



# Bell Piano Newsletter<sup>®</sup>

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## Bell Family Piano Stories

The Moore family of Montreal, Quebec has had a Bell piano (right) in their family since 1905. Back then the grandmother, a music teacher, purchased a second hand Bell piano number 4660. It is estimated the piano was made in 1893.

Every summer during the 1930s and 40s it was moved 73 KM northeast of Montreal to the country house and then back again in the fall. The grandmother loved the piano so much she wanted it with her all year long. It was quite a chore for the grandfather and his brothers to move it twice a year.

Currently the piano is with a grand daughter near Ottawa, Ontario. After many years they are considering selling it as they need to move to smaller home and the piano will not fit into the new place.



Here is a similar piano (left) from the Piorer family in Halifax, Nova Scotia. This Bell piano number 4626 has been owned by the same person for 59 years. It was bought by her parents for her from a family who had a musical daughter who became deaf and they had to sell the piano. When the deaf child saw her beloved piano going she cried bitter tears.

People and pianos can develop strong attachments just like people to their pets. At the moment they are keeping the piano yet are dreading the day they have to move into a smaller place and have to get rid of their beloved Bell piano.

This Bell player piano (right) number 34728 was probably made in 1926. It was purchased new by the parents and passed from one family member to another until 2005. Unfortunately, the former owners name has been lost. After 89 years the piano had to move on to someone else.

This Erin, Ontario family were moving and offered it to a good home. After sitting in a warm warehouse for a year it was given to small church in Guelph, Ontario. The church recently downsized and this player piano is now in the pastor Sloss's house giving enjoyment to his family.

The iron tubing for the player key hoses were removed years ago. The player mechanism needs some work but overall it's in great condition.



This Bell piano (left) number 4202 is from Australia. It has been in the Robertson family since first arriving around 1893. The piano left Guelph by train to Vancouver then by ship to Sydney. It then traveled north 837 KM to Wallaby Station, New South Wales by Bullock cart to the family farm. Another seven moves over the years has seen this piano travel 24,485 KM. This old piano has given the Robertson family four generations of musical pleasure for over 115 years.

The piano has design similarities to that of pump organs. The candle holders and higher top design were common on organs of that era. It has only two pedals as three pedals did not start appearing until 1895.

## Bell's Patented 4 Pedal Pianos

In 1895 The Bell Organ and Piano Company patented two versions of a 4 pedal piano (right). Both for different purposes. One was for those in apartments and the other for those who wanted a different sound or Honky Tonk as it was known as in New York City.



The home or apartment version (bottom right) used the fourth pedal to lower a wooden bar down in front of the hammers that would completely dampen the sound. This allowed the player to play without disturbing others within the home or apartment or the neighbours.

The second version (lower right and left) used the same wooden bar only this time it did not go down as far. Attached to this bar in the treble section only were leather strips with a small piece of metal at the end of each strip. When the hammer struck the metal clip it hit the metal strings giving it a tinny or mandolin sound which became popular in New York City during the 1890s and was referred to as a Honky Tonk piano.



The apartment version is sitting in a warehouse collecting dust, unfortunately, in need of rebuilding. The Honky Tonk version has been in the same family since it was built in 1904. It became the property of a Bell Company foreman and handed down through the family. It is still in great playable condition, although the metal clips have been cut off (below centre). Serial numbers (red circle) are in different positions.

Both of these pianos have the same patent date and inscription. They also have Bells patented Bell Tone steel back frame (for details see BPN January 2007). Both also use the same pedal mechanism and are elaborately carved (above right).



Below is inscribed on both pianos; *Orchestral instrument and practice Clavier Patented January 23, 1895 The Bell Organ & Piano Co. Ltd. For Canada*



Bell 4 pedal 'Honky Tonk' piano still being played today (above).

The Bell 4 pedal apartment piano sitting in a warehouse (below).



Above left is the 4th pedal mechanism used in both piano versions. Below left is the Bell Tone steel frame also used in both versions.



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## The Case of the Cracked Bell®

Inspector Radcliffe and Constable Davis are returning from the mortician's where Sir William Bell's body was inspected after he was hit by a train under suspicious circumstances. As the largest employer in Galt everyone is concerned about their jobs at the piano factory. The two policemen must act quickly to not only solve this case but allay towns fears.

### Part 5

It was now 2 PM when the inspector and the constable were returning to the police station. Sir William Bell's body had only been discovered on the railway tracks six hours before and the town was in a near panic with the thought of the town's largest employer closing. However, Radcliffe did not expect what greeted them as they headed back to the station.

As the two policemen came out of a narrow lane-way a block away from the police station they came upon a wall of people. Actually, it was a sea of people. From one side of the street to the other. In front of the station they stood, blocking all the traffic. People stretched up and down the street from the town centre in Market Square to Trafalgar Square around the corner towards city hall. It seemed as if half the population of Galt, some 5000 people, were there. They had not noticed all the people at first as they went through side alleys in order to get back to the station faster.

Now that they had come into the midst of all these people Radcliffe was surprised. "DAVIS!" the inspector said commandingly. Immediately Constable Davis moved from behind the inspector to being in front of him.

"Excuse us. Let us pass. Police business." Repeated the young policeman over and over again.

Slowly the two weaved through the crowd. As they got closer to the station one of the two policemen on duty at the top of the station steps noticed the inspector and constable coming. He shouted, "Make way for the inspector. Let him pass" and pointed in his direction. The people sea of men and women parted allowing the two to pass quickly.

A few moments later the two men were atop the police station steps. Radcliffe was about to go in when the one who shouted for the people to move stopped the inspector. "Sir. These people are very worried and would like some reassurance from you that things will be alright."

Radcliffe paused, stopped, and turned around.

He motioned for Davis to get the megaphone so he could address the crowd. In that moment while he stood there Radcliffe could see the fear and concern in the people's eyes and faces. Davis returned and handed the inspector the megaphone.

Raising the device to his mouth Inspector Radcliffe spoke to the crowd. "People of Galt I know and feel your pain. Sir William was my friend to. I want to find out what has happened to him as much as you do. At the moment there will be no change in the work at the factory. Please go home and let us find out what happened. We will tell you what is going on as quickly as we know it. Thank you all for your concern. Now please go home."

With that said Radcliffe lowered the megaphone and put his hand to his eyes. He would not admit to having to brush away a tear. Radcliffe had lost a good and dear friend. It was only now starting to sink in. Was Sir William's death accidental or not? Either way he had to find out the awful truth.

Those that were in the crowd who could clearly see the inspector and his hand to his eyes knew what it meant. One man shouted out, "A'right lads let the man do 'is job. Giv'm some space." Another echoed the sentiment and the sea of people began to move slowly away. The inspector paused, handed Davis the megaphone then turned and walked into the police station.

By the time Radcliffe went into the lavatory to freshen up and got back to his office Colonel McCrae was there with the pictures he and the newspaper photographer had taken that morning. McCrae said, "We used some empty space at the newspaper office and got several people working in order to develop all these photographs and get them to you quickly. Not all of them are here but enough to give you an idea of what had happened."

Radcliffe did not see his aid Constable Davis anywhere. Viewing the photographs were more important and would seek out the young man later. As he looked at the pictures there was something about them he did not like, but figure out what.



## The Case of the Cracked Bell®

The inspector and the constable were met by a sea of Bell employees and concerned towns people. They were fearful not only about the about their jobs at the piano factory but the future of the town. (Since a Bell Piano Newsletter has not been produced in some time it was decided another episode should be told.)

### Part 6

As the inspector looked at the photographs he was astounded by the clarity and details. First one eye brow raised then the other and then both. He looked quickly at the diagram McCrae had drawn and listened while the colonel pointed out the angle, location and what information each photograph revealed. The inspector just looked from one image to the other to the diagram and back again while absorbing all McCrae was telling him. Something was not right

No emotion appeared on the inspector's face until he saw the photograph of Sir William's crushed body. He was not prepared for it and it startled him. His head and shoulders suddenly jerked back and a breath of air escaped from his mouth. He had seen the dead body of his friend at the railway tracks and at Gilbert's funeral parlour yet neither caused this reaction of horror. Somehow this black and white photograph brought something to life, so to speak, that Radcliffe had not expected.

McCrae stopped talking when he saw the inspector's reaction to Sir William's picture. "I am terribly sorry James I did not realize this one would affect you so. We all had the same reaction when we first saw it as well. How callous of me not to fore warn you of it. My sincere apologies." remarked the colonel to his friend.

Radcliffe nodded his head. "No need to apologize. I have seen worse. Just was not expecting it." He said quietly as he gently put the photograph face down in the other pile.

"You and the newspaper people have done an excellent job Mac, Willie would have been pleased with the work you all did." continued the inspector. He paused then said, "Your photographs show two sets of foot prints. One coming from the station on the south side along the railway tracks where the wood piles are and heading eastward. The other set

are coming from the south through the wood piles toward the railway tracks going northward. Both sets meet then an encounter happens between both sets of foot prints which results in a stand of lumber falling down. Then one set of footprints staggers off towards the tracks. Where does the second set of foot prints go? Which ones are Willie's?"

"Actually Cliffe the south bound foot prints are walking away from the railway tracks. The person is backing up as one of these photographs will show. Oh! It's not here and must be in the other group still at the newspaper office." Radcliffe's right eyebrow raised at this piece of news. 'Backing away?' he thought and why?

McCrae continued, "Where those footprints originally came from we do not know. There were so many footprints north of the railway we could not tell whose was whose or if the person was walking on the railway tracks themselves. I sent young Davis to fetch Willie's shoes. He should be back from Gilbert's any moment."

"Ah! Speak of the devil. Here is the young man now." Commented McCrae. With that an exhausted Constable Davis barged into the room and collapsed panting in the chair opposite Radcliffe. He could not speak as he was so winded having run full speed to and from the morticians. Davis could only hand over Sir Williams shoes to the inspector.

While Davis rested the other two men looked at the photographs to see which one was Sir Williams foot prints. Then they looked at the plaster casts and back to the shoes. Both men paused looked at each other then looked at the photographs again." Both men's eyebrows raised. "His foot prints are not here!" exclaimed McCrae.

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