

Notes from NEW HAMPSHIRE



Hilary Justice (L)
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NH Co-Chairs

Hello, hello, and welcome to the latest edition of “No one has any idea what’s going on.” Pull up a chair and join us by the fire for a mug of tea. If you put something stronger in it, we won’t tell.

Your intrepid NH co-chairs have once again gathered some stray threads from what still seems a rather frayed situation, which we (Hilary, really; Heidi’s side-lined at the moment with a minor injury) now present to you as our written interpretation of what, in other times, might more closely resemble whole cloth.

Some, but not all, of our state’s church handbell choirs are back at the tables. Some are full-choir (recently First Church UCC Nashua rang for a pre-Thanksgiving service; Brookside is back to rehearsing, socially distanced, and ringing for livestreamed or recorded services). Some, like Exeter UCC/Congregational’s Heritage Ringers, have reduced their numbers to a quartet and are ringing informally in front of the church, to the delight of people passing by. Still other groups continue on hiatus, a hiatus that is starting to feel endless.

In England during plague times, cities used to shut down theatres (okay, they were almost always looking for a reason to shut down theatres), leading to situations where art started popping up all over the countryside, often at inns and taverns; sometimes in stable-yards. Of course it was always very serious, indeed. And peaceful. No brawling. Never.

Something similar seems to be happening in NH. We’ve received reports that at least one pack of itinerant bell troubadours started popping up at outdoor church services, especially right around harvest time, when food is plenty and laughter is loud.

In other words, the GSR Garage Bell Band joined Lee Congregational for its last outdoor Vespers of the year, the one right after the time change. As Pastor Larry said, that night GBB was literally “ringing us from light into darkness” (which doesn’t work at all well as a metaphor, but—hello, it’s NH, and winter is coming, and it’s best to be realistic about that kind of thing).



Masked itinerant bell troubadours, spotted at
Lee Congregational Church

Magical and beautiful to ring through the sunset into emerging stars, ending with moonrise. We wandering bell troubadours highly recommend the experience.

(If you happen to spot any in the wild, it’s okay to feed them; they’re friendly.)

In other news, after the Granite State Ringers’ Board voted to cancel its holiday concert season, the group members still really wanted to ring (perhaps “were chafing at the bit and threatening to bust out of their covid-constrained music-less quarantine cells” would be more accurate), so director Joan Fossum, prophetically anticipating whatever new restrictions might be handed down

from on-high, temporarily split the group into two sextets (thus avoiding problems if there was suddenly a rule against “groups greater than 10”). The resulting GSR Red Team and Green Team have been rehearsing separately and will be performing 12-bell holiday music at various events soon: at the Jingle Bell 5K, at RiverWoods Durham, at Brookside’s drive-through bell caroling, and at St. Paul’s United Methodist Church’s drive-through bell caroling.

Finally, on a much more serious note...

And finally, at least as of this writing, the GBB will have the honor of ringing at a very hospital event in Nashua, where families who have lost a child come in one by one to hang an ornament on the tree.

Best memorize that music; can’t see for the tears.

We’ll do our best to honor and support those families, and we know we won’t ring alone – every bell ringer in the state of NH and within Area 1 will be with us in spirit.

Wishing you all the best possible holidays. Stay safe. Stay warm. Stay cool.

And keep us posted with how you’re all doing at nh.area1@handbellmusicians.org

We miss you. (Obviously.)

Hilary Justice (your scribe for this issue) and Heidi Prior (who may never let Hilary write these again)

NH State Co-chairs