



“ A
Jingle
Bell ”

HISTORY

By Charlene Notgrass




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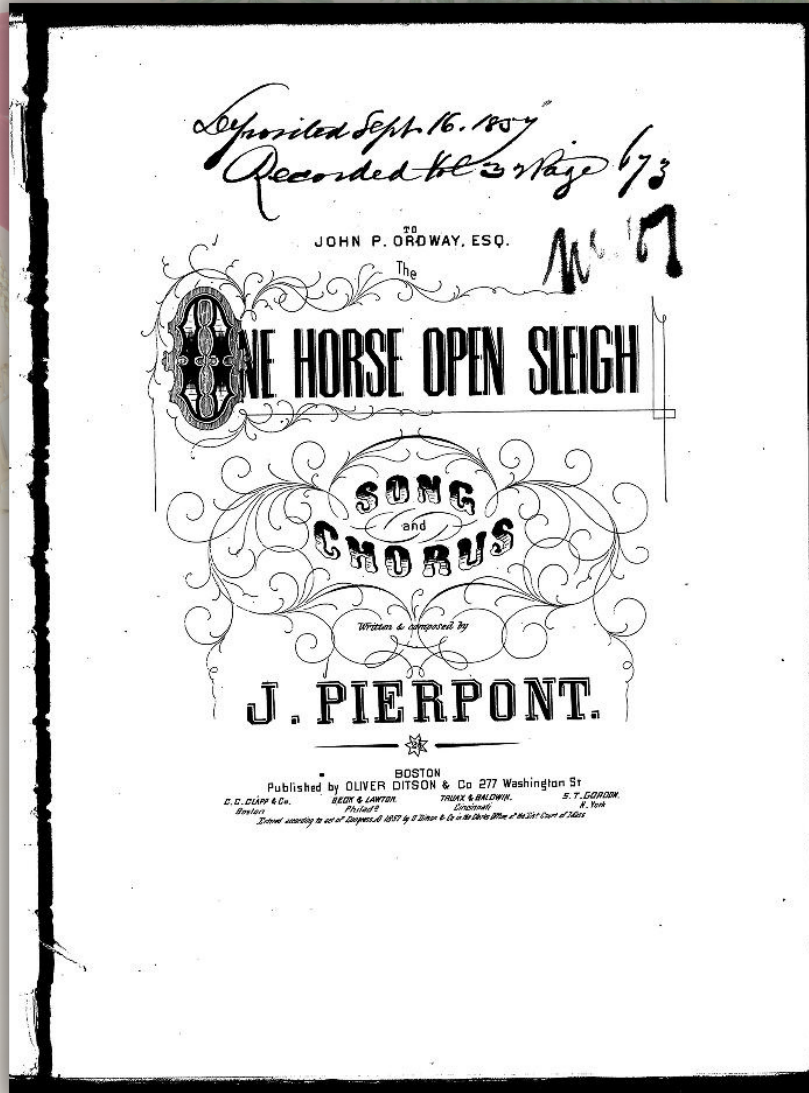
A “Jingle Bell” History

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*Christmas Belles by Winslow Homer,
published in Harper's Weekly, January 2, 1869,
courtesy of the Smithsonian American Art Museum,
The Ray Austrian Collection, gift of Beatrice L. Austrian,
Caryl A. Austrian and James A. Austrian.*

When future songwriter James Lord Pierpont, born in 1822, was a boy, he once wrote to his mother in Boston from his boarding school in New Hampshire, telling her how much he had enjoyed a sleigh ride. In 1857, while living in Georgia, Pierpont published "One Horse Open Sleigh," which was surely inspired by one or more of his childhood sleigh rides.



Two years later, the song was released under its new name: "Jingle Bells." As you know, it became wildly popular.

For several years, children of diplomats living in Washington, D.C., took turns saying "Merry Christmas" in their native languages on radio. During the intermission of this program in 1939, the Marine Band played "Jingle Bells." Above the music, Justice William O. Douglas could be heard whistling the tune, as you can see in the picture below.



*Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas
and his wife, December 20, 1939,
courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

On December 15, 1965, astronauts Wally Schirra and Tom Stafford left Cape Kennedy on a mission for NASA. When Schirra and Stafford boarded their Gemini VI-A spacecraft, they brought along two non-regulation objects. On December 16, Tom Stafford made a tongue-in-cheek radio announcement. He said:

We have an object, looks like a satellite going from north to south, probably in polar orbit....very low, looks like he might be going to re-enter soon....Standby one, you might just let me try to pick up that thing.

Then Stafford and Schirra began using the contraband they had brought onboard. Stafford began to play "Jingle Bells" on a tiny harmonica while Schirra jingled six small jingle bells hung on a cord.

These two musical instruments that played "Jingle Bells" from space are in the collection of the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. I don't have public domain images to share with you here, but you can see some [here](#) and read more about the story.

Creating music with bells has a long history, going all the way back to the Old Testament, when God commanded that the priestly garments for Aaron and his sons have bells around the hem. Those robes must have been beautiful with their pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet material and bells of gold between them.

Many years after the resurrection of Jesus, Christians began to build church buildings. In time they added bells to call people to worship or prayer and to announce special occasions.



*SA bell at a Greek church in Bethlehem,
photo by the American Colony (Jerusalem),
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

In time, bells came to be associated with Christmas. Let's be thankful for the bells, the music they bring, and for ears to hear them. Every blessing, even the blessing of bells, comes from our loving Father.

*Every good thing given
and every perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of lights,
with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.
James 1:17 NASB*



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