

## Middleboro's cupola taken down

The Middleboro Town Hall cupola was removed on Thursday.



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**By Alice C. Elwell**

**Enterprise correspondent**

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MIDDLEBORO —

The tilting cupola on top of the Town Hall was taken down Thursday by a 135-foot crane, and town officials hope the cupola will be back in place by the end of the summer.

The removal, which had been delayed twice because of inclement weather, went off without a hitch, and the cupola weighed much less than expected as it was riddled with rotted wood, said Phil Murray of Murray Brothers Construction of Leominster, the firm was paid \$19,300 to do the job.

“It only weighed a couple thousand pounds,” said Murray, who said the lighter weight made for an easier transit from the Town Hall dome to the

cupola’s temporary resting place in the center of the Town Hall lawn.

The rotted wood lightened the load making a huge difference as it was hoisted to its temporary resting place in the center of the Town Hall lawn.

Murray had earlier estimated the cupola to weigh about 6,000 pounds. Murray’s crew attached a cable through the top of the cupola to timbers that were crossed through its columns. The columns were severed and the cupola was lifted off by the crane. “It went awesome,” Murray said.

Crew members Wilson Pessoa and Jared Lincoln covered the hole in the slate-covered dome of Town Hall left by the cupola. Inside the dome was a walk back in time, graffiti from early last century, including some written by prom-goers from 1924, was emblazoned along the walls. Most prominent was “Bill 1961.”

The Town Hall, built in 1873, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The building underwent \$2.5 million in renovations more than a decade ago, reopening on March 6, 2000.

Paul Fellini, construction administrator in the Planning Department, was the first to notice the cupola was tilting at the beginning of the year. After it came down Thursday, Fellini remarked on the extensive rot that had taken place. He said two of the columns were completely gone at the base and the others were rotted. Fellini said the columns were crushed by the weight of the cupola and the center post was twisting. Once on the ground, architects rolled up their sleeves and began taking measurements to create a restoration plan.

Patrick Guthrie, an architect from the Boston firm of Menders, Torrey & Spencer Inc., expects to have a plan ready by next month.

He had advised the town to get the cupola down as soon as possible once the tilt was noticed. After examining it on the ground, Guthrie said there was extensive rot in the columns and the cupola's stability atop Town Hall was unpredictable, "Down here we know it's not going to fall over."

Once the restoration plans have been approved, the project will go out to bid for about a month, said Town Manager Charles J. Cristello.

The work is expected to take less than two months.

Selectmen Chairman Alfred P. Rullo Jr., said the project will cost about \$125,000.

The town recently received a \$30,000 emergency grant for historic preservation from the Secretary of State's Office.

Rullo said the town will borrow about \$70,000 to cover the rest of the cost.