

Connick Windows

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

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Ralph Adams Cram and the "Early School" of American Stained Glass

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"In the 1890s [Bertram] Goodhue was the dominant partner, as one might expect, in matters of stained glass; after [Christopher] Whall, stained glass seems to have become at least as much RAC's province. Eventually this was so much the case that RAC may justly be thought the dominant influence on American stained glass of the first half of the twentieth century."

If one wishes to explore the history of stained glass in the United States in the 20th-century, there is no better starting point than this passage, published in 1995 and tucked away in a footnote on page 501 in Volume 1 of Douglass Shand-Tucci's *Ralph Adams Cram: Life and Architecture* (henceforth Cram 1).

In 1997 Jean M. Farnsworth observed: "Our understanding of the history of America's stained glass is still in its infancy." A few years earlier, Linda Papanicolaou had called the period between glass designers William Bolton and John La Farge—1840-1880—"something of a 'dark ages'" in the study of glass in the United States. I would extend the "dark ages" another 30 years to 1910; while the history of opalescent glass has been extensively if somewhat uncritically documented, the indigenous revival of traditional antique glass design and fabrication has generated little scholarly heat and less light.

Ancient Yet Modern

The impetus to create contemporary stained glass windows inspired by medieval practice in the USA was largely due to the influence of English designer, writer, and social activist William Morris, his collaborators, and the younger architects, artists, and craftsmen they influenced in the Arts & Crafts Movement, so named in 1888. The artistic climate favorable for such an undertaking in this country owed its vigor primarily to the successful revitalization of 11th-century forms by American architect H. H. Richardson in the 1870s and 80s. (The Gothic revival in the USA in the 1840s was a picturesque interlude comparable to 18th-century "Gothick"; the influence of English Gothic-revival architect A. N. W. Pugin, while not negligible, was minimal. Pugin's influence in the USA grew after Cram's work made an impact.)

Craftsmen first sought to recapture the characteristics of medieval glass—radiant color, architectural fitness, mosaic patterns of small segments of glass, pronounced leading—using opalescent or "American" glass. Between 1893 and 1896, Otto Heinigke of Heinigke & Bowen of Brooklyn, New York, made windows for churches designed by Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson that explored neo-medieval iconography in opalescent glass. In 1894 Ford & Brooks of Boston installed opalescent windows in a Pittsburgh church that impressed a young Charles Connick by their "decorative flatness . . . flat chunks of glass, used honestly with heavy leads, and barred with stout irons." In 1896 Harry E. Goodhue, working at Horace Phipps' glass shop in Boston, became CG&F's glazer of choice and continued the exploration of older forms in new material.

The first published theoretical statement came from Heinigke. In 1897 he wrote in *Architectural Review*: "The strong old work is today called archaic and mediaeval and out-of-date; yet the formulas, upon which this old designing was done, are as true now as when they were invented These principles only need adaptation to modern uses and demands; they are the alphabet with which we may make new volumes." Yet Heinigke, writing when opalescent glass making was ubiquitous, was not arguing that medieval practice was superior or should be normative, but that it could occupy a significant place in American glasswork and should not be excluded. Like most American artists, he traveled to Europe and saw the great cathedrals, but such trips were, of necessity, infrequent, and a black and white photograph a poor memento. Unlike British and Continental artists, Americans had no indigenous examples, no ready access to the art in situ, and few imported models to study. As Linda Papanicolaou reminds us: "as late as 1902, Otto Heinigke complained that there were only four pieces of medieval glass distributed among the museums in Boston, New York and Philadelphia in which artists could study glass painting techniques."

In 1901 Cram discussed stained glass windows in *Church Building*. "If sensationalism in the use of modelled and opalescent glass is the killing vice of American work, painted glass is very surely an equally deadly sin in English work." He didn't condemn American glass *per se*, but its use in windows recreating Renaissance-derived easel painting in glass. A stained glass window was to be "decorative," not "pictorial," "subordinate to its architectural environment It must continue the structural wall surface perfectly; therefore, it must be flat, without perspective and modelling." Each window is "a mosaic of pieces of glass" and leading was to be accentuated rather than minimized.

"The mediaeval workers in stained glass have discovered practically all that there was to know in their art In design, in religious feeling, in decorative quality and workmanship, in the spacing of the quarries and the distribution and proportioning of leads, they said the final word. We cannot even make some of the glass they made. We can make very wonderful substitutes that have certain splendid qualities of their own. All we can do is to use this as they would have used it, following implicitly their principles and their ideals."

He illustrated a 15th-century English window reproduced from Heinigke's 1897 article (and so credited) and a "modern English design" by Gerald Moira.

The first significant neo-medieval American window made of traditional hand-blown, "antique" glass appeared in 1902. Cram identified Harry Goodhue's Brown Memorial in CG&F's Emmanuel Church, Newport, R.I., as "perhaps the first successful attempt in America at restoring in any large space the principles that marked the great French glass of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries." This window marks the beginning of Harry Goodhue's exclusive use of antique glass. Recent research indicates that Heinigke designed antique glass aisle windows in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields in Philadelphia circa 1902, possibly earlier. They, glazers William Willet in Pittsburgh and Nicola D'Ascenzo in Philadelphia were soon creating modern windows (secular as well as sacred) that explored and adapted medieval forms and materials.



North window
First Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh
William Willet 1904-1905

In September 1907 Cram published "The Question of Ecclesiastical Stained Glass in the United States" in *Christian Art*. He praised the "genuine" and "vital" England glass of "Kempe, Hardmann, Heaton, Butler & Bayne, Clayton & Bell, Holliday, and, above all, Christopher Whall." He also praised the work of Heinigke, Goodhue, and Willet in the USA, noting that "there seems to be a genuine movement all along the line towards a return to the old principles that are yet new, since they are final and established for all time."

In 1907 the window Cram had commissioned in 1906 from English glazer Christopher Whall, "The Risen Christ," was installed in All Saints', Ashmont, Boston.

The Superiority of English Glass

Perhaps it was coincidental, but after 1907 Cram became impatient with American neo-medieval glass. That year William and his wife and partner Annie Lee Willet created windows for Calvary Church, Pittsburgh, including those in the Chancel and Lady Chapel. Harry Goodhue's studio contributed an aisle window. These, a Willet aisle window, and the south transept and south aisle windows by Heaton, Butler & Bayne were installed in 1907 and 1908.

On March 20, 1909, Cram sent a report to the Vestry of a visit he had made to Calvary Church on March 18th to examine the windows. He praised Willet's Chancel window as "unquestionably one of the most notable examples of the revival of the fundamental principles of the art of stained glass, as they were understood in France at the highest point of the development of mediaeval art." He characterized the Lady Chapel window (by Annie Lee Willet) as

"a more modern type of design and craftsmanship It has all the good qualities of the modern School of glass making, with none of its conspicuous defects . . . it has precisely that note of brilliancy and emphasis which is imperative, and is, I believe, in view of its position, far more satisfactory than would have been any window couched in earlier and more conservative terms."

The Goodhue window in the north aisle he assessed as "well in character with the work on the south side [by Heaton, Butler & Bayne] and is not subject to any serious criticism," an affirmative if not overly enthusiastic assessment.

Cram extravagantly praised the English firm's windows. The south aisle windows are "perhaps the finest sequence of modern windows in any church, whether old or new, whether in England, or the United States" and he stated that the south transept window elicited the "same degree of praise." He called the design of the not yet executed West "Apocalypse" window by Heaton, Butler & Bayne "thoroughly magnificent."

Finally, Cram addressed future windows, especially the north transept: "it must follow the English lines, rather than those adopted in the case of the chancel window, or the window in the Lady Chapel I cannot believe that in this particular position any American window would justify itself."

In 1909 Cram turned again to Christopher Whall and commissioned five clerestory windows for Boston's Church of the Advent, installed in 1910.

Cram's Dissatisfaction with the Early School of American Stained Glass

The "early school"—the term is Charles Connick's—of American stained glass had, despite the occasional success and signs of progress, not measured up to Cram's requirements for fully neo-medieval, modern stained glass windows in the English manner. American artists were unable or unwilling to ignore post-medieval developments in glass making and design. Heinigke, for example, who had not worked with Cram since the late-1890s, created neo-medieval windows that combined opalescent and antique glass. He also designed and made opalescent windows, skylights, etc. for Beaux-Arts architects. Letters and memoranda 1910-1913 at the Archives of American Art and the Willet Studios shed light on Willet's work at Calvary Church, West Point Chapel, and Proctor Hall, Princeton, and document tensions between the architect and the artist. Cram found Willet's designs insufficiently Gothic and Willet considered Cram's views on what constituted "correct" stained glass inconsistent and his manner patronizing and obstructive.

I am almost persuaded that after 1910 Cram would have exclusively used English glass, had it not been for the appearance—and artistry—of Charles J. Connick, and the emergence of a younger, second generation of artists, both native-born and British émigrés.

Cram's Personality and Influence

The son of a Unitarian minister, Cram became an Anglo-Catholic and, like many converts, his commitment was extreme. In the 1950s architect Charles D. Maginnis recalled: "Cram had a mind of extraordinary positiveness which was never satisfied to hold a qualified conviction What he admired he exalted to the upper ether. What he disliked he consigned to the lower regions. In his criticism, there were no half tones." An assessment of Cram by Roman Catholic author Rose Macaulay is quoted in Cram 1: "unbalanced and child-like enthusiasm—even fanaticism—and idealism, combined with such good architectural knowledge."

Prone to rigid (if changing) assessments, Cram had an instinctive tendency to see what he wanted to see or believed should be seen. He lacked the complex social vision of William Morris, whose medievalism was neither religious nor sectarian, or the artistic breadth of Bertram Goodhue, Cram's partner and Harry Goodhue's elder brother. Yet, Cram's single-minded enthusiasms engendered great ecclesiastical art. He did create something that had hitherto not existed: American Gothic architecture (which American scholars are still struggling to comprehend). Roman Catholic architects took note, and to Cram's surprise, so did Protestant denominations. He had the ability to elicit distinguished work from firms that often produced inferior glass. If he reduced Arts & Crafts to ecclesiastical decoration, he nonetheless inspired great artist-craftsmen (too many in fact to name here). He brought the work of Christopher Whall, the leading English Arts & Crafts glazer, to America.

Cram's version of how stained glass was revived in the United States censored the trajectory of events and excluded early practitioners. He couldn't admit that differing artistic viewpoints and trial-and-error (including his own) marked the early years. In 1924 he turned the long-dead Otto Heinigke into an icon, while misrepresenting the character of Heinigke's career. Cram ignored Harry Goodhue's early advocacy and his mentoring of stained glass artists Wilbur Burnham, Joseph Reynolds, and the most gifted of Harry's pupils, his son Wright, although Cram greatly benefited from their artistry. Willet refused to be browbeaten; as he wrote to Dean West of Princeton: "We have no desire to discredit Mr. Cram's judgment or good taste . . . we only object to his dictating as to how we should do things and to binding ourselves to his approval." Cram ignored Willet's contribution to the revival of stained glass in the USA.

Charles Connick—an artist-craftsman, not an ideologue—illustrated windows by Willet, Heinigke, D'Ascenzo, Young & Bonawit, Burne-Jones, and Whall, together with his own work, in a 1915 article, "Stained and Painted Glass." Connick's inclusion of Willet was more than honest historiography; it reflected Willet's critical place in the younger artist's development. In 1937 Connick, who led the second generation of American stained glass artists, wrote in his autobiography: "Some versions by William Willet in Pittsburgh and others by Christopher Whall in Boston helped toward [my] conversion to active light and color." He also called Willet:

"one of the pioneers in American stained and painted glass. He followed precedents in a manner of his own and combined traditions of early work in France and England with an exquisite detail in painted figures and faces that showed the influence of later schools . . . his work in many Pittsburgh and Philadelphia churches, in West Point and Princeton, is eloquent of talent and sincerity that have long encouraged every American craftsman in stained glass."

"We are richer," Connick wrote, "for those who have preceded us." He was speaking of the American pioneers of stained glass. He was also speaking, unquestionably—and despite his frailties and foibles—of Ralph Adams Cram.

Sources and Acknowledgments

Henry Lee Willet papers and business records, 1885-1965, and Charles Donagh Maginnis papers, 1900-1980, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Many of the publications cited here will be found in the bibliography and footnotes to my articles, "Harry Eldredge Goodhue: Pioneer of American Stained Glass," *The Stained Glass Quarterly* 99:1 (Spring 2004): 54-67, and "Harry Wright Goodhue: Stained Glass of Unsurpassed Distinction and Rare Beauty," *The Stained Glass Quarterly* 99:2 (Summer 2004), forthcoming. Other publications include: Otto Heinigke, "Architectural Sympathy in Lead Glass," *Architectural Review* 4:8 (December 1, 1897): 60-64; Ralph Adams Cram, *Church Building*, Boston: Small, Maynard & Company, 1901: 135-150; Otto Heinigke, "Rambling Thoughts of a Glass Man," *The Craftsman* 3:3 (December 1902): 170-182; George Herbertson Charles [Charles J. Connick], "Stained and Painted Glass," *American Churches*, Vol. 1. New York: The American Architect, 1915: 67-83; Linda Papanicolaou, "Owen Doremus (1819-78): Another Pre-Opalescent American Stained Glass Maker," *Stained Glass* 89 (Fall 1994): 189-191, 224-229; Jean M. Farnsworth, "An American Bias for Foreign Stained Glass," *19th Century* 17:2 (1997): 15-20. Information from Martin Aurand, Peter Cormack, Jean Farnsworth, and Helene Weis is gratefully acknowledged.

- At its annual meeting on April 5th, The Connick Foundation welcomed two new directors: Robert E. Reber, retired dean of Auburn Seminary in New York City and James R. Salzmann, Director of Development at Harvard University.
- The Boston Public Library and The Connick Foundation are organizing an exhibition in the Boston Room, Boston Public Library, Copley Square, Boston from June 7th to June 30th 2004. The exhibition will consist of stained glass exhibition panels, cartoons, designs, and correspondence that the Connick Studio gave to the Boston Public Library when it closed. Books from the Connick Studio's library that inspired the exhibition panels will also be on display.
- The Stained Glass Association of America will hold its summer convention in Boston from June 25th - 30th. Information can be found on their web page http://www.stainedglass.org/main_pages/association_pages/conf.html