



Bell Piano Newsletter[®]

Volume 1 Issue 2

Published By: MBI Communications Ltd.

August 2005

A History of William Bell

William Bell was one of the early Guelph business giants. Along with George Sleeman, (brewer and mayor) and James Goldie (miller) they developed the towns broad industrial base which it still has today. Yet little is know of Mr. Bell. There are no pictures and the information is still incomplete.

William Bell was born in Dumfries in the county of Dumfries-shire, Scotland on September 5, 1833. His parents William and Mary Bell along with brothers Joseph and Robert later moved to Canada.

Young William learned the carpentry trade in Scotland and later became a building contractor. He moved to Toronto in 1853 and then to the United States either New York City or Minnesota. He came back to Guelph in 1860 to marry Isabella Christie. They moved to Minnesota 1861 following his trade.

In 1865 the couple returned to Guelph with son William J and daughter Edith L. He joined his brother Robert to develop the Bell Organ Company.

William had the sales and business knowledge that propelled the business to develop new products, acquire a rival, and export. His carpentry expertise produced quality products.

By 1883 the two factories with 400 men occupied a downtown block. A lumber yard with drying kilns and stables with 200 men was across the street.

In 1884 the company was sold to a British syndicate that controlled the factory and business development. This control continued until 1928 when the company was sold to John Dowling of Brantford.

When the organ and piano businesses were well established William turned to other ventures. He was co-founder and president of the Guelph Board of Trade, Guelph Junction Railway (still exists today), Globe Building and Loan, Traders Bank of Canada, and VP of Manufacturers Life Insurance. He was on the school board and was supposedly appointed to the Guelph Police Force.

William retired from Bell in October 1897. Nothing else is heard from him until he was killed by a railway train on September 26, 1912. He was 79.



Here is a Bell 6.5 foot high organ referred to as a **harmonium**. These organs had no pipes only reeds and used foot power to

generate air through a bellows producing the sound. The space behind the music desk is hollow.



Below is a smaller harmonium called a **melodeon**. This particular one is light weight and portable. It was used by a local church for tent services. These pictures are from the

Publication Notice

This newsletter is produced and copyrighted by MBI Communications Ltd. of Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Contact us by phone: (519) 837-1419 or email: MBICOM@BELLNET.CA

This newsletter is emailed free to all who ask. We seek Bell Piano stories and information plus reader opinions and comments.