

Every fifteen minutes

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Enterprise Correspondent

More than 100 years after its installation on the grounds of what is now the site of Stonehill College's building and grounds department, one of the approximately 3,000 Howard steeple clocks ever made still rings loud and clear every fifteen minutes.

The site was formerly the Clock Farm of the Ames Estate, where horses and Guernsey cows were bred. The steeple clock was installed in 1870 and served to summon the farmhands working on the 60 acres of fields. At that time, this land off of Route 138 in Easton was considered part of East Stoughton.

On Oct. 23, 1978, Stonehill accepted roughly 30 acres of the land as a gift from David Ames, the reigning patriarch of the Ames Estate. The college purchased the other 30 acres from a separate owner.

In 1980, the college called in Vincent Mack, a woodshop teacher at Oliver Ames High School and veteran clockmaker, to repair the clock. The clock had not been working since the mid-1950s, and Mack had to do extensive work to restore it to proper working order.

"I took the whole clock apart, cleaned it and replaced it. I had to repair the three winding shafts that were badly bent," said Mack.

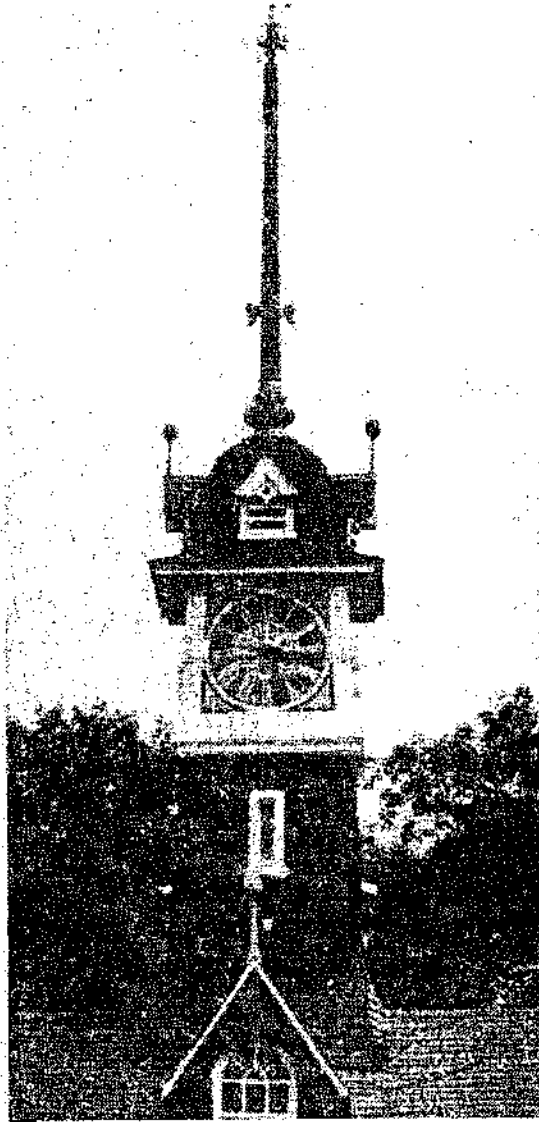
The clock had other problems as well, including those caused by birds that had nested around the steeple bell.

Stonehill joins Yale University and Brown University as institutions of higher education in New England that possess Howard steeple clocks. The maker, Howard Clock Co., originated in Roxbury in 1842, and is now based in Waltham. The company stopped making tower clocks nearly 20 years ago. In its early days, the company was one of the top tower clock manufacturers in the world. There are other active Howard steeple clocks in New England, and many Howard tower clocks throughout the country. Japan and Australia also have active tower clocks.

The clock at Stonehill operates with very little maintenance. It is crank-wound every four or five days, primarily by Vasco Amorim, maintenance supervisor of buildings and grounds. Minor replacements are made occasionally, such as replacing the spring that holds the pendulum in place. The hands on one side of the four-faced clock are not working at the moment, but it is basically functioning well.

There are three separate cables connected to the bell, with adjustments set for one bell ring at 15 minutes after the hour, two rings on the half hour, three rings at 45 minutes after the hour, and four rings on the hour. The mechanism has brass gears located some 20 feet from the top of the inside of the steeple. A pendulum with a 15-pound ball at its bottom moves the gears. There are three separate sets of weights for the hour, half-hour, and quarter-hour strikes.

"We plan to maintain the clock and keep up its historical value," Amorim said.



The Howard steeple clock, above, was installed in 1870 on the Clock Farm building, below, of the Ames Estate in Easton. (Photos by Stanley A. Bauman)

