



Lovely Lane United Methodist Church.

For the first time in 100 years, Lovely Lane United Methodist Church looks exactly the way it was first intended. Cherished for its historical, architectural, and spiritual significance, the restoration of the original 1887 building has been a 24-year campaign, requiring the combined efforts of a faithful congregation, accomplished craftsmen, and a dedicated architectural firm.

Situated at 2200 Saint Paul Street in Baltimore, Maryland, Lovely Lane is heralded as the “Mother Church of American Methodism.” Its first pastor, Frances Asbury, became the first bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784.

Originally conceived by architect Stanford White, the Romanesque-style structure is regarded as one of the finest churches in the nation. White’s approach to the church was unconventional for its era –

a terra cotta roof; rich, dark interior colors; a sanctuary with curved pews and balcony; and a full, shallow dome depicting the heavens exactly as they appeared on November 6, 1887 at 3 a.m., the day the church was dedicated. The structure broke the mold of traditional churches, imparting a grander, theatrical quality to the setting.

Efforts to restore the building started in 1980 when preservation architectural firm Kann & Associates was retained to

The dome of the ceiling, before repainting under the direction of historical paint expert Matthew Mosca.

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By Pauline Harris

assess and develop a restoration strategy. The outcome resulted in a phased approach that worked hand-in-hand with miraculous fundraising efforts and the unfaltering commitment of a devoted congregation.



To date, the entire exterior of the building has been restored. The church tower has been re-pointed and the facade cleaned. In 2001, a new terra cotta tile roof was installed to replace the temporary one and protect the church interior. With the roof restoration initially projected to cost \$1 million, project manager Roger Katzenberg suggested an alternative method of cutting ceramic tiles to fit the exterior, costing less than half the original estimate.

Inside, everything harks back to the 1880s design. Nothing has been drastically altered. The crowning achievement of this program, a \$1.2 million restoration of the main sanctuary, was completed earlier this year.

The highlight of this phase is the 360-degree mural of the heavens that blankets the sanctuary's elliptical dome ceiling. The celestial masterpiece depicts the night sky as it appeared the day the church was dedicated. Blue skies provide a backdrop for white billowing clouds with bronze stars and planets. It creates the impression of an open building – one with no roof, where nothing stands between God and those who come to worship.

Originally painted in 1887, the mural was redone in 1900, and then covered by a painted canvas in 1930. The restoration involved removing the canvas and using the remains of the mural and historic photographs to carefully replicate the original version. Much of the original content was discovered upon removal of the canvas, but the painting had been severely damaged. Remnants of the painting were analyzed by an historic paint specialist to ensure that the colors would match the original masterpiece. The stars were mapped onto the floor using a laser so that their placement could be accurately recorded before the surface was covered in primer. The stars were then re-mapped onto the ceiling again, utilizing laser technology.

Before work could begin on the mural, the exterior roofing needed to be addressed. The original tile had been removed 25 years earlier and replaced with a red-colored clay asphalt tile. The roof had reached the end of its lifespan by 1999. Using photos of the original roof, Kann and Associates was able to recreate what once was. Because the roof was part of the church's exterior, the congregation was able to access funds from a state his-



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toric tax credit to replace the roof with original tile.

Due to the building's curves, the original roof design used ribs to segment the curves, cutting S tiles to create a seam.

Instead of using tapered tiles, six ribs were cut in each curve, creating five different segments of the roof. Standard Spanish S tile by Ludowici were used for the majority of the restoration, excluding the roof over the circular stair on the south side of the



Painting the cornice.



From the balcony, the overall effect can be appreciated.

building. Due to its cone shape, towered tile was used for that section of the roof.

The roofing work weighed heavily on the progress of the project, as it was necessary to complete the roof restoration before refurbishment could begin on the ceiling mural or other aspects of the interior.

Through the remainder of the building, Louis C. Tiffany and Francis Lathrop stained glass windows were restored, historic plasterwork mended, and the woodwork refreshed. The 1930-era Lovely Lane Hall and the lower level gymnasium were rehabilitated and made available to local schools and community organizations. Extensive handicapped accessibility has been introduced, as well as an upgrade of the building's mechanical and electrical systems.

The original Wilton carpets were repro-

duced, the distinctive sanctuary seating was reupholstered and reinstalled, the organ pipes were re-gilded in gold leaf, and the dramatic lighting scheme recaptured. The painted surfaces – rich, dark, brick-red walls that gradually lighten toward the ceiling – were meticulously studied and precisely replicated under the direction of historical paint expert Matthew Mosca. Metal


Below: The roof turrets were retiled in Spanish S tile by Ludowici.



leaf, faux marbling, and gilded stenciling finishes were also reintroduced.

Though some work still remains to be done, the congregation's desire to return the richness and recapture the splendor of this landmark church is practically realized. What remains is restoration of the chapel, the main entry, two vestibules, and the vestry.

The restoration of Lovely Lane reaffirms the church's commitment to Baltimore's Old Goucher College Historic District and brings hope to its 200-member congregation. They recognized the importance of preserving and restoring the building to its full integrity. Current pastor Reverend Nancy Nedwell takes pride in what has been accomplished, how it reflects the ministry, and strengthens the community.

The entire project has cost between \$5-6 million. Funding has come from various resources, including the congregation, the State of Maryland's Historic Tax Credit Program, and the France Merrick Foundation. 

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