

Belmont bandstand

Restoring Belmont's bandstand 'a labor of love'



J.R. Graton of Northfield, a member of the famous New Hampshire Graton family covered-bridge makers, stands next to his work at restoring the Belmont town bandstand. DAN SEUFERT PHOTO

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By DAN SEUFERT

Union Leader Correspondent

BELMONT — Standing in the middle of the soon-to-be-refurbished downtown Belmont bandstand, J.R. Graton's words ring with a slight echo.

That's because the 1908 bandstand was built to high acoustic standards. In those days, there were no speakers or amplifiers. When a musician played or a singer sang, the perfectly angled bandstand ceiling was the only source of amplification to crowds that gathered on summer nights for concerts.

The acoustic quality of the bandstand remains solid and is not lost on the bandstand's current caretaker, J.R. Graton of Northfield, who is the grandson of the late Milton Graton and the son of Arnold Graton, the famous New Hampshire covered bridge makers.

J.R. Graton's specialty is restoring historic buildings and landmarks. He's working for the town at a reasonable wage, he says.

"It's a labor of love," he says.

The bandstand restoration, while not technically part of the larger downtown restoration project, is important to bring back the town's historic character, said Linda Frawley of the town's Heritage Commission.

"It's where people used to go for shows; it was very integral in Belmont life," Frawley said.

The bandstand, which is now located a few feet from where it was built in 1908, has been moved while residents searched for its new home. It now sits in a perfect place, Frawley said, across from the historic Belmont Mill buildings.

The restoration effort has cost the town \$60,000, Frawley said. About \$20,000 of that came from town funds, and the rest has come through grants, such as the \$15,000 grant received last week from the state's Land and Community Heritage Investment Project.

The ceiling hasn't required much work, though, which is good, "because that's what sends the sound outward," he said.

Painting and installing electricity will complete the work. Frawley said the project should be finished by the fall of 2015 at the latest.

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