

CITY HALL BELL HERITAGE

By Robert Williamson

Finding a heritage story related to current events is always a challenge especially for a Community Newspaper like the Mountain News. However, Spectator columnist, Mark McNeil provided an excellent premise for a Mountain related story to start the New Year in a timely fashion. His Flashback column on Tuesday, December 13, entitled "Ringing the Bell" captured my attention.

The striking feature of the story was the announcement that the bell in the clock tower in the City Centre, formally the Hamilton Eaton Centre, at the corner of James Street North and York Boulevard would ceremoniously clang in the New Year while bidding farewell to the mall which is being replaced with condos. After providing a memorable history of the bell, Mark McNeil pointed out that it stopped ringing initially when the old city hall, built in 1890 was torn down for the development of Jackson Square in 1961.

The new city hall, built where it is today on the south side of Main Street West, contained only a clock face on the marble facade and the bell disappeared into storage awaiting a suitable site worthy of holding a massive two ton bell.

It is at this point that the Hamilton Mountain enters the heritage story. Robin McKee, a well known local historian and fellow member of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society executive, tracked down the bell which was located in Sam Lawrence Park. Through the courtesy of Post Card Collector, Jon Soyka, we have a picture showing the bell on display in the centre of a sturdy concrete flower planter on the edge of the escarpment overlooking the city. The photo was taken by W. M. Johnson after the bell was dedicated as a heritage monument by the Germania Club on June 24, 1967. It remained on display as a centre piece in the park until 1990 when Murray Aikman says it rang once more on October 18 in a new clock tower added to the northeast corner of the Hamilton Eaton Centre. It became the City Centre when the department store closed. It was there that the bell rang for the last time New Years Eve 2022. With luck it may become a garden attraction once again in the new condo centre.



The 1890 City Hall Bell on display in Sam Lawrence Park 1967 to 1990

Photo courtesy Jon Soyka.

Left column photos:

City Hall c. 1890 with its new clock and bell tower.

HPL Special Collections photo.

Same site several years after 1961 when the 1890 city hall was demolished.. Note the Eaton sign in the background where the last bell tower was constructed in 1990 and the bell made its final peal, New Years Eve 2022.

Photo by Robert Williamson.

Mountain Memories by award winning writer Robert Williamson of the Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society appears monthly to preserve Hamilton's Mountain Heritage.

