

The Gardner News

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Cheers as historic church preservation completed

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NEWS STAFF WRITER

HUBBARDSTON — The First Parish Unitarian Church was built in 1773, serving as the community's first meeting house.

It has since undergone renovations, in 1842 and 1868, which helped preserve — but not change — one of the town's most recognizable landmarks.

Wednesday afternoon, beneath a picturesque blue sky, parishioners and community members gathered to commemorate the symbolic completion of the church's most recent restoration project.

"There couldn't have been a better day for this," said Cyndy Doane of the church's Parish Committee following a "topping-off ceremony" in which workers from Leominster-based Murray Bros. Construction placed the weather vane back atop the church steeple.

The brief and informal gathering at the church Wednesday marked the completion of much of the restoration project, which was funded through a \$40,000 grant from the Massachusetts Historic Commission, \$55,000 in



News staff photo by DANIEL KITTREDGE

Foreman Matt Buckley and Steve Dodier of Murray Bros. Construction affix a weather vane atop the steeple of the First Parish Unitarian Church Wednesday, marking the completion of most of the work on the church's current restoration project.

Community Preservation funds and additional monies raised through the parish.

Jason Murray of Murray Bros. said all work requiring use of a

mechanical lift, including painting, steeple repairs and refacing of the clock, has been completed. What remains, he said, is largely mason-

Turn to CHURCH, Page 4

Renovations to historic church done

From CHURCH, Page 1
ry work on the lower part of the church that was slowed because of the need for approval from the state historic commission.

"It shouldn't be more than a couple of weeks," said Mr. Murray of the remaining work.

A native of Princeton, Mr. Murray said his company often works on historical restoration projects in the area. Hubbardston's church, he said, exemplifies the type of structure that makes the region unique and appealing.

"That's what I like about New England the most," he said.

Phil Warbasse, vice president of Princeton architectural firm Chenot & Associates, said the finished product is "beautiful."

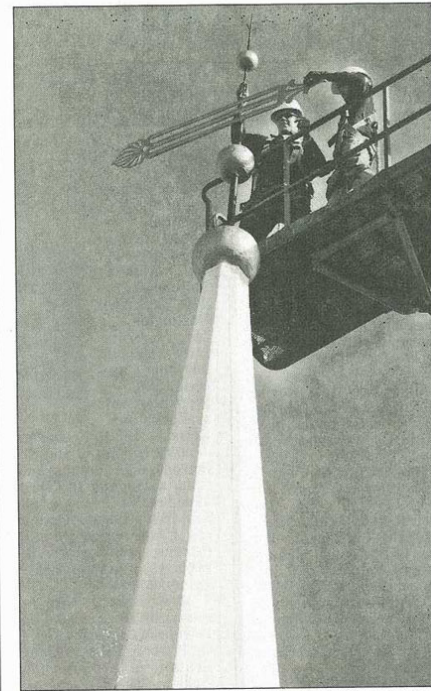
Ms. Doane, in brief remarks following the placement of the weather vane, lauded the dedication of the parish committee during the roughly three years since the renovation project was first conceived.

She lauded Mr. Warbasse for his "endless positive direction" throughout the effort, as well as Carol DiNinno, a preservation planner with the state historical commission who served as that agency's liaison to the parish.

Murray Bros., said Ms. Doane, did "a fine job" on the project, and were also helpful and accessible throughout the effort.

All the parties involved, she said, "made a dream come true" for the parish committee and the church's membership.

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T&G Staff Photos/CHRISTINE PETERSON

HUBBARDSTON — Matt Buckley, left, and Stephen Dodier, employees of Murray Brothers Construction, place the weather-vane atop the spire of First Parish Unitarian Church yesterday. The property, in the state Register of Historic Places, is being restored.

Rising atop a church steeple

Cyndy Washburn-Doane, local project coordinator with the state

Historical Commission, looks at the church after the weather-vane has been put in place. She and four other church women worked hard to pull the project

