

THE CLOCK

The clock in the bell tower of the church has been a focal point in the city of St. Albans, Vermont for over a century. It was installed shortly after the completion of the present building, in 1894.



The clock has four faces, giving time of the day in all four directions of the tower. The bell has rung the hours steadily for over a century, with the exception of the years when work was being done.

The clock was owned by the city of St. Albans until the mid-1900's, when ownership and responsibility was turned over to the church. Also owned by the city for many years was a telegraph and chain fall bell ringing mechanism that caused the church bell to be rung oddly and incessantly for a number of

minutes whenever a fire call came into the city firehouse on Kingman Street. While no longer in use, since the advent of air raid and firehouse sirens, the telegraph and ringing machinery are still in place in the bell tower. In 2010, the church made an honorarium of the alarm system back to the fire department, but it still remains in the tower.

There was a close call in the 1950's when one of cables holding the tremendous clock weights powering the bell mechanism, broke, causing the huge, 1000 pound weights to crash downward, through two floors, over 100', to embed itself into the ground. Repairs were soon made by Lawrence King and the clock was operational again, with plans in place to regularly check the cabling.



Wade Smith, clock winder

In 1993, the Mitchell family at St. Albans Foundry provided new parts which were installed, and the decision was made to electrify two of the faces, keeping the remaining two faces connected to the clock to be manually wound. In 2003, the clock was completely dismantled, under the supervision Fred Ringer and David Welch, of the Green Mountain Timekeepers with Park Newton and sons, and Wade Smith assisting, and brought down the 88 tower steps, piece by piece, to the front yard, where members of the church hand cleaned each gear, cog, screw and

part. It was then reassembled, but it needed care and occasional work as the old clock “settled in” to its new adjustments.

Wade Smith and David Douglas, with David Welch began work on the clock faces in 2000. The St. Albans Fire Department helped in the beginning of the project by donating their hook and ladder truck and a few firefighters to remove two clock faces. Then the discovery was made that the faces could be removed from inside the tower, so dismantling could continue in inclement weather. The electrified faces were restored to the original manual wound connections and one face mechanism was cleaned and refurbished. All the exterior faces were cleaned and Roman Numerals repainted. The hands, earlier made by Herm Schuster, were repainted to their original white. During the time of this work, the search was on for parts for the fourth face, as all the available parts had been used for the restoration of the three faces. One part had to be made. It was fabricated by a foundry, known by David Welch, who was friends with the owner. We were able to secure the needed part for \$40.00.

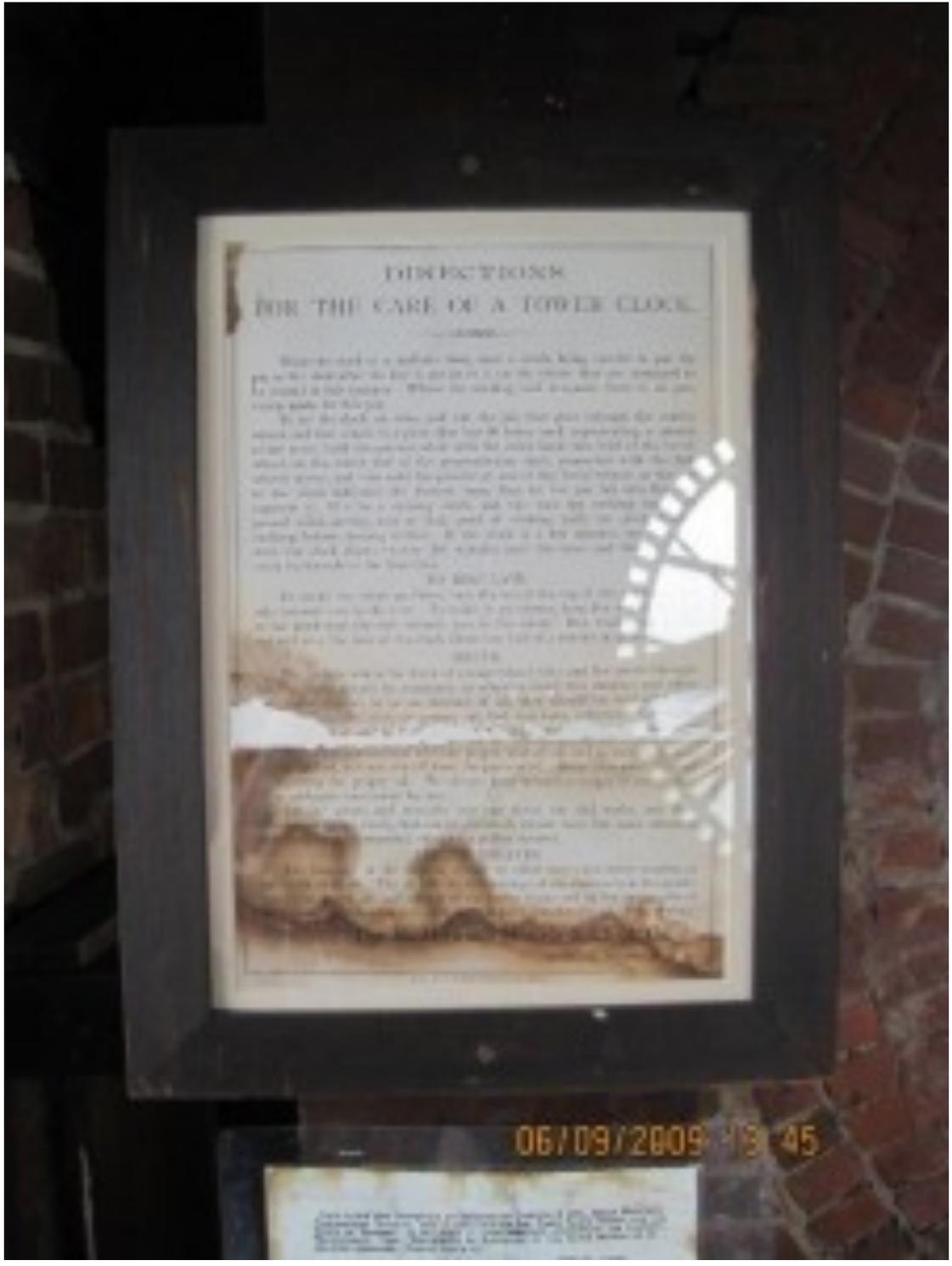


Wade learned from the owner of the Clock Shop in Essex, that there was a badly charred and bent, face mechanism, salvaged from a fire in the church tower of the Congregational Church of Jeffersonville. Speaking with the Clock Shop owner about our story brought a donation of that mechanism, which David Douglas cleaned and straightened. It was a mechanism for a wooden face, so the glass was removed and a wooden circle installed and painted to match the color of the glass faces. With that installation, the straightening of the fragile, leaded shafts, the clock was completely restored.

It was a five year project, completed for a total of \$40.00.

The clock and chime still peal over Taylor Park. It can be heard throughout the city. A team of dedicated clock winders, climb the stair weekly and hand wind, continuing the task begun 125 years ago. There is a device to assist in the winding, but a few stalwart individuals opt to manually wind.





The notice posted in the tower near the clock advising that our clock is entered into the historic registry of the Green Mountain Timekeepers and that they are available to assist with maintenance and repair.