

***The Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell –
Sixteenth anniversary of dedication***
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on May 1, 2012)

On Friday afternoon, May 3, 1996, the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell was dedicated and officially placed in city hands in a brief ceremony. What may have been the most significant events of the day was the freedom to ring the bell.

Undoubtedly, many excellent remarks were expressed, many people thanked and much ado made about the long road to the dedication. But just ringing the bell hanging in its final resting place had to be the ultimate expression of accomplishment.

Although there had been controversy surrounding the bell for two years and a lawsuit pending, there was NO CONTROVERSY at the dedication. All was joy and elation at a job well done and complete at last.

Ron Bridgeman wrote in *The Oak Ridger* on May 6, 1996, that, "Boyd Carter, President of the Oak Ridge Community Foundation, officially turned the 4-ton bell over to the city..." Bridgeman reported that, "Carter emphasized our common humanity and urged those in attendance to, 'transmit the heritage of this day on to those who follow after us.'"

As we look back 16 years, it is good to think on our Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell's history. There are certainly key individuals who must be recalled for the story to be complete.

"Without Shigeko there would be no bell." – Pat Postma said of Shigeko Uppuluri. Humble and self effacing, Shigeko truly is THE key individual who accomplished the feat of bringing a Japanese "Temple" style bell to Oak Ridge. Her late husband, Ram, was the source of her inspiration.

The Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell, located overlooking the conflux of two streams, is a beautiful example of the combined influences of east and west cultures. It has multiple meanings to various people. Much as Oak Ridge itself with its Manhattan Project beginnings is perceived differently by many of our citizens and visitors.

Venkanta Ramamohana (Ram) Uppuluri, originally from India, and Shigeko Yoshino Uppuluri, originally from Japan, came to Oak Ridge in 1963. They quickly adopted Oak Ridge as their home but recalled fondly memories of their homelands and the symbols they saw there as youths.

They continued to travel extensively and considered various international symbols that might add to Oak Ridge's worldwide connections. There were many international visitors to Oak Ridge and many who had adopted Oak Ridge as home. Even then Oak Ridge was known worldwide and was, without realizing it - I believe - an international city.

One suggestion Ram made to Shigeko while they were on a trip to Japan was to bring a huge bell from Japan to Oak Ridge. He included this thought in his "Proposal to Enhance Tourism in Tennessee" in 1987.

The idea of a friendship bell began as many other such ideas. It sprang from something else. Originally the idea Ram and Shigeko Uppuluri had wanted to promote was to build a Japanese style park somewhere in Oak Ridge.

A "Committee of 50" was formed and charged to create programs to bring growth and development to Oak Ridge and to celebrate the city's 50th anniversary in 1992-1993. This committee is still fondly recalled by many as having been a key moving force in generating interest in the growth and development of Oak Ridge.

Members still pride themselves in the spirit of cooperation and enthusiasm for our city created by this group. Ultimately, the Friendship Bell was one of the results of this committee's efforts.

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The bell was cast by Japanese master bell maker, Sotetsu Iwazawa on July 14, 1993 at his Kyoto foundry. The design includes two vertical panels urging international friendship and peace. That design was created by Oak Ridge artist Susanna Harris.

The casting ceremony was traditional Japanese. The bronze material is 85 percent copper and 15 percent tin. This mixture is known to make the bell's tone rich and also is a lasting material that requires little upkeep. It is the material of choice for bells.

The Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell was shipped to Oak Ridge in September, 1993. In October, 1993, it was placed on display at an interim location in the courtyard of the Oak Ridge Municipal Building. In May, 1996, it was placed in its present location in the bell house pavilion in A.K. Bissell Park and dedicated on May 3, 1996.

One young lady, Elise Campbell, succeeded in removing the unduly binding restrictions to ringing the bell and brought us ultimately to the realization that the bell should be freely rung by any and all. The freedom to ring the bell is enjoyed by many and obviously much appreciated by the ever increasing number of visitors who seek it out.

The plaque reads:

FRIENDSHIP BELL

This bronze bell was designed in Oak Ridge and cast in Japan in 1993 to serve as a symbol of the bonds of friendship and mutual regard that have developed between Oak Ridge and Japan over the past fifty years... Friendship made so much more meaningful because of the terrible conflict of World War II which Oak Ridge played such a significant role in ending. This bell further serves as a symbol of our mutual longing and pledge to work for freedom, well-being, justice, and peace for all the people of the world in the years to come. Given to the people of Oak Ridge on the occasion of their 50th birthday by the Oak Ridge Community Foundation and friends in the United States, Japan, and other nations. 1996 Oak Ridge, Tennessee - Born of War, Living for Peace, Growing through Science

The statement of purpose included,

"FIRST – To celebrate the past 50 years of growing friendship and peace with Japan...

SECOND: To express for the future, the profound longing and commitment to work for the freedom, wellbeing, justice, and peace for all the peoples of the world.

The Statement of Purpose also included, "...The Friendship Bell will serve as a continual reminder of our dedication to put our science, technology, and humanity to work in the future together with friends everywhere to building the perpetual peace we all long for – striving for understanding, good health, good environmental stewardship, well-being, and for justice for all people of the world."

On March 4, 1996, the bell was transported from the temporary storage location in the courtyard of the municipal building to the pavilion under construction. On May 3, 1996, the bell was dedicated.

On Thursday, May 3, 2012, at 9:30 AM, a commemoration of the original dedication of the Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell will be held at the bell. The public is invited as are all who participated in the original dedication ceremony.

This ceremony will serve as the official public announcement of an upcoming 2012 Bell Festival program on July 14, 2012.

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A World Bell Festival is being organized by the Apolda, Germany Festival Committee. As a participant in the festival, a four-hour mini festival will be held in Oak Ridge at the International Friendship Bell culminating in the ringing of our bell and performances of local hand bell groups. There is more to come, but plan now to join in the celebration.



Oak Ridge International Friendship Bell in spring beauty

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The true sentiment of the bell is seen in the people who enjoy it

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A beautiful setting in A. K. Bissell Park