

Connick Windows

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

The Charles J. Connick Stained Glass Foundation, Ltd., Orin E. Skinner, Founder, Marilyn B. Justice, President October, 2004

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"There is no Frigate like a Book to take us Lands away" STAINED GLASS BY CHARLES J. CONNICK & ASSOCIATES

Janice H. Chadbourne



*There is no Frigate like a Book to take us
Lands away*
Emily Dickinson

Stained glass design: Charles Connick 1939
Photograph: Peter Cormack

The work on display illustrates stained glass that was inspired by literature, poetry, history, art, music, famous personages, nature, symbolism, commerce and industry, the armed services, and, of course, the Bible. It is our hope that this exhibition will either introduce you to or reacquaint you with the Connick Studio Archive at the Boston Public Library. This exhibition is a collaboration effort between the Boston Public Library, Fine Arts Department and The Connick Foundation.

In 1912 Charles J. Connick established his stained glass studio at 9-11 Harcourt Street, Back Bay, Boston. The Studio grew and developed into a premier stained glass artists' community. Collaborating with leading architects of the early twentieth century, Charles J. Connick and his dedicated workers in glass revived the medieval tradition of light transmitted through pure, unobstructed colored glass in a modern expression. Architect Charles D. Maginnis wrote of the Connick Studio's work: "...There has been successfully transplanted here in a fresh loveliness, a sane and beautiful tradition, and a glowing page has been added to the annals of American art".

When the Connick Studio, a cooperative, closed in 1986, their vast collection of records and art works spanning 74 years was given to the Boston Public Library. A few selected materials were retained by the newly organized Connick Foundation.

As part of its aspirations, the Connick Studio wished to inspire the public with an understanding and knowledge of stained glass. Exhibition panels were made in the Studio using designs of some of their favorite commissions and sent to various places for exhibition. The Boston Public Library inherited forty of these panels as well as designs, cartoons (full size charcoal drawings of windows indicating lead lines) for most of the Connick Studio's commissions.

As you peruse the material and art work here you will get a sense of the tremendous talent, production and vision of the Connick Studio. You will also understand that because of the workshop's use of materials and because of the condition of heat and dust in the Studio, the Connick Archive is in great need of conservation work. A few pieces have been conserved for this exhibition, but thousands of designs, cartoons and correspondence files are at jeopardy and need attention soon.

The title of the exhibition has been taken from a panel that Charles J. Connick created for the Newtonville Library in 1939. His vision of Emily Dickinson's poem beginning "There is no Frigate like a Book" inspired the panel and is perfectly fitting not only for a library, but also for a library's exhibition! The Boston Public Library was given the Connick Studio's library, a diverse collection of books covering a wide range of topics. The Connick craftsmen frequently referred to these volumes, and also utilized the resources of the Boston Public Library -- to study pictorial composition, color, attributes of the saints, historic costume, lettering, hymns, church liturgy, medieval culture, American history, works of art and architecture, and great works of prose and poetry.

Connick saw stained glass as a handmaiden to architecture. Although the language might be somewhat archaic, this concept recognized stained glass as part of the architectural fabric, as an element that needed to harmonize in color and design scheme with its environment. The Studio's relationship to the architect and architecture were important to the creative process and is often very apparent in the correspondence files of the Connick Archive.

All material used in this exhibition belongs to the Boston Public Library with the exception of the "There is no frigate like a book" glass panel (Private Collection) and "There is no frigate like a book" cartoon (The Connick Foundation Collection).

The Fine Arts Department gratefully acknowledges:

- The Connick Foundation who funded the conservation of the stained glass panels, as well as selected gouaches, cartoons, photographs, and the diorama.
- Joseph Ferguson, stained glass artist and sculptor, who restored the diorama.
- Daniel Maher Stained Glass Studio, Somerville MA, who restored and installed the stained glass panels.
- At the Boston Public Library, James Meade and the Buildings Office staff (including the carpenters, laborers, and custodians), Mary Bender of the Communications Office, James McGlone, Clerk of the Trustees, Mary Beth Dunhouse of Special Collections, John Dorsey of the Research Library Office, and Ted Whiteside of the Library's storage facility.

Janice H. Chadbourne is Curator of the Connick Collection and Curator of Fine Arts, Boston Public Library. This article is Ms. Chadbourne's introduction to the June 7th to August 31st 2004 Connick Studio exhibition, 'There is no Frigate like a Book'. The exhibition was displayed in the Boston Room of the Johnson building, Boston Public Library, Copley Square.

The Orin E. Skinner Lecture will be given by James O'Gorman 10 November 2004 in Rabb Lecture Hall, Boston Public Library, Copley Square, Boston at 6:30 pm. The lecture will be a slide presentation entitled "The Arts and Crafts Movement: Two Bridges to Boston." It is co-sponsored by the Boston Public Library and The Connick Foundation and is free and open to the public.

Peter Cormack pays tribute to the English stained glass artist Alan Younger (1933-2004), who gave the Foundation's Orin Skinner Memorial Lecture in November 2002:

Alan Younger, who died in May this year, was one of the most distinguished stained glass artists of the post-1945 era. A really superb craftsman as well as a gifted designer, he worked in the spirit of the Arts & Crafts Movement, of men like William Morris and Christopher Whall whom he greatly admired. But although he revered the craft's great traditions, from the Middle Ages onwards, Alan's vision always remained expressively personal and modern. His windows in some of the great English Cathedrals - Durham, St. Albans, Chester - and in parish churches throughout Britain are thoughtful and poetic exercises in harmonising his own contemporary idiom within the context of historic architecture. That he invariably succeeded in this challenging task was largely, I believe, due to his total commitment to craftsmanship. He almost always worked on his own, retaining control over every creative and technical process, nurturing every individual piece of glass, so that his windows truly embody in a very direct way his warm and multi-faceted personality.

It's to Alan that I owe my own introduction to the Connick Foundation. He had corresponded with Orin Skinner in the 1980s and developed a fascination for the Connick Studio's achievements, an interest which I soon came to share fully. Some of my most treasured memories of Alan are of our regular slide-show sessions devoted to early twentieth-century American and British stained glass. Alan's always-perceptive comments were like a 'master-class' in appreciating and analysing the aesthetics and technique of the craft.

Other cherished memories are of watching Alan at work in his tiny garden studio at Crystal Palace (how appropriate for such a consummate 'glassman'!) in south London. He was a wonderful colourist and understood how glass-painting - 'clothing the raw glass with texture', in Whall's phrase - could make his rich colours smoulder with living, ever-changing light. Alan Younger's great rose window at St. Albans Cathedral (1989) and his Henry VII Chapel window at Westminster Abbey (2000) are among the masterpieces of modern stained glass. They will thrill and move lovers of light and colour for generations to come.