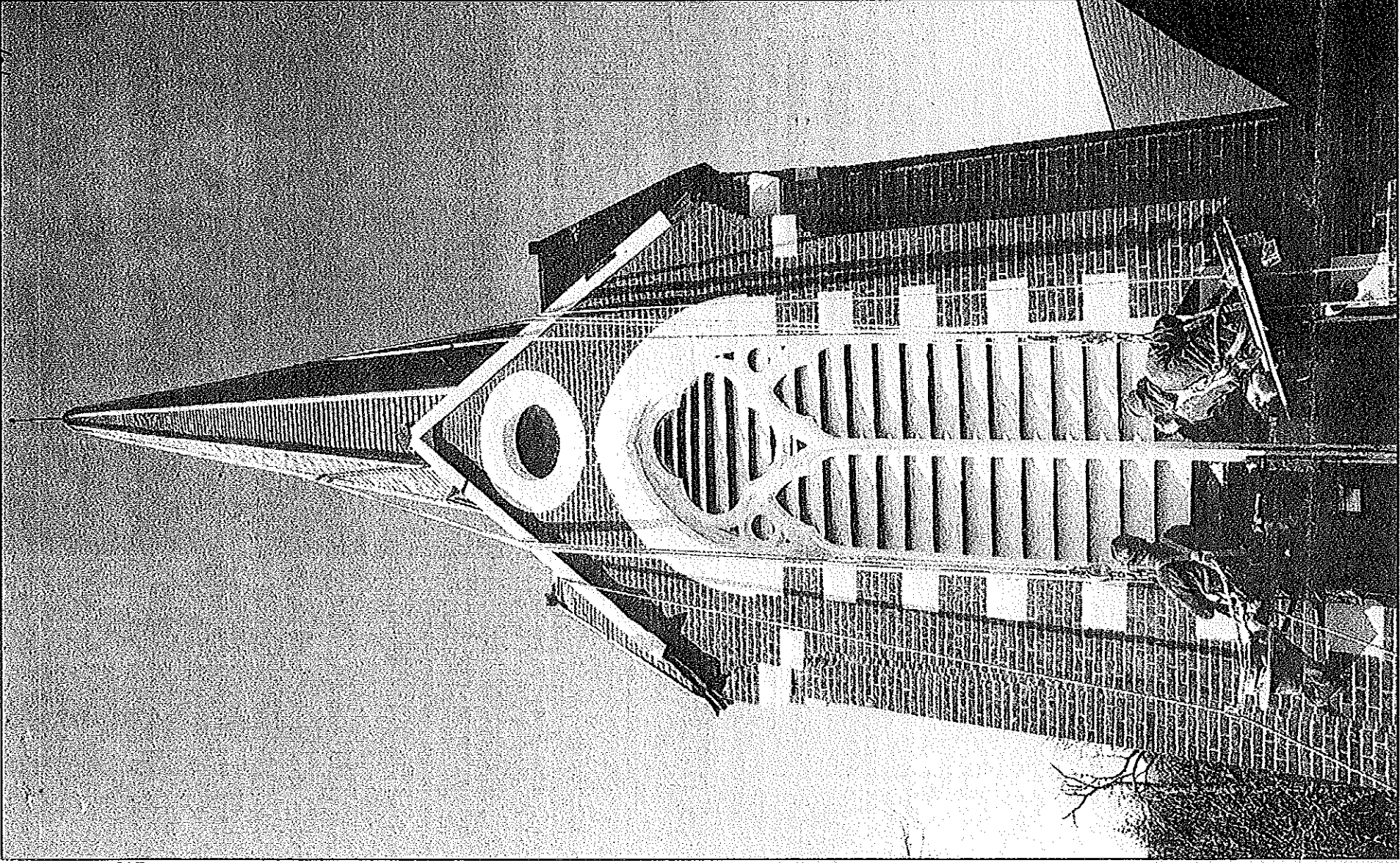




Stephen Dunn / The Hartford Courant

■ Guy Cone, left, of Portland, and Mike Osborne of Madison hang suspended from the steeple of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church on Hartford's Main Street this week. The two employees of the Russak Restoration Co. of the Cobalt section of East Hampton are painting the louvers of the steeple, part of an extensive restoration project for the historic church.

Historic church getting face lift

By LAURA C. MARKS
Courant Correspondent

Suspended between a triptych of windows, restoration worker Sam Doherty performed a task called pointing.

The task secured concrete blocks that formed a decorative arch above windows at the Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church.

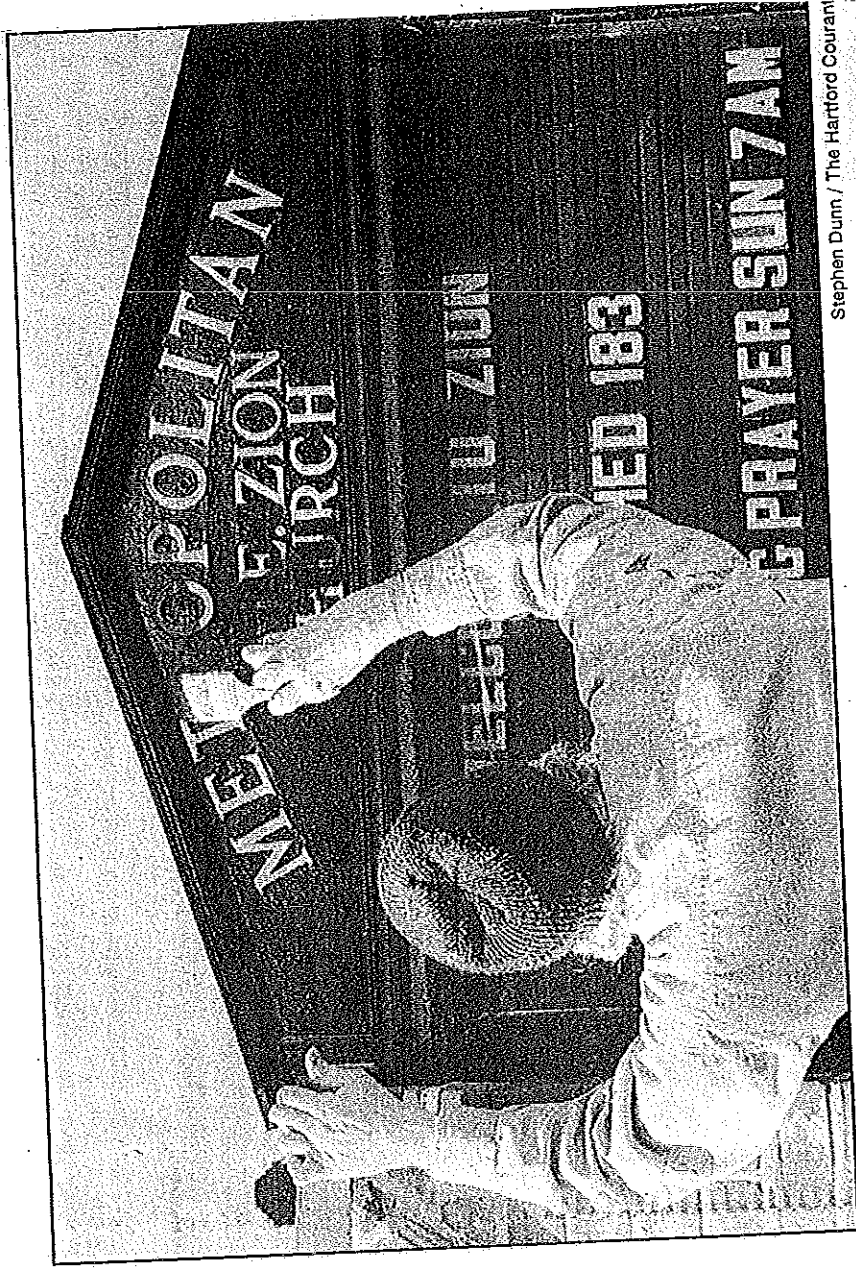
Since August, Doherty and other crew members from Russak Restorations, located in the Cobalt section of East Hampton, have been repairing the crumbling Victorian church on Main Street's north end. The exterior restorations will be completed next week.

The painting, pointing, brick replacement and cleaning started almost immediately after the Connecticut Historical Commission announced the church's inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

"That was a coincidence that that culminated at the same time," said the Rev. Raymond E. Price, pastor of the church. The congregation had been collecting pledges for the restoration since July 1992 and learned of the church's new historic status just last July.

The exterior improvements and new stained glass are phase I of the restoration project, which

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Stephen Dunn / The Hartford Courant

■ Kevin Wall of East Hampton, an employee of the Russak Restoration Co. of the Cobalt section of East Hampton, paints the letters on the marquee of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church on Main Street in Hartford this week.

Historic Hartford church getting face lift

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will cost the church \$350,000. As of August, church members had raised \$100,000, said Price. The church borrowed the rest, he said.

Phase II will bring the interior of the church up to code, said Price, who estimates the second phase will cost \$100,000.

The work crews affectionately call the building "This Old Church," alluding to "This Old House," a TV program showing how old buildings are restored to their former glory.

"It was all black and moldy. It was in total disrepair," said Eric Russak of Russak Restorations. "Nothing had been done to this church for 50 to 75 years." On Thursday, two workers were suspended from the slate-covered spire to repaint the louvers, which ventilate the bell tower.

The church, which was built in

the 1870s, is being restored to its original appearance. Next week, Guarducci Stained Glass of Massachusetts will start installing replicas of the peach, gold and blue stained glass, which has a frosted floral pattern.

Price said the restoration will be a credit to the city — particularly the city's North End.

"I'm quite pleased with it. It's been quite a challenge ... It will make the national register proud that another historical site is being restored," Price said.

Nationwide, fewer than a thousand historic buildings are individually listed in the historic register, said John Shannahan, director of the Connecticut Historical Commission. Those not listed individually are included in historic districts.

On the church's registration form, Shannahan noted that buildings owned by religious organizations or used for religious purposes

are not normally eligible for the national register.

However, he convinced the U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service to register the building because of its architectural traits and historic role in the development of the urban African-American community.

The church, built in the High Victorian Gothic style, was constructed between 1873 and 1874. The gothic church, like a medieval church, has pointed, arched windows, buttresses and projecting gables.

The Metropolitan A.M.E. Zion Church bought the building in 1926, when it moved from its Pearl Street building.

The church moved to Main Street as industrial growth and tobacco production brought workers to the Capital area and caused a surge in the African-American population, Shannahan said.