

WENDELL WESTCOTT

June 27, 2001

Jeff Charnley,
interviewer

Charnley: Today is Wednesday, June 27, the year 2001. We're in Lansing, Michigan. I am Jeff Charnley, interviewing Dr. Wendell Westcott, for the Michigan State University Oral History Project for the sesquicentennial, which will be commemorated four years from now in the year 2005. Dr. Westcott served as the university carillonneur from 1941 to 1987.

Dr. Westcott, you see we have a tape recorder here. Do you give us permission to record this interview?

Westcott: Yes, very much so.

Charnley: I'd like to start with a couple of brief questions about your personal educational background. Where were you born and raised, and where did you go to school?

Westcott: I was born in Michigan, went to school to Michigan State University. It was Michigan State College in those days. The education that is more pertinent to the carillon, I studied in Mechlin, Belgium, at the Carillon School, and graduated--dates are--1957. It was years and years ago. As a matter of fact, I got the highest-rating diploma of anyone who ever graduated from that school.

Charnley: Why did you come to Michigan State College as a student?

Westcott: I was originally an organist. My first formal instruction in music was on the organ rather than the piano, and then I took up the piano later. So I was an pianist and organist before I came.

It was quite accidental that I came to Michigan State. A violinist friend said, "There's a new department up at Michigan State, a new faculty. They've brought in a lot of outsiders who are outstanding musicians, and have more or less renovated the music department." So I went up and found out, sure enough, there was a very distinguished musician teaching piano, and I studied piano and theory for two years with a theorist, Arthur Fairwell, who was a major name in the world of composition. So I was studying privately first with the teachers, who then told me I should really enter college and get a degree. So that is what I did.

After the bachelor's degree, the music department, for the first time, initiated a program of higher education, and so I was one of the first of those to enter the graduate school and get a master's degree in piano, in 1939.

Charnley: Would you talk a little bit about the background to the carillon. How was it that MSU got a carillon, or what's the tradition of the bells?

Westcott: Quite a background. A lot of history that led to the MSU carillon. The carillon was just introduced in this country in 1922, so by the time Michigan State became interested in bells,

the carillon itself was a novelty. A few educational institutions had carillons, a handful, meaning not more than half a dozen. And so when the tower was built as a memorial to the fact of the first building teaching scientific agriculture anywhere in the world, they felt that they needed to have some bells. They'd learned that bell towers really are for the purpose of containing bells.

They knew nothing about the subject of what to have, so a committee went to Ames, Iowa--Iowa State College at the time--who had a small carillon, and the result of that, rather than another small carillon, was to order ten bells. Perhaps they were short of funds and ten bells were better than not having any. They found, though, once they had installed those--and to my knowledge, that might have been about 1927. I don't have the exact dates of that because it was before my time, but shortly after the tower was built, the ten bells were installed.

Charnley: And this was Beaumont Tower?

Westcott: In Beaumont Tower. They could not play the alma mater, they discovered. I guess they didn't think about what they were going to do with those ten bells when they got them, except ring them if they had a football victory or so.

So they did get, the next year, three more bells to allow the alma mater. Thirteen bells was still meager, because the history of bell-ringing in this country had been bell chimes in churches and town hall towers, perhaps of eight to sixteen bells. And so they joined the ranks of the bell chime installations, of having something at least you could play a few recognizable tunes, maybe changing a note here and there if you didn't have that particular accidental. But that was not considered too much, considering that there were a few other colleges with bona fide

carillons.

So they ordered, in 1935--that was a few years later, you see--ten more bells, to make twenty-three, which technically makes it a carillon. You have to have twenty-three bells for the term "carillon" to be used, which is actually two octaves of bells, minus the two lowest chromatics, C-sharp and D-sharp.

So the MSU carillon then was born in 1935, when it became a set of twenty-three bells, played from a clavier of levers, with some pedals as well for the larger bells. So you're seated to play it as you do the piano, where the previous chimes were played from what we called a chime stand, standing up, and with a lot of effort depressing keys at a distance of about six inches, which takes a little time so you can't play very fast and you don't play rapidly on the chime.

I inherited then a carillon of twenty-three bells when I was approached to see whether I would be interested in taking up this instrument. The music head at the time had come from a small college in the South where there was a carillon, so he was aware that the best candidates for the carillon were organists, and I happened at the time to have been the church organist at Central Methodist Church in Lansing. So he called me in and wondered if I would be interested, and I said yes, well, just because it was another activity, but it might have possibilities.

After a year, though, I entered, along with many others, the army of the U.S., to fight against Germany, and so that was my experience for the first year. During those war years, they did find students who were able at least to find some notes to play simple music, and so that was the interval while I was away.

So I began again the fall of 19--these dates are confusing now, in my later years.

1947. Fall of '47, and played until the summer of 1985.

Charnley: Who made those original bells?

Westcott: I don't recall if I mentioned, the chimes of the nineteenth century were all made by American Bell Founders. The carillon was unknown, of course, and there was no need to go elsewhere when we had, oh, perhaps two dozen bell foundries all over the country.

Charnley: What caused the demise of the American foundries?

Westcott: If it were not for some of the circumstances of history, we might not have a carillon today. But during World War I, the siren was invented. I have this information from one of the founders who no longer was in business, Manealy [phonetic] founder in New York. The siren put out of business, he said, the American bell business because so many of the situations where the bell was used, now it was cheaper to get a siren, which really carried a longer distance and was more practical. So the invention of the siren during World War I made the American bell foundry industry extinct. I don't think most people are aware of that little tidbit of history.

Charnley: What company was it that made the bells that ended up at MSU?

Westcott: So we're now going to Europe for the rest of American bell history. All the bells today come from Europe. There's not a single American foundry in existence, although one did make one carillon. There was one carillon. I think most of the bells had been replaced by European bells now, by the Manealy Company in Troy, New York.

Before World War II, two English foundries dominated the bells hung in belfries in this country: John Taylor in Loughborough, England, and Gillett [phonetic] and Johnston in Croydon, England. The bells, our first twenty-three bells, from the ten, then three bells later, ten more later, all came from the Gillett and Johnston bell foundry in England. When I took over then, in 1941, I was playing on Gillett and Johnston bells.

Following the war, I thought, as a musician who played the piano and organ, that twenty-three bells were not enough to do very much on. I needed a better instrument to play the music that would attract my interest. Otherwise, I think after a couple of years, I would have given up, thinking this is too elementary for someone who is doing piano and organ.

Just by coincidence, when I thought, well, I would like to have a larger carillon, the head of a bell foundry in the Netherlands, [unclear] Bell Foundry, was in this country, trying to reestablish their business. They had been taken over by the Nazis during the war, and had done nothing for several years and were just broke. They thought perhaps the American market might be a good thing to enter, to reestablish. They did get an order down in a suburb of Cincinnati. I learned about that and contacted the representative, who happened to be the head of the foundry, who came up to MSU. "Yes, we'd be glad to help you out and supply some more bells."

We then had the second installation in this country of [unclear], who now probably have more carillons in this country than any other single founder. I can't be sure of that, but at least

during my time, they had--actually, I played dedication recitals on thirty of their instruments around the country, so that's one of my--

Charnley: And you visited the factory there, or the foundry, in the Netherlands?

Westcott: Yes. Well, I not only visited the factory, but because I had already--I have to get my dates straight. This is in later years, when I started the Spartan Bell Ringers, of handbell ringing. That was 1954. Yes, we're still in that time period. I said another thing you could do to enlarge your business would be to get into the handbell business. We only have one foundry in the world, the White Chapel Bell Foundry, in England, where I had gotten my bells, and so that might be a good thing to do. They took me up on it and engineered some handbells.

So while I was over in Belgium, working to get my degree in carillon, they engaged me to come over to the Netherlands once a week and organize a group of their foundry workers, none of whom spoke English, and I did not speak Dutch, although one had enough English to transmit some of my directions.

I arranged a lot of Dutch folksongs that they learned, and, lo and behold, a concert was arranged, that was broadcast on the Dutch national television and radio, and all the press were present, and this group of Dutch foundrymen played a very fine program of Dutch folk tunes that was heard in all of the Netherlands.

The fact that an American had introduced handbells to a bell country such as the Netherlands was of major interest to the Dutch, so I have two or three dozen press notices from the various newspapers that I had to pick out of the wastebasket at the bell foundry, who didn't

consider that of any particular importance, to add to my archives. So I was very pleased that I had one little part of the bell history of the Netherlands, introducing them to another kind of bell-ringing, done on handbells.

Charnley: You said you went to the Netherlands, or you contracted with the foundry. How many more bells did they provide for the MSU carillon?

Westcott: So as I earlier said, twenty-three bells were very limited for musical expression. As a result of this head of the foundry from [unclear] coming here, we ordered fourteen treble bells. A year later, six more. I have to say that the MSU Development Fund was responsible for this addition. Fortunately, a very fine gentleman by the name of William Davidson, Bill Davidson, was running the Development Fund in those days, and he shared my interest in enlarging the carillon, to make it into a better instrument.

So the fourteen bells led to six more the next year, to make twenty, and then in 1957, four more bells, to make forty-seven. So for the greater part of my career at Michigan State, I had forty-seven bells, or a range of four octaves. Part of them, twenty-three bells--well, then, in addition to four more bells, Gillett and Johnston, twenty-seven bells then, Gillett and Johnston, and twenty bells, [unclear].

Now, I might mention that the last history, so far as the bells are concerned, the I_____ firm, another Dutch firm, had been experimenting in the 1950s to try to improve the treble bells. In fact, that had been the problem from the beginning, in the fifteenth century. They could only

tune up to a certain range, and they didn't have tuning forks or means to control tuning with any precision in the upper registers. In the seventeenth century, improvements were made, but most of the carillons in Europe were three, three and a half octaves. The improvements that this I____ factory made were to greatly increase both the timbre and the control of tuning of the treble bells, a lot more brilliance so that the last installation that we have done that were installed in, I believe it was 1997, were twenty-two.

We added two bells to the Fritzen [phonetic]. We strapped the Fritzen bells and we have twenty-two I____ bells that are very superior bells. I can feel that no one has surpassed the I____ treble bells, and I'm sure other foundries are analyzing the bells to see what they can do to improve their trebles, because the Gillett and Johnston trebles were not good. The Taylor, I have to be blunt, were worse. So many of the Taylor bells in the existing carillons--as an example, Ann Arbor, the University of Michigan, changed their Taylor bells, and I believe they--I'm not sure. They got Dutch bells, but I'm not sure which foundry they went to, so I'd better not comment on that.

Charnley: In the 1950s, they got some from England also. You were mentioning those. What was that circumstance?

Westcott: Yes. When we got as many, I felt, that we needed, in the treble, it would be better to have more bells in the base, because you might say that the status of the carillon is judged by how big your bass bell is. The largest bass bell, unless there has been one since, and it could well be that there has been, is at the Riverside Church, New York, which is twenty tons. I've played

that many times. They have a little electric help on that. You have to turn it on, so you're making an electric connection to ring that. So at least coming down to the pitch, middle C, which I engineered, by having four bass bells, it gave us a range of four octaves, C to C. So the present range, they changed the bass, but they added two more bells. So you have C to C, plus C-sharp and D, two notes over four octaves.

You need some bass. It's like the violin only goes to G. Well, we have a piano in the orchestra to accompany the violin that can go down lower, but if everything were just from that lower G on the violin, with nothing more, you feel that here's an element of musical expression that you need to complete the range, to do everything you want to express.

Charnley: What was the company that you got the bass bells from, or that the university contracted with?

Westcott: We went back to Gillett and Johnston, the original maker of the first twenty-three bells. And then as a sideline, because Gillett and Johnston had gone bankrupt, they had John Taylor, the other English foundry, cast the bells, and the tuner from Gillett and Johnston went up to Loughborough and did the tuning.

They took the profile from Gillett and Johnston, so they are really more Gillett and Johnston bells in the bass, but the actual tuning, or casting, rather, was done by the one who had been--I'm confused. The tuning was done by the original Gillett and Johnston man, but the casting of the bells was done at Loughborough.

Charnley: And there were some problems with the finances, you had indicated. What was that?
The company went bankrupt.

Westcott: I happened to be, in 1956, over in Mechlin, Belgium, studying the carillon, and the order had been placed, I think, before I left for Europe, and things weren't progressing. We didn't hear from them. We wondered, we have a contract, and where are the bells?

So I made a surprise visit over to the Gillett and Johnston foundry and sort of got the runaround. At some point I learned that they were bankrupt and the bells were being cast in Loughborough, by Taylor. But unfortunately, Taylor wanted three more thousand dollars before they would release the bells from their foundry, and I relayed that to the Development Fund here, that "If we're going to get any bells, we're stuck. We've got to pay \$3,000 more."

Well, they were able to do that and the bells then were delivered. So that's how things go in the world of business.

Charnley: By modern standards, what would the cost of those bells be today?

Westcott: Today, the bells that we had--altogether, the bells I was responsible for, or involved with, the four bells in the bass and the twenty bells in the treble, the amount we paid--I'll have to make an educated guess--about \$16,000. Those same bells today would be probably \$200,000. That's an educated guess, and I may be a little off in that realm. More than five times or more than what they cost at that time. So scrapping the \$3,000 or so we paid for the first Dutch bells of [unclear] as a very minor thing compared with what we got in place of them.

Charnley: In the early years, when did you play the carillon?

Westcott: Well, lo and behold, in the early years it was world cast on the WKAR Radio. I vaguely recall it was on at noon. It might have been twice a week, but that's so many years ago. That's what I seem to recall, a couple of times a week for fifteen minutes, WKAR.

It was a challenge then for a musician to take twenty-three bells and make it sound as if maybe there are a lot more bells there. As a matter of fact, I'll have to say, in my career, I had to dedicate a set of bells somewhere in Ohio, I forget where now, eleven bells. Well, they had a formal dedication and I was engaged, with a fee, to play on eleven bells. I arranged enough music that when they heard that concert, they couldn't believe that it was all done on just eleven bells.

Charnley: You mentioned before that initially the carillon was not under the direction of the music department.

Westcott: Yes, that's interesting. Things over the years changed. At one time it was Michigan Agricultural College, Michigan State College, Michigan State University. When the bells were first installed, they sort of had a relationship with campus spirit--well, which it still does, campus spirit. But the campus spirit revolved around athletics--the football team, the basketball.

So the jurisdiction of the bells, the playing of the bells, was given to the athletic

department. Russell Daubert, who was the swimming coach, was the player. I suspect that he probably had a background of the trumpet, because I noticed when I visited once, the notes were one tone different, the rhythm note, from the note he was playing. The trumpet has to transpose, so I suspect that he was a trumpeter as well as a swimming coach.

So that existed until, for some reason, the jurisdiction was given to the secretary of the university, who happened at the time to be John [A.] Hannah. I don't think we have that position anymore, but it was given to his jurisdiction, who called the music department, and because this was some sort of a musical instrument, "You're the one now to provide a player." I guess I've already said, I was called in by the department head, who knew enough that carilloneurs come from the ranks of organists, and I was a church organist, and as I've already said, he invited me to play and I did.

Then, as I say, after the war, I wasn't going to go along much longer on two octaves, and because of the fortunate occurrence of the representative from the Dutch foundry being over here, Bill Davidson, of the Development Fund, was very amenable to increasing the carillon.

And then I'll have to say as an aside, my Spartan Bell Ringers. He wondered, in one of our conversations--I saw him many times--"What about handbells? Do they still exist? We used to have something called Swiss Bell Ringers." I had no idea, so I looked into it. Yes, they still exist. There are a lot of ladies in New England, from English extraction, middle-aged, for the most part, who rang handbells and did English change-ringing. I believe there's a guild of ladies in New England.

In connection with the carillon, in some respect, I've forgotten, probably playing somewhere in Boston, I met with Mrs. Arthur Surcliff [phonetic], who was the main head of the

handbells, and learned about the handbells. As a result of our little confab--I think there were two or three of us--we decided to make it national, so I was one of the earliest ones on the ground floor of establishing the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers. I think that little historical fact has long since been forgotten, but there were, as I recall, four of us that talked about having it nationalized, and I was getting handbells at the time myself, so why not have a national guild. Today, many don't know it. The last word I had, there were 10,000 groups--

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

Charnley: When the tape ended, you were talking about the founding of the American Guild of English Handbell Ringers, that you were of the founders. How many, now, groups are you aware of?

Westcott: Today, or at least a few years ago, there were 10,000 groups of bell-ringers in the country. The average number seems to be ten, so there are at least 100,000 persons engaged in handbell-ringing. I'll say the majority are in churches, but many of the schools also have, because of the same age--most of them are teenagers from, say, twelve to sixteen or so. So there are a few also in the colleges, but I knew the first one of any college in the country that had a group of handbell ringers.

Charnley: Interesting. Would you talk a little bit about the Spartan handbell ringers? What was actual name?

Westcott: The Spartan Bell Ringers. Bill Davidson, the director of the Development Fund, as I said earlier, in our conversations, wondered about the handbells. Yes, they exist. New England has several groups. White Chapel Bell Foundry, the maker of our American Liberty Bell, is the sole one making these handbells. So it didn't take any persuasion. He was as interested in getting the bells as I was, and he ordered a set. I think we maybe had two orders. Maybe we started with three octaves and then made a four. I can't remember now. Maybe it was four octaves from the beginning. Anyway, we had four octaves during our career.

As a matter of fact, Bill Davidson gave it the name. The MSU Development Fund gave it the name, the Spartan Bell Ringers. I did not. Probably if it had been up to me, I would have thought of some esoteric name that sounded like one of the famous ensembles, but because this was to represent the spirit of the university, another one of the organizations, along with the glee club and the band, which had public exposure, Spartans seemed to be--and wherever we went, they always asked, "How come you had that name Spartan Bell Ringers? That sounds like something in Greece, mythology or so."

Well, most don't know--I guess some don't know, anyway--that Spartan relates to Michigan State University. So I think it was a very apt name because it did identify. and that was the purpose of the Development Fund, was to have an organization to just promote the name Michigan State University. But it never had a close relationship with the music department as such. It was sort of an independent organization.

Most of the players, throughout its career, were just general college students. I might

have had two or three from time to time of music majors, but it was just those who had enough background and intelligence to be able to do this job.

We ended up, by the time we closed shop in 1966, with an international reputation known as the premiere group in the world. In fact, I'll have to say, from my knowledge of the past, because most of the ringing in the past was done by English ringers who were practicing their change ringing, primarily, the handbells were made, in the beginning, to practice change-ringing. And then they, as a diversion, might play simple folk tunes, to have a tune, which is sort of fun, too, to make melodies. But it never had gotten far as a major musical expression.

In fact, if you want to know the real history of handbell-ringing, P. T. Barnum, back in probably the 1960s, I think it's about then, brought over a group of English handbell-ringers, and felt we needed a more attractive term, and so we were going to call them Swiss bell ringers. They had to go under the heading of Swiss bell ringers, and the name stuck for decades until vaudeville died out. But those ringers are always English.

From the pictures I have seen of them, the way they handle their bells, they would have done simple music, just tunes. If they could have heard my group playing the minute waltz of Chopin, not slowly, at the tempo that it's played on the piano, they couldn't have believed their ears. In fact, most of the audience that has heard us play that and other virtuoso pieces have said, "We have heard you play that, but we still don't believe our ears. We don't believe that that was possible on the bells, even though you just played it for us tonight."

Charnley: Had many of the players who came to the group, did any of them have bell-ringing experience before?

Westcott: I think one or two might have had a little in their church, but basically inexperienced. And I was a hard driver. I will have to say I really drove them crazy, but they appreciated it. When they could go all over the state and the eastern, the most common thing that they told us afterwards, "We've heard it, we don't believe it. We don't believe it can be done."

I have the bulletins of the handbell organization, when we gave this national concert in Washington, D.C., before ringers from all over the country, with their directors, which I consider the most important engagement we ever had. They, also, the speed. "I guess we'll just have to close up our boxes and forget bells. We can't ever match that, and we might as well quit. It's way above us." Not only that. That was the showpiece that they all knew, so they could appreciate it. But we had some jazz numbers. As a matter of fact, I'm going to give you a recording of our repertoire, a CD recording, so you can see what I'm talking about, whether they're as good as I'm saying they were.

Charnley: You played in New York, too.

Westcott: Town Hall, New York. Review in *The New York Times*. I wasn't very pleased with it, because [Vladimir] Horowitz was just making his comeback after being out of concertizing for twelve years, and there was a writeup with his picture, telling about reentering the concert field, and right beside his article was the article on our town hall concert that we had just given, with great success.

Charnley: Did you ever hear from President Hannah after that, or about that incident, about that concert?

Westcott: No, not a word. Not a word from anyone. Not from the music department. Absolutely as if it were a nonevent. Not a word. As a matter of fact, my archives are from all over the state in the eastern country. I don't have a single word written about the Spartan Bell Ringers. I do on the carillon, from board members. I do from our present president [M. Peter McPherson]. I have several letters.

Charnley: How about from the players? Did they keep in touch with you? Have they subsequently kept in touch with you at all?

Westcott: A few have, yes. They've gone all over the country, and three or four have, who don't live so far away. But I guess it's something, when it's right in your home town, it's just something you take for granted and it's there, but it doesn't concern me. I'm not a member. It has no relationship to me. So our relationship was with our audiences and those who engaged us.

I neglected to say we went on concert tours every spring for eleven years, I guess, all over Michigan, the Upper peninsula. We've gotten as far as Illinois in the West. We had a concert at Yale University. Our host, as an aside, was someone by the name of Ernest Hemingway. That was his name, but it wasn't the Ernest Hemingway that everyone knows. Just as an aside.

Charnley: The carillon concerts that you did in the 1960s, how did that change? Did that format

change at all, or how you played, how often you played?

Westcott: It's history now, but it's in the archives of the university. We had a booking agency called The Cap and Gown, that John McGough [phonetic] started in 1954 or '55. I'm not sure whether it was '54 or '55. It's the same time that I organized the Spartan Bell Ringers. So we had a booking agency from the very beginning.

One of our first important engagements was for the National Christmas Tree-lighting ceremony in Washington, D.C., at which Richard Nixon gave the address. Eisenhower had had a heart attack, and so Nixon was pinch-hitting for Eisenhower, and we played. That was our first important engagement, believe it or not, on national television, before an audience there of several thousand, playing some Christmas carols for the National Christmas Tree-lighting ceremony. It gave us a good boost, a start.

As a matter of fact, on that same trip, we played, believe it or not, in the court of the Pentagon, which is as large as a football field. If you've seen it from the air, there's a--and we gave a concert that was piped all through the Pentagon. I don't know whether it was a part of the war effort or not, but the secretary of defense sent down his regards, because he was from Michigan, as a matter of fact.

We were royally entertained, and we had several other engagements on television-- Washington and Soldiers; Home, I believe we played. We had some others. I don't remember. But that was our first season of national television. Yes, and I'll show you later, we have a picture of Richard Nixon holding bells in [unclear]. It so happened that--I don't know how this came about, but a photographer from the *Saturday Evening Post* accompanied us for that

weekend, taking pictures at different places. The writeup of the Christmas tree in the *Washington Post* the next day featured the Spartan Bell Ringers, a picture taken from back of them, with the tree out there in front. So our bell-ringers were the main attraction. I'll show you that later. I have a lot of mementos that are interesting.

Charnley: It's hard to imagine Richard Nixon as a bell-ringer.

Westcott: He was very pleasant and said, "Now, get out of the way." People would say, "Oh, these nice girls here." They had a nice costume and everything. And he was very pleasant. I met his wife as well. She was very cordial.

Charnley: Was there anything else about the Bell Ringers that you wanted to talk about on the record?

Westcott: Each year we improved, as I built on the previous year, and the fact that most of those who entered stayed in, if they were freshmen, or whatever, they stayed in until they graduated. It was so much fun. So each year I could build on the fact that I had experienced players from the year before, so each year actually was better than the year before, the fact that I could build on the repertoire they'd already played, a repertoire that we continued, just add a new repertoire each year.

By 1965, when we played in Washington, D.C., it was the best group I had. In 1966, the last year, when we gave the concert at Town Hall, I neglected to mention one important detail.

One of my players had gotten sick just before we were to go on tour. It was either to cancel the tour and this opportunity to play in Town Hall, or be pinch-hit. I'm so confused, because I had one rehearsal to take that part and we'd go on tour. And here, we had to give one of the most important concerts of our whole career, in Town Hall, New York, and I had to be one of the players.

Well, the article featured that fact, that here was the director, who had to pinch-hit at the last minute, or there would have been no concert. That was the headline in *The New York Times*.

Charnley: The carillon, let's say in the 1960s, you did concerts then, also, or how often did you play?

Westcott: Through making acquaintance with the head of Fritzen, being their second installation, and being a carillonneur, and particularly when I had gotten the highest rating of the Carillon School ever given, in 1957, I had a relationship first with Petit [phonetic] and Fritzen, and then I.T. Veerden [phonetic], in Cincinnati, took over the sales aspect of Petit and Fritzen in this country. I continued then with I.T. Veerden, as being a musical supporter of their product and playing dedications of new instruments.

So I played, during a ten-year period, thirty dedication recitals on new carillons. In fact, I have a record of playing more dedications than anyone else in the history of the instrument just because of that association with the one selling the instruments.

They have a very fine installation in Springfield, Illinois, at the public park. I've forgotten what it's called--Washington Park. It has a name I've forgotten. But it's one of the few municipal

carillons, and the best carillon that Petit and Fritzen has in this country, a large carillon, in a very fine campanile in the park.

They established international festivals in 1962. I played every time, for fifteen years, until I gave it up fifteen, sixteen years later. So I had nice relationship, helping to promote the carillon as something that was being advanced year by year in this country, particularly in educational campuses. As I say, back in 1935, when this became the carillon, there probably were hardly a dozen campuses with carillons, and now there are at least seventy, according to what I've been told.

Charnley: What would you say are the most important ones around the country? Not meaning to be a quiz or anything, but from your own experience.

Westcott: I have to go on my memory. Ann Arbor; Yale; University of Chicago; Duke; Sewanee--University of the South, I guess it's called; University of California at Riverside. Did I say Kansas? I don't to repeat. Let's see, there's another in the Midwest. I've forgotten. Well, let's see, let's take Michigan at--what's the name?

Charnley: University of Michigan? Grand Valley State?

Westcott: Grand Valley State. They have two carillons. Ann Arbor now has two carillons. I believe the college at Kalamazoo.

Charnley: Western Michigan?

Westcott: Western Michigan has a carillon. We probably have more college carillons in this state than any other state.

Charnley: That's interesting. The Grand Valley State ones, are they Dutch carillons, too?

Westcott: Yes, they are.

Charnley: Well, it would make sense.

Westcott: I know they're first-rate carillons because I___ is, I think, making the best carillons today.

Charnley: It wouldn't surprise me, with the West Michigan connection with the Dutch, too.

Westcott: Exactly. They wouldn't have had anything but Dutch. Well, actually, as I said, Gillett and Johnston, the English foundry that made our first bells, went bankrupt. Taylor also is really no longer. They seem to be able to get together a few workers to make a carillon now and then, but actually they're also extinct. John Taylor, whom I knew, was the last Taylor name, and he, of course, has died. So the equipment is there and they do some business making bells, but I'm not aware of it. I doubt they're making any carillons today.

Charnley: How would you say that, in the course of what happened with the carillon here, obviously there were some recent renovations, but in 1960s and, let's say, early 1970s, what was your main repertoire that you would do when you did a concert?

Westcott: I'm not quite sure what you want. When I quit then, the carillon was silent for twelve years. I think the university didn't quite know what to do, because they didn't want to pay any money. The story was that it was unplayable, and so when I read that in the press, I was surprised because I could have gone out anytime and played it. I have to be embarrassed to look at the action, because there was no money. I have to say, because there was no money for the upkeep, I did all the upkeep, and to look at the wires that go from the key to the clapper and see a splice here, a splice here, one kind of wire here, another kind of wire there, sometimes the wire might be two inches long where it broke and I had to add a piece, it was embarrassing for some outsider to see that action, to see how awful. I had brass wires--what do you call thicker brass? Brass rods is the name. Words don't come to me.

Horrible to use brass rods from a key to the tumbler, to the clapper, because they're too heavy and you want to have short lengths of about thirty-two inches, spliced together, in order to have an absolutely straight line from down here to up there. If it's zig-zaggy, where's your control of action? You come down to the key and you had to take up the slack before anything happened.

So you need a straight wire from your key to clapper, and by having sections of wire

strung together with braces every thirty-two inches, to keep the things from whipping around, that gives you a positive action.

I didn't have any equipment to make loops to join two wires together. There happened to be an alumnus who had a factory out here, east of East Lansing, who had equipment to take these brass rods and make a little loop on the end. All right, that allowed me to have brass rods to have something straight to go for that connection. But it was too heavy, so it had a bearing on your action because you don't want that much heaviness before you actually move the clapper.

So to see my action, the wires would break periodically. I'd have to stop in the middle of my concert, go upstairs with a pair of pliers, repair the thing, whatever I had to do with the wire, come down with my hands all greasy, and continue the concert. I did that at least a half a dozen times. Okay, it's interesting to my audience, who are up there watching it all. This is what's happening.

There was no money, no thing in the budget for the upkeep of the carillon. The greasing, sometimes I did myself. Now and then I got someone, maybe a couple times, to go up there and grease, but I knew how to do it and it's not that big a job. It might take an hour, the different things you grease.

Yes, this period, the bells were silent. The carillon was silent simply because there wasn't anyone to play it, but the easiest way to say why it was silent was that it was unplayable. I personally resented that publicity, saying that it was unplayable, when that was not the fact and I could have gone up anytime, if there was something I had to do, as I had done hundreds of times, to fix one of the notes. It was playable. It was unplayable because there was no one to play it.

Charnley: When was the renovation done?

Westcott: '96, '97. I guess it was completed in '97.

Charnley: What was actually done in that renovation?

Westcott: The new Dutch bells of I_____, they're very superior bells, which I certainly was in agreement with. I would like to have had more bells on the bass end as well. Those were added. A new clavier, which was infinitely better than my clavier. It was the difference between, let's say, an upright piano and a Steinway grand. That's how you can compare what I had to play, a bargain basement clavier that cost \$700. The current one, I believe, cost about \$30,000.

So I had a very imperfect instrument. Wires, we called them leads, from the key to the clapper, that should have been done professionally by technicians, not myself. I tried to find out where I could get steel wire through the buildings and grounds. I never could find someone that sold steel wire that was straight. It's always in a circle.

Charnley: On a spool.

Westcott: So this was one way of getting--the brass rods were straight, and this fellow with the equipment, some factory in that direction, had something. The president of the firm was out there with me, making the curve so I could connect two rods together. If I had to saw it to a length, I did it, but all of the action, except what could have been kept from the original Gillett

and Johnston, was there. But I had to do it in a amateurish way. It's disgraceful, for a carillon of that importance, that they couldn't find maybe two or three hundred dollars to have wires. It was a matter of interest. No one was interested in doing it.

Charnley: Who paid for the renovations this time? Was it the Development Fund or individual donors?

Westcott: It came from several sources and, frankly, I don't know. One year the class of that year, I think raised \$100,000. That's a class. It came from many sources, so, frankly, that's one that had a lot of publicity.

Charnley: When you do a concert now, how many people usually attend?

Westcott: I'll have to divide your question into two parts. Dr. Milton Muelder, who was the former dean of arts and letters, that had a different name for the college.

Charnley: Science. It was one big college.

Westcott: Back in the fifties, in the time we were enlarging the carillon, he was the dean. As I remember, when I had to get away for a concert elsewhere, the dean has to sign it, and I have just one of those things where he signed to release me to go to play somewhere. He, unbeknownst to me, was an admirer of my playing, and it was because of that that he gave \$50,000, the interest

from which would support five concerts in the summertime. So we have now, in the summer, a season which is under way now. In fact, there's a concert tonight of the Dean Milton Muelder--dean, I don't know, doctor, probably--Memorial Concerts. So those came about because of his interest in my playing, and felt that there should be some concerts.

My God, here they've spent half a million dollars--I don't know where it all went, but a major part was the carillon--and we aren't going to pay a nickel for it to be played. To me, it defies--and so I'm playing every Sunday at two. I'm not asking for any publicity, because I don't need any publicity. I don't want it, in fact. My personal thought is that probably the institution's embarrassed to have someone who now is ninety years old playing the carillon gratis. My playing actually is no less good than it was earlier. In fact, I have a better instrument, a more sensitive clavier, so I think it's better than it was--

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Charnley: This is tape two of the Dr. Wendell Westcott interview.

When the last tape ended, you were talking about the concerts today, and the fact that you're playing still, at ninety years old.

Westcott: I say that because they had a big--can you see that thing on the wall?

Charnley: Governor's certificate.

Westcott: Yes, signed by the governor and a representative and a senator. It was a big surprise. I went in on my birthday to play my regular Sunday program, opened the door. My God, here was a room full of people, with that. I hardly could hear what was being said, because I was about to go up and play my regular Sunday program. So I was very pleased to have that.

I have a letter, another booklet. Well, we're being taped. Peter McPherson. Yes, you know who—TIAA John Biggs is the CEO.

Charnley: Clifton Wharton was, I know. You have a whole scrapbook.

Westcott: Yes, a scrapbook. That was in the *State Journal*. Well, that's another memento I've treasured very highly.

Charnley: What are some of your favorite pieces that you play?

Westcott: That's hard to say, because it's in the dozens. I will say this, though. From my experience over the years, I'm playing not to enhance my artistic stature, but to be a part of university scene of why the tower is there, why the bells are there, a musical instrument is there. It's to really reach the audience who I want to listen to it.

I really, and I neglected to say, am carrying on a tradition that has five centuries of history in the lowlands of Europe. There they have as many carillons in tiny Belgium and tiny Holland as we do in this great big country. Each one has as many carillons. That has been a 500-year-old

institution of providing music, music for the people, which basically are hymn tunes, folk music.

I should have said folk tunes first, hymn tunes.

As a sideline, a few compositions that the carillonneur writes to have a little variety, to satisfy his own musical tastes, because he's probably the organist in the church down below. So the carillon as an instrument to play for concerts started--I'm giving you a little more history, I'm digressing--started in the 1890s, in Mechlin, Belgium, the place where there's the school where I studied, by J____, to have formal concerts that an audience would come to, as you come to an indoor concert. Never before in the 500-year-old history had there been formal concerts, with an audience, let's say, of 50, 100, or 500 people there. Maybe a couple of dozen, maybe nobody. It just was sounding and you could hear it in the town square and so you could hear it all around. It was just informal playing.

For the first time in the 500-year-old history of the carillon, J____, because he had improved the instrument vastly from previous, instituted formal concerts. They had special trains from other countries that came to those. It was such a special event that special trains were made to bring in audiences. So that was the beginning of the idea of the carillon as a concert instrument, was back in 1890s, J____, improving the instrument so that it was a better usable instrument than previously.

So when it has come to this country, the idea of concerts has dominated more than just the idea of background. Well, I did both. I played at eight o'clock in the morning, five o'clock in the afternoon, five days a week. That's ten times. Actually, I was playing more times than any other carillonneur in the world. Also on Sunday, the Sunday afternoon concert. Also for all of the football games, and for special events, such as the May Morning Sing, and whenever there was

some special thing. I played for dozens of groups from, let's say, what do you call them, school--

Charnley: Assemblies?

Westcott: No. Where they come. There's a word. A group of students from Grand Rapids and all over Michigan. Field trips. They would hear me play and then come up to the playing chamber and I'd talk a bit about it. Take them up to the belfry. Now you can't do it because the way the bells are arranged, you can't get up to the belfry anymore. At least the public can't. So I always had tours to the belfry after all of the summer concerts. very often three different tours. I could only get twenty-five people up there at one time, and I have three tours, which means seventy-five people. So now that is one feature you can't do.

Well, as I say, the carillon is traditionally for just background thing. I was doing both that. I had my formal concerts in the summertime, Sunday afternoon. I had the informal plays, eight o'clock and five o'clock, which was just atmosphere while they were going at the end of the day. I think more appreciated the eight o'clock time.

I have letters, believe it or not, from the [unclear] about that fact. It became a part of the campus and now it's no more. What do we have now? At twelve o'clock, we have an automatic thing playing a tune, single notes. At five o'clock, automatic, playing a tune, lasting a minute. I don't think I want to have my feelings on that too widely dissembled. But personally, to me, for a fine carillon**Error! Bookmark not defined.**, to have the only official playing, those twice-a-day tunes. All right, the unofficial playing, when the students get a piece good enough to play, they go up there and play it.

Charnley: So there are some MSU students that go up there?

Westcott: Yes. I think they do a little of their practicing up there. In fact, one tonight is--I think it's she. Sally Harwood is playing with her teacher. She happens to be one of the lawyers for the university, and she apparently had a musical background, and from the little I've heard, she plays very well.

But so far as having a resident carillonneur, as we have in other areas, even in our own state--Yale has their carillonneur now, Kansas had, from the very beginning; Ann Arbor from the very beginning. I think anyone I can think of.

Charnley: Grand Valley, you said, has a resident one also?

Westcott: Oh, yes. I don't know whether she plays both carillons, or there's someone else that plays the other. But the idea that we can't afford to have a player.

Actually, my position was half--once the carillon got under way. It wasn't in the beginning. It was after some years. I don't remember. It was half carillon and half teaching piano. I'm a pianist as well as organist. So I thought probably they'd do the same thing. find someone in the music department who was interested, and if they didn't want to have a full-time carillonneur. But I think they don't feel that it's important enough to have a full-time carillonneur.

Charnley: So there's no replacement right now?

Westcott: No. Other than--

Charnley: The students that you mentioned.

Westcott: The fellow who teaches, who labels himself "MSU carillonneur." Well, it's stretching the point a little bit.

Charnley: Not official.

Westcott: He's not paid to play at all. I think he will play a concert. Well, yes, I think he's playing tonight with a pupil, but not on a regular basis. Now, I think, my daily playing, I can see, when I started on the campus--this was long before your time--it was all on the north side of the river. Now, with all the buildings on the south side, most of the students are there. They aren't where the carillon is. So the morning and afternoon is less appropriate now than it was during most of my time.

But five concerts, that an outsider has to provide, is unique. It implies that the university doesn't consider it important enough to the spirit of the university, why they had the bells in the first place, to give campus spirit to help out the athletic department. Yes, I'm also playing for the football games. I've been doing that since I reinstated.

Charnley: This is before or after the game?

Westcott: I was doing it before and after, and then I, now, the last year, gave up afterwards. My wife says there aren't enough people in the vicinity to warrant it. More are there before the game, so I play about an hour before the game. I'm glad to play. The money part was never an important feature at any time, because my salary was among the lowest of the music department. Again, a manifestation that they didn't consider the carillon worth paying anything, really. I'd say my salary was commensurate with what I did half-time, my teaching, and I actually was playing all those years gratis, if you want to get down to the mechanics of the figures. But I don't regret--my position as carillonneur has had opportunities that most have not had. My scrapbook is just full of material.

Charnley: Can you think of any time, maybe either a time, a day, a really memorable concert that you gave, or something that you remember? What comes to mind?

Westcott: Yes, yes. Yes, I can think of one. Dr. [Clifton R.] Wharton [Jr.] was a good friend of Duke Ellington, and when Duke Ellington died, Dr. Wharton gave me a ring, "Could you play a piece in memory of Duke Ellington, who has just died?" Well, I didn't have a thing of Duke Ellington's in my library. I went over to the music store. My gosh, thank goodness, they had a volume of Duke Ellington pieces, maybe twenty-five pieces. Okay, I had a week's notice and not only to play one Duke Ellington piece. I played a whole program of Duke Ellington.

I had to arrange that whole program in seven days' time. I was working day and night until maybe three o'clock in the morning. I know the last pieces, I didn't even have time to put in

the measure bars. Here were the notes, but I knew what I'd written. I just had written it twenty-four hours earlier, but I didn't even have time to finish the manuscript. So I played a Duke Ellington program. I had one of the largest, and maybe my wife can remember, maybe it was the largest audience I ever had, but it was a large audience. Dr. Wharton heard it, of course, and said, "Yes, I got the spirit of--." In fact, he wrote it, so I have the record. "I got the spirit of things," and he enjoyed it very much, and appreciated it.

When I retired--I have to think. Well, right now, I'd have to look at the date and see. I think it's when I retired for the final time then, after the part-time, I had a letter from Dr. Wharton, who was then the chancellor in New York, which you would know, wishing me well. That's the only letter I had from anybody, was Dr. Wharton.

Charnley: When you actually retired.

Westcott: Yes. Who wasn't even around at the time.

Charnley: In looking back at your career, and the carillon itself, is there any final thought you want to share for the record?

Westcott: Well, I suppose I'd say that I felt I had the best position the campus. It was never work. I spent hundreds of hours, thousands of hours, writing music. I've written far more than anyone else in the music department has ever written, because I had to write it to have a repertoire. Ninety-five percent of it was arrangements of music that I chose to write. The rest

were compositions. But the arrangements were far more listenable, more practical for my audience than compositions. The compositions were written because I enjoyed doing it.

The satisfaction of writing music and having a place to play it--composers will write something. They aren't performers. They have to beg someone, some orchestra, to play their piece. Or some pianist or someone to play it and maybe build up their name as a composer, beg them to play. I wrote my own music and played my own music. I had it both ways. I had everything, and if I didn't like some of what I'd written, I made alterations. If you could see some of my manuscripts, it's all been fixed over, so a lot of them is just like a living trust we have. We've had about five different variations of it, and I'm still in the process of making a change right now, on our house.

Charnley: But you have a key to the orchestra door, more or less.

Westcott: Yes. So the idea of writing music and performing it publicly, before an audience, what more satisfaction could anyone have than that? So it's not only I can appreciate it, but I have an audience that's appreciated it. To talk about a job that you don't have to work at, well, it was never work to me.

The playing is not work. My God almighty, it's the most of anything you do. You talk to any performing musician--a pianist, a violinist, or what have you--you aren't alive unless you're performing. Or orchestral conductors, if you notice, they all live to a ripe old age--eighty, eighty-five or so. Others don't make it. I consider myself, I'm ninety, I have to do this, the same thing the orchestra conductor does, and I consider my age, at ninety, I don't know how many more

years, is due to being a carillonneur, having to climb seventy-two steps, twice a day. The same distance, my piano studio, I walked upstairs. It was, I estimated, the same distance that I did by stairs there, twice a day. Once to go up to teach, once to go down to get my mail and go back up. All of that going up steps, exercising with hands and feet, twice a day, what better exercise? I belong to the gym. I see these people in the gym doing the different things. Boring as hell.

Charnley: They're not making music.

Westcott: But I have the music. My mind is on the music when I'm playing, but as an asset, I'm getting a tremendous workout of hands and feet as well. So what better job could you have than being a musician, not only a performing musician, but a creative musician, writing music?

Charnley: And the Beaumont Tower remains a symbol, even though maybe it's not the geographic center, it still is the symbolic center, for the university.

Westcott: It's a symbol of my life among--well, let's make it after the war, because the beginnings, on two octaves, it was meager. But from 1947 onwards, things focused on the carillon, and then when the handbells came along, which, rather than one spot, we could go all over the country, and because of my unique position as carillonneur, I don't know of any other carillonneur who had handbells. Now, maybe since then they're might be one somewhere, but it's not a common experience.

If you're a carillonneur, you aren't in a position where you can recruit the people. I think

the college is about the only place where you have people old enough who can do the kind of thing that I did. So I had a combination of the carillonneur and the college students to draw from, to do a companion thing, that rather than being in one spot, was all over the world, through the BBC in London. We gave probably about two dozen concerts a year on the handbells, here plus the tour. Maybe more than that, because we were going over to the Kellogg Center seven or eight times a year.

It was the most popular entertainment for these banquets, and as I could show you, there's legislation dinners. The state legislature, several times, they had all of the--they call it booty, bags of stuff to hand out, for their take-home presents. Yes, engineers' banquet. It was just better entertainment than someone getting up and playing a piano solo, or someone singing, or what else they do to entertain. Telling jokes.

Charnley: I want to thank you, on behalf of the project, and I appreciate your insights and certainly your experience and long career.

Westcott: You're entirely welcome. I haven't gone over this history ever, I guess, before, to this degree.

Charnley: I'm glad we were able to capture it on tape. Thank you.

Westcott: I enjoyed doing it, and I hope I haven't been too illiterate in some of my comments.

Charnley: Not at all. Thank you.

[End of interview]

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