

LANCASTER EAGLE-GAZETTE

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Seen from the bell tower above, workers from The Durable Slate Co. move across a system of scaffolding above pedestrians and automobiles passing by High Street as the workers remove the original cupola from the roof of First United Methodist Church on Thursday. (E-G photos by Ken Ritchie)

Landmark to be replaced First United Methodist Church rebuilding 1905 cupola

By **RACHEL ADAMS**
The Eagle-Gazette Staff

LANCASTER – It's been a Lancaster landmark for nearly 100 years, but the cupola high atop First United Methodist Church is past its prime.

The church, at the corner of Wheeling and High streets, has been shrouded in scaffolding lately as workers from The Durable Slate Co. in Columbus removed the copper cupola and brought it down from the church roof. The Durable Slate Co., known for its work on historical projects, will take the cupola to its Columbus facility and replicate it in new copper.

On the Web

- View a digital photo gallery of the cupola's restoration at www.durableslate.com.

"It's going to be one glowing piece of copper," said Rick Ladina, who, along with his twin brother Ron, took charge of the project.

The cupola was in place when the church was dedicated in 1905, said church business administrator Pat Betts, and was only guaranteed for 80 years – a fact that didn't come to the congregation's attention until the sanctuary ceiling started to leak.

"We got 99 years out of it – that's pretty good," said church project manager Jim Hatchel.

In November, 2002 it became apparent that the cupola, which sits on top of a stained glass skylight, and its surrounding woodwork needed replacement. Experts were called to evaluate the situation, but it was difficult to find a company to take on such a monumental task.

Enter The Durable Slate Co., who had previously done work on the slate roof of Rising House, Pastor Larry Brown said. That project was such a success, parishioners were happy to have Durable Slate back.

"We're very pleased with their work," Brown said. "One of the important things for us was to maintain the historical integrity of the building."

Continued on reverse.

LANDMARK (continued)

The Ladina brothers used a hoist to remove the cupola from the roof and bring it down to street level. The next part of the project, Rick Ladina said, is to replace the water-damaged wood, repair the stained glass that surrounded the cupola and recreate the cupola.

The project is expected to take two months, weather permitting, and carries a \$112,000 price tag. Brown said the church, built in 1905, has a special fund specifically for repairs.

“We’ll all be pleased when it’s completed and glad we decided to do the repair to protect our building,” he said.

Parishioner Pearleene Reffit, 73, of Lancaster is particularly excited to see the new cupola.

“I’m happy that they’re doing it – thank goodness,” she said. “It’s deteriorated throughout the years and it certainly needed replacing.”

Reffit, who’s been a member of the church for 63 years, said many people in Lancaster use the cupola as a landmark – something by which to get their bearings.

“It’s always been a historical landmark,” she said, joking that she hopes visitors to Lancaster don’t get lost while the copper beacon is being replaced.

Ron Pletcher, who’s in charge of the First United Methodist Church project, said his company enjoys preserving the past.

“We really like and enjoy taking on some challenging projects that some people might shy away from,” he said. “We prefer to get into the historical restoration end of it – it’s our niche.”

The new cupola should be in place by the end of October, Brown said, to charm another eight decades of First United Methodist Church parishioners.



Ron Ladina, 40, of The Durable Slate Co. in Columbus, uses a rope to guide the First United Methodist Church cupola away from a large stained glass window during its descent from atop the church.