

Belvedere Coming Down for Restoration at Historic Liberty Hall

The ornate carved wood belvedere tower that tops historic Liberty Hall in Machiasport will soon be coming down. But it will also be going back up after it is carefully restored.

Restoring the belvedere, replacing the 24-year-old roof, and repairing the wood trim at the tower's edge are part of a 3-stage

ing—chewed it like beavers—so it's going to be a delicate maneuver, but it's a passion with me, these old buildings."

A belvedere is often referred to as a belfry, according to John Turk of TTL-Architects in Portland, historic preservation specialists who are overseeing the restoration. But a belfry has a bell, and Liberty Hall's ornate carved tower does not. The word "belvedere," adapted from Italian, literally means "fair view." The tower was originally constructed to provide a view of historic Machias Bay, where Americans in 1775 captured the British vessel, the *HMS Margareta* in the first American sea victory of the Revolutionary War.

The ambitious \$1.1 million restoration of Liberty Hall is being carried out under the leadership of the Committee to Save Liberty Hall, a 12-member group of local citizens, chaired by David Freedberg, a professor of art history at Columbia University and a Machiasport seasonal resident.

"Liberty Hall holds a very special meaning not only for Machiasport, but for America. It is so gratifying to watch the work begin, and see a growing number of people become aware of its importance," Mr. Freedberg said. "The enthusiastic support of so many well-wishers and contributors is testimony to the building's architectural and historic merit."

The Committee is working with the Town of Machiasport

in an innovative public-private partnership to raise funds to save the beloved area landmark.

Philip C. Rose, First Selectman of Machiasport, is delighted to see the restoration underway. "I'm greatly pleased to see this first significant and remarkable step toward getting the building restored," Mr. Rose said. "Liberty Hall is a beautiful and important historic landmark. The restoration is the result of a lot of hard work and wonderful public support."

The Town of Machiasport has contributed \$25,000 to match grants from foundations and contributions from the public. So far, \$235,000 has been raised for the project, including major grants from the Maine Community Foundation, the Davis Family Foundation, the Fisher Charitable Foundation, and a \$100,000 CDBG grant from the Maine Office of Community Development.

Contributions for the restoration of Liberty Hall can be sent to: Friends of Liberty Hall, P. O. Box 22, Machiasport, Maine 04655. Requests for a publication describing the history of Liberty Hall and plans for its restoration can be sent to the same address, or obtained by calling the Machiasport Town Offices at 255-6418.

Liberty Hall was built in 1873 in a bold Italianate style by Andrew Gilson, a Machias architect who was also a Machias selectman. According to Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Director of the Maine Historic Preservation

Commission, Liberty Hall is one of Maine's finest Victorian town halls. The building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

Liberty Hall served as Machiasport's town hall until 2000, and was the scene of town meetings, theatre productions, basketball games, and community dinners and festivals. That year the town opened new consolidated town offices. The building is equipped with a large stage. As recently as 2000, Liberty Hall was the site of musical theatre productions, such as "Barefoot in the Park," which attracted audiences throughout the region.

The Town and the Committee plan to use the building, when restored, for community and cultural events, including town meetings, offices, performances, and other programs.



A rare view looking out from the belvedere — a view that will not be possible until the tower is restored and returned to the top of the building. *Photographs by David Freedberg*

The belvedere, constructed of old pine and hemlock, is approximately 18 feet by 18 feet, said Mr. Morse, and weighs about 4 to 6 tons.

"The belvedere is as big as a large room," said Mr. Morse, "though it may not look that big from the ground. The raccoons have eaten away at the fram-

be performed by Belden Morse



The belvedere at historic Liberty Hall in Machiasport.