

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Gene Corriden, who has babied the Town Clock through the Loma Prieta earthquake and a fire that damaged the interior, is in charge of the clock's refurbishing effort, which begins next week.

TIME OUT

108-year-old Town Clock to stop for upgrade, new paint

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SANTA CRUZ

Time will stand still at the landmark Town Clock next week, when work begins to tune-up the century-old timepiece.

While the clock tower, which stands at the convergence of Pacific Avenue and Water and Front Streets, is being given a face-lift sealant, and a fresh coat of paint, the 108-year-old Seth Thomas timepiece will

be dismantled, cleaned and rebuilt.

"It's an old clock, and it needs a little more care than newer clocks," said Gene Corriden, a retired biochemist who has maintained the Town Clock since 1976.

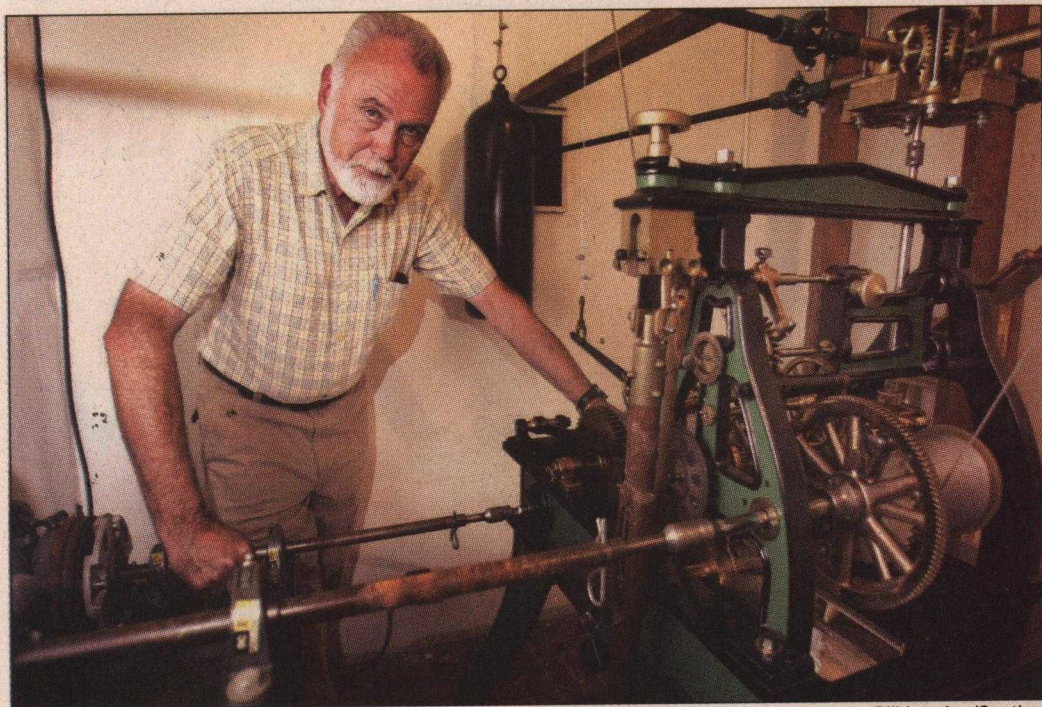
Corriden, who was instrumental in restoring the clock during the 1970s, says there is no timetable for the work.

"It depends on what I find when I take it apart," he said. "You can't just order [replacement] parts; you have to make them."

Corriden is well aware of what it takes to replace the delicate mechanism of the historic clock. He fabricated many of the

clock's components when the timepiece was returned downtown during the country's bicentennial.

The Town Clock is actually the second giant timepiece to grace the city's skyline. The first town clock in Santa Cruz was built in 1873 as part of the original Odd Fellows building on Pacific Avenue near Church Street. The building and the clock were badly damaged during a fire in 1899, and a new clock tower was built in 1900 when the Odd Fellows building was replaced. The clock remained in place until 1964, when it was



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Gene Corriden, caretaker of the Town Clock for the past 31 years, will remove and rehabilitate the inner workings of the downtown landmark starting Monday.

Clock

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removed when the building was remodeled and eventually put into storage. The city of Santa Cruz purchased the clock for \$1.01, and both the clock and the tower were dismantled while city leaders searched for an appropriate location.

The clock pieces were stored in various locations until plans were made in the 1970s to restore the icon to its former glory. The Citizens Committee on Community Improvement helped raise funds and recruit a labor pool to restore the Town Clock. Corriden, who had broached the idea of restoring the clock with several local historians, oversaw the rebuilding of the clock's mechanisms. That was a formidable task.

"When they brought it to me it was just a rusty pile of junk," Corriden said of the clock's innards. "The parts were dirty and rusty, and I had to fabricate some of the parts."

The clock tower was dedicated on July 4, 1976, even though the project wasn't completed until the following year. Since that time, Corriden has maintained the clock. In addition to lubricating the mechanisms every three weeks, he visits the clock every New Year's Eve to make sure its correctly calibrated. Initially, he would call POP-CORN to get the correct time. In later years, he began using an atomic clock to ensure accuracy.

The Town Clock survived the 1989 earthquake, although its hands froze at 5:04 p.m. It also survived a 1995 fire, which started in an electrical box inside the clock tower.

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