

WWI MONUMENT

Keeping history fresh



Erik Trautmann / Hearst Connecticut Media

Workers with Culture Preservation and Restoration, including Gary McGowan, on Saturday complete the final paint work on the 1873 French cannon on the Norwalk Green, donated to Norwalk after World War I.

Even heavy guns need some TLC

By Robert Koch

NORWALK — Even a 136-year-old French cannon that has not fired a shell in a century or so needs a little sprucing up from time to time.

With that in mind, Cultural Preservation and Restoration Inc., of Belvidere,

N.J., spent two weeks sandblasting, repainting and lacquering the 155-millimeter field gun that has graced the Norwalk Green for about a decade.

“After this (cannon) was installed nine-and-a-half years ago, Hurricane Sandy came through and there’s been a lot of weather that has done damage to it,” said Gary McGowan, president and principal conservator of CPR, as he worked on the cannon with a dust mask over his face. “And it’s close to the road so there are pollutants from cars and

what not, and the sun beats down on it and the cold.”

To protect the cannon from the elements for another decade, CPR sandblasted its surface with crushed glass to remove the old paint. The company next applied primer before putting down a lacquer coat over the weekend.

“The gun is going to go back to that sort of sky-blue color,” said McGowan as he worked last Thursday.

The plaques, which are on the

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Workers with Culture Preservation and Restoration, including Gary McGowan, complete the final paint work on the 1873 French cannon donated to Norwalk after World War I, on the Norwalk Green on Saturday.

CANNON

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cannon's pedestal and carry the names of Norwalk residents who fought in World War I, were cleaned and repainted as part of the \$15,950 rehabilitation project undertaken by the First Taxing District, which owns and maintains the green.

The cannon was last rehabbed in advance of its rededication on the green on June 7, 2009. The event, which included patriotic music performed by the U.S. Military Academy Band, was part of the Taxing District's annual Flag Day ceremony.

"We hired the same person because there's not many people that can do this kind of work," said Taxing District Operations Manager Lauren Mappa, referring to McGowan's company. "This cannon is so important to us it has its own notebook."

The cannon was forged in Bourges in 1881 as part of France's rearmament after the Franco-Prussian War. It was fired at the Battle of Verdun during World War I.

The French government donated the cannon to Norwalk after World War I as a thank-you for the city's contribution to the allied war effort.

For decades, a World War I memorial comprising the

cannon and granite pedestal was on the Taxing District property on Wall Street near the Norwalk Library. When the pedestal was moved to the green in 1950, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 603 acquired the cannon and moved it to the post headquarters on High Street. In 2008, the VFW Post sold its headquarters and transferred ownership of the cannon to the district.

McGowan said the cannon is unique for its construction — a combination of wood, concrete and steel — as well as its enormous size.

"I don't know of one quite this size," said McGowan, when comparing the cannon to others his company has restored. "It's a field gun and would have had to be maneuvered during the war either by steam tractor or teams of horses. So this is a big one."

At any rate, Taxing District officials do not plan on moving the cannon any time soon. They are proud to have it stay right where it is on the Norwalk Green.

"What we're doing is just sprucing it up a little," said Frank Zullo, First Taxing District Commission chairman and former Norwalk mayor. "We are committed at the district, obviously, to keep the green attractive and very pleasant. We look at it as the gateway to the city of Norwalk and so we want to keep it in top shape."