

THE WINDOWS

Those who tour our church remark about the artistic building itself and about the various aspects of the interior that make the church notable and memorable. The Centennial Celebration booklet shows and describes many of those points of interest.

An historical accounting of how our current church building came into existence can be found in:

1. "Gathered Sketches," prepared by Edmund Steele, Church Historian,
2. "Memorial of the First Congregational Charter," by Frank L. Greene,
3. "History of the First Congregational Church of St. Albans, Vermont," taken from an unknown source from Clare Sheppard,
4. "The First Congregational Church of St. Albans, Vermont Centennial Celebration," a booklet prepared by Ethan Newton, Organist, Clare Sheppard and Mr. and Mrs. Ed Steele, Church Historians, and Wade Smith, Architect.

In those detailed descriptions about our beginnings, one can follow the evolution of our Congregationalist heritage from the late 1700s to 1976 where "Sketches" ends. Our church membership continues to worship devoutly in the third and current building that was erected, following the fire that destroyed "First Church," in the years of 1892 to 1894. The architect, R. H. Robertson of New York designed our present structure in what was described as "modern with the Roman predominating."

This report is directed toward the church windows:

Tiffany windows:

1. John Gregory Smith (God shall wipe Away all Tears)
2. Ann Eliza Brainerd Smith ("Peace" – And Now Abideth These Three...)

Lamb windows:

– four windows in the lower Sanctuary:

1. Norris (Lord is my Shepherd)
2. Dickinson (Lift Mine Eyes Unto the Hills)
3. Gorton (Samuel – Speak Lord, for Thy Servant Heareth)
4. Carlisle (Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death)

– one choir loft window:

1. Atwood / Dutcher (Come let us Sing to the Lord)

“Yellow” windows:

Two large windows in the rear balcony have been removed and replaced with clear glass. Other “yellow” windows are located throughout the Sanctuary, large and small. Differing opinions regarding these yellow windows. Note that the hues vary in the different panes. Some professionals believe that these were installed in the building and intended to be temporary, to be replaced at a later date, and so, the quality of glass is inferior. Other professionals disagree, with opinions that the glass panes were each hand made and vary in color due to the process of glass production, adding that they were not inferior, but intended to last through time.

Clear, hand made, leaded small windows:

These are located at the rear of the Sanctuary and can also be seen in the “Anti-Room,” and “Fellowship Hall.” These are indeed treasures, never to be duplicated again. Each pane is different in its character, and each is surrounded with leaded separations and hand made Rosettes at each corner.

To better understand the church windows, their history, care, repair and upkeep, various professionals have been consulted from Massachusetts, Burlington and Derby, Vermont and Lyme, New Hampshire. Written information was also obtained from “Tiffany Windows: the indispensable book on Louis C. Tiffany’s masterworks,” by Alastair Duncan, in which one of the Tiffany windows of the 1st Congregational Church of St. Albans (Ann Eliza Brainerd Smith window), referred to as “Peace,” is featured.

Personal comments were obtained from Mr. Gregory Gorman, owner of The Studio, in Lyme, N.H., from his interview and from his report to our church, dated 12/7/99.

TIFFANY WINDOWS:

The Tiffany Project, in Greensboro, MD, an ongoing effort in search of existing Tiffany Windows, states that according to several authorities, only half of the windows originally made by Louis C. Tiffany remain in existence today. Our two Tiffany windows are described as “delightful treasures,” by Mr. Gorman, who continued by adding that they were notable and interesting by the many different techniques used in each one. It is thought that because of this, they are quite rare examples of this art.

Two leaders in research and experimentation emerged, in the late 1800s, at a time when glass art was its low point in demand and quality: John La Farge and Louis C. Tiffany. Both were accomplished painters. They, with others, began the movement known as the American School of Stained Glass, whose philosophy was simple: “a window’s definition should be contained as much as possible within the glass itself.” Tiffany’s talent, combined with the religious fervor of the 1870s lead to huge demand for church construction and decorative glass. Tiffany and La Farge were fierce rivals, but Tiffany gradually gained favor and success, despite the loss of two studios to fire.

Tiffany carefully guarded his secrets of mixes, formulas and temperatures. Even bubbles and blemishes of the finished product were noted and used in the pursuit of beauty. Finally, there was no color or texture that Tiffany could not produce. Mottled glass is the most characteristic and immediately identifiable as being “Tiffany,” as he was, and continues to be, renowned for the vast number of varieties he was able to create. It required the most rigid of temperature controls. Basically, the chemical, fluorine, was incorporated into a lead-based glass. Fluorine is a crystalline substance, which begins to collect in the glass in different patterns at different temperatures, creating “pulsating, two-color combinations.” Our windows definitely show this technique. Some glass pieces have three or more different colors. The Tiffany Studio was, at its creative height, the one leading the rest in such new techniques, none being able to duplicate the quality and artistic level that Tiffany achieved. His techniques could be duplicated today and are being duplicated, however, the expense is prohibitive and the quality remains quite below Tiffany’s norm.

Other techniques that are readily evident in our windows are:

– Drapery glass: This was really Tiffany’s invention. Created to simulate the folds in clothing and vestments, it was his greatest challenge and greatest achievement. The glass, while still molten, was thrown onto an iron table and rolled into a disk, which was pulled and twisted into folds that created various degrees of translucency. This technique was used for lilies and flower pedals and fabric.

– Fractured glass: Known as “confetti” glass, this is a method of embedding bits of colored glass into sheets of clear glass. Irregular colored chips and fragments of glass were scattered onto an iron table, on which was poured the hot, clear glass. The combination was rolled flat. This was highly effective for backgrounds in landscape, providing a diffused impression of looking through variegated foliage.

– Glass jewels: Molten glass was pressed into molds to form ovals or faceted prisms which, when set into the window, would produce brilliant gem-like effects, changing shades of color and brilliance when the viewer changed position. These were used in crowns, crucifixes, flower centers and as accents in geometric borders.

– Etched glass: This consists of two or more layers of glass rolled together while still molten to form a single sheet. The application of acid and acid resistant wax to the surface eats away the exposed areas to create two or multi-colored designs. A highly realistic effect was achieved, as evident in our windows, by etching a flashed opaque white-on-orange glass to produce the horizontal cloud formations in the sunsets.

– Plating: This technique was used to give more depth of color. Layers of glass placed on top of each other. In some of Tiffany's windows, six layers of glass were known to be used. Tiffany plated on both the front and back of his windows; the former tending to diffuse and soften the light and the latter providing perspective to landscapes.

NOTE: A technical problem resulting from Tiffany's extensive use of plating is the extensive weight of the accumulated layers of glass, predictably causing severe buckling and cracking typically occurs with Tiffany windows, as it has with ours.

All of these techniques are easily identifiable in our windows, as are combinations of these techniques, producing a truly artful product that is interesting from top to bottom and holds one's interest easily.

Also typical for Tiffany is the incorporation of another, opaque, single sheet of glass, which was installed behind the window. This was to diffuse the light coming through the window so that sunlight would not create "hot spots," and also to keep the elements away from the leading. Moisture of any kind is the enemy of leading, causing it to corrode and also causing the soft caulk, inside the leading, to harden.

Tiffany's business spanned 50 years. During that time there were thousands of windows created that are now "tucked away" in quiet villages across the United States. Many have been lost to fire, disrepair, vandalism or dissolving of church communities, to date. Considering the enormous volume of windows produced, there are remarkably few duplicates. More often two windows might reflect one style of vine, or figure, but the backgrounds would differ. The Studio was proud of its claim that each commission was unique. In the one or two instances where it bent this dictum, "it covered its trail by placing these windows in churches of different denominations, thousands of miles apart." A window of remarkable similarity to the John Smith window, called "Behold the Western Evening Light," was located in the Congregational Church in Newton Massachusetts. The church and window were destroyed by fire in the 1950s.

Our two Tiffany windows were commissioned in 1905 as memorials of John Gregory Smith and Ann Eliza Brainerd Smith. Because they are memorial windows and have religious texts, they would decrease in value as art. But because the text and memorials are in the lower sections of the window and divided from the main portion, they increase in artistic value. Unfortunately, the John Smith window has been “embellished” by a name scratched in the glass, below the Tiffany Studios signature. That damage decreases the value of that window. The upper portions contain no religious figure or theme, and so the value is increased. Evident in both is the variation of color within the glass, giving a realistic impression of the marble in the pillars and the leaves and flowers. The various hues of the skies are remarkable. The various sizes and shapes of the jewels at the top bring one’s eye upward to enjoy the entire window. The use of plating definitely gives the impression of depth in both windows.

LAMB WINDOWS:

We have five wonderful examples of the Lamb Studio windows in our Sanctuary. These are painted glass windows and so, are of artistic merit, certainly. The Lamb Studio is small and still is producing windows today. It is the oldest working glass studio in the country, having a lineage back to colonial days. It was still under the control of the Lamb family descendants at the time our windows were made. Their technique of color and design is noteworthy, making their windows prized. Each is decidedly different and took different talents from Katherine Tate-Lamb, who, most likely was the major designer and glass-painter of the three in the lower Sanctuary. The embellishments of those three is similar. The circular flourishes and borders that decorate each do provide a conformity that brings them together, yet the individuality of each is interesting. Strongly evident are the different styles of the faces of the figures.

The technique of using the strong blue color is useful to give the windows a noticeable 3-dimensional aspect. Blue tends to “come forward,” while red tends to “recede,” so red is often used in sunsets and background curtains. On close inspection, one can easily see brush strokes and finger smudges as decoration in the paint.

The choir loft window is quite different from the downstairs three. It is quite contemporary and could easily be described artistic and flowing. The figures and garments seem to be in movement. Of note about this window, is the fact that one can appreciate it as two distinctly different windows. From the floor of the Sanctuary, one sees the large figures and the scripture. The general coloration of the small pieces seems fragments of coloration behind the figures. From another perspective, a few feet away, in the loft, one sees a different window, as the figures seem to be of lesser importance and the smaller painted portions can now be seen and appreciated. Each small piece of glass has its own picture or contribution to the theme. The viewer is encouraged to ponder the reasons for the small “art statements” that complete the message of the window. It is a window that one can spend a long time in front of and viewed differently each time it is seen. Mr. Gorman knows, because of the creative style of the piece, that it is the work of Margareta Overbeck. He described the loft window as “an exceptional and rare thing” with “flair and deeply felt emotion.” Her fingerprints and other personal techniques can be enjoyed in this window that demonstrates her skill and fanciful approach to her work.

THE “YELLOW” SANCTUARY WINDOWS:

These windows, like most churches in New England, were typical of the first that were installed in newly built churches. They were intended to be temporary windows to be replaced by memorial windows after the costs of construction were paid. Our balcony windows have since been replaced with clear glass panels.

1. Other yellow windows:

They were intended to be temporary as well. Because of the lesser weight and because they do not face due west and suffer from the extreme heat, they are in better condition.

1. Clear leaded interior glass:

This glass is a treasure and has artistic merit in not only the unique quality of the glass itself, but also in the handmade, small corner circular pieces that join them, as well as the leading.

Our windows are unique and are, most assuredly, part of our historically rich building.

Information compiled, by Linda Smith, church Co-Historian.