



# Ponca City Firehouse Bell

## Dedication Speech

By  
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History tells us a lot about a community, it speaks of its people. Their trials and tribulations. Their challenges, defining moments, failures and even their successes.

Today it is important that we share what information we can about a piece of Ponca City history that has finally come back home and taken its rightful place of honor.

For seven or eight years after Ponca City was first formed it took on the ways of a small, thriving town, and the citizens were too busy to think about having a fire department.

Historically speaking, the fire department did not exist until late in the year of 1900. Prior to then, when Ponca City had fires, the age-old bucket brigade system of putting out fires, was utilized by the citizens.

Recorded accounts tell us that this method of fire control took place as early as the winter of 1894.

It took a civic-spirited brewing company to really make the people of Ponca City interested in a fire-fighting organization.

The brewery company presented the people of Ponca City with two pump carts and 1,000 feet of hose. Since they had to be pulled by hand to the scene of the fire, it was decided that they should be kept the opposite sides of the business district - so one of the carts would always be fairly close to any major fire.

One was placed somewhere at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Grand Avenue, while the other cart was parked in a livery stable in the 200 block of South Second Street.

For an alarm system, the city fathers purchased a huge iron bell and set it up in a temporary tower behind a building at the northeast corner of Grand Avenue and First Street.

In early 1901 the first City hall was constructed on the spot we stand today. In that modern brick structure, the alarm bell was placed.

From the records we have learned that the bell was made by the C.S Bell Company in Hillsboro Ohio and was purchased for the sum of \$155.00.

The bell is described as a 40" diameter, equipped with a double clapper and is made of steel alloy. I doubt it has ever looked as nice as it does today.

The intent of the bell by all accounts was to notify the citizens and volunteers of a fire and the need to respond to protect property and lives. By the looks of our downtown it did that job very well.

Many of us remember when bells were used to announce celebrations, the changing of the year and to call us to our places of worship. I'm sure this bell served for more purposes than just an alarm device.

Under the leadership of a man named William Hartman McFadden Ponca City rapidly progressed.

As a Mayor he pushed for the creation of fire districts and running water in the community. He also authorized the purchase of the first motorized fire truck in 1914.

That first fire truck was a called a Velie, and it was manufactured in Kansas City. I wished we had saved that piece of history as well.

McFadden was also responsible for the construction of the Civic Center in 1917, which now proudly serves as the center of this magnificent City Hall complex.

As our City grew, it was time for change, and progress dictated that the old city hall make way for the additions to the Civic Center. Those structures still serve us today.

According to the Ponca City News, the big bell was struck for the last time on June 6, 1924, as wrecking of the old City hall and fire station began.

Newspaper articles tell us that the building was demolished by the fireman of that era; and as the bricks tumbled earthward, they along with other materials were stockpiled for future use.

We know through both written and oral history that the materials including the bell were stored.

We also know that the Ponca City Fire Chief of that time, Chief George Brown, lived next door to a man named Harry Braden, who owned land in the Osage.

In 1927, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and current Braden School was constructed at the nine mile-road location, east of town and the bell was once again put to good use.

Our research indicates that Mr. Braden himself built the school, and those who are familiar with that structure have suggested that Mr. Braden asked the Chief Brown for the bell.

Those who attended that small country school have recounted to many of us how they could clearly hear the bell calling them to school and the need to hurry to be on time.

By their account the bell was also used to celebrate weddings, funerals and other momentous events. The thought of those days has brought back fond memories to many who attended Braden School.

For over four decades the bell continued to serve northern Oklahomans by calling the children in the Braden School area to attend school and further their education. The school closed in 1968, and the bell once again fell silent.

But the life and use of this bell wasn't over. Although it sat idle for another three decades the residents of the Braden School area kept it protected.

In 1999 through the efforts of many people in the Braden community and the assistance of Tom and Mavis Burton a request was made to bring the bell home.

Funds were raised, volunteers were organized and the short journey of transferring the bell from the Osage to Ponca City was undertaken.

There were many who gladly gave their labor and money, and time doesn't permit us to name them all. All were important to that process.

But what is significant is that the people of Ponca City recognize and applaud the people of Braden community for the care of the bell and their graciousness in allowing it to return home. Please join me now in honoring those from the Braden community.

Since its return it has served Ponca City only a few times.

Once as part of our millennium celebration and once in a time of sorrow in honoring one of Ponca City's fallen heroes.

For almost another decade the bell was silent as it collected dust in the corner of the fire station.

But our bell seems to have nine lives; for as evidence in your attendance here today, the history of the bell continues, as new leaders have had other ideas about its use.

Those with greater vision, those with a passion to honor our past and present, those with an aspiration to recognize so many who have served this community, decided to make a change.

With the leadership class of 2009 as the catalyst, the final approval of the new city administration and Mayor Nicholson's determination, it was decided to give the bell its rightful place of honor.

Today, over 100 years later, it now stands in almost its original position where in 1901 the first City hall was located. How fitting is that.

If it could speak, what would it tell us of our history?

Would it tell us of the struggles and challenges this great city has seen?

Would it tell us not to give up, that the best is yet to come?

Would it tell us that when it rings we should once again rally to the needs of this community?

As we all know, bells can't talk, but by placing the bell here, as a community you may have spoken for it.

You may have told those who look upon it that you have not forgotten our past.

You have not forgotten those who put their lives on the line everyday, or those who serve this community in less harrowing occupations.

History is for those who care to review it and those who ask how far we've come.

History is for our children and their children.

Today as we continue the history of the bell, let us remember all who have answered her call, whether it is to fight fires, save lives, further their education or to simply serve this community.

For me the symbolism of the bell represents our past and future,

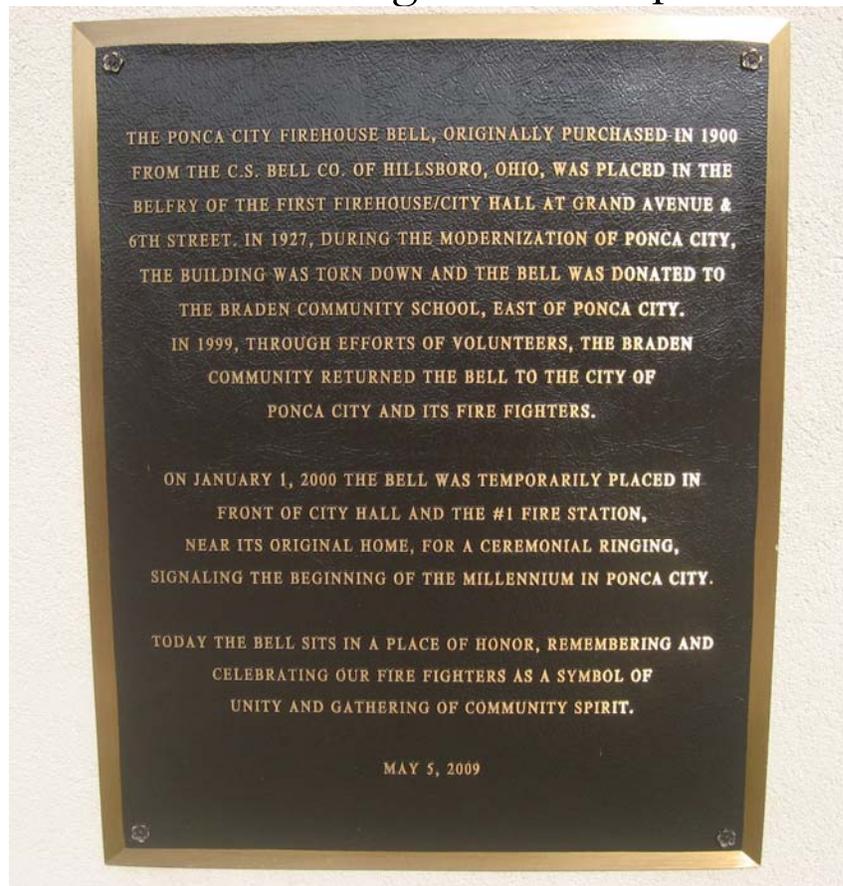
For once again it can proclaim there is nothing this community cannot accomplish when it decides to work together and answer the call of the bell.

Thank you.

## Ponca City Firehouse Bell Acknowledgement Plaque



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The Ponca City Firehouse Bell, originally purchased in 1900 from the C.S. Bell Co. of Hillsboro, Ohio was placed in the belfry of the first Firehouse/City Hall at Grand Avenue and 6<sup>th</sup> Street.

In 1927, during the modernization of Ponca City, the building was torn down and the bell was donated to the Braden Community School, east of Ponca City.

In 1999, through the efforts of volunteers, the Braden Community returned the bell to the City of Ponca City and its firefighters.

On January 1, 2000, the bell was temporarily placed in front of City Hall and the No.1 Fire Station, near its original home, for a ceremonial ringing, signaling the beginning of the Millennium in Ponca City.

Today the bell sits in a place of honor, remembering and celebrating our Firefighters and gathering of community spirit.

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