



# Bell Piano Newsletter<sup>®</sup>

Volume 1 Issue 1

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Welcome to issue one of the Bell Piano and Organ Company Newsletter. Although the company stopped manufacturing instruments in Guelph under the Bell name in 1930. The products still linger on.

The purpose of this newsletter is to pass on history about The Bell Company to current owners, give profiles of current owners and how they obtained their Bell product, track down missing information about the company and create an interest in a local Canadian company that made and sold products around the world over 100 years ago.

(The name of the city is pronounced phonetically as G-W-ELF). Some people have had trouble pronouncing the name so I just wanted to mention that.

The Bell company made pianos, pianettes, player pianos, melodeons, organs, small portable pianos, benches, stools, and phonographs.

The head office of The Bell Company in Guelph grew into one of the largest companies in the British Empire with locations in England, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. There are no figures how big the company got as employee records have been lost over time.

Another Guelph business, the McLeod Piano Company, made melodeons and merged with Bell adding the McLeod melodeons to the Bell product line. The Bell Company product line of piano and organs extended from small suitcase size pianos to seven-foot high organs.

Kelly Pianos was a Guelph music store that had Bell put the Kelly name on Bell made pianos. Brand advertising is nothing new but it shows just how well some piano dealers liked the Bell products.

The Bell Company also made games booklets. These booklets contained musical games such as London Bridges and some included a brief description of the accompanying game. Bell made instructional manuals on piano playing. These included basic lessons on music theory, exercises, and sheet music. Overall the Bell Company produced everything the player needed for learning and playing a piano or organ.



Above is a McLeod small organ that was also made in Guelph. The Bell company merged with McLeod & Wood making their organs and melodeons part of the Bell product line.



The Bell factory on Carden St. near downtown Guelph employing 100 men 1881. The bell tower was added in 1882. From the Guelph Public Library archives C6-0-0-0-492 entitled "Bell Piano and Organ Company".

Currently the newsletter is searching through the Guelph Public Library's newspaper microfiche for news items relating to The Bell Company. The earliest record goes back to 1867 from the Guelph Evening Mercury. This daily paper still exists today as all other papers from this era have gone. The information found is very old and hard to read and will be recreated in a newspaper style format.

The Bell Company had been in existence for three years when they merged with McLeod & Wood in 1867. By the following year they were importing pianos from the United States. The new expanded factory went into production by the early 1880s. This building was twice the size of the building on page one. A business directory from 1882 stated The Bell Company was producing ten pianos per day.

## Guelph Evening Mercury

Friday July 26, 1867

One Penny

Monday March 13, 1868



### GUELPH Melodeon and Cabinet Organ FACTORY BELL BROS.

Would respectfully intimate to the public of the Dominion that they have entered into partnership with Messars R. B. Wood and R. McLeod, under the style and firm of

#### BELL, WOOD & CO.

Mr. Wood has worked in some of the best factories in the United States and Canada and has a thorough practical knowledge of business in all its branches: his tuning has invariably taken the first prize wherever exhibited. Mr. McLeod has worked as case maker in the best factories, and has a thorough knowledge of that department in all its branches.

All our instruments are warranted for five years. Illustrated Catalogues sent free on application.

Pianos tuned to order at Toronto Prices. Satisfaction guaranteed in every instance.

First class PIANOS for sale.

Guelph, 18th July, 1867

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## Pianos, Pianos

### Bell, Wood & Co.

Have now on hand Pianos made by the Union Co., New York, whose Instruments are second to none, and yet are sold at least \$100 less than those of either Steinway or Chickering : also by HEINNTZMAN & CO., Toronto, who took the first prize at the late Provincial Exhibition for "purity and quality of tone."

They will also sell cheap a due bill of \$100 (American currency) on GROVESTEEEN & CO., Pianomakers, N.Y., also a good second hand Cottage Piano.

They are also - prepared to take second hand Melodeons or Pianos as part payment of new Pianos or Melodeons of their own manufacture.

Pianos tuned to order at \$1.50.

Guelph, 9th March, 1868

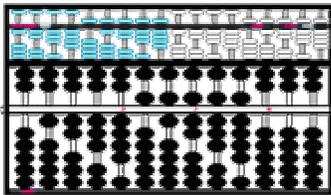
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### Interesting news items from that time.

- An Oyster Room was a private hotel room where men could go for private drinks and cigars.
- Balsam was promoted to cure lung, cough, and cold ailments.
- A life sized chromo lithograph portrait of Charles Dickens could be purchased at the book store.
- There were no weather and few sports reports.
- The only sports note found talked about the local Guelph baseball team beating their Hamilton rivals after 7 innings 62 to 17.
- Weekly chapters of a book are published from different authors.

## Bell Piano & Organ Company Estimated Serial Numbers

<i>Years Produced</i>	<i>Guelph Museum</i>	<i>D. M. Best</i>	<i>Pierce Atlas</i>	<i>Newsletter Calculations</i>	<i>Year Production</i>
1864 - 1893				No records	
1894		4,924	4,900	4,912	504
1895	5,000	5,748	5,500	5,416	2325
1897	7,000	7,088	8,236	7,741	1162
1899	8,600	8,615 / 8,821	8,615	8,615	874
1900	9,000		8,854	8,927	312
1903	12,000	12,284 / 12,443	12,446	12,293	3366
1905	14,000	15,222	13,787	14,336	2043
1907	18,000	18,630	18,000	18,210	3874
1910	21,000	21,887 / 22,592	21,887	21,877	3667
1912	24,000	24,273	24,000	24,091	2214
1917	29,000	29,285	29,285	29,285	5194
1918	30,000	30,099 / 30,996	30,099	30,099	814
1919	31,000	30,948 / 31,578	30,948	30,948	849
1923	33,000	33,377	33,377	33,377	2429
1924	34,000	33,924	33,924	33,924	547
1894 - 1924	30 years	Pianos made	28,7000	Yearly Ave.	1005.8
1925 - 1939				No records	
1940 - 1975	Bell by Lesage	26501 to 57056	31,005		886



### **Our Serial Numbers**

The serial numbers produced in the newsletter are based upon other lists. If two lists match then that number was used. When various numbers were found an average was taken.

### **How the numbers add up**

There are no serial numbers prior to 1894 but we can speculate based upon the numbers and research. There were 4,912 pianos numbers for the first thirty years or 163 piano per year. However I don't think 163 pianos were made in the first year of operation.

From a Guelph business directory in 1882 there were three piano makers in town. Based upon employees and pianos produced it took 10 men to make 1 piano per week. This directory stated Bell was making 10 pianos per day and would double this with the new factory. If this were true then the 4,900 figure would have been reached by 1884.

The Bell Company made a variety of products with different serial numbers. If Bell made 5 pianos per week the same as the other piano makers did from 1880 to 1893 they would have made 250 per year and 3250 over thirteen years. That leaves 110 pianos per year or 2 per week being made between 1864 and 1879. This gives 1650 pianos made in fifteen years. Thus 3250 plus 1650 equals 4900 which was reached in 1894.



## Thank You



I want to thank all the people who have helped providing information for this first issue. Firstly Jack Wyatt the piano museum curator of the Piano Technicians Guild (PTG) in Kansas City, Kansas, Tom Ward of the PTG for giving the museum tour and introducing me to my first Bell piano.

Kathleen Wall of the Guelph Civic Museum for the history of the Bell company and sharing the museums Bell collection. Darcy Hiltz Research Librarian at the Guelph Public Library for allowing access to the rare books and material the library has. My parents Mel and Lily Briant and Wendy Gagne for being my editors.

I also want to thank Greg Foard a piano technician and piano historian from Elora, Ontario. Tocher Piano of Hillsburgh, Ontario a piano dealer and piano technician.

### Receiving this newsletter

The newsletter will be emailed in a PDF format unless a printed copy is requested to be mailed. There will be no mailing costs as of yet, however this may change if many people want it.

If you wish to receive a copy of this newsletter, pass on information or want to give a profile of your Bell Company piano or organ then contact me, David Briant, at [WD40PIANO@BELLNET.CA](mailto:WD40PIANO@BELLNET.CA).

Kathleen Wall is Assistant Curator at the Guelph Civic Museum [KATH-LEEN.WALL@GUELPH.CA](mailto:KATH-LEEN.WALL@GUELPH.CA). Darcy Hiltz is the Research Librarian at the Guelph Public Library [DHILTZ@LIBRARY.GUELPH.ON.CA](mailto:DHILTZ@LIBRARY.GUELPH.ON.CA).

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Above is a Bell pianette which has only 66 keys. There are 10 single bass strings and 56 double strings. There were no triple strings. It was designed for small rooms and for use aboard ships.

Unlike regular pianos a pianette had no iron or steel frame holding the string pins. It was made of wood making it light weight. The pins moved easily with less tension and didn't hold a pitch.

The serial number on this particular model is estimated to have been made in 1889. With no list of serial numbers prior to 1894 it is hard to determine. After The Bell Company was sold to Lesage in 1930 all the company records went with them.

This pianette is in the Piano Technicians Guild head office and museum in Kansas City, Kansas. Below is a picture of me tuning this pianette while attending a piano seminar in January 2005.



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