HISTORIC BELL—Pictured is the bell which is presently perched atop a tower in the yard of the Baldwin Elementary School. The bell was cast in 1881 by Rumsey Manufacturing Co. of St. Louis at a cost of $1500. The bell, which changed hands often through the years, was used as a fire alarm and as an air raid warning bell during World War II. (Photo by Gerald J. Delambre)

Old Historic Bell Still Rings

At Close Of School Day In Baldwin

Daily, during the school season, at three o'clock sharp, a resonantly clear sound is heard as an old, historic bell sitting on the front lawn of the Baldwin School is rung by hand, denoting the end of the school day.

The bell and the Baldwin School go back into history quite some time.

In 1890 John Baldwin, Sr. tore down a house known as the old Darby Plantation Sugar House and used the old slave-made bricks to build a combination church and school on Main Street. It was dedicated in 1881 as a Methodist Church and school with much fanfare. Seven bishops from Ohio came for the dedication.

SCHOOL

The first story of the building was used as a school with five classrooms and a hall. The upper floor was an auditorium which was used as a chapel.

The bell in the belfry of the old school was cast in 1881 by Rumsey Manufacturing Co. of St. Louis, Mo., and was sent down to Baldwin by boat. The reported cost of the bell was $15,000.

The first minister was W. S. Fitch from Ohio and he lived next door to the school in the house in which Mrs. D. L. Johnson lives today. This house was the original Darby Plantation house and was built in 1799.

The church school later became an academy and had boarding students from as far away as Jennings. They lived in cabins in the back of the school. These cabins were still in existence until about 55 years ago.

The St. Mary parish school board bought the property and it was used as a public school until 1889 when it was torn down and a new school was built.

FIRE ALARM

The bell was given to the town by the late Superintendent R. L. Robinson to be used as a fire alarm. It was also used during World War II as an air raid warning bell.

Later it was loaned to the Charenton Catholic Church. Through the efforts of Mayor D. D. Longman, it was brought back to Baldwin in 1961 and the school board had it erected on the present bell tower.