Time to clean up the clock

By JOHN ROBINSON
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — The Town Clock, the white tower of time and tone that graces the entrance to downtown, is undergoing a facelift. It is the first such refurbishing of the historical landmark since it was resurrected in 1976 as part of Santa Cruz's Bicentennial project.

The cleaning and painting of the clock will take about three weeks and cost approximately $10,000. Karl Barthel, who won the bid for the job, says the sheet-metal body of the structure will be recaulked and repainted, and the wooden face will be scrubbed and painted. Refurbishing the brick pedestal on which the tower stands will have to wait until more money is available.

"It's kind of an honor to get the job," Barthel said Wednesday. "When you do a public restoration, you want to do your best."

When the clock was officially dedicated July 4, 1976, the Star Spangled Banner was sung while the flag was raised by a color guard of veterans and Boy and Girl Scouts. As the mayor and other officials spoke, a time capsule of Santa Cruz memorabilia was sealed into the base of the clock.

The Town Clock project was launched in early 1974 as the city's salute to the nation's Bicentennial.

The original clock tower was built in 1873 and stood atop the Odd Fellows Building on Pacific Avenue near Cooper Street. It was destroyed by fire in 1899 and reconstructed in its present form in 1900.
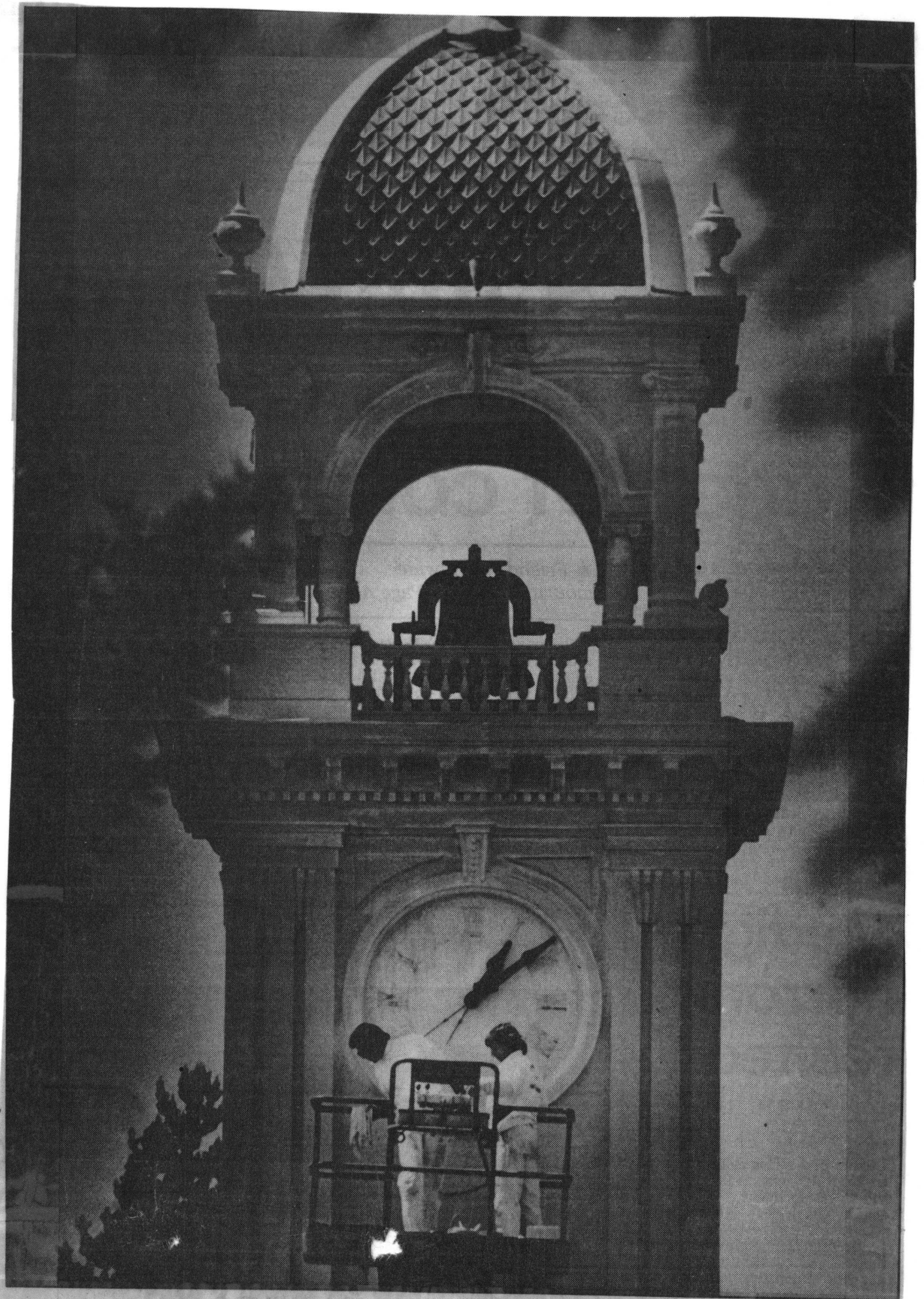
In 1964, as part of a redevelopment project, the tower was dismantled brick by brick by the IOOF and sold to the city of Santa Cruz for $1.01 after a spirited bidding with the county.

The tower bell was originally located in the Santa Cruz firehouse. The original Seth Thomas clockworks, made in 1900, were carefully reconstructed, using original parts whenever possible.

The tower was dedicated July 4 1976. The restoration of the clockworks, which was hampered by a scarcity of parts, was finished and the closkc was running in time to ring in the new year of 1977.

The Town Clock cost about $120,000 to build. Of that amount, $60,000 was raised through community fund-raisers and donations.

The stately clock has rung in many a new year and with the facelift, will continue to ring in more.

Karl Barthel and helper Bill Mackin will spend about three weeks giving a facelift to the Town Clock.