

Whitneyville Restores Its History

by Mary Anne Clancy



The newly renovated cupola is back at home on the Whitneyville Town Library. (Clancy Photo)

"I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work on this" said Belden Morse, proprietor of the Steeple People, as he spoke about his company's renovation of the original cupola on the Whitneyville Town Library.

Morse and the Steeple People took the 118 year old cupola from the top of the library in September of last year. Working from a pattern provided by the original, they reconstructed the bell tower using the tools of the time when it was originally constructed.

"Its all mortise and tenon" said Morse, "and its all pegged. We used hand augers, a variety of

wooden chisels and a wooden hammer."

The completed project took 360 hours from the time it was removed last fall through to last Wednesday when a crane lifted the 4600 pound tower and its bell back onto the library.

"The library was originally the Whitneyville School" said Dot Bodger, 1st Selectman of Whitneyville and the secretary of the library.

"The original school burned and this building was built in 1868. It was the school up until 20 years ago and has been our library for the past 18 years."

Bodger said the town had tried to have the

building registered with the National Register of Historic Places, but had been turned down because there was no recorded architect.

According to Jane Heart, spokesperson for the Steeple People, the cupola was at the site for almost a week prior to placing it back on top of the building.

"A pigeon built a nest in it and laid an egg and Belden made sure the nest wasn't disturbed when the crane picked up the tower" said Heart.

"Shortly after the three men moved the tower into place on top of the library, the pigeon returned to her nest according to Heart.

"I feel like I've been to a private school" said Morse. I'd like to see a lot more renovation work done. Its a history all of its own, the building and the original people who worked on it.

Heart said several older citizens were present for the placing of the tower last Wednesday and some had tears in their eyes.

"That bell used to call us to school" said one of the bystanders.