

The Carmel Pine Cone

Volume 96 No. 5 On the Internet: www.carmelpinecone.com January 29 - February 4, 2010

YOUR SOURCE FOR LOCAL NEWS, ARTS AND OPINION SINCE 1915

FROM THE BELLS DOWN, MISSION RESTORATION EFFORT BEGINS

By MARY BROWNFIELD

THE CARMEL Mission's nine bells have been silent since last summer, but come March, they will ring anew — and by remote control. The year-old nonprofit Carmel Mission Foundation, which is independent of the Roman Catholic Church and the local diocese, raised the \$80,000 needed to restore the bells — just one of many of the \$2 million in projects it hopes to undertake to preserve the historic buildings and their contents.

"The bells have a good deal of romance to them," said

See **MISSION** page 21A



PHOTO/COURTESY VERDIN CO.

Workers with the Verdin Co. use a very tall forklift to remove bells from Carmel Mission's tower for refurbishment.

MISSION

From page 1A

Carmel resident Sam Wright, a founder of the foundation and a member of the church choir.

Since it was founded by Padre Junipero Serra in 1771, the Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Rio Carmelo has housed numerous bells in its tower. When it was abandoned and fell into disrepair in the mid-1800s, the contents disappeared, but after rebuilding efforts began in the 1880s, many of the pieces were recovered, including some of the bells.

The newest bell in the current array was made in 1975, with the oldest dating back to the early 1800s.

Some of the bells were specifically commissioned for California missions, while others are more contemporary. Their Mexican makers inscribed many of them with names, such as Guadalupe and Ave Maria, a bell that was cast in Mexico City in 1807 and weighs half a ton. The bells were hung using rope, rawhide or steel cable, and were rung by pulling a rope.

And they were in serious need of TLC. Last June, representatives of the Verdin Company — the oldest bell company in the United States, founded in 1842 and family operated in Cincinnati, Ohio — removed the bells by crane to take them back to the foundry for restoration. After discovering that two of the bells, Ave Maria and another named Animas, were cracked, Verdin sent them to a Dutch company, Royal Bellfounders Petit & Fritsen, for recasting. The original bells will be displayed on the Carmel Mission's grounds, while the new bells cast by Petit & Fritsen will hang in the tower, Wright explained.



PHOTO/COURTESY VERDIN CO.

A representative of Verdin Co., the oldest bell foundry in the country, carefully removes a bell from the Carmel Mission.

The process of repairing and restoring the bells, as well as mounting them in the tower so they will be stationary while their clappers are controlled via remote control, is "a very difficult job," according to Wright, since they must retain their historic integrity while accommodating modern technology.

Big grant, more work

Last year, the foundation commissioned an historic structures report to determine the history of the various buildings on the Mission grounds and their condition, and identify problem areas worthy of attention. The to-do list adds up to at least \$2 million worth of work, according to Wright, so the foundation has a lot of fundraising to do.

"The stone is cracking in some of the archways, there's plaster over adobe in certain places, and it's cracked and leaking, so water is wicking into the adobe walls," he said. "In addition to the structures themselves, we have identified and targeted various groupings of art and artifacts for restoration," including Spanish pieces from the 16th century, vestments worn in Junipero Serra's day and the contents of the state's oldest library, which was established on the site before the Mission was built.

"This whole issue goes way beyond the capabilities of a local parish," Wright said. The foundation was established "so potential donors, as well as directors and volunteers, would see it as being independent of the financial control of the Catholic Church."

But they still collaborate. "There's a discussion that goes on between our foundation and the administration of the parish relative to what are or appear to be the significant restoration needs," Wright said. "And having identified and agreed upon them, we single out the things we are prepared to fund from a restorative standpoint."

Despite the huge federal budget deficit, the CMF recently received \$650,000 in taxpayer funds via the Save America's Treasures program, through which the National Park Service distributes money for the preservation of significant historic and cultural resources of all kinds, from Frank Lloyd Wright's Hollyhock House in Los Angeles and the Old Naval Hospital in Washington, D.C., to Kilauea Point Lighthouse on the Hawaiian island of Kauai and the Faneuil Hall art collection in Boston, Mass. Wright said the foundation has to raise an equal amount of matching funds, plus more, for its work at the Mission.

Throughout 2010, structural and mechanical engineers, a hydrologist, a seismologist and other experts will help develop plans for repairs. The City of Carmel will have a say on major work, and Wright anticipated construction could begin next year.

With the first of many projects well under way, and with a need to match the federal grant as quickly as possible, the Carmel Mission Foundation is seeking donations. To support its restoration efforts, send checks to P.O. Box 221351, Carmel, CA 93922. For more information, call (831) 624-3261 or visit www.carmelmissionfoundation.org.



Some of the bells at Carmel Mission were found to be cracked (left) and sent to be recast by a company in Holland. The bells, the oldest dating to the early 1800s, weigh as much as half a ton.