



USF History Vault: The Chimes of the St. Ignatius Church Bell

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On any given day at noon and at six in the evening, the bells of St. Ignatius Church can be heard ringing across the USF campus, summoning parishioners and mass goers. The bell rings from the northeast corner of the church, but perhaps unbeknownst to most, the notable bell has been in service since 1863, when it was originally purchased for the Jesuits' garden at USF's (then called St. Ignatius Academy) first location on Market Street. In fact, it is now the oldest bell used regularly in the entire San Francisco area (aside from the Mission Dolores bells, but those are rarely used).

In the first ever "USF History Vault," the Foghorn explores how the bell ultimately came to reside at the current St. Ignatius Church.
A Voyage from the Atlantic Coast

The bell originates all the way from Sheffield, England, when it was initially cast in 1859 for the Volunteer Fire Company of San Francisco. Weighing in at 6,000 pounds, at that time it was the heaviest and largest bell that England manufactured. In 1860, the bell made its way around Cape Horn on a windjammer. Upon arrival, the fire company lacked the funds to acquire the bell, so it was placed on display on the sidewalk of Conroy and O'Connor, a hardware store in San Francisco.

And it sells...for \$1300
In August of 1863, two Jesuits central to the university's beginnings ventured across the hardware store during a walk. Founding President of St. Ignatius Academy, the Rev. Anthony Maraschi, S.J., (also the founding parish priest of St. Ignatius Church), accompanied by the Rev. Burchard Villiger, S.J., who went on to become the third president of St. Ignatius college, stumbled upon the front store of Conroy and O'Connor. Before the two Jesuits lay a row of cast steel bells—every single one from England. In particular interest of the bunch was the largest, which came with an engraved "San Francisco" imprint on the rim. With a new church and school on Market Street in mind, Fr. Maraschi managed to negotiate \$1,350 for the steel bell. It was then placed in a tower 30 feet high above the garden, where it rang consistently for the young college.

1906 Earthquake Summons New Site
Although the bell's first home came to be at St. Ignatius Church and College on Market Street, it was relocated in 1879 to the new site on Van Ness Avenue and Hayes Street. Hanging in the tower of the church, its untimely end at the site came during the 1906 earthquake and fire, when the bell collided to the bottom of the destroyed St. Ignatius Church. Still intact, the bell was recovered a few weeks later, and again transferred by wagon to a temporary location on Hayes and Shrader streets.

And the Rest is History
July 4, 1914 marked the beginning of a historic establishment on Fulton Street and Parker Avenue. The bell was finally lifted to the northeast tower of the St. Ignatius Church, as we know it today. San Franciscans joined the first celebratory mass on August 2, 1914.



Cast in 1859, the St. Ignatius Bell (foreground tower) has been a USF landmark since 1914. (Cass Krughoff/Foghorn)

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After a long 96 years of service in its current home, the St. Ignatius church bell continues to call upon the masses of people. Although another San Francisco earthquake is unlikely to cause a historic end to the beloved church bell (even the 1989 earthquake left the entire church and bell practically unharmed), for now it remains overlooking the USF community, untarnished and in good working condition.

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