



NICOLE S. COLSON / Record Staff

WORK IN PROGRESS — Renovation work continues on the steeple at the Second Congregational Church in East Alstead.

Historic Alstead steeple getting major overhaul

By NICOLE S. COLSON
Record Staff

EAST ALSTEAD — By late fall, the sound of church bells ringing will once again be music to everyone's ears.

The historic Second Congregational Church's steeple restoration project is two-thirds complete. Built in 1787, it has served its congregation since 1788. But its steeple, built in 1830, was in danger of toppling to the ground from deterioration aggravated by the vibrations from the ringing of the bell it housed.

Walter Wornick, the church's moderator and board of trustees member, has said if it had toppled, the church bell also would have fallen and shattered like glass because it is made of such thin metal.

Like the bells at the United Church of Acworth and the Alstead Historical Society, it was made at the Paul Revere foundry, but this one was one of the last ones cast there. Luckily, the bell is intact, with no cracks.

In past years, it was rung before and after Sunday church services and sometimes to deliver messages such as local deaths and births in the community. The church, active all year (a full-time reverend was recently hired), is used for meetings of the Lake Warren Association

and vacation Bible school in addition to Sunday services.

Some restoration work on the steeple was done by a congregation member in 1940, but nothing by a professional. Restoration carpenter Brian Gallien of Ironwood Restoration in Marlow began work on the tower 11 weeks ago.

Instead of removing the two-tiered steeple from the building, Gallien installed scaffolding and jacked up parts of each tier to gain access to the supporting beams and determine which were rotted and needed to be replaced. He removed the bell using a crane; it sits on the church lawn and will be lifted up to the steeple at the restoration project's end.

Members started a fundraising campaign in 2005 to pay for the work by sending out letters to people in the community that outlined their plan and asked for donations. Wornick said many who donated had a personal connection to the church, as did one couple who were married there. Roast beef suppers have contributed to the goal — so far about \$40,000 has been raised and about \$15,000 more is needed.

"We've done quite well for a small church," Wornick said, adding the group doesn't have a final fundraising number in mind.

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East Alstead steeple getting needed repairs

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That figure is still somewhat undetermined based on possible unforeseen costs, such as large supporting beams for the upper tier of the bell tower. As the flooring at the top is taken apart, Wornick said, it may be determined that more beams need to be replaced or need to be reinforced with new beams.

One item that wasn't part of the initial estimate is the rebuilding of the cradle the bell sits in. The original Gallien was rotted.

The structure will be re-sided and new roofing will be added. Louvers were installed on each of the steeple's four openings, one on each side. They were made by Beech River Mill in Ossipee, a family run business since the 1800s. The louvers will allow the bell to be heard, but will prevent the inside of the steeple from being damaged by the elements.

This is a true restoration effort in that rather than installing vinyl siding on the tower, new wooden boards will be used. And the top tier will be covered in a new layer of tern, an antique metallic material used atop steeples that can deteriorate over time.

rate over time.

The original weather vane will be returned to the top of the tower with a new iron fitting that anchors into a supporting beam below it that will be rebuilt. The original fitting was damaged by wind.

Wornick has said he has heard stories of residents living nearby who used the weather vane every day to determine how to dress their children for school.

Once the work is complete, there will be a bell-ringing and dedication ceremony.

But, for now, the church invites everyone to visit and see the work in progress.

Also, its final roast beef dinner of the season (proceeds go to the steeple restoration fund) will be held Saturday, Sept. 15, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. The menu includes carrots simmered maple syrup, vegetables, bread, real mashed potatoes, dessert and beverage. Cost is \$9 for adults and \$5 for children over 6.

Donations to the church's steeple restoration fund may be sent to the East Alstead Congregational Church, P.O. Box 429, Alstead 03602. For more information, call Wornick at 835-6165.

**WALTER
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