



Update on First Church Cockerel Weathervane

September 15, 2023

The great gilded cockerel weathervane that has stood atop First Church in Cambridge for the last 150 years is coming down to protect it from further damage caused by extreme weather, pollution and its own venerable age. The decision to bring the much-loved cockerel down for its own safety was made in a unanimous vote by the First Church Executive Council and following extensive consultation with nationally recognized experts in the field of American Folk Art and historic weathervanes who strongly advised removal as soon as possible.

The cockerel is actually 302 years old, created in 1721 for a church in Boston's North End. It was made by Shem Drowne, the coppersmith who also made the grasshopper weathervane atop Faneuil Hall. One expert called the First Church cockerel a "magnificent example of an American weathervane, but more so, a magnificent example of American vernacular sculpture." The cockerel is a national treasure! The experts urged that for its protection from the elements and the safety of people and property around it, the cockerel be brought down as soon as possible. Drone videos revealed there is significant and dangerous erosion of the gilding on one side of the cockerel, especially its large tail feathers.

The date for its descent is still being determined, but the goal is to make the move as soon as possible. Once the cockerel is safely down and securely stored, church leaders and the congregation will need to consider next steps in the stewardship of this national treasure, including discerning whether the time has come to consider selling it. Another future decision is whether the Shem Drowne original should be replaced with a replica or something else.

Right now, however, the priority is to give the First Church community a chance to reflect on, ask questions about and consider next steps following the decision to remove the cockerel, which was announced to the congregation on Sunday, September 10, 2023. A first listening session will be on Sunday, October 8, at 12:30, followed by a weeknight Zoom session on a date to be announced.

Links to the drone videos:

Less damaged side:



More damaged side:

