included concerts May 20 at Central United Methodist Church and May 21 at Trinity Episcopal Church, both in Lawrence.

The spring concert series was the final set of performances for Carol Fleeger, one of the Lawrence Community HandBell Choir's founders in 2016, as artistic director of the group.

Auditions for the next concert year will be conducted in August. Contact Amy Seifert, the group's new artistic director for details, [here](#).



National Seminar 2023

by John Klopp, Guest Columnist

I wanted to take a moment to thank everyone who did such a marvelous job of putting together the 2023 National Handbell Seminar in Irving, Texas. The organizers, clinicians, performers... everyone who worked so hard to make this a positive and rewarding experience, is to be commended!

While I am not new to handbells, in many ways I feel like I am new to the handbell world. I began ringing in junior high, ca. 1974. I was recruited to ring in a choir that was being newly formed by Director of Music Ministry Mike Farrell. During my high school years, Mike took us to a handbell festival in Lincoln Nebraska, which began to open my eyes to the possibilities of handbells. I continued to ring through my college years, but then “fell away” when I began teaching in a small, rural school in Iowa.

I came back to handbells off and on over the next many years, both ringing and directing. After my time away, it was interesting to begin learning some of the new techniques that had been developed. Marts, mart lifts, malleting, thumb damping, etc., were techniques that had not yet been developed in my earlier years as a ringer. I was fascinated when a local group, the RiverBend Bronze (RBB), came to perform at my church. Such diversity of instruments, such skill and musicianship, I was totally enraptured.

It was a few years later when one of the members of RBB, who also rang in the church group I was part of, approached me about directing the ensemble. The founding director, Larry Peterson, had moved out of the

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*Beth McFarland
Illinois State Chair*

Beth has served as Illinois co-chair and this is her first year as solo state chair. She invites and welcomes Illinois members to share this position with her. She also invites Illinois HMA members to submit articles for Quavers.

John Klopp (back row, second from right) joins Area 8 friends for a photo at the 2023 National Seminar in Irving, Texas.



If you have not attended National Seminar, I highly recommend you do. There is truly something for everyone, for ringers of all levels and experience. Whether you are a ringer, director, or both, you will come away with so much that will help you and your ensemble to grow. I am already making plans to attend the 2024 seminar in Connecticut, as well as the Area 8 Festival in June of 2024.

National Seminar, continued

area. He was replaced by James Bawden who agreed to take the group as interim director for two years while the group searched for a new director. The two-year period was fast approaching its completion and the group had been unsuccessful in finding a replacement.

When Liz approached me about auditioning to be director of the group, I must admit that I was intrigued. Being familiar with the performance level of the group, I felt it would be a challenge that would offer growth for me, but I wasn't sure what I could bring to the group. Although I had been ringing for many years, and was experienced as a conductor, I had very little experience with advanced ringing. Liz assured me that the group had the skills and technique necessary to accomplish what the director asked for, they needed someone who could tell them "when they suck" (her words, not mine!) and offer a musical vision for them to work toward. I told her I would give it a try and agreed to audition.

That was in the spring of 2018. I took over as director of the group that fall, and the rest is history. I feel it has been a great collaboration. I have learned so much from the members of the ensemble about the art of handbell ringing, and I think I have helped them to develop into musical and artistic group. I must give a special nod to Stephen Swanson. Typically, he is the person I turn to when I need to ask "how are we going to make this sound like ____ (fill in the blank). His knowledge of handbells and handbell technique has truly made him a leader in the development of the group.

This brings me back to National Seminar. I had discussed the possibility of attending with the RBB board, but was not able to make it work until this year. I am delighted that I was able to attend. I found the experience to be humbling, exhilarating, enlightening, and affirming. It was both humbling and exhilarating to be surrounded by so much talent and knowledge. I was able to sit down and converse with composers and arrangers with whom I was familiar only through seeing their names on the printed page. Ringers with skill levels beyond anything I had thought possible were sharing their knowledge about how to make the seemingly impossible possible. Listening to groups perform that have truly taken the art form to the highest level helped me to develop a vision for what was next for my own ensemble. It was also affirming in that, while I now have learned so much I did not know before, it showed me that the possibilities of what could be are within reach.

Concerts from the 2024 National Seminar will be available until August 15, 2024, and can be found [here](#)

Visit the [Area 8 website](#) as information about the Area 8 Festival in Columbia, Missouri, becomes available.

Visit the [Handbell Musicians of America website](#) frequently for more information about the 2024 National Seminar in Hartford, Connecticut, July 9-13, 2025.



Dick Crusinberry

Meet Jessica Kite, Mid-Iowa Festival Clinician

Dick Crusinberry, Iowa Chair



The 2023 Mid-Iowa Handbell Festival is pleased to have Jessica Kite as its clinician! Jessica is the longtime Director of Handbell Choirs at Concordia University in Nebraska. A Concordia graduate herself, Jessica discovered her love for ringing during her college years. Her journey came full circle in 2006 when she was asked to return to Concordia to lead its handbell choirs. She was excited to have the opportunity to work with collegiate ringers.

Under her guidance, Concordia's handbell program has flourished. She

leads two auditioned choirs, one for beginning ringers and another for more advanced musicians. Under her tutelage her ringers have improved their ability to play more challenging music. Her choirs have expanded their repertoire, tackling larger quantities of music, and have widened their performance opportunities.

In addition, under her leadership Concordia's handbell choirs have expanded their instrument collection. When she took over the program, Concordia had five octaves of handbells and three octaves of handchimes, as well as two more bass bells. She has worked tirelessly to advocate for additional equipment, increasing the range and type of instruments on which her students perform. Today Concordia's inventory includes more than seven octaves of bells, three octaves of handchimes, one octave of bass chimes and two octaves each of Cymbells and Silver Melody Bells.

Jessica has also broadened her students' performance opportunities. Initially, her choirs performed primarily for campus chapel services, local church services and at local assisted living facilities. Under her leadership Concordia's handbell choirs have performed throughout Nebraska and neighboring states, and have performed for workshops, on Nebraska Public Radio, and for the Nebraska Capitol Tree Lighting ceremony. Notably, they have released an album, *Faithful*, and renowned handbell composer Matthew Compton has written a piece, *Catalyst*, specifically for the Concordia Handbell Choir.



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*We are excited
Jessica will be our
clinician this year,
and we hope you
will join us October
21 at Windsor
Heights Lutheran
Church in Des
Moines for the
Mid-Iowa festival!*

Mid-Iowa Festival, continued

Jessica has been a clinician at other workshops and brings the same passion to this work as she does to teaching college students. She notes, "Like many handbell directors, I kind of fell into my current role. It was not something I was expecting. Eighteen years later I am still directing and enjoying what I do! When my choirs perform, I hope people see several things: a passion for working to play a variety of repertoire with excellence, some fun and creativity in our concerts, and we want to share the Gospel message through the sacred music we play. When I work as a clinician, I try to bring these same elements to the workshop, along with some practical answers to questions that ringers and directors have! I love to share support and encouragement with other handbell musicians, just as I have been supported by the handbell community over the years."



Concordia's handbell program offers students the opportunity to audition for either a beginning or advanced 14-member ensemble. Concordia Ringers and Concordia Handbell Choir allow students with varying degrees of musical interest and ability to grow their skills and enjoy making music with their peers.

The growth of Concordia's handbell program is evident not only in the number of student participants but also in the expanding inventory of instruments, according to Professor Jessica Kite, Concordia's director of handbell choirs. When Concordia's first handbell choir began in 1979, three octaves of bronze handbells served as the start-up inventory for one handbell choir, led by Dr. David Held. Professor Rebecca Dorn grew the program further during her tenure. By the time Kite took the reins in 2006, the music department had just over five octaves of handbells and three octaves of handchimes. (Source: [Concordia University-Nebraska website](http://www.concordia.edu/handbell))

CU-Nebraska in Concert in Des Moines, Iowa Friday, October 21

The Concordia

University-Nebraska

handbell choir will

perform a concert as part

of the 2023 Mid-Iowa

Handbell Festival. The

concert will take place on

Friday, October 20, 2023,

at 7:00 pm at St. Stephen

Lutheran Church in

Urbandale, Iowa. The cost

is free to all. Donations

will be accepted to assist

with the cost of travel.

Winter Touring in Nebraska

Byron Jensen, Nebraska Chair

Touring in Nebraska (Spring 2023)

This past spring's touring by Nebraska handbell choirs was generally limited to our own communities. Of course, that does not mean the process of packing, loading, unloading and setting up doesn't have its complications and hopefully some laughter. Below I offer one member's contribution sent to me and some anecdotes.

From Jessica Kite (Concordia University):

Concordia Handbell Choir had the privilege of performing in three out-of-town locations this past school year. In October 2022 the choir performed for the Merrick Arts Council Concert Series at the Central City Performing Arts Center in Central City, Nebraska. The concert featured a few pieces by local handbell choirs followed by nine selections played by Concordia Handbell Choir.

In February 2023, Concordia Handbell Choir assisted in worship at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in rural Staplehurst, Nebraska. The choir was pleased to play a piece requested specifically for a baptism that was part of the service that Sunday!

In April 2023, Concordia Handbell Choir gave an afternoon concert in Omaha at Pacific Hills Lutheran Church for the church's new concert series. The choir played a full concert that included a wide variety of pieces for Lent, Palm Sunday, Easter, several spirituals and also original works. One of the pieces performed was written by a Concordia student who was a member of Concordia Handbell Choir this past year!

Concordia Handbell Choir is looking at making some performances in Iowa and Kansas this coming school year, as well as their typical performances in Seward, Nebraska, in December and May.

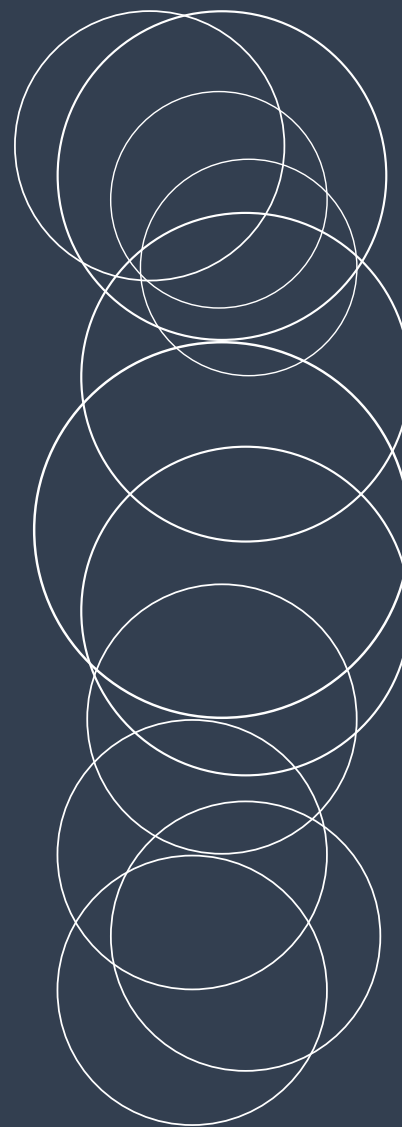
Thank you to Jessica for sharing the wonderful outreach you had with the Concordia Handbell Choir.

When I was at Ottawa University (Kansas), the choir and handbells generally did a five-day tour in March during a portion of our spring break. One year, the case of handbell music was placed in the chapel's narthex for no apparent reason other than I think the idea was for everyone to come through those doors to board the bus. That we didn't have the music was only discovered after driving west for five hours and setting up for the concert. I called our music office assistant who met me in Salina (about the halfway point), after which I drove back west towards an oncoming blizzard. I do not recall what city our first performance was in, but by the time I arrived around midnight with the handbell music, at least eight inches of snow had fallen, and by morning, a total of fifteen inches brought everything to a standstill. We could

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Byron Jensen



If your church, school, or other organization is not in a position to renew its membership at this time, consider an individual membership. The cost averages out to about \$8 per month. Membership information can be found [here](#).

Nebraska Tours, continued

not travel to our next destination that morning, but the ringers had great rehearsals throughout the day! Fortunately, we continued our tour the following day without further incident. Moral of the story? Have a checklist of equipment and assign equipment to ringers for consistent inventory when loading.

Speaking of equipment, three years ago our church's handbell rehearsal room was moved to the second floor. Fortunately, there is an elevator and we moved to a larger room where two sets of tables could separately accommodate the adult and youth groups. What remained downstairs only got moved a few weeks ago. With assistance from our maintenance guy, the music file cabinet was moved, along with equipment that was still in the closet after three years. Long-forgotten was a folding six-foot Malmark table; four folding and adjustable legs for a custom-built table used when we performed from the balcony; a box of scrap parts for the Petit-Fritzen bells; Schulmerich F3-B3 bells added to the Petit-Fritzen bells before I arrived (and you can only imagine how that sounded); used gloves; old mallets, a dozen electric stand lights that were replaced by battery-operated lights; and over a dozen music selections that never found their way into a file drawer. Everything was moved upstairs, and what seemed like a large rehearsal room suddenly became a bit more crowded.

I suspect we all have "forgotten" handbell equipment purchased either by us or our predecessors. Is this forgotten equipment ever going to be used again? What do I do with the bass bells that replicate what we purchased eighteen years ago? Anyone need broken P-F bell parts just for nostalgia? Where's that narthex where things can be left and forgotten? Perhaps a social media site already exists to list handbell equipment no longer in use. If not, maybe someone can start one. Thanks for reading. Have a great rest of the summer making music...and clean out your closets!

Upcoming National HMA Events

Click [here](#) for more information

October 5-8, 2023

Distinctly Bronze West
Vancouver, Washington

January 26-28, 2024

Virtual Winter Workshop, Online

February 29-March 3, 2024

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Hartford, Connecticut

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21st International Handbell Symposium, Hamamatsu, Japan



The Past is Prologue:

Early Days of AGEHR: the Castle Hill Era, 1954-1959

Laurie Austin, Area 8 Historian

In our last edition of *Quavers*, we discussed Margaret Shurcliff and the New England Guild of Handbell Ringers in the first half of the 20th century. As the popularity of bell ringing spread across the country, it became clear that a national handbell organization could better serve the needs of North American ringers. From that New England-based organization, the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers (AGEHR) was born. AGEHR was re-branded in 2010 as Handbell Musicians of America to better reflect the mission of the organization.

By 1954, there were 17 bell bands who were members of the New England group. Just as the New England Guild had been established in Margaret Shurcliff's Boston home, so was the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers on June 23, 1954, when Mrs. Shurcliff became AGEHR's founding president. A 1955 edition of the AGEHR newsletter, *Overtones*, described Mrs. Shurcliff as "tall and stately and friendly. She is a charming hostess, a fascinating story teller, has a delightful sense of humor, and is devoted to spreading the art of handbell ringing. In her long years of bell ringing she has gathered up many experiences and anecdotes with which she flavors our conversation and delights our concert audiences. Both her Beacon Hill home and her summer home in Ipswich,

Massachusetts, are open to handbell ringers at all times."

The American Guild was established as "a clearing house for many groups of handbell ringers in America. In addition to acquainting local groups with their ringing neighbors, the objectives of the organization are to exchange ideas related to the selection and arrangement of music; the techniques of ringing; methods of teaching; the conducting of bell choirs; the arrangement and management of concert programs; and the maintenance of bells."

In August 1954, the first handbell festival in the United States was held in the lovely coastal town of Ipswich, Massachusetts. Mrs. Shurcliff had a summer home in Ipswich and knew the Crane family, who built the magnificent Crane Estate in 1928 at Castle Hill nearby. Margaret's husband, Arthur, was a noted landscape architect who developed several of the property's features including its most iconic element, the rolling lawn leading down to the ocean called the Grand Allée. The Crane Family donated the house and surrounding property to the Trustees of Reservations and Castle Hill became a museum in 1949, and continues to be open to the public.



The Crane Estate in Ipswich, MA, pictured from the Grand Allée, during my visit in July, 2015.

The First AGEHR Festival

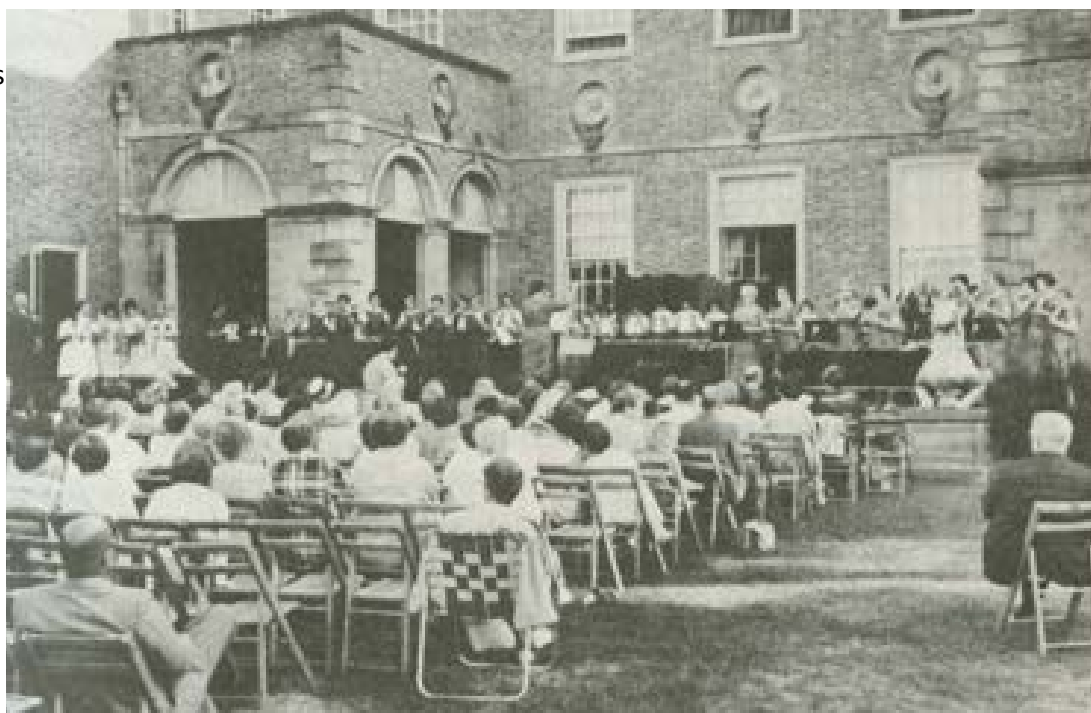
The first festival had many of the same elements we continue to treasure today in a handbell festival: a weekend devoted to handbell music, with discussions about bell ringing by members, performances, a business meeting, and elements of fun and relaxation. The New England Guild first conceived of it and provided the financial backing (\$50 after all expenses and income was accounted for), and developed the program in conjunction with the newly formed American Guild. There were opportunities for socializing at the afternoon tea on the terrace, dinner, a buffet, and a banquet, as well as the tour of nearby historic homes and beautiful gardens. Attendees who were there the entire three days numbered 26, but including the people who came for part of the time, there were a total of 41 registered festival goers.

Sessions included lectures and discussions among its members. Edna S. Lepper of Old South Bell Ringers discussed her bell experiences. [Incidentally, Old South Church continues its handbell tradition to this day with both worship music and hosting the Boston Handbell Festival every May.] Margaret Shurcliff gave some background on her vision for the American Guild, as well as told stories of her bell experiences in the US and abroad. Nancy Tufts gave a presentation about her recent visit to the Whitechapel foundry in London and showed wonderful pictures demonstrating the tuning process for handbells. Scott Parry discussed his experience working in the Whitechapel foundry, and had another session about handbell notation and composition. Parry was of the opinion that bell bands should play music specifically composed for bells, pointing to the Belgian School of Carillon music as an example. There was a spirited discussion as to relative strengths of chordal versus melodic patterns in bell music, which made it clear that bells can be used in diverse ways—semi-classical programs, traditional carillon music, and for chordal or hymnic types of compositions. There was a separate discussion devoted to change ringing, and from there the conversation continued about uses of bells by various kinds of groups.

A festival wouldn't be complete without performances, and this one did not disappoint. There was a "delightful" mini concert given by the Bell Ringers of Cape Ann, who performed three songs before a banquet. They rang memorized music arranged by their clever director, Helen

Runkle, on two octaves of bells without tables, hanging the non-ringing bells from ribbons around their necks. The big outdoor public concert given on the terrace was a stunning success. The organizers had optimistically put out 300 chairs for concert goers, but actually more than 400 local people attended. They heard a varied program given by The Cape Ann Bell Ringers, the Paul Revere Ringers, the Junior Beacon Hill Ringers, the Beacon Hill Ringers, and two impromptu groups including a couple of women who had never before rung bells until the festival. The performances included change ringing, classical, and contemporary pieces.

During the business meeting, there was unanimous agreement that the festival was a great success and it should be continued the following August, again at Castle Hill in 1955, with a goal of increasing registered attendance from among the concert goers. Indeed, Castle Hill would be the site of the festivals for the first six years, from 1954 through 1959, a time of great growth and change in the organization. Some of these festivals were attended by Albert Arthur Hughes and Annie Lilian (Smith) Hughes of the Whitechapel foundry, and to expand membership, AGEHR was able to get a list of names of everyone in the US who had purchased bells from them. One attendee of the 1955 festival estimated that maybe 100 people came, and remarked it wasn't as well attended as it could have been because of a polio scare and a recent hurricane. The 1956 festival had 140 full time attendees for the three days, over half of whom were young people.



The first AGEHR Festival in Ipswich, MA.

Bessie Erb Assumes Leadership

Bessie Erb took the reins of AGEHR in 1957, when Mrs. Shurcliff resigned due to health. Margaret Shurcliff died in February, 1959, and the last Castle Hill festival would be held in memory of her great contributions to the instrument. By 1959, the 266 registrants actually exceeded Castle Hill's maximum capacity of 200 people. At that festival, a plaque created at the Whitechapel foundry summarized Mrs. Shurcliff's contributions to bell ringing, and was dedicated and installed in her memory at her Ipswich home.

When AGEHR was first established, there were no handbell-specific music publications. Bell ringers were also music arrangers by necessity. As bell sets mostly ranged from one to two and a half octaves and weren't standardized, most music would have to be adapted by its ringers to fit their particular range of bells. Scott Parry's 1957 book, *The Story of Handbells*, included a survey of bell owners which revealed there were less than a dozen bell sets in the U.S. that exceeded three octaves. This prompted a lot of discussion about what kind of music was appropriate for bell ringing. To stimulate music publication, the music committee of the AGEHR made lists of suggested songs in several categories that would be well suited for bells. Examples of songs in each category included: folk music—*The Ash Grove*; vocal music—*Annie Laurie*; sacred music—*Ring Out, Ye Crystal Spheres*; instrumental music—*L'Arlesienne/Farandole*; music of the theater—*Barcarolle* from *Tales of Hoffman*; early clavier music—*Siciliano*; and piano music—*To a Wild Rose*.

Parry discussed the particulars of arranging music in his book. In his discussion about dampening the sound of a bell, Parry

thought that damping should be used sparingly—employing it only when the harmonies change, or for staccato effects. Because of the bell's sustained nature, he believed chords should be established by the minimum number of bells necessary. Parry suggested that three bells at a time was generally sufficient.

One thing to realize at this time period is that conventional music notation (as we are accustomed to today) was only one way of writing bell music. There was also numerical notation, with numbers to denote the note on the scale, written vertically to denote chords, and with accompanying written notes about the meter. And there was literal notation, which is similar to numerical, but the note letters are written vertically to show chords. The history of bell music notation is fascinating and deserves its own article—so I will return to this in a later issue.

An *Overtone* article from December, 1958 triumphantly proclaimed that “the year 1958 will always be remembered as the year handbell music was actually put on the market. It had been sold by our own arrangers for several years, but not until this year did the music publishing houses begin to produce music for handbells. Choral Services, Inc., brought out Richard Litterst's arrangements of hymn tunes; Harold Flammer, Inc., published Alinda B. Couper's arrangement of Leontovich's ‘Ukrainian Carol of the Bells’ for voices and bells; and J. Fisher and Brothers published Mrs. Couper's ‘Pastorale for Organ and Handbells.’” With this announcement, the national AGEHR organization had achieved one of its major goals within five years of its creation.

Our Area at Midcentury

An early 1955 AGEHR membership directory lists 46 groups and individuals that year, including some from what is now Area 8. Also around this time, Scott Parry published his survey of bell ownership. He asked the name of the director/organization, their address, how many bells they owned, what range of bells were owned, what manufacturer, and whether any bells were on order. In this period, it was still common to purchase the diatonic bells and add the semitones as necessary. Our own Area 8 archives also list some of the pioneers from this period. From these sources comes a compilation of some of our area's earliest adopters of handbells.

Illinois

Mrs. J.A. Middleton, Jr., Whitechapel Bell Choir, 8964 Pleasant Ave., Chicago, IL.

James R. Lawson, University of Chicago, Societas Campanariorum. As of 1957, awaiting delivery of two octaves of Gillett & Johnston bells. He served as the carillonneur of the 1959 festival, and assumed librarianship at the University of Chicago for AGEHR's new Margaret H. Shurcliff Library of Handbell Music, which was dedicated at the festival.

Richard Litterst. Attended early festivals in Ipswich, directed choirs at Second Congregational Church in Rockford, 1959-2002. He was an early arranger for handbells, and his music was the first to be included in the registration packets for the festival attendees in 1958. Later served AGEHR in several capacities, including Music Chairman, National President, and Area 8 Chair. He taught many workshop classes, directed at area and national festivals, and was an honorary life member of AGEHR.

Iowa

Frances Keck brought handbells to Iowa in 1958. She established a church program in Des Moines.

Kansas

Joyce Wentz, Atchison, KS. Taught bells in the Atchison schools as early as 1954. Her group performed for the southwestern Music Educators National Conference in Hutchinson in 1955. She is remembered for working hard to further bell ringing in schools.

Mrs. Howard Parsons, Chanute, KS. As of 1957, awaiting delivery of almost two octaves of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel] bells.

Mrs. Lewis M. Edwards, 223 W. Sixth St., Concordia, KS. As of 1957, owned 1+ octave of unknown bells.

Paul Lefever, Manhattan, KS. Directed a bell choir at First United Methodist Church in Manhattan, 1957-1960. (see also Missouri)

Florence Marlow, Prairie Village, KS. When she moved to Prairie Village in 1956, Marlow immediately started an adult group called the Mello-Bells, and in the next six months she was directing two bell choirs at Village Presbyterian. After her attendance at the 1955 Castle Hill festival, Florence was inspired to help organize and had groups that performed at the Southwest regional festivals in 1957-1959, in Oklahoma, Texas, and the KC area. In 1959, she traveled alone to the national AGEHR festival at Castle Hill and was subsequently elected the organization's secretary. (see also Missouri)

Missouri

Paul S. Lefever, Linwood Presbyterian Church, Kansas City, MO. In 1952, he directed a choir for a short time in KC using his own bells. As of 1957, owned 2.5 octaves of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel], additionally awaiting delivery of 2 more octaves. (see also Kansas)

Florence Marlow, the Blue Bells, 474 Catalina Ave., Webster Groves, MO. Marlow's first 13 bells cost \$150, and arrived in Missouri in January, 1953. The day after they arrived she gathered her friends for a luncheon to show them the bells, and the Blue Bells were born. Sixteen days later they had a performance. As soon as the first bells arrived, she immediately ordered more to fill out the two octaves. At that point, everything she knew about bell ringing came from whatever she could find in the library and exchanging letters with Mrs. Shurcliff.

Florence Marlow finally met Margaret Shurcliff in person when she visited Massachusetts in June, 1954. At that point she learned about the upcoming first festival but wasn't able to return a few months later to attend it. The Blue Bells, under the direction of Florence Marlow, attended the second Castle Hill festival in 1955, where they learned more of what could be possible with bells. They were the only group from our region to attend this festival. In 1956, Marlow moved away from the St. Louis area, but the Blue Bells continued. The Blue Bells were an instant success, appearing on St. Louis television and radio programs, and also got involved with the 20th and 21st National Folk Festivals in 1954 and 1955. When Marlow moved back to the St. Louis area in 1959, within three months she had organized at John Knox Presbyterian Church in Florissant, two bell choirs who rang at Christmas that year. (see also Kansas)

Pauline Underwood, Presbyterian Church of Butler, MO. As of 1957, owned 2 octaves of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel] bells.

Emily Balsler, Manchester, MO. As of 1957, awaiting delivery of 2 octaves of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel] bells.

Gladys Walker, Peters Memorial Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO. As of 1957, awaiting delivery of 2 octaves of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel] bells. Walker started the first church bell choir in the St. Louis area at Peters Memorial Church, formed in December, 1954. Later served on the AGEHR national board.

Annalou Raffels, St. Louis, MO. As of 1957, awaiting delivery of 1.5 octaves of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel] bells.

David Workman, Kansas City, MO. Performed on handbells for most of his professional musical life. He was employed in the 1950s by the University of Kansas extension to visit schools and community groups across several states, doing handbell demonstrations and performances. Workman started manufacturing handbells in KC in the 1950s. [Stay tuned for a future article about this.]



The Blue Bells in 1953, left to right: Winnie Mosby, Nolan Callicott, Florence Marlow, Estell Ehrhardt, and Emily Balsler.

Nebraska

Richard W. Litterst, First Central Congregational Church, Omaha, NE. As of 1957, awaiting delivery of 2.5 octaves of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel] bells. (see also Illinois)

Roger Arnold, Central Congregational Church, Omaha, NE. Took over the choir after Litterst left in 1959.

Mrs. E.L. Meek, Omaha, NE. As of 1957, owned 1 octave of Mears & Stainbank [AKA Whitechapel] bells.

Our Region Will Soon Take Center Stage

By 1960, AGEHR was expanding so much that they decided they needed to regroup before hosting another national event. Instead, they were trying to find ways of promoting regional events in 1960. It makes sense, then, that AGEHR divided the country into regional areas in 1960. The states in what is now Area 8 first belonged to Areas V (Illinois) and VI (Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, and Kansas). In our next article, our region takes center stage, when St. Louis hosted the first national festival after the Castle Hill era.

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Area 8 Scrapbook #5, Area 8 archives, including the reminiscences of Florence Marlow.



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Does Your School Qualify?

Area 8 offers a handchime loan program to schools in Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. *Qualifying schools will receive:*

- 3-octave set of handchimes for one semester (approx. 4 months) with teaching materials
- support network and/or mentor
- one-year membership to Handbell Musicians of America.

To check availability of handchimes for loan or to submit an application, please contact Nancy Youngman, Area 8 Chimes Chair.

To learn more about the Chime Loan Program, visit the [Area 8 website](#).

A video featuring Nancy Youngman describes in detail the Area 8 chime loan program and can be found [here](#).