

Restoration Process

In preparing to commence this project a significant amount of time was spent finding professional resources for the restoration and receiving estimates on the cost of the work. As the cost was substantial the services of the Southeast Iowa Regional Planning Commission were obtained to prepare a HRDP grant application, which the parish did receive. Due to the grant and the generosity of our parishioners we were able to hire Parma Conservation, LTD for the conservation of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary painting.

Parma Conservation was established in 1998 for the conservation of historic works. Since its founding, they have conserved hundreds of historic murals and paintings for municipal buildings, post offices, schools and churches across the United States.

To restore the painting a varnish that was not art quality was removed. A improperly repaired tear was repaired. Any areas with damaged paint was retouched. An archival varnish was applied and the painting was stretched on it's frame.

Before restoration you can see a yellow hue which darkened the entire painting. Additionally you can see wrinkles and cracks in the painting.



After Restoration the colors are much more

vibrant. The distortions are gone and previously hidden details can once again be seen.



In the full picture found on the front cover you can now clearly see Mary is depicted with her hands folded in prayer and gazing upwards, wearing a white dress with a blue robe and she has a halo of stars. She is surrounded by nine angels.

Information for this brochure collected from "The Church with the Dome" book, explorekyhistory.ky.gov, Wikipedia., the Sisters of Notre Dame, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Parma Conservation



This project was supported in part by the State Historical Society of Iowa, Historical Resource Development Program.

Additional funding for this project was provided by individuals and families of St. Mary's Parish. The generous support for this project has provided an avenue to preserve a piece of our parish history and a piece of significant historical religious art.

A special thank you to Maureen Kieler who spearheaded this restoration project in memory of her late husband Dan Kieler and his love for his parish and this painting.

ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION PARISH

Art Restoration Project

Assumption of the Blessed Mary

By Melchior Paul von Deschwanden
1868



ST. MARY OF THE ASSUMPTION

119 4th Street

PO Box 68

West Point, IA 52656

Phone: 319-837-6808

website: www.westpointstmary.org

Email: westpointstmary@diodav.org

The Artist & Art of the Time

Melchior Paul von Deschwanden
January 10, 1811 – February 25, 1881



Deschwanden was a Swiss religious painter. Born in Stans, Switzerland to Johann Baptist Deschwanden and Reina Luthiger, he was raised Roman Catholic.

In his early teens Deschwanden studied drawing with several artists before enrolling in the Munich Academy in 1830. He then spent time in Lausanne, a French speaking area of Switzerland to learn French.

In 1838-1840 he studied at the Florentine Academy and was particularly drawn to the work of Fra Angelico, a religious painter who later became a Friar of the Dominican Order. After meeting with a Nazarene Artist, Friedrich Overbeck, Deschwanden made a decision to devote his work to religious painting. Further Nazarene influence came from Austrian Artist Edward Steinle and Peter von Cornelius.

The name **Nazarene** was adopted by a group of early 19th century German Romantic painters who aimed to revive honesty and spirituality in Christian art. The name Nazarene came from a term of derision used against them for their affectation of a biblical manner of clothing and hair style. The principal motivation of the Nazarenes was a reaction against Neoclassicism and the routine art education of the academy system. They hoped to return to art which embodied spiritual values, and sought inspiration

in artists of the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance, rejecting what they saw as the superficial virtuosity of later art.

Deschwanden was a prolific religious artist, particularly known for his altarpieces. His work was so popular in Catholic and Protestant circles that it is found in churches in the United States and around the world. In the U.S. in addition to his painting in West Point a Deschwanden painting can be found in St. Ferdinand's church in Ferdinand, Indiana. The fourteen stations of the cross hanging in the Mother of God church in Covington, Kentucky where created by Deschwanden. And his artwork can also be found in Annapolis, Maryland.

A common theme among these parishes was strong growth in the German immigrant community. Also each of these churches were established at a time when the priests had moved to the United States from Europe to establish and serve the growing Catholic communities.

History of our parish and the painting

The earliest evidence of Roman Catholics in Lee county dates back to 1673 when Father Pere Marquette, a Jesuit priest, met with Native Americans in southern Lee County. In the early 1800's priests traveling from St. Louis to Prairie du Chien served our area. In the 1830's Catholic immigrants from Germany began to settle in West Point with the first Mass celebrated in 1842 in a log cabin on the Strothman farm south of West Point.

Father Alleman, a French immigrant, completed seminary in Kentucky and was assigned pastor of the Fort Madison area in 1841. In 1842, he established the first Catholic Church in West Point, St. Philip's Parish, with a school to follow in 1846. In 1858, Father Reffe was appointed as pastor of

West Point. During his time the parish grew with many immigrants arriving especially from Germany, which prompted the building of a new church.

The present church was built between 1860-1862. The German people with their strong devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, dedicated the church in honor of the Mother of God and her Assumption into heaven.

From 1867-1869 Father Hattenberger was pastor of our parish. In 1868, Deschwanden's The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary painting was purchased and placed at the high altar. The painting was created specifically for St. Mary's of West Point.

Father Bonaventure, a friend of the artist, influenced him to create this beautiful work for the parish, likely due to a connection with the Father Hattenberger. Father Bonaventure was born in Thurgovia, Switzerland. He joined the Franciscan Order known as the Friars minor Capuchins and opened a novitiate in Wisconsin.

The painting as an altar piece in the parish was replaced by the Assumption Statue acquired in 1893. However, the painting was not removed it was just relocated within the church. After some further church remodeling the painting was moved to it's current location.

The painting depicts a critical element of Catholic doctrine, the ascent of the Virgin Mary into Heaven. Mary is not only the namesake of our parish but the Patron Saint of the United States, with a strong devotion by Catholic Immigrants. The painting represents the strong enduring faith of the descendants of those who established our parish and the community of West Point.