

Historical Society celebrates 50th year of Highland House Museum

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Highland County Historical Society

With the ringing of the massive bell in front of the Highland House Museum by Justin Harsha at midnight Dec. 31, 2015, the yearlong celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Highland County Historical Society has transitioned into the 50th anniversary of the Society's ownership of the Highland House as its museum.

As reported previously, the Society acquired the property in 1966 with encouragement and assistance from Virginia Bell Thompson, president of the C.S. Bell Company, an important early industry in Hillsboro.

During 2016, through the courtesy of The Highland County Press, the Society will feature one of its Hall of Fame honorees each week.

We begin the series with Charles Singleton Bell, founder of the C.S. Bell Company and grandfather of Virginia Bell Thompson.

The features are quoted directly from the plaques in the museum.

C.S. Bell

Charles Singleton Bell founded the C.S. Bell foundry in Hillsboro, where many thousands of bells and other products were produced for nearly a century.

Bell, a native of Scotland, purchased the Clayton Foundry on West Beech Street in 1858.

In a few years, a second foundry and showroom was built on the northwest corner of Main and West streets.

The bells produced at the foundry originated from an alloy that Bell created by accident.

This alloy allowed Bell to produce bells less expensive than the brass, copper, or tin used at the time. He also learned to alter the alloy in order to pitch the bells.

In 1889, more than 20,000 bells were manufactured and shipped to all parts of the world.

During World War II, because of the shortage of brass and copper for armaments, C.S. Bell Foundry was chosen to supply the bells for the U.S. Navy and our allies.

C.S. Bell, through his generosity, built and gave to the City of Hillsboro the famous Bell's Opera House, at one time one of the finest theaters in the country.

C.S. Bell was a driving force in this community, and a man of great strength, humility, and generosity.

