



The Times

Church hopes to put ring back into bell Patriots' Week events to support restoration

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BY ANDREW KITCHENMAN

TRENTON -- Decades have passed since the bell in the tower of the First Presbyterian Church on East State Street produced clear, melodious sounds, but the church's pastor is looking to change that.

The church will kick off its annual role in the Patriots' Week festivities with a colonial-tavern-style dinner on Dec. 26 to raise funds to renovate the bell.

The bell was made by the Hedderly brothers of Philadelphia between 1805 and 1807. The brothers made bells for buildings across the East Coast and England.

The Rev. John Russell Allen, the church's pastor, said there are historical references to the sounds of the bell. However, as the timber frame that holds the bell has rotted through, the church stopped using the bell.

"It's in need of help," Allen said yesterday.

Since he became the pastor in 1999, Allen hoped to refurbish the bell by redoing the roller wheel that turns the bell and rebuilding the frame that holds it.

While Allen said the church was fading at the time of his arrival, it now offers a variety of programs, including activities for Patriots' Week. It has 53 members but serves hundreds of residents through Saturday morning breakfasts/Bible study sessions, as well as having 75 children in preschool and 70 children in a grade K-8 family enrichment program.

Allen projects the cost of renovating the bell so that it can ring again at \$45,000. The pastor also hopes to renovate the entire church building at an estimated cost of \$3 million.

The church was founded in 1712 and has been located in buildings constructed in 1726, 1805 and 1840. The bell was used in the second building and later moved to the current building.

"It's got historic significance for the city of Trenton," Allen said of the bell.

Allen said the fundraising dinner will bring the past alive, including a colonial, seasonally appropriate meal that will include squash soup, lobster and oyster pie, smoked ham and bread pudding, as well as light beer and cider.

The following day, there will be a colonial church service at First Presbyterian, including two historical re-enactors renewing their wedding vows. The couple and Allen will wear colonial-style clothes.

Other colonial features of the service will include hymns in which the pastor sings a line and the congregation repeats it, and an elder church member offers a critique of the pastor's sermon during the service.

There will be a colonial wedding reception afterward, serving rum punch and cake, which Allen said is an accurate representation of the more modest receptions of that time.

Other Patriots' Week events at the church will include:

A tavern lunch at the church, which will be renamed "The Sign of the Dove Tavern" for the \$12 lunch, with archaeologist Richard Hunter guiding diners through a journey through downtown. The lunch will be Dec. 27 from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.;

A commemoration ceremony paying tribute to the soldiers in the Battle of Trenton on Dec. 27 from 2:30 to 3 p.m. (between the re-enactments of the first and second battles);

Another tavern lunch on Tuesday, Dec. 30; and

A New Year's organ recital on Dec. 31 at 12:15 p.m.

Patriots' Week is presented by the Trenton Downtown Association and includes a variety of activities from Dec. 26 to Dec. 31. These include a reading of Thomas Paine's "The Crisis"; an 18th-century dance lesson at a ball; the battle re-enactments; historical puppet shows; a forum on the colonial African-American experience; a street fair; fife and drum concerts; and many others.

Reservations and a \$30 donation are required for tickets to the Dec. 26 dinner. To make reservations, visit the church website at old1712.org or call (609) 396-1712. For a complete Patriots' Week schedule, visit patriotsweek.com.

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