

Connick Windows

Thoughts, news and comments concerning the art and craft of Connick stained glass, published periodically by....

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The Tree of Jesse Window (1904) by Ford & Brooks of Boston*

Lance Kasparian

Lance Kasparian is an architect and historian who has researched American stained glass for over twenty years. He kindly contributed reviews of books for our newsletters of October 2000, June 2002 and October 2002. In addition, he delivered the Orin E. Skinner annual lecture in November 2003.

* [This version of the February, 2005 Newsletter is an expansion of the printed version. Included here are bibliographic references as well as additional color photographs.]

In 1933, as Charles Connick reminisced about an earlier generation of Boston stained glass artists, he recalled that he had been impressed during the 1890s by the "decorative flatness of two new windows in a great Methodist Church" in Pittsburgh. This church was Christ Methodist Episcopal (now First United Methodist) and the maker of the windows was the Boston firm of Ford & Brooks. Installed around 1894, the windows featured pictorial panels designed by Charles Elliott Mills, who was an associate in the firm and also a Pittsburgh native. But it was almost certainly the sidelights and tracery panels that Connick recalled when he wrote that he never forgot the "substantial effectiveness" of these windows with their "flat chunks of glass, used honestly with heavy leads and barred with stout irons."¹

At the turn of the century, Ford & Brooks was in the fore of the American Arts & Crafts Movement. This was a time when stained glass artists were setting aside preoccupations with painterly aesthetics and the industrial arts, and exploring instead the ancient roots of their craft and the fields of contemporary architecture, graphic design, historical scholarship and belles lettres in search of a more unified and principled expression. Organized in 1890, the firm was initially connected with the decorative painter and interior designer W.J. McPherson² and styled as an artistic collaborative under the subtitle, "The Pelham Studios." This was probably a reference to the 18th century painter and pioneering mezzo-tint engraver, Peter Pelham (1697-1751), who was step-father and teacher of the young Copley, and also a leader behind the flourishing of the engraver's art in colonial New England.³ In the spirit of Pelham, Ford & Brooks embraced the philosophy of mutually helpful relations between artists and craftsmen and adopted the practice of recording the names of the "co-workers" who participated in their projects. Among the earliest works produced by the firm was the Hinkle Memorial window (1890) for Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati.⁴ This window incorporated McPherson's "crystal work" (i.e., jewel work cast in molten lead) as described in the judges reports for the Exhibition of American Art Industry sponsored by the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art in 1889.⁵

While the founders of the firm, Edwin M. Ford and Frederick Brooks, were both members of the Society of Arts & Crafts and the Somerset Club in Boston, little has been discovered about their backgrounds. Prior to establishing an independent stained glass studio in 1887, Edwin Ford (dates unknown) was head draftsman for E.P. Treadwell architect and stained glass designer in Boston.⁶ At the 1889 Exhibition of American Art Industry he earned a gold medal for stained glass and first prize for mosaics.⁷ Frederick Brooks (1859-1932) was the son of a wealthy Boston family and is known only to have studied painting with Lefebvre in Paris. Joining Ford & Brooks, was the painter and muralist Charles Elliott Mills (1856-1956), who had studied in Munich and Paris with Duveneck, Whistler and Carolus-Duran. Mills was a teacher at the Cowles School of Art and also a longstanding member of the Tavern Club in Boston.⁸ Another co-worker in the studio was Edith Brown (1872-1932), who was a graduate of the Boston Museum School and student of Arthur Wesley Dow and Denman Ross. Before joining the firm, Brown was a children's book illustrator and in 1908 she became artistic director of the Saturday Evening Girls and Paul Revere Pottery.⁹ In addition, there was Sydney P. Guild (dates unknown), a young designer respected by Connick,¹⁰ and also the artist Francis S. Sturgis (1853-1922) and architect Edmund Wheelwright (1854-1912).¹¹ How this collaborative was managed remains unclear. For the Class of 1875 window, *The French Explorers* (1895) in Memorial Hall at Harvard College, it was recorded that Ford & Brooks was selected to design and execute the work, but the cartoons were drawn by Mills who was largely responsible for execution. Sturgis, who was a member of the Class of 1875, was said to have "contributed much to the result," while Wheelwright "devoted time, thought, expert criticism, fine discrimination and able criticism."¹²

The firm of Ford & Brooks appeared in the *Boston Directory* for the last time in 1905. Thereafter the co-workers presumably disbanded and pursued individual artistic careers. In their fifteen years of collaborative enterprise Ford & Brooks created a notable body of primarily opalescent stained glass work, including a window in tribute to fellow stained glass artist Sarah Wyman Whitman at Trinity Church Parish House, Boston. In addition, there were windows at St. John's Episcopal Church, Stamford, CT; Mt. Auburn Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati; Church of the Holy City (Swedenborgian), Washington, D.C.; and *Massachusetts Mothering the Coming Woman of Liberty, Progress and Light*, a window exhibited in the Woman's Building at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and now at the Smithsonian of Stained Glass in Chicago.¹³

Connick's early opinion of Ford & Brooks would only have been enhanced by their 1904 chancel window produced for the Church of the Messiah (Episcopal) in Boston. This window was viewed by the rector of the parish as part of a strategy to join his faltering congregation to the surrounding residential neighborhood which was then blossoming along the trolley line between the Conservatory of Music, Symphony Hall, and the Museum of Fine Arts.¹⁴ Described as "an attempt to reproduce in modern glass the idea of the mediaeval *Jesse* window,"¹⁵ the window represented a heraldic design illustrating the lineage of Christ and the corresponding scriptural passage: "and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse and a branch shall grow out of his roots."¹⁶ Strictly regimented by its Perpendicular Gothic framework, this design is executed in a palette of opalescent glass marked by boldness and purity of color. This was a departure from the soft hued pictorialism and tonal effects which characterized the opalescent work of the period. Vine scrolls with shields and bosses painted in imitation of block printing reflect the popular influence of William Morris' Kelmscott Press. In contrast to the subordinate inscriptions in the borders of the firm's earlier work, this window places the text at the center of the design. Drafted in lead and glass, these inscriptions unite the crafts of the typographer and glazier and capitalize on the "decorative flatness" which Connick admired in the firm's work ten years earlier. This vivid graphic character, though undocumented, is possibly attributable to Edith Brown or Sydney Guild. Altogether Ford & Brooks captured in this window the spirit of the emerging Arts & Crafts and neo-Gothic Movements and a delight in the art of the book. Located at the corner of St. Stephen and Gainsboro Street, this church was more recently known as St. Anne's University Parish at Northeastern University until it was closed in October of 2004 by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston. The current status of the church property and the future of this notable window are presently unclear. - [LK, February 22, 2005]

¹ Charles J. Connick, "Boston Stained Glass Craftsmen," *Stained Glass* (Summer 1933): 84-93. This article was also published in *The New England Architect and Builder* (April-May 1933); and in Connick's monumental volume, *Adventures in Light and Color* (New York: Random House, 1937): 400-402, n. 38.

² *Boston Directory* (Boston: Adams Sampson & Company, 1889-92). McPherson shared an address with the firm at 44 Boylston Street from 1889-92.

³ William H. Whitmore, *Notes Concerning Peter Pelham, The Earliest Artist Resident In New England and His Successors Prior to the Revolution* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1867), pp. 3-4.

⁴ Boston Architectural Club, *Catalogue of the First Annual Exhibition of the Boston Architectural Club* (May 1890). The lower panels of the window were shown at the exhibition and cited as the work of "The Pelham Studios... coworkers: Edwin Ford, Frederick Brooks, Charles M. (sic) Mills and Edith M. Brown." The Hinkle Memorial window may be viewed on-line at: <http://www.mtauburnpresby.org/>

⁵ The Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, *Exhibition of American Art Industry of 1889, including a competition for American Workmen. Pottery and Porcelain; Glass-Ware; Terra Cotta; Tiles; Stained Glass; Mosaic Work. Awards and Reports of the Judges* (Philadelphia, n.p. 1889), pp. 31.

⁶ *Boston Directory* (1883-1886).

⁷ Pennsylvania Museum, *Exhibition of American Art Industry*, pp. 30, 34 and 36.

⁸ Biographical information for Ford, Brooks, and Mills is taken from research by the late Mason Hammond (1903-2002), Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature Emeritus at Harvard University. Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library, Cambridge, MA, Hammond, *The Stained Glass Windows in Memorial Hall, Harvard University* (unpublished manuscript, 1978): 256-72. See also: *Catalog for Cowles Art Institute (Formerly Cowles Art School) Season of 1899-1900*, which lists Mills as visiting faculty.

⁹ Kate Clifford Larson, *The Saturday Evening Girls: A Social Experiment in Class Bridging and Cross Cultural Female Dominion Building in Turn of the Century Boston*, (M.A. Thesis, Simmons College, 1995).

¹⁰ Connick, "Boston Craftsmen," p. 84. See also: *Boston Directory* (1891-1902). Prior to joining Ford & Brooks in 1891, Guild was associated with the Tiffany Glass Co. in Boston, see *Boston Architectural Club Catalogue* (May 1890), p. 51.

¹¹ Hammond: 271.

¹² Hammond: 258.

¹³ *Massachusetts Mothering the Coming Woman of Liberty...* may be viewed on-line at: http://www.navypier.com/SubLink.cfm?Main_ID=15&Sub_ID=7

¹⁴ Rev. John McGaw Foster, "Strategic Position of the Church of the Messiah," *The Church Militant* (April, 1903): 6.

¹⁵ Rev. John McGaw Foster, "The Church of the Messiah," *The Church Militant* (October, 1904): 22-23.

¹⁶ Isaiah 11:1

The Tree of Jesse Window

Originally made in 1904 for the Church of the Messiah (Episcopal) in Boston by Ford & Brooks

Three detail images are shown below the full window.

All photograph are by Lance Kasparian.

