



Loretto Chapel™

Santa Fe, NM

The OUR LADY OF LIGHT CHAPEL (Loretto Chapel), fashioned after Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, was constructed in the 1870's to serve the Loretto Academy which was operated by the Sisters of Loretto.

Believed to be the first gothic structure west of the Mississippi, the Chapel had a design flaw: a conventional stairway to the choir loft could not be installed without adversely impacting the diminutive Chapel's seating capacity as well as its aesthetics.

Seeking divine guidance the Sisters made a Novena to their patron saint, Saint Joseph the Carpenter. As legend has it, upon the ninth and final day of the Novena a mysterious carpenter arrived to design and construct a circular stairway to the choir loft. The tools upon his donkey were just a saw, a T-square, a hammer and tubs in which to soak the wood.

His "miraculous stairway" contains thirty three steps in two full 360 degree turns. This stairway has no center support nor is it held from it's sides - it's full weight rest on its final tread.

Upon completion of the stairway the carpenter disappeared without seeking payment. No records have been found for the purchase of the materials with which the stairway was built. Many sisters believed the craftsman to have been an embodiment of Saint Joseph the Carpenter.

Originally build without a railing its use was a daily reinforcement of faith by both sisters and students. In the 1880's the banister was added.

Engineers and architects marvel at the stairway; there is no known duplication of it's design.

Original Colored Pencil Art

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