ST. AUGUSTINE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Report to Donors

April 2026

243 N. Lawrence Street Philadelphia, PA 19106 https://StAugustineHF.org

CHURCH TOWER … RESTORED AND SOLID



Worshippers, tourists, and visitors to historic Philadelphia's St. Augustine Church can breathe easier because of increased safety stemming from vital repairs to its 178-year-old tower.

You made this possible, and we are very grateful.

Structural deficiencies had jeopardized the continued use of the building for worship, education, and community services as well as for the proper care and preservation of its historical frescoes, paintings, and the prized "Sister of the Liberty Bell."

What's more, a City of Philadelphia inspection following the 2013 collapse of the Center City Salvation Army Thrift Store made the timeline for repairs urgent. Shutdown was possible.

Donors to St. Augustine Parish's six-year capital campaign (2018-2024) responded by making the tower restoration a priority and a reality.

But, as anyone who's gone through a major renovation well knows, unexpected issues often surface and, of course, just when the punch list is ready to wrap.

Significant newly found masonry and wood damage to the tower surfaced at exactly the same time the campaign was ending and the St. Augustine Heritage Foundation was launching.

This independent private foundation was created to support the *ongoing* preservation, restoration, and improvement of the historic buildings, grounds, and artworks of the parish beyond the capital campaign. This new unanticipated challenge from the tower, however, landed first on the docket of immediate needs. Repairs to the church's most prominent external feature, which dominates the skyline overlooking the Ben Franklin Bridge, could not be ignored.

We are delighted to report that your charitable gifts to the St. Augustine Heritage Foundation helped to complete this major tower repair and restoration project under the expert skill of Premier Building Restoration, Inc. Your financial commitment to this pressing need made a critical difference.

"St. Augustine Church, from its inception in 1796, has been the work of many hands and hearts. Your generosity proves that this model still is alive and well," says **Augustinian Rev. Paul Galetto**, parochial administrator. "Your generosity allows us to continue the mission of helping God's people. We cannot thank you enough."

All that remains? The beauty part —scaffolding, expert painters, and coats and coats of historically accurate paint.

Restoration Plans in Play

- **Church Organ**
  Church staff recently discovered damage to the façade of the church organ. A metal pipe cover came loose and crashed over the balcony onto a pew. A subsequent inspection revealed many loose pipe covers that also were in imminent danger of falling. Each of these originals, installed circa 1881, has been temporarily removed.

  The total cost to repair the façade of the damaged pipes, which will restore the overall appearance of the instrument, is estimated at approximately $35,000.



Much of the organ temporarily draped during restoration

- **Tito Troja Paintings of St. Augustine**
  Eight paintings created in 1897 by celebrated Italian artist Tito Troja depict the life of St. Augustine and are considered the most valuable assets in the church, prominently gracing its side walls. While everyone enjoys their presence and so many have become accustomed to seeing them, these paintings have never been professionally treated to restore their beauty and preserve their value.

  Every one of these paintings needs substantial restoration. Most measure approximately 12′ x 6′. Each must be taken down, packed carefully, shipped to Delaware, restored by expert artisans, shipped back to the church, and rehung. Costs to do all of this are estimated at a minimum $65,000 per painting.

  We are working closely with the Augustinian community to pursue a major grant for these restorations, which will require matching funds from additional individuals, foundations, and others interested in securing the restoration of these religious and artistic treasures.



See page 4 to READ MORE … VIEW MORE … LEARN MORE *about this cherished Troja painting, "The Baptism of St. Augustine."*

- **Frescoes Painted by Nicola Monachesi**
  Several notable frescoes painted in 1848, given official recognition by the Philadelphia Historical Commission in 2015, are unique to both this church and art holdings throughout the Philadelphia region.

  What's more, they hold a particular distinction as the first frescoes to be painted in any church in America.

  Artist Monachesi (1795-1851) brought his talent with him from Italy's Marche region to apply to the ceiling of this special church that is the founding parish and location of the Augustinian order in America.

  Irish immigrant Rev. Matthew Carr, OSA established St. Augustine Church in 1796 for a primarily Irish and German immigrant population. Completed in 1801, the church enjoyed the financial support of such colonial-era leaders as President George Washington, financier Stephen Girard, Navy Commodore John Barry, and Thomas Fitzsimons, signer of the U.S. Constitution.

  With the exception of one wall that remained standing, that 1801 building was burned to the ground in 1844 by the anti-Irish, anti-Catholic Nativist ("Know-Nothing") riots that targeted this and other Philadelphia Catholic churches. These Monachesi frescoes figure prominently on the ceiling of the church, rebuilt in 1848. Restoration costs will vary with ease of access to the ceiling.



Monachesi fresco in dome above altar

Engaging With and In Our Community

Foundation Celebrates America250

St. Augustine Church is participating in a collaborative program with Interfaith Philadelphia to promote the historical and cultural significance of the city's old and venerable historic churches.



St. Augustine Heritage Foundation will host a two-hour panel discussion, "Religion and the Immigrant Experience: Building This Country Together," at St. Augustine Church on June 7 that draws on the parish's 18th century immigrant roots and up through today's populations. Notable speakers will provide historical, academic, and community perspectives. The program is free and open to the public.

A walking tour of 12 of the city's historic congregations is also planned during this America250 celebration year. Historic St. George's Methodist Church (located across from St. Augustine), Arch Street Meeting House, Christ Church, Old St. Mary's, Old St. Joseph's, Mother Bethel AME, Gloria Dei (Old Swedes' Episcopal), and Mikveh Israel are among those participating. The self-guided activity will help residents and tourists meaningfully engage with diverse expressions of faith and help foster connections across lines of difference.

Check our website at https://StAugustineHF.org and Interfaith Philadelphia's at https://www.interfaithphiladelphia.org for more information on the June 7 program (2:00-4:00) and the Religious Freedom Walk. A free copy of the "Passport to Understanding: Religious Freedom Walk" is available at St. Augustine Church and the Philadelphia Visitors Center on Independence Mall West. Scan the QR code for tips and prompts at each participating congregation, identified by an Interfaith Philadelphia banner displayed, ***above***, by foundation president Kathy Rigby.

History Fairs Inform, Educate, Raise Visibility

Within four months of the foundation's first meeting in June 2024, board member Jeffrey LaMonica conceived, created, and delivered our first history fair.



The Delaware County Community College history professor ran with the ball, managing all invitations and other necessary details —including refreshments and other hospitality—and scheduling the activities of our volunteer board members.

Carr Hall, a gathering space located on the St. Augustine Parish property, offered an excellent setting to host this informative and interactive event for all ages. Volunteers from the Museum of the American Revolution, Fort Mifflin, and Lest We Forget Slavery Museum joined other historical organizations in displaying prized artifacts, sharing facts and stories with the fair's visitors, and donning in-character period attire … hello, James Madison!

History Fair 2025 drew an even larger attendance, with visitors enjoying a greater number of historic documents and items (***right***). Plans are expected to continue this annual event.



With Appreciation … From Foundation President Kathryn Rigby

Chairing the St. Augustine Heritage Foundation board is an honor and privilege. I serve with eight dedicated volunteers who span businesses and professions that include the law, finance, education, government, non-profits, and Catholic ministry. We operate with no salaried staff, and on a very lean budget.

Together, we share an immense regard for the history, legacy, and beauty of this extraordinary church, the significance of its location in historic Old City Philadelphia, and its exceptional interior marked by priceless frescoes and unique paintings of St. Augustine. I'm touched by what ***my board colleague Rene Quinlan*** *says: "I believe that when people visit the church, they are impressed by transitioning from a simple exterior into a relatively simple interior, punctuated by an extraordinary, gleaming white altar area. As your eyes focus, you begin to see the beautiful architectural details, the sculpture, and the paintings."*

We thank you for your support of this historically significant church. Your charitable gifts totaling ***$33,425*** *(to-date from July 2024) are producing an impact — from helping us earmark a portion of the funds to repair the organ façade and restore one of the St. Augustine paintings to covering some of our start-up expenses. We are so very grateful. We invite you to visit St. Augustine Church to view first-hand the remarkable building that it is, its inspiring spiritual presence, and its unmatched treasure of art and architecture. When you do, I'm certain you'll echo Rene in his esteem for this exceptional space.*

We invite your comments and welcome your suggestions. Contact President S. Kathryn Rigby at skf1@comcast.net

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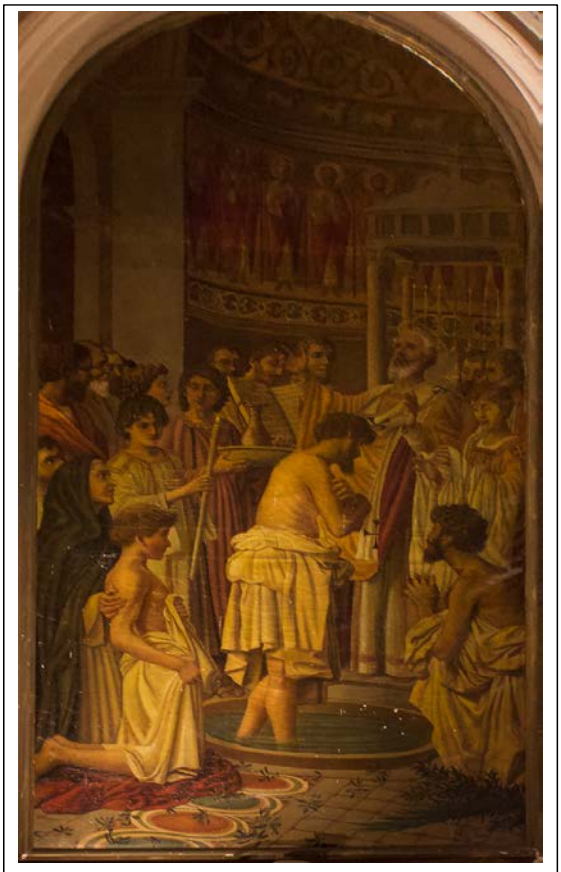
About One of St. Augustine Church's Treasured Paintings

EXAMINATION AND TREATMENT PROPOSAL

Paintings Conservator: Kristin deGhetaldi



Artist: Tito Troja (Italian, 1847-1916)
Date: 1898
Title: *The Baptism of St. Augustine*
Object: Oil (est.) on Canvas
Inscriptions: None visible at the time of examination
Dimensions: Approx. 144 x 73 inches (curved/rounded upper edge)
Proposal Date: February 28, 2024
Examined by: Kristin deGhetaldi with consultation from Professor Brian Baade (Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation).

CONSTRUCTION/CONDITION SUMMARY (PRIOR TO TREATMENT)

The original support is a medium weight, plain weave, linen (est.) canvas. The primary support is mounted to what appears to be a wooden auxiliary stretcher/strainer with at least two horizontal crossbars. The tacking margins were not accessible at the time of examination; however, the priming appears to be white in color and is likely oil-based (and possibly contains the pigment zinc white due to the brittle nature of the paint and ground layers). The pictorial layers have been built up using successive layers of semi-opaque paint, with hardly any areas of pronounced impasto. Finally, the picture is coated with a rather thick layer of synthetic (est.) varnish. The canvas support is only in fair condition; there is a pronounced bulge along the entire bottom of the canvas as the support appears to be coming detached from the upper edge of the auxiliary support. There are additional planar deformations along both sides of the canvas as well as in the proper lower right corner. The paint and ground layers are extremely brittle and possess a pronounced craquelure pattern throughout (there are also pronounced stretcher bar marks in the paint). Some areas display signs of cupping, lifting, and active flaking while tiny losses are also scattered across the surface. The uppermost varnish layerhas become degraded, discolored, and undersaturated while more than three-quarters of the pictorial surface has been heavily overpainted; the overpaint has also darkened and discolored over time. Beneath the overpaint is yet another yellowed layer of varnish (presumably the original). White drips and other surface accretions are visible throughout. Finally, the entire surface is covered with a layer of imbibed grime and dust.

Solution? A 16-step restoration and preservation process *using proper organic solvent and conservation materials, removal of "more tenacious overpaint," inpainting areas of loss and abrasion with the use of stable conservation colors, and more. Paintings conservator* ***Kristin deGhetaldi*** *earned her doctorate degree in preservation studies at the University of Delaware, followed by a three-year Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in painting conservation at the National Gallery of Art. She has studied in Florence, Italy, and completed workshops, conservation positions, and internships at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and the RISD Museum. She formed her art preservation private practice in 2009. To learn more about Dr. deGhetaldi, visit https://www.deghetaldiconservation.com.*