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Belmont residents celebrate return of bandstand

BELMONT — A man calling himself — and looking like — President Abraham Lincoln joined the 12th New Hampshire Regiment Serenade Band in celebrating the refurbished town bandstand, which is now open for a summer concert series, as it was more than a century ago.

The Civil War-Era tribute band and Lincoln, who was played by Jim Miller of Canterbury, brought a historic feeling to the bandstand, which is now located a few feet from where it was built in 1908.



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Abraham Lincoln, as portrayed by Canterbury's Jim Miller, stands at the edge of the repaired and refurbished Belmont town bandstand Saturday night. (COURTESY)

"It's nice to have the bandstand back," said Belmont Historical Society President Wallace Rhodes. "What's really nice is the job they did restoring it. As far as we can tell, it looks exactly like it did when it was first built."

Local bands, and one band in particular, the Belmont Cornet Band, used to play in the center of town on Saturday nights from 1889-1950, Rhodes said. But the tradition faded after 1950, and the bandstand fell into disrepair and was moved to another spot nearby, where it sat until the town began revitalization efforts downtown seven years ago.

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

The project was completed last fall. On Saturday night, with perfect summer weather, about 80 residents brought lawn chairs and blankets to the town green. Rhodes and others, meanwhile, reviewed drawings of the Belmont and Upper Gilmanton "lads lost" in the Civil War.

Both towns lost their share of soldiers in the war, Frawley said.

The bandstand was restored with help from numerous volunteers, and with donated help from Marsh Electric, restoration contractor J.R. Graton, and painter John Thompson. The restored bandstand was honored recently with the Elizabeth Durfee Hengen Award for outstanding preservation achievement from the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

It was Saturday night in downtown Belmont, as it used to be.

"People were listening from parked cars and their porches," Frawley said. "Just like they used to do."

The next concert will be on July 3 featuring a different lineup of musicians.

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