



Preserving the Heart of a Community: The Tabernacle at Oak Bluffs

Rising 100 feet above Trinity Park in the heart of Oak Bluffs, the wrought iron Tabernacle has stood as a beacon of community life on Martha's Vineyard since 1879. More than just an architectural marvel, this open-air pavilion has long been a gathering place for music, worship, and celebration—welcoming generations to sing, reflect, graduate, and rejoice beneath its soaring canopy.

Thanks to a decades-long, multi-phased preservation effort led by the Martha's Vineyard Camp Meeting Association (MVCMA), the Tabernacle has been lovingly and carefully restored to ensure it remains a vital centerpiece of island life. From reinforcing its unique wrought iron structure to restoring the cupola, recreating the historic cross with cutting-edge carbon fiber, and installing a new accessible lift to the stage, every element of this project reflects a deep commitment to preserving both heritage and functionality.

What makes the Tabernacle truly special is its role as the island's communal heart. This is where locals and visitors alike gather for "community sings," religious services, concerts, and the beloved Grand Illumination Night, when thousands of colorful Japanese lanterns light up the Tabernacle and the 300 surrounding Victorian gingerbread cottages. Perhaps most moving of all, the Tabernacle is the place where every Martha's Vineyard high school student walks across the stage to receive their diploma — a local tradition so essential that each phase of restoration had to be scheduled to be complete for graduation.

Preservation here meant more than protecting history — it required balancing resilience with reverence. The Tabernacle's coastal setting demanded innovative solutions for climate threats, including hurricane-force winds and potential flooding. Structural engineers designed specialized cable systems to be installed in advance of storm events, and roof materials were carefully chosen to withstand the elements while preserving acoustics and aesthetics. Even the roof

replacement — swapping out hazardous asbestos for fiber-cement panels — was approached with sensitivity to the building's character and performance.

This preservation triumph showcases what's possible when history, technology, and community come together. It celebrates the ingenuity of 19th-century bridge-building, the power of 21st-century preservation, and the unwavering spirit of the people who cherish this space.

The Tabernacle defines what it means to preserve a sense of place. It is a landmark not only for Oak Bluffs but for the entire Commonwealth — a site of shared memories, joy, awe, and resilience. Cast your vote for the Tabernacle and support a project that keeps history alive in the most meaningful way: through community.