

The St. Paul's carillon is one of only four in Northern Ohio and there are only six others in the rest of Ohio. It is a two octave carillon of 25 bells. While most carillons today are four octaves containing 49 bells (and 162 of the 183 carillons in North America are larger than St. Paul's) the St. Paul's bells are exceptional quality and can be played in a way that makes the instrument seem larger than it is. The tower, on the other hand, is unusually large and could hold a carillon of five octaves—61 bells.

The St. Paul's carillon is played each Sunday before the last morning service and extended recitals are performed on Feast Days, especially at Christmas and Easter.

Many carillons of four octaves and larger, especially those at colleges and universities, are known for summer recital programs where a great variety of music and a considerable body of original carillon music is performed. In The Netherlands, about the same size as Ohio, there are more than 180 individual carillons and in that part of Europe, carillon playing reaches back 300 years before the first carillons came to these shores.

Although there are many towers with bells, a carillon is different because the bells are precisely tuned and must be at least two chromatic octaves (24 bells) so that music and harmonies can be played in all different keys. The 49 bell keyboard below is not at St. Paul's but it shows how the carillon is played. The "keys" are directly connected by wire to a ball called a "clapper" located close to the inside of the fixed bell. The downward motion of the key pulls the clapper to the bell and the performer has full mechanical control of tone and volume.



The first American carillons were commonly just two or three octaves and a 23 bell carillon at St. Paul's was intended to be the first in Ohio and only the seventeenth in the country in 1928. Alas, only 8 bells were installed in the 23 bell frame in 1929 and it was 25 years later, corresponding with the new Nave and new Holtkamp Organ, that the tower finally had a true carillon when seventeen matched bells were added. In the sixty years since, the carillon has held its own although in 2010 with the considerable help of the Side Door/Act II shop some important repairs were made (the heavy bells were 81 years old with rusting original support bolts) and the playing action was improved.

Our carillonneur David Osburn has written a comprehensive history of the St. Paul's carillon, its relationship to other carillons, in depth details about the donors who made the carillon possible, and the interesting story of the donor of the St. Paul's tower—a person with connections to John D. Rockefeller and his son John D. Jr. who was responsible for two of the largest carillons in the world—one at the Riverside Church in New York and one at the University of Chicago.