

Then and Now...Call Bells

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This article is the third in a series of articles utilizing the extensive collection of bells procured during the lifetime of Winston Jones. Following Mr. Jones' death, the collection was gifted to Hastings College, Hastings, Nebraska.

One of the more commonly found descriptions in the Winston Jones Collection is "Call Bell." As one might assume that category may be applied to a wide variety of bells utilized in a wide variety of settings to do exactly what the label describes, "call." Defined in *The Century Dictionary*, "a Call-bell is a small (usually stationary) bell, used as a signal to summon an attendant or servant. A common form consists of a stationary hand bell which is rung by means of a clapper pivoted at one end, and acted on by a means of a vertical plunger. Also called bell-call."

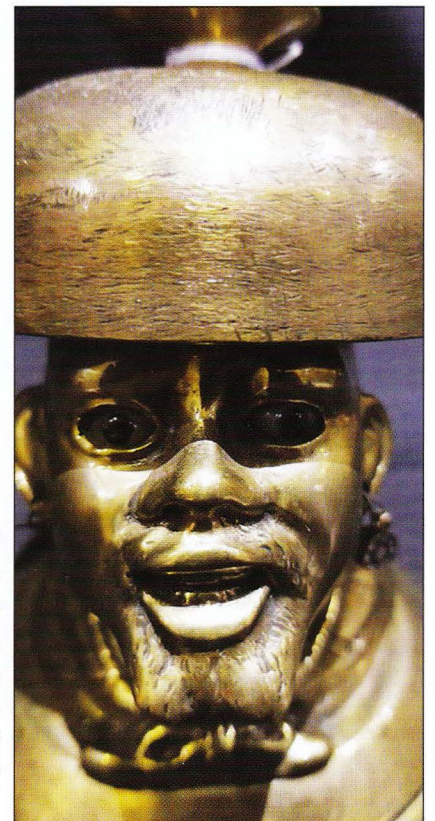
Although a majority of the bells from the Jones Collection match that description, a number of the bells are simply hand bells used to "summon" when rung. Others are manipulated by pulling a pull, chord, or rope.

It is certainly safe to say that modern technology has found ways to replace the call bell. Now our telephone plays a tune rather than rings; our alarm clock annoyingly beeps at us when calling us to awaken; our microwave oven tweets to call us when its function has completed; and a loud piercing mechanical sound announces that one class has concluded and students should move efficiently to their next class before the next mechanical sound indicates they are tardy! Gone are the days when the likes of Downton Abbey characters Lord and Lady Crowley can summon (utilizing a complex system of servant bells¹ rung in the servants quarters by pulling ropes in individual castle rooms) servants like Mr. Carlson, Mrs. Hughes, and the rest of the staff! To be honest, the closest many of us may be to experiencing the function of the

call bell is ordering room service at a hotel or calling for pizza delivery!



Figure 1. Bronze Call Bell with Holding Tray (Hand rung) Austria – c. 1790. Used as an Altar Bell.²



Figures 2 and 3. Brass Call Bell of Asian Man-servant (Top strike), France, 18th Century with original Mother-of-Pearl eyes (painted irises) and enamel earring.



Figure 3. Original photo from Winston Jones.

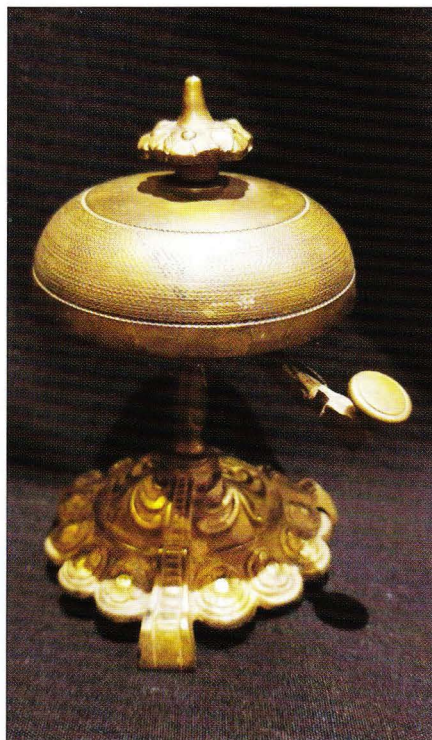


Figure 5. Bronze Call Bell (Side strike), France, c. 1755-70..

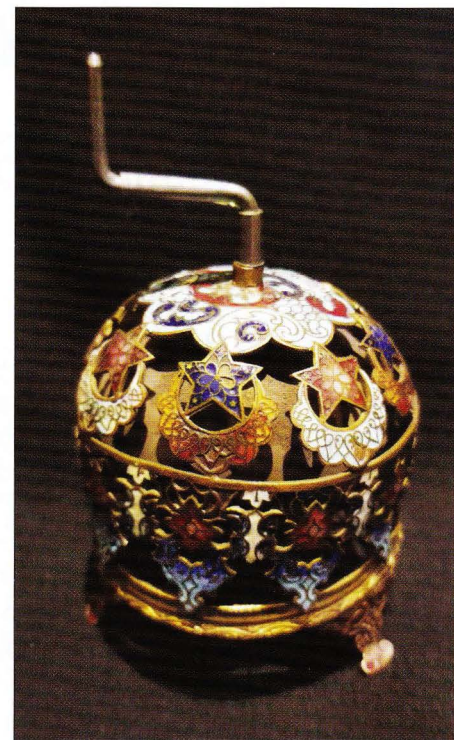


Figure 6. Gentleman's Slave Call Bell (Hand top crank mechanism), Morocco, c. 1800, with enamel cryptic Arabian motives and dome design.



Figure 4. Bronze Call Bell with Peacock features and ornate base (Top strike), England, c. 1870.



Figures 7 and Figure 8. Brass and Silver Call Bell with devil face motif base (Top strike), United States, c. 1875, used by the Sunday School of the First Presbyterian Church of Hastings from 1888-1911 to call children from opening assembly to specific room and to call parents to pick-up students following the Sunday School hour. Author's comment: It is unknown if the choice of the bell enhanced with the devil was coincidental or intentional!



Figure 9. Bronze Call Bell (Hand manipulated), Vienna, Austria, c. 1800, a very fine and ornate bell of a Persian sitting on top of bell. The bell rings when the upper hammer is pressed downward; the lower hammer raises causing the bell to be rung with alternating strikes.



Figure 10. Front Desk Call Bell (Top strike), United States, c. 1860, Original desk bell from the Queen Hotel of Idaho Springs, Colorado, used 1879-1898, gift to Winston Jones from his parents Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Jones.

Figures 11 and 12. Brass Scottish Theme Call Bell (Hand rung), England, c. 1890, incorporating Scottish Thistle with handle design of a Scotsman bearing sword; wearing kilt, cape, sporran, and Balmoral tam.





Figure 13. Servant Bell System (restored), American, c. 1880, originally designed and installed in a home located near the Victorian mansion of J.J. and Molly Brown (known as "The Unsinkable Molly Brown") on Pennsylvania Street in Denver's wealthy Capital Hill neighborhood in Denver, Colorado. The system was salvaged, cleaned, and remounted on a new board. The doorbell on the far left was added to the system following the installation of electricity in the home.

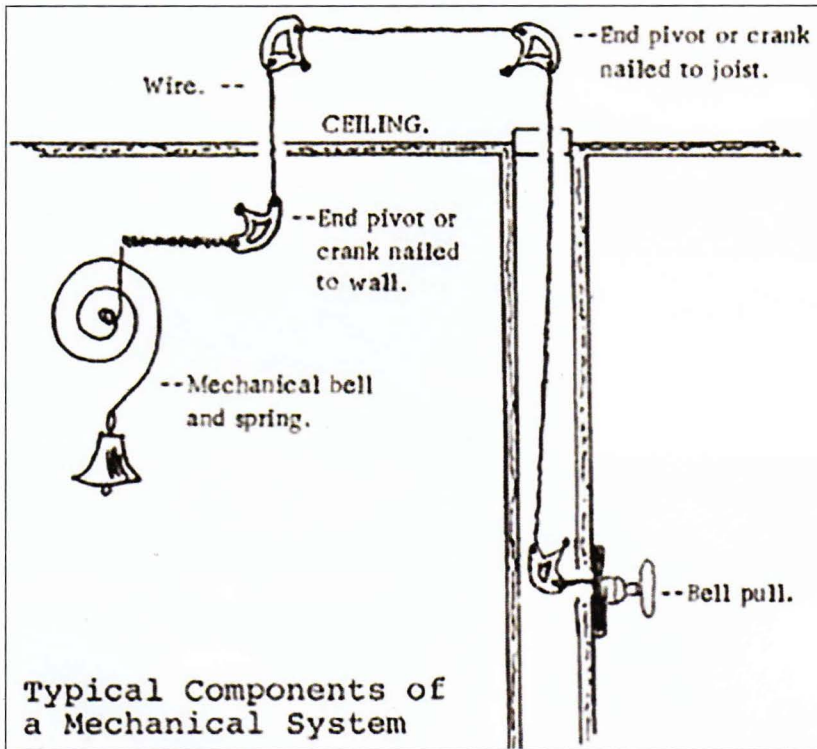


Figure 14. Diagram of the working components of a Servant Bell System.¹

Endnotes:

¹ Components of a Servant Bell System, credit to: Tom H. Gerhardt, *Old-House Journal*, October 1979.

² In the Roman Rite of the Catholic Church, Lutheranism, Methodism, and Anglicanism, an altar or Sanctus bell is typically a small hand-held bell or set of bells. The primary reason for the use of such bells is to create a joyful noise to the Lord as a way to give thanks for the miracle taking place atop the altar. An ancillary function of the bells is to call the attention of those attending the Mass that a supernatural event is taking place on the altar.



Figure 15. Silk Embroidered Bell Pull, France, c. 1804-14, Metropolitan Museum of Art.²