

Revival of a Stained-Glass Window

Don Pellett
as told to: Sergei Smirenski

January 15, 2026

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Introduction

Since 1854, the settlement on the left bank of the Wisconsin River began to be called Portage. As early as 1856, a wooden church was built, and in 1898 a beautiful stone church appeared. The building has been well preserved to this day, but some of its elements began to deteriorate. For example, the colorful stained-glass windows, in which thin lead rods were used as the supporting framework of the design, changed shape under the influence of seasonal temperature fluctuations. This caused breakage of the colored glass inserts in the stained-glass window of the bell tower's facade.

Don Pellett, who has devoted more than fifty years to the art of creating stained glass, took on the task of restoring the situation.

About our restorer...

Don Pellett has over fifty years of experience designing, creating, and restoring stained-glass windows for churches, homes, public and private spaces, including Agrace Hospice Care, Madison WI, and restoration of the Wisconsin State Capitol, Madison. He took the task of restoring the stained-glass window over the front entry doors.

After three years attending the School of The Art Institute of Chicago he began employment as an apprenticeship in stained glass at "Daprato Rigali Studios", Chicago, IL 1963, followed by "Botti Studio of Architectural Arts", Evanston, IL.

Self-employed partnership with Bob White at the "White and Pellett Glass Workshop", Chicago IL "The Lighthouse Stained Glass", Madison, WI Self-employed at "Millrace Artisan", Sauk City, WI.

Timeline

- 28 Jun Remove stained glass window in frame; place temporary board in opening; 5.5 hrs [Figure 1](#)
- 02 Jul Preparation work, extend work surface, remove old putty and tacks holding glass; build sandwich boards to flip glass over; tape glass; 4 hrs
- 12 Jul Remove glass from frame; cut wires attached to rebars and release glass; use heat gun to clean frame of remaining putting; strip old paint to bare wood; oil bare wood; 2 hrs
- 17 Jul Make rubbing of stained glass lead lines and interior shape of wood frame; begin to remove and separate the old lead from the glass; dismantle window; 7 hrs
- 18 Jul Drive to "The Vinery Glass" Whitewater WI for glass to match the 20 broken pieces and lead H cams for rebuilding window; 5 hrs
- 22 Jul Layout the rubbing of the window and square the centerline to the base of the glass; on another rubbing lay out the individual pieces of glass in their correct place; clean each piece of glass removing old cement, paint, and dirt; 3 hrs
- 23 Jul Cut new glass replacing the broken pieces; 5 hrs
- 24 Jul Start building the new window; 4 hrs
- 25 Jul Build window; 3 hrs
- 26 Jul Build window; miscellaneous cleanup; 2.5 hrs
- 29 Jul Finish leading the window; 3.5 hrs
- 30 Jul Miscellaneous cleanup; 1 hr
- 03 Aug Solder outside face of glass; 2.5 hrs
- 04 Aug Flip window between sandwich boards; solder the inside face of the glass, mix cement and cement the inside faces of the glass; 4.5 hrs
- 05 Aug Flip window and cement outer side of glass; get putty and materials; 4.5 hrs

- 06 Aug Remove old varnish from inside of wood frame and make pattern for cutting Lexan; 2 hrs
- 07 Aug Cut copper wires and solder them to window for attaching the rebars; 2 hrs
- 08 Aug Back putty the frame, install glass in frame over putty; press in and hammer carpet tacks at every lead joint around the leaded window; attach the copper wires around the rebars; 5 hrs
- 14 Aug Paint outer side of frame with 1-2-3 primer; putty window; paint finish coat of exterior paint; 4 hrs
- 02 Sep Pickup Lexan, 1/2" U-channel, spray paint, stainless steel screws, and foam tape; 4 hrs
- 03 Sep Cut Lexan, spray paint U-channel, pre-drill holes for screws, make 56" wood sill, cut notches in U-channel to bend to shape and fit; drill 1" hole at top of Lexan for exterior light fixture; 5 hrs
- 06 Sep Install window and Lexan protection glazing; 5 hrs [Figure 36](#)

Total time: 85 hrs

Restoration Begins...

The entire process resembles a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, and Don's painstaking work was akin to that of a jeweler-restorer.

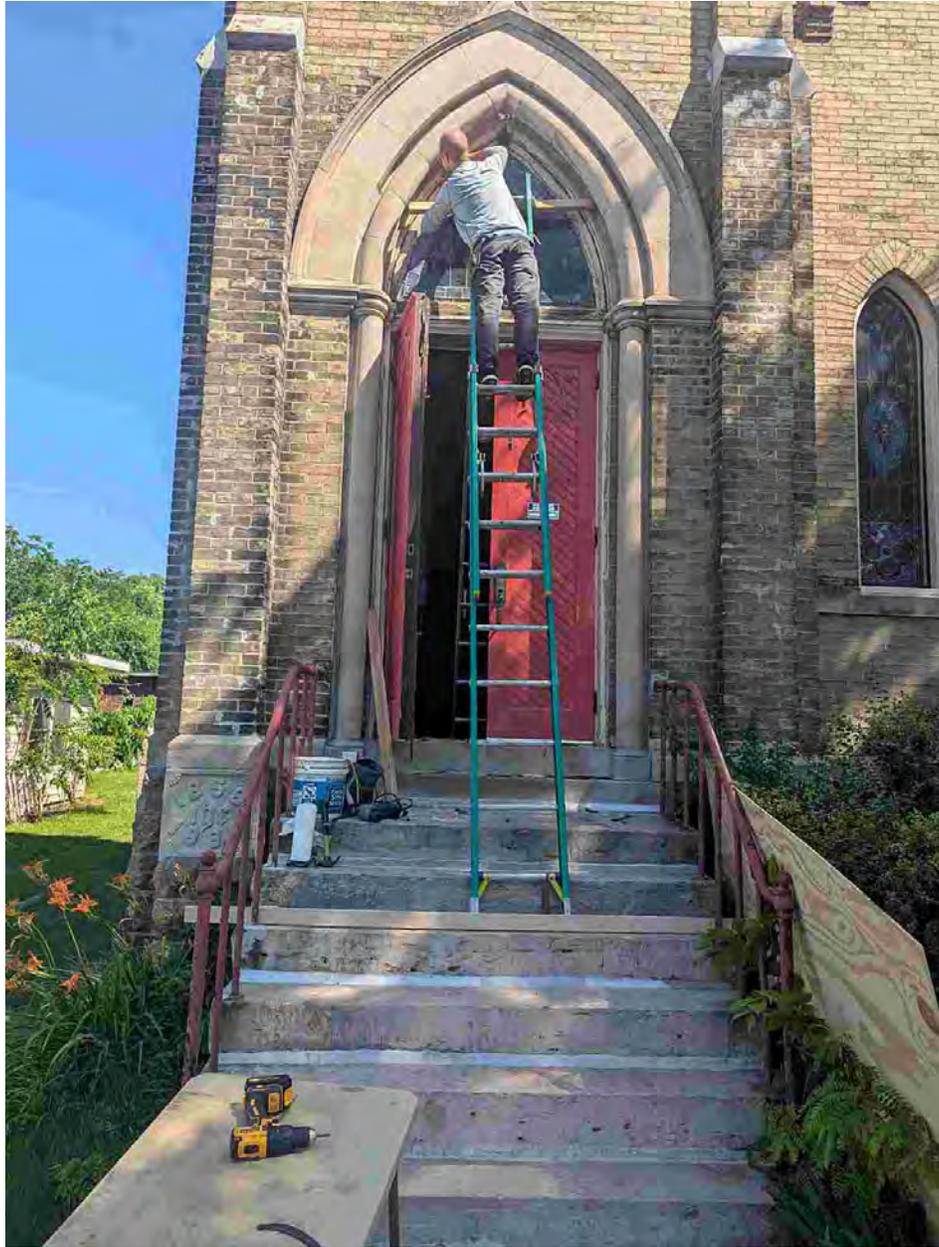


Figure 1: The project started on June 28. The risk of damaging the stained glass arose at the very first stage, when Fr. Dcn. Matthew, climbing the ladder, carefully removed the stained-glass panel. See [28 Jun](#)



Figure 2: To protect the building from the weather, plywood was inserted in place of the stained-glass window. See [28 Jun](#)

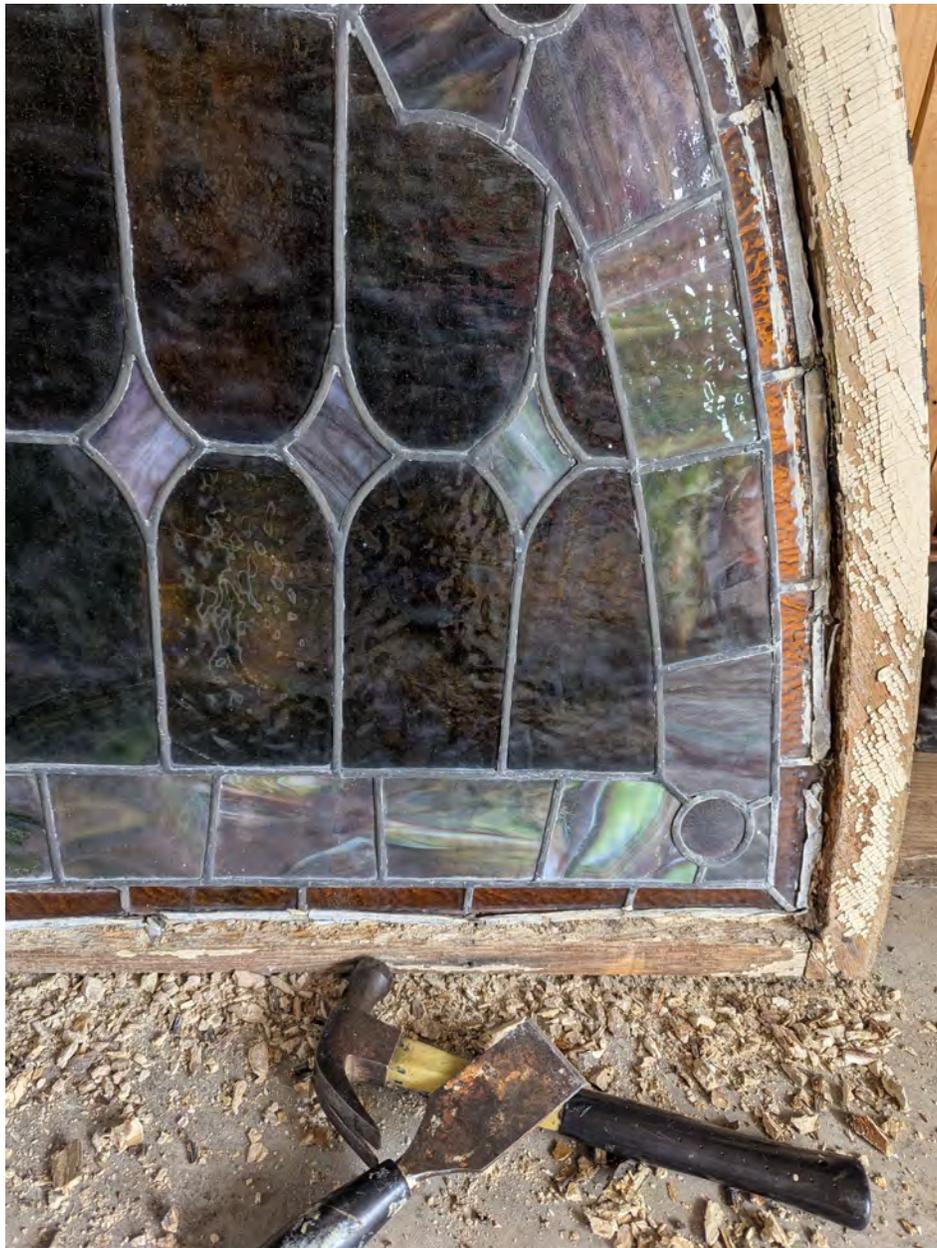


Figure 3

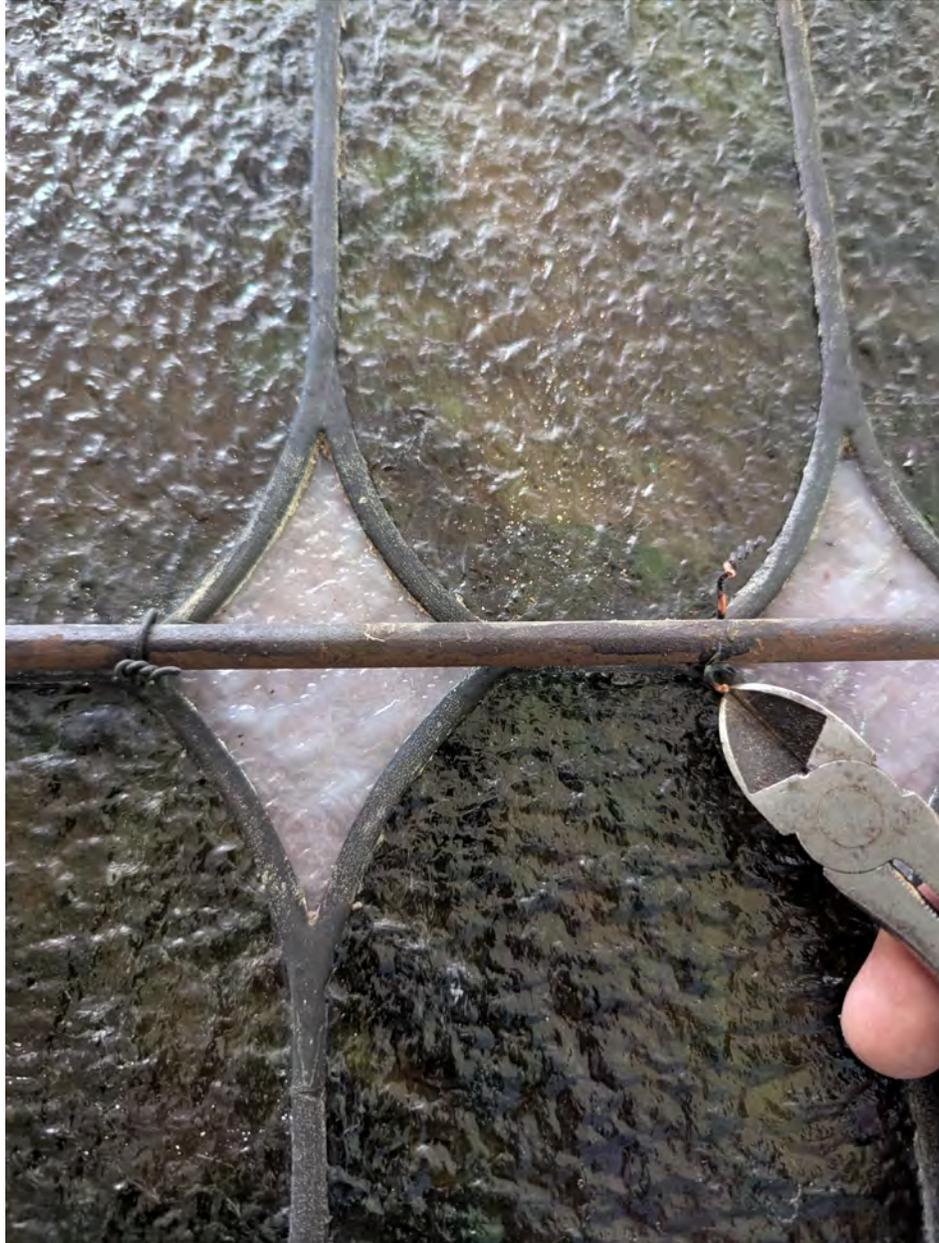


Figure 4: Don began to remove the carpet tacks from around the glass and the copper wires attached to the rebars on the interior holding the glass in the frame. See [12 Jul](#)



Figure 5: Separate glass from frame. See [12 Jul](#)



Figure 6: The frame was freed. See [12 Jul](#)



Figure 7: Laying the glass window on the work table, Don carefully made two rubbings of the lead lines with a crayon. One to build the window on, the other for laying out the pieces of glass in their correct place. See [17 Jul](#)



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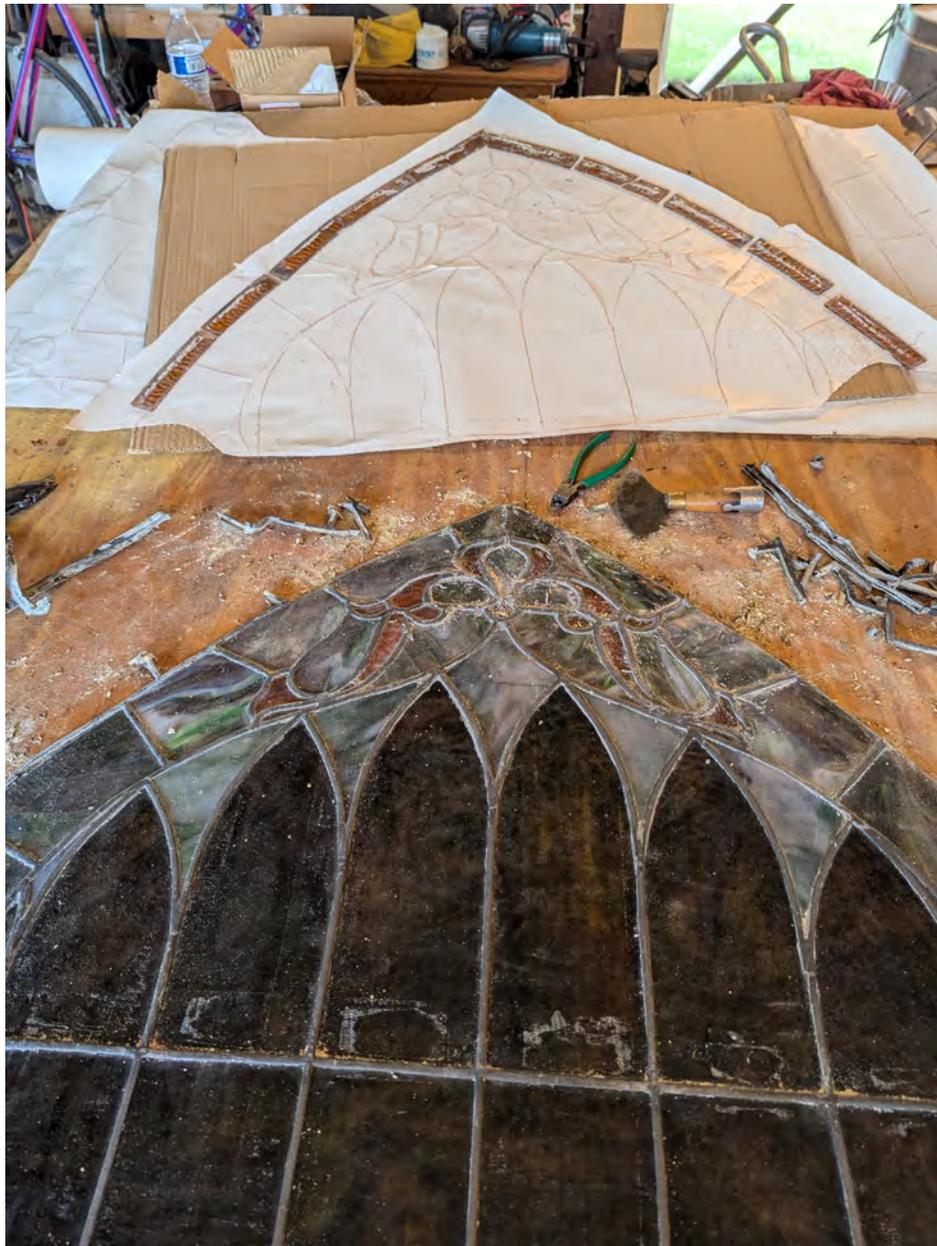


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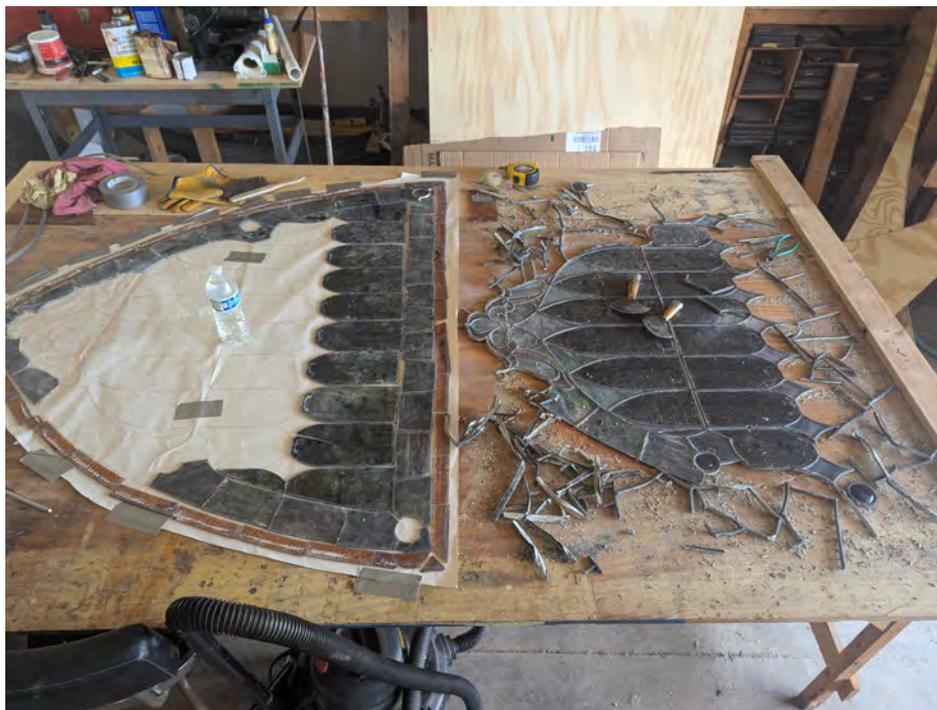


Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12: Twenty broken pieces were replaced with new glass.



Figure 13



Figure 14: The window is built out from the lower left corner, making sure the vertical lines of the $\frac{3}{16}$ " lead comes and window are square. With nails holding the glass in place. See [24 Jul](#)

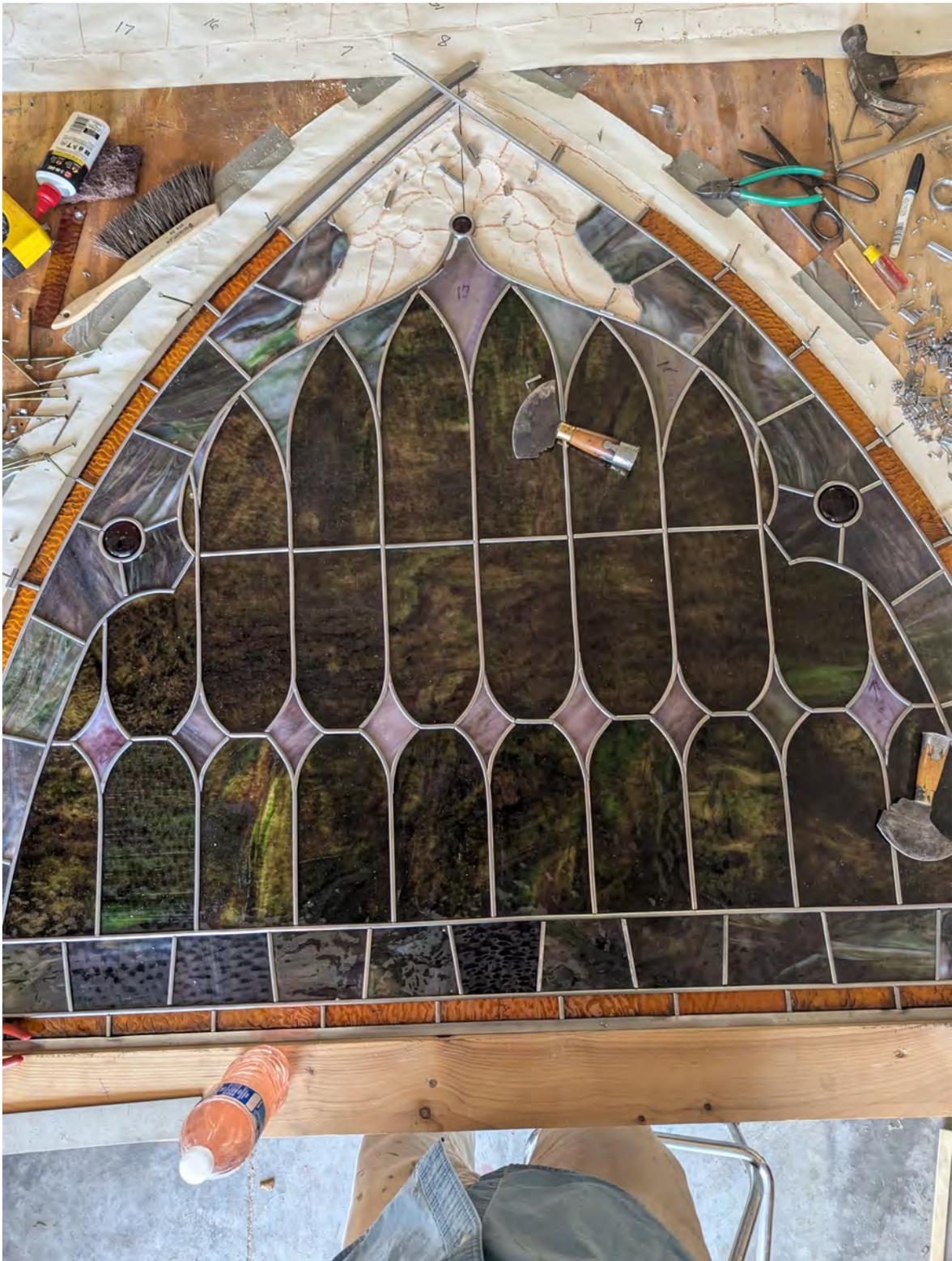


Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18: After the window is built, a cement made of putty, turpentine, linseed oil, Japan drier, plaster, and some black oil paint (or lamp black) for a gray color. In the old days, a generous amount of lead oxide was added. This cement is scrubbed into the lead to form a seal between the lead and the glass. The excess being removed with a stiff brush.



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22: Copper wires were replaced and soldered.



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Figure 24: The wood frame turned out to be in excellent condition. It was enough to treat it with linseed oil and paint.

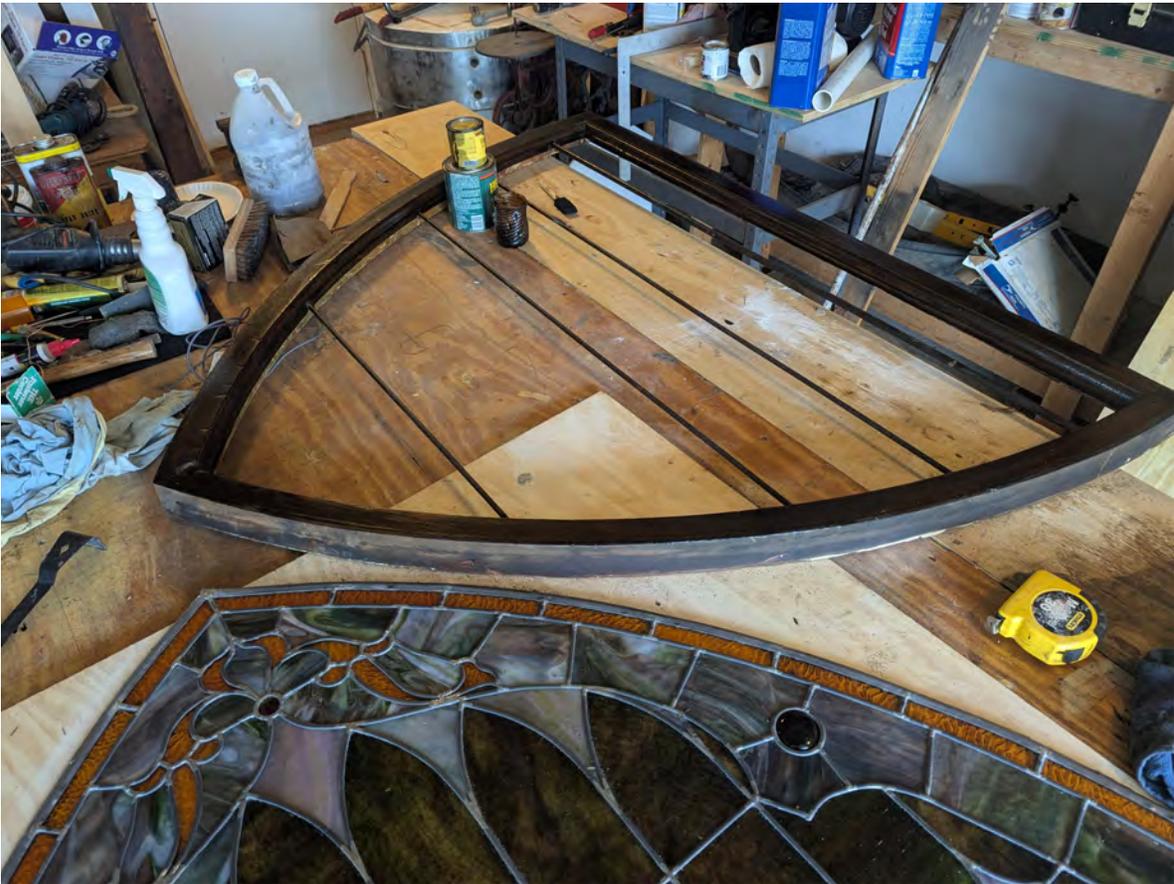


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Figure 26: Putty is applied to the frame and the new window is pressed into the putty.



Figure 27: The glass is secured with carpet tacks around the window.



Figure 28: Putty was applied to the frame and the new window was pressed into the putty and then secured with carpet tacks around the window followed by the final application of putty. The new copper wires were then secured to the rebars on the interior of the frame.



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Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33



Figure 34

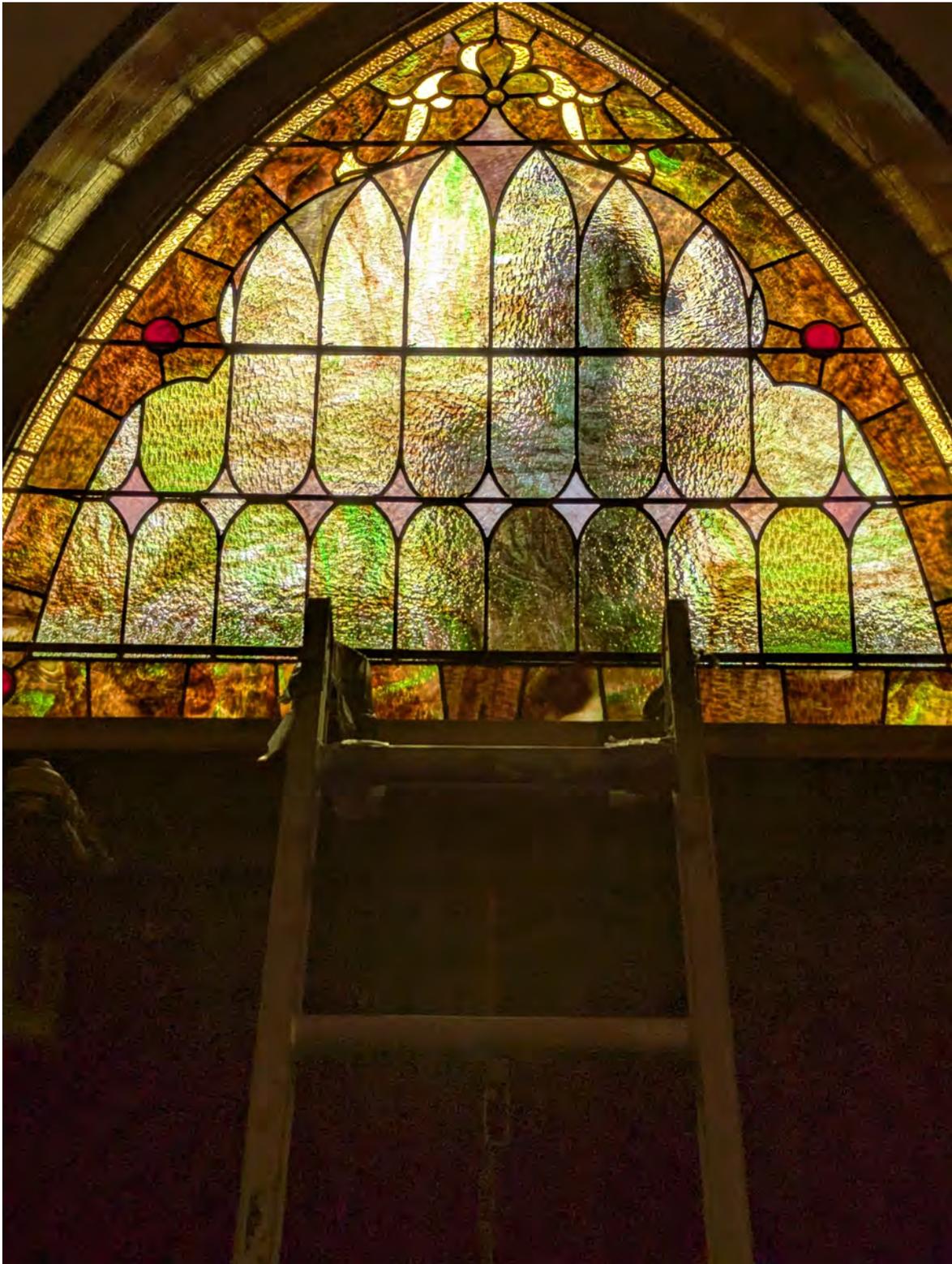


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Figure 38



Figure 39: All the parishioners of St. John the Wonderworker Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (ROCOR) and St John the Wonderworker are grateful to Don Pellett for the joy of the return of this beauty.