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Ringing in a new era for mission

CARMEL'S HISTORIC BELLS REINSTALLED AFTER RESTORATION

By JIM JOHNSON
Herald Salinas Bureau

After nearly a year of silence, the venerable bells will ring again at Carmel Mission.

On Thursday, a smattering of people, including students of the mission's Junipero Serra School, watched from the courtyard as nine historic bells were re-installed in their bell towers after almost

a year's hiatus for restoration.

The bells, some more than 200 years old and with names like St. John of the Cross, Ave Maria and Animas, were taken down in June and either restored or recast before they were returned to their lofty perches by the Verdin Company of Ohio on Thursday.

Most of the bells were refurbished in Ohio. Two of them, which had cracked

because of age and use, were sent to the Netherlands to be recast by the renowned Petit-Fristen Co.

The bells will be mounted instead of hung, and will be run by automatic strikers.

The restoration effort, paid for by an anonymous donor through the Carmel Mission Foundation, will cost about \$80,000, said the Rev. John Griffin, a pastor at the mission.

Bells

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mission's history alive," Griffin said. "The bells hadn't been inspected for a long time. They should be good for another 100 years. We're doing our part for California and the church."

President Sam Wright called the project "the first piece of a major restoration program" aimed at refurbishing the entire mission, including the Basilica, the adobe outbuildings, and its art and artifacts.

Wright said the foundation will announce the beginning of a \$4 million capital campaign in June. The foundation already has secured about \$650,000 in a federal matching grant, he said.

The program is scheduled for completion in 2013, the tricentennial of the birth of Father Junipero Serra, founder of Carmel Mission.

The bells captivated 9-year-old Oliver Kraustrunk, a third-grader at Serra School. Kraustrunk joined his classmates on the mission grounds during a morning break to gawk at the bells as they were being placed by crane into the South Bell Tower.

Later, he quickly rattled off facts about his favorite bells. His favorite, St. John of the Cross, was originally cast in 1781, he said. He also confessed to a soft spot for Animas, which he pointed out was cast at the mission itself.

But the coolest part, he said, was getting to touch the bells, including the original Ave Maria, which was cracked.

Principal Peggy Burger said the students and staff missed the ringing of the bells, to which they have a special connection because of the campus's location.

"Their campus is a mission," Burger said. "What a great way to learn about the history."

Carmel's Caroline Gill, the events chairwoman, brought her granddaughter Clara Matlack from San Jose to share the occasion. Gill said Clara, a fourth-grader studying California history, had a special interest in the Carmel Mission because she chose it for her class project.

Clara said the local mission was her favorite because it was the second oldest in the state's mission system, and because of its links to Serra.

An official celebration, dubbed the "Return of the

Griffin welcomed the bells' return, calling them "Very much a vital part of who we are" as a church community. The restoration project, he said, represented the community's effort to keep the historic legacy of the Carmel Mission and the California mission system going.

"Most of all, this is doing our part to to keep the

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The Carmel Mission Bells

- St. John of the Cross, cast in 1781 in Mexico
- Russian Bell, 1800, Russia
- Guadalupe, 1804, Carmel
- Animas, 1804, Carmel
- Ave Maria, 1807, Mexico
- Mexican Liberty Bell, 1810, Mexico
- Spanish Bell, 1846, Spain
- W.F. Storer, 1800s, unknown origin
- Dutch Bell, 1974, Netherlands

Source: Carmel Mission Foundation

Bells," is to be held May 2 at the mission and is open to the public. There will be a special Choir Mass at 2:30 p.m., when the bells will be blessed and officially rung for the first time, followed by a courtyard reception with speakers and refreshments.

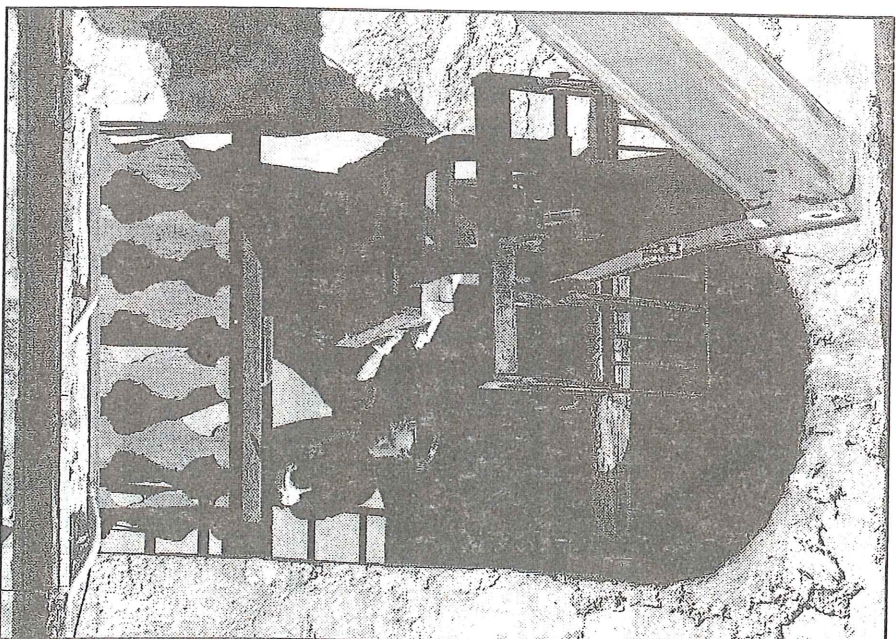
Officially named Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo, the Carmel Mission was founded by Serra in 1771 and served as the headquarters for the state's Spanish mission system, which includes 21. Serra is buried on the mission grounds.

The mission, which features the original bell tower and walls, remains in use as a parish church and a school, and an estimated 100,000 visitors and students pass through its gates each year.

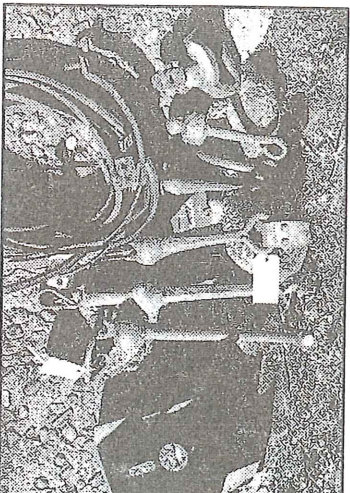
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A new bell to replace the 203-year-old Ave Maria bell in the South Bell Tower at Carmel Mission sits ready to be placed Thursday.

VERN FISHER/The Herald



Phil Dravage of the Verdin Company in Ohio installs one of nine bells in the South Bell Tower at Carmel Mission on Thursday. The company refurbished most of the bells.



Old bell clappers are seen outside the mission.



Junipero Serra School third-graders, from left, Julama Smith, Francesca Saracino, Camille Ty, Oliver Kraustrunk and Dominic Enerti check out the Ave Maria bell, which is more than 200 years old and was one of the nine bells being replaced Thursday.

VERN FISHER/The Herald