

Clock set for renewal

Front Street landmark to be restored



The clock on Front Street, near Commercial Street, has been dismantled and sent for repairs and renovation. Matt Miner, left, of Connecticut Timekeepers, hands off one of the faces to John Rives of The Clock Man. (T&G Staff/CHRISTINE PETERSON)

By Lisa D. Welsh TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF

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-- JOHN RIVES, CLOCKMAKER

WORCESTER — By spring, time will no longer stand still in downtown Worcester.

No one can say exactly when it stopped, but the hands on the Worcester Five Cents Savings Bank clock at 50 Front St. have not moved in about 20 years. One side showed 3:48 and the other 9:27.

The classic E. Howard Co. clock has been part of the city's streetscape since 1892. It first stood in front of the bank that bears its name on Main Street and was moved to Front Street when the bank became Consumers Savings Bank in 1953. According to Douglas Butler, a former director of Consumer Savings Bank, when that bank went the way of other local institutions, no one else took responsibility.

“Street clocks were very popular in Worcester in the early 1900s,” Mr. Butler said. “Jewelry stores and all

the banks downtown would have them. At one time I bet there were 20 clocks downtown."

Saving the Worcester Five Cents Savings clock has become a collaborative effort of Preservation Worcester, the George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation, the Worcester Cultural Commission, the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the city of Worcester.

Mr. Butler, a member of Preservation Worcester, nominated the clock for protection two years ago. It was listed on Preservation Worcester's most endangered landmarks list for 2006 and the Worcester Cultural Commission took an interest.

Through their efforts, \$10,450 was secured to restore the clock to its gold-gilded glory, rather than the dented, faded, cracked monument it has become.

The George F. and Sybil H. Fuller Foundation granted \$5,250 toward renovating the clock, and Preservation Worcester and the Cultural Council have agreed to cover half of the restoration costs.

The clock had been deemed abandoned property and the city of Worcester will take ownership of the clock once it is repaired. It is expected that the clock will return to 50 Front St. in the spring.

Members of the groups responsible for the restoration efforts gathered last week as the clock was dismantled.

Restoration work is being done by clockmaker John Rives, and his Worcester company, The Clock Man.

"E. Howards were popular at the turn of the last century. They were called Eight Day Wonders because they could keep time for eight days before needing winding," said Mr. Rives, who is also the official city timekeeper and responsible for winding the City Hall clock every seven to eight days. "There are no manuals to follow, but I plan to put the clock back into its original condition. We'll restore it to its original authenticity and reconnect it. It's important to keep connected to the past."

As a small crowd watched, Mr. Rives removed wooden pieces, antique gears and innards of the clock.

City Manager Michael V. O'Brien said he learned about the clock's listing by Preservation Worcester last year after calling Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester.

"In the middle of all of the downtown renovations, I asked, what can we do save the clock?" the city manager recalled. "Compared to the rebuilding of downtown, this clock might seem small in stature, but with it Worcester is preserving our past as it looks to the future."

No longer an Eight Day Wonder, the clock will receive new electrical wiring connecting it to the city's system and it will be maintained by the city.

"The whole streetscape is going to change as (CitySquare) begins to develop and with everything new that is happening downtown," said Cyrus D. Lipsitt, chairman of the cultural commission.

He said the organization supports performing and visual arts, humanities and history, so the restoration of the clock was an appropriate, if not typical, project.

"It's certainly an historic piece. Trolleys ran before it and I'm sure it was a local focal point," Mr. Lipsitt said.

"I imagine that people will use it again, and say 'I'll meet you at the clock.' "