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## Historic restoration specialist hopes to return bandstand to its original splendor

BY DONNA RHODES

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BELMONT — Having grown up working with a father and grandfather who are renowned for their work on old covered bridges all across the United States, JR Graton is no stranger to the art of historic renovations.

Now owner of his own company, JR Graton Historic Restorations in Northfield, he has brought his talents to the Belmont Bandstand, where he is helping to bring back its original splendor.

“I started working on covered bridges over the summers and during school vacations back in 1968. Since that time, I’ve worked to restore a lot of churches, old barns and some homes, but this is my first bandstand,” said Graton.

Painting and a new roof are part of Phase 2 for Belmont’s bandstand restoration project, which was made possible through an LCHIP challenge grant and matching funds from the Belmont Heritage Commission. The goal is to restore as much of the original structure as possible and to have any necessary repairs recreated to look like the original.

When the bandstand was moved to its new location last spring, Graton was brought in to replace the lattice work and intricate railings on the 106-year-old structure. The railings, he said, had been replaced back in the ‘70’s, but were done with a press board and not made like the original.

preserve the roof for years to come.

“The dipping is probably the hardest part of all of this because it takes so long. I have 86 clothespins, so I can dip 86 shingles at a time and hang them up to dry,” he said.

So far, Graton said he has found no surprises along the way,



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**Historic restoration specialist JR Graton of Northfield compares the old wood shingles he has been removing from the Belmont bandstand with the new shingles he has handmade so that the structure will once again look as it did when it was built in 1908.**

“I made the railings with real wood this time, and there were a lot of band saw cutouts I had to do, but it came out great. You don’t see decorative stuff like this done on porches and railings these days,” he said.

Once Graton finished with the wooden décor of the bandstand, John Thompson stepped in to paint the structure in its original colors of deep green and a rustic shade of red. Graton then returned in late August for his next step- the roof.

“The swooping roof really gives this bandstand character. It has some really neat features. I don’t think it’s leaked, it’s just worn

out,” Graton said.

For the past few weeks, he has been busy pulling the old wood shingles off so he can replace them with the new ones he has been creating back at his workshop.

In all, Graton said he has more than 1,000 shingles of varying size to cut for the eight-sided roof. Besides the standard rectangular pieces, there are also a few rows of pointed, decorative shingles that he must hand cut as well. Once cut, each piece in hand dipped into the red paint that will bring back the original appearance and

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as is sometimes the case with restorations, like a church steeple he worked on in Holderness. As he took the shingles off that structure he found signatures on the sheathing, written by the people who had built the roof many years before.

“It’s pretty neat to see things like that.

Every now and then, I come across it, but so far, I’ve found nothing on the bandstand,” said Graton.

When nailing on the new roof, he has several photos to guide him in placing the rows of decorative shingles in their proper place as he moves toward the narrow peak. But, even

with all the shingles in place, there will still be one more step to completing the roof.

“All the old photos show there was a finial (a round wooden ball) on the very top. It’s been missing for a long time now, so I’ll make a new one to put up there when I’m done,” said Graton.

As one other final touch on the project, an old granite slab will be placed at the bottom of the steps with the date “1908” etched into it, commemorating the year the bandstand was built.

Graton said he hopes to have the roof done in time for a special September 28 bandstand

program that will celebrate its restoration.

“I usually do a lot of structural work, not decorative, so I’ve really enjoyed this. The colors really make it pop and it’s probably the prettiest historic bandstand in the state. I’m glad I got to be a part of restoring it,” said Graton.