

original painting left, which will make an accurate restoration possible and allow for preservation of much of the original.

Because Tucker likes to work with local labor, the committee suggested she contact the Fine Arts Work Center. Working like apprentices, former center fellows Shelley Simpson and Jennie McDade, both painters, and Harriet Pappas, a sculptor, have become fascinated with the work of conservation.

"We keep standing back from it and wondering what our paintings are going to be like next year," McDade said.

The first task they mastered with Tucker's help was setting up and dismantling the scaffolding which eventually took them 20 feet from the church floor to reach the water damaged ceiling.

"One thing that's really neat about working with Linda," McDade said, "is that she doesn't just tell us what to do. She explains why we're doing it. She explains why the plaster cracked to begin with, and why we're repairing it in a certain way. So we get a certain amount of knowledge while we're doing the job, which makes it more interesting."

Working area by area, the restorers first wash away the overpainting.

"You see evidence that the wall has been a problem for a long time," Tucker said. "You can see places where attempts have been made to fill the cracks and paint them over."

The cracks resulted from stress on the wall caused by the slow decay of the original foundation. Now that the steeple has been strengthened and the foundation work is almost complete, no new cracks should develop.

Once the cracks have been exposed, they are cleaned out and wetted with a combination of water, alcohol and a bonding agent. Next the restorers fill them with structural plaster, give them a smooth skim coat, and sand and seal them.

The wall is then ready for the final step, reconstruction of the design and repainting of the trompe-l'oeil. The amount of painting to be done will depend on the condition of the wall.

"The original mural is really beautiful—the texture and transparency of the surface," said McDade.

As much of the original trompe-l'oeil will be left exposed as possible, and for those areas that need repainting, Tucker carefully tests her paint to get the color, texture and transparency that best match the original.

Based in Cambridge, Tucker does not advertise her work as a conservator. Projects are referred to her through historic preservation societies, and through the Coopers-town Graduate Program in the Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, where she earned her master's degree, specializing in murals.

After doing an internship in Florence, where she studied fresco painting, Tucker returned to the U.S., and in the last five years has done restorations in such distant states as Wisconsin, Michigan, Colorado and Wyoming, as well as in New York and throughout New England.

McDade has lived in Provincetown since October. She has a master of fine arts degree from the University of Georgia, and in the fall will return to Lawrence, Ka., where she teaches painting at the University of Kansas.

Simpson, who has a master of fine arts from Yale, has lived here two years. She plans to move to New York when the mural restoration is done, and may seek employment on similar projects there.

"It's a nice, fulfilling experience to be involved in the restoration of a church," Simpson said. "It's working for an art cause."

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## Church steeple being repaired

If you happen to pass by the Universalist Church of Provincetown, you may notice a web of ropes and ladders surrounding its steeple, as well as two daring young men who are in the process of painting and caulking it.

The much-needed repair work, which will prevent leaks in the 135-year-old Asher Benjamin steeple, is being paid for by the Restoration Committee of the Lower Cape, a non-denominational society formed in 1968 to restore historical buildings in the area.

Joe Acker, a member of the committee who is also on the Universalist Church's board of directors, said the repair work on the steeple will cost about \$5,000.

Acker knows almost everything there is to know about the church, except how tall it is.

"That information is buried in the records somewhere," Acker said, glancing up at the roof of the church, as if trying to estimate its height. "But I'm quite sure it's one of the tallest steeples in town."

Bob Levesque and Scott Nimelett, the young steeple-jacks from the American Steeple, Tower and Chimney company of Salem, don't really care to know how tall the steeple is. They have been painting and repairing the tower for the past two weeks and work without safety nets. Nimelett

has been learning the trade only a month, but Levesque has seven years experience doing steeple work. And both men's fathers preceded them in the business.

"All I know is it's high, real high," Nimelett said, looking up.

The church has been repaired twice before in its long history. Twelve years ago the main crossbeam split during a storm, and steel girders were inserted to buttress it. The building was repainted in 1977, another project supported by the Restoration Committee.

The church's interior boasts "one of the finest examples of trompe l'oeil in the western hemisphere," Acker said. Trompe l'oeil means "fool the eye" in French, and indeed, the painted-on niches and columns are a realistic-looking optical illusion indeed.

The elaborate trompe l'oeil interior was part of the original church design, but over the years time, and water damage from a hurricane, began to take its toll on the design.

The Restoration Committee came to its rescue, hiring several artists to carefully reconstruct the painting. In 1972 the church was admitted to the National Register of Historic Places and was designated a national historic site.