

## Chicago Architect's Gem Rises Again

*Overdue renovations at a North Side church coincide with rebirth of its congregation*

*Jaime Levy Pessin, Special to the Tribune.*



Long wrapped in quaint white siding, Lake View Presbyterian Church has revealed its true color, as imagined by its architect, the legendary John Wellborn Root.

That color is red. Very red.

After a yearlong exterior restoration project, the structure at the corner of Addison Street and Broadway last week came out from under its scaffolding, displaying red cedar shingles similar to the ones that originally covered the church. A steeple-also red- spirals up in a cone, its shingles twisting their way up 50 feet.

But the changes at Lake View Presbyterian aren't just on the outside. The congregation itself is changing too.

"It's exciting to see the building come back to life as the congregation comes back to life," said Rev. Joy Douglas Strome, the church's pastor since 1996.

When Strome arrived, she said, the church was in bad shape. The sanctuary was dark and had electrical problems, the yard was a mess and membership had dwindled to 47 people, with only 30 coming regularly to worship. Today the church's membership is 200, and services draw 130 to 140 people.

The congregation started in 1884 as an alternative to the churches in Chicago and Evanston, which were difficult to reach in bad weather. After meeting in tents and other makeshift facilities for four years, the congregation built the church in 1888 for \$14,257.

Known for his partnership with Daniel Burnham, Root designed some of Chicago's most famous commercial buildings, including the Rookery and the Monadnock building.

The church is full of innovative craftsmanship, such as the spiraling shingles of the steeple.

The steeple's conical shape is echoed in ornamentation on staircase and balcony railings inside the church.

But one aspect of the church is distinctly different from much of Root's work: the wood frame. Typically, Root used brick, steel, terra cotta and other sturdier materials, said Pauline Saliga, executive director of the Chicago-based Society of Architectural Historians.

"A wood-frame church in the Chicago area is kind of rare," Saliga said. The one other Chicago church designed by Burnham & Root, St. Gabriel Catholic Church on the South Side, is terra cotta and brick, she said.

The wooden structure might explain the color choice, as both Strome and Saliga suggested the congregation chose the red cedar shingles to mimic more expensive material such as brick.

During the 1940s, Strome said, the congregation made a decision that altered the building's essence, choosing to wrap the church in siding to insulate and fireproof it. By 1996, the church was structurally sound but rotting wood, electrical problems and peeling paint mirrored the decline of the church's congregation, which had dwindled in numbers.

"Things were real clear to me real early on: If we were going to grow, we needed to take care of the building, be better stewards of it," she said. "Part was common sense, part was practical. You need light to read during a church service, and you don't want paint falling on people in worship.

"The obvious sign that it needed attention was that every time we did something, the return was great," Strome said. She realized that, "if we can look as bad as we look and still get visitors every Sunday, there's a spiritual hunger to be met and we need to get busy."

Renovation started in September. Of the \$1.23 million cost, \$500,000 was donated by the presbytery and the rest was raised through private donations, though the church is still trying to drum up \$230,000 that hasn't yet come through.

The siding came off and workers found the original cedar shingles underneath. A paint historian helped them determine the shingles' exact color. This time, the church was insulated and fireproofed with sheathing underneath the shingles.

George Reyes, a congregation member since 1986, has been coming to the job site every day to help coordinate the work. "This was something I felt called to do," said Reyes, a retired city Streets and Sanitation worker. "It's the joy of seeing people actually coming into our doors. Maybe this change here is enough to bring them back to church."

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