

# An Extraordinary Gift to Complete the Memorial Belltower

Bill and Frances Henry

November 21, 2017 | Lisa Hall (<https://campaign.ncsu.edu/news/author/lhall2/>)

The [Memorial Belltower](https://www.ncsu.edu/belltower/) (<https://www.ncsu.edu/belltower/>) is the best known and most beloved symbol of NC State University.

Built to [honor 34 alumni killed in World War I](https://news.ncsu.edu/2017/04/the-names-in-the-belltower/) (<https://news.ncsu.edu/2017/04/the-names-in-the-belltower/>), with its cornerstone laid in 1921 and a formal dedication in 1949, the Belltower has graced the background of countless photos marking student milestones, stood sentinel over ROTC commissioning ceremonies, and been a beacon for celebrations such as Packapalooza and Homecoming parades. The university spotlights the tower red on holidays that recognize veterans and to celebrate major NC State occasions and achievements.

Despite its prominence at the northeast corner of main campus and in the center of the university seal, however, the 115-foot-tall landmark has been a belltower in name only.

No actual bells ring out from its apex – only a recording of chimes issuing from speakers.

That's about to change.

A gift from Bill and Frances Henry, of Gastonia, will enable the university, finally, to complete the Belltower – including the installation of the full complement of 54 bells, carillon and interior stairs as originally designed. Five bells were bought as the result of an earlier campaign; the Henrys' gift will purchase the remaining bells.

## A TRIBUTE

### The Memorial Belltower

Originally built to pay tribute to those who fell in past conflict, the Belltower has become a symbol of inspiration to the Wolfpack community.

[Watch the Video →](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQt_UqYYAms&feature=youtu.be)  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQt\\_UqYYAms&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQt_UqYYAms&feature=youtu.be))

Their commitment also will provide for much-needed renovation, structural repairs and stabilization of the tower. The project includes upgrades to the surrounding plaza, which will be named Henry Square. The work is expected to take about three years.

"This is truly a unique and extraordinary gift," NC State Chancellor Randy Woodson said. "The Belltower is one of the most hallowed places on our campus, but with so many facilities needs in recent years, we haven't been able to give it the attention that it needed and deserves. This gift represents the culmination of a team effort to ensure that the Belltower stands strong for generations to come, and it's a great example of the impact of our growing culture of philanthropy.

**A LIVING LEGACY**

"I'm proud to be part of this moment in NC State history and to see the Memorial Belltower at Henry Square completed. We're grateful that the wait is over."

Support NC State Students  
Today

Bill Henry is a 1981 alumnus of the College of Textiles. His brother, George, is a 1984 alumnus of the Poole College of Management and a third brother, James, who passed away in 1997, was a 1985 alumnus of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The Henry family has supported other efforts at the university including an endowment established by Bill and George to provide need-based scholarships.

[GIVE NOW →](#)

Bill and Frances, whose son William is a freshman in the College of Engineering, are passionate about finishing the Belltower as an NC State pride point.

"The Belltower is one of the most iconic and unifying sites on the campus of NC State. I have observed through my last several visits to Raleigh just how important this monument is to a wide array of individuals and groups," Bill said. "It is amazing to see how many people gather around the Belltower each time I come to Raleigh. I feel that it is important to finish this work in order to properly recognize the alumni who gave their lives in World War I.

"On behalf of the Henry family, it is our honor to complete the renovation of the Memorial Belltower for the entire NC State University community."

— Bill Henry

Completion of the tower, built from 1,400 tons of granite on a 700-ton concrete base, will be a century in the making.

Vance Sykes, graduating class of 1907, is credited with starting the push for the Belltower in 1919-20. Construction happened in fits and starts, in the midst of the Great Depression and World War II.

After the stonework was finished in 1937 as a federal Works Progress Administration project, student honor societies and graduating classes in the late 1930s donated the clock and floodlights. Finishing touches in the 1940s included the tower's marbled shrine room – where senior class rings now spend a night – and what was planned as a temporary speaker system. There have been minor upgrades to the sound and lighting systems over the years; a carillon housed in Holladay Hall as part of the electronic bell system replaced the original in the 1980s.

In 2009, students initiated a grassroots campaign to finish the Belltower. Gifts from some 411 students, alumni and other donors financed the purchase of a five-bell Westminster chime set. Three bells are currently displayed in the Erdahl-Cloyd West Wing of D.H. Hill Library and the others are in storage.

The class of 2010 purchased the largest 2,000-pound bell. Members who gave at the \$210 level have their names engraved upon it. The five bells also include the Helena H. Gardner Bell, given by her husband and their three children in her memory, and the W.F. Morris Sr. and Jr. Bell, given by W.F. Morris III and his family to honor his father and grandfather.

Meanwhile, the Belltower has continued to suffer significant deterioration, particularly water damage to its interior. Workers reseal joints and do patchwork repairs to maintain safety, and gravel has replaced pavers around the tower. About a year and a half ago, the World War I memorial plaque in the shrine room had to be moved offsite for safe-keeping, because water was starting to blur the names of alumni killed in service.

The Henrys' gift is part of NC State's [Think and Do the Extraordinary Campaign](https://campaign.ncsu.edu/about-the-campaign/) (<https://campaign.ncsu.edu/about-the-campaign/>), which has a goal of raising \$1.6 billion for student and faculty support, facilities and programs. It represents vital, ongoing efforts to bridge the physical campus' past and future, according to Brian Sischo, vice chancellor for university advancement.

"The Campaign has put a spotlight on our power to transform, build and leave a legacy. This is a time of amazing energy and momentum for NC State," Sischo said. "Centennial Campus continues to develop. Reynolds Coliseum and the Gregg Museum of Art & Design have been reborn, and Talley Student Union has been completely reimagined. Now, at long last, the Memorial Belltower at Henry Square will be completed, right next to Holladay Hall where this great university began.

"It will be an exciting day when the bells ring out for the first time. Tremendous thanks to the Henrys and to everyone who has contributed to this project."