

ORIGINS OF THE SHIP'S BELL CLOCK

The present ship's bell clock evolved from a crude sand clock dating back to the time of Columbus. This primitive clock was called a sand or sandglass clock, and was an essential device for controlling routine duties at sea in addition to its uses for navigation purposes.



Records of epic voyages tell us that this device was used by the helmsman to measure time in half hour increments. Watches or shifts were organized into increments of four hours; a custom that is still widely used. With the sandglass at his side, the helmsman would signal the passing of half hour increments starting with the strike of one bell at the end of the first half hour, two at the 2nd and so on until reaching eight bells which signaled the end of the watch.

The tradition of the sand clock continued for hundreds of years and was replaced only by the development of the pocket watch from Italy and Germany, and the chronometer from England. It was not until the 19th century that the first mechanical ship's bell clock was produced in America. The working principal of this American innovation remains almost unchanged to this day.

THE SHIP'S BELL CODE

4:00 8:00 12:00 = 8 Bells 🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎
4:30 8:30 12:30 = 1 Bell 🛎
5:00 9:00 1:00 = 2 Bells 🛎🛎
5:30 9:30 1:30 = 3 Bells 🛎🛎🛎
6:00 10:00 2:00 = 4 Bells 🛎🛎🛎🛎
6:30 10:30 2:30 = 5 Bells 🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎
7:00 11:00 3:00 = 6 Bells 🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎
7:30 11:30 3:30 = 7 Bells 🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎
8:00 12:00 4:00 = 8 Bells 🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎🛎

Weems & Plath®

Manufacturer of Fine Nautical & Weather Instruments

