



## Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, 2002-2017

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Volume 18  
Issue 4 *Winter 2009-2010*

Article 5

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Winter 2009

### Chapel of Love

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#### **Recommended Citation**

Travis '11, Nicole (2009) "Chapel of Love," *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine*, 2002-2017: Vol. 18 : Iss. 4 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/iwumag/vol18/iss4/5>

This is a PDF version of an article that originally appeared in the printed Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine, a quarterly periodical published by Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact [iwumag@iwu.edu](mailto:iwumag@iwu.edu).

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# Chapel of Love

**Twenty-five years after its construction, Evelyn Chapel continues to offer both beauty and meaning.**

**Story by Nicole Travis '11**

At its consecration ceremony on May 5, 1984, Evelyn Chapel was dedicated as “a statement of love to students now and in the future,” in the words of Scott W. Carlson, a 1974 IWU graduate and United Methodist pastor.

This past year, Illinois Wesleyan hosted a series of events commemorating Evelyn Chapel’s 25th anniversary and the special place it holds in the hearts of recent generations of IWU alumni who have found it a place of solace, contemplation and celebration since its founding.



**In 1984, workers placed the copper cupola atop the newly constructed Evelyn Chapel.**

1984 was the 200th anniversary of the Baltimore Christmas Conference, where about 60 Methodist ministers gathered to launch the Methodist Episcopal Church and subsequently establish John Wesley’s church and vision in the New World.

The chapel’s name honors a devoted supporter of Illinois Wesleyan and longtime Bloomington resident, Evelyn Sheehan. Her husband Jack was the namesake for Sheehan Library, which opened in 1979.

Given Evelyn’s central role in campus life, it may be surprising for IWU’s younger graduates to learn that, prior to 1984, the University was without a chapel for some 40 years. Evelyn’s predecessor, Amie Chapel, was destroyed in a fire that consumed Hedding Hall in 1943, and plans for a new chapel were continually postponed to allow for construction and renovation of academic and residential buildings. In the meantime, chapel services were held in Presser Hall’s Westbrook Auditorium, where a transportable altar was pushed onto the stage.

Timing for the new chapel’s opening turned out to be ideal, as

At the consecration ceremony on May 5, 1984, the congregation sat in folding chairs to welcome the \$1.7-million building to campus. Pews, carpet, cushions and the \$168,000 Casavant organ had yet to arrive, but the Illinois Wesleyan community nonetheless stood in awe of the chapel, modeled by Chicago architect Ben Weese after America's early Moravian architecture in memory of John Wesley, whose ministry and theology was strongly influenced by the Moravian Anabaptist movement.

Winning the 1985 Interior Architecture Award from the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and a similar award for the entire building in 1987, Evelyn was also featured in a cover story of the January 1985 issue of *Architecture*. The magazine praised the structure's simple elegance and "soaring spaces" that provided "a strong focal point for the campus" as well as "a strong sense of belonging."

That sense of belonging influenced the decision of couples such as Robb and Sarah McCoy to marry in Evelyn Chapel (also see the [main story](#)). "Illinois Wesleyan was our home," Robb explains. "It was where we formed our relationship, and it was the place we shared for three years. We both envisioned getting married in a place that felt like home to us, and that meant Bloomington — and, more specifically, it meant Evelyn Chapel."



**Amie Chapel served the University's religious needs from 1872 until 1930, when it was destroyed in the Hedding Hall fire.**