

The Prattville Academy Bell

Prattville Primary School, Wetumpka Street, Prattville, Alabama



The Prattville Male and Female Academy, built in 1859 by Daniel Pratt • The 1859 Meneely Bell

For more than One Hundred and Forty Years the Academy bell has been a symbol of Autauga County's dedication to education. The 900 pound bell sits atop a metal frame at the Prattville Primary School on Wetumpka Street. The Bell, cast in 1859, was the work of a famous bell foundry in West Troy (now Watervliet), New York, the Meneely Bell Foundry. Meneely Bells were said to be the Tiffany of the trade. The company, founded in 1826 by Andrew Meneely, ceased operations in 1952. The bell foundry produced more than 65,000 bells in the company's 174 years. Meneely bells rang for President Franklin Roosevelt's and President John Kennedy's funerals and for President Lyndon Johnson's inauguration. The replacement for the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia in 1876, as well as many church bells in that city, were Meneely bells. Other Meneely bells include bells at Cornell University, the Metropolitan Life building in New York City, and the West Point military academy. Local Meneely bells are in St. John's Episcopal Church, Montgomery, a 1885 C chime and two bells at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Selma, a 1888 F chime and a 1938 F chime. The diameter of the Prattville Bell is 36 inches with a medium tone of A. Most bells, cast at that time, were cast with 78% copper and 10% tin.

Daniel Pratt's Academy was the first free school in Alabama. In earlier days, benches were around the wall. In Pratt's school, each student had a desk positioned in rows as they are today. Poet, musician and professor at John Hopkins, Sidney Lanier taught at the academy in 1867. He left after an illness forced his return to Macon, Georgia. A student at the Academy, state geologist for more than half a century, Eugene Allen Smith cleared the way for the development and utilization of the state's natural resources; discovering, mapping and publicizing the rich mineral deposits in Alabama.

The metal tower was built by Continental Gin Company in 1953 and still holds the bell on the school grounds. The bell was moved to its present position in the summer of 2002.

New York Times article 1967

From Judge Daniel H. Thomas, Mobile

Brass Bell of 1850's Still Peals for Classes

Prattville, Ala. (AP) A bell more than 100 years old still summons elementary school children to class each morning, just as it did for some of their forefathers. Daniel Pratt, who founded this town, had the 2,300 pound brass bell made for the Prattville academy, which he also established. From the late 1850's until 1927, town children knew its gong meant the start of classes.

Then a new school was built -and the old bell was put aside until 1953, when a special tower was built for it on the school grounds, site of the old academy where it first rang.

* The Bell weight was incorrect in the Times article. According to Meneely Co. records, a 36" bell weighs 900 lbs. a 49" bells weight is 2,300 lbs.