



## **Hearing History: Sounds of the Collection**

### **Video Podcast Transcript**

### **Minnesota Historical Society**

I'm Matt Anderson for the Minnesota Historical Society. Historical objects are wonderful to look at, and exhibits and online photographs allow visitors to do just that. For some items, though, seeing just isn't enough. From musical instruments, to bells, to clothing, the Society's collections include numerous items that need to be experienced with the ears.

#### **Object: Cowbell (67.230.88)**

The Society's collection holds some 80 bells, from small ones used to call the attention of unruly students in Minnesota classrooms, to the ship's bell from the Civil War frigate USS *Minnesota*. We start here, though, with a humble iron cowbell. This specimen, dated to about 1910, was used in Mille Lacs. The cowbell was a low-tech predecessor to the modern electrical fence. The herd couldn't wander too far without being... well... heard.

#### **Object: Sleigh Bell (62.4)**

Similar in function, though decidedly more melodious, is this two-chimed, nicked brass sleigh bell. The bell has an interesting back-story. According to lore, the bell was brought to Minnesota by Norwegian immigrants. Because baggage policies allowed only essential items to be transported, the sleigh bell supposedly was hidden inside a loaf of bread to escape detection. Whether or not that story rings true, the sleigh bell certainly does.

#### **Object: Doorbell (2010.74.1)**

This doorbell was once mounted outside a room at St. Paul's Commodore Hotel. A caller turned the key, which then activated a clapper that struck against the brass bell. The Commodore, opened in 1920, was frequented by F. Scott Fitzgerald and Sinclair Lewis. The building suffered fire damage in 1978, but it was renovated, and today houses condominiums and offices.

**Object: Jingle Dress (1990.506.1)**

This black cotton blouse is a part of an Ojibwe jingle dress used by the White Earth Band, near Detroit Lakes, around 1920. The jingle dress, an important part of Ojibwe Pow Wow regalia, takes its name from the sound produced by the many metal cones as the dancer moves.

**Object: Music Box (9376.1)**

This unusual contraption is a hand-cranked musical organ. Wooden rolls are fitted with pins to activate the organ's valves, generating chorded melodies as the handle is turned. This organ dates to about 1910.

**Object: Toy Piano (9589.9)**

And who knows how many virtuoso pianists got their starts on toy pianos like this one? While it certainly can't compare to a full-sized prototype, this toy version produces a surprisingly pleasant tone.

**Object: Yarn Winder (7546.1)**

Sometimes, of course, sounds aren't supposed to be melodic at all. Such is the case with this Norwegian yarn winder. The clock device attached to the crank trips a wooden clapper every 40 revolutions. At that point, the person operating the winder would tie the yarn and then continue for seven knots to produce a complete hank.

We hope you've enjoyed this opportunity to listen to some of our historic objects. It's not often that history speaks in such an audible way.