

# Connick Windows

Thoughts, news and comments concerning the art and craft of Connick stained glass, published periodically by...  
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## Whose Colonial Revival? Connick Depicts the Origins of New England

Judith A. Neiswander, Ph.D.

On September 25, 1932, the congregation of Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis dedicated the Pilgrim Memorial Window, designed by Charles Connick and fabricated in his Boston studio. The window was the gift of General Charles McC. Reeve, in memory of his father, Isaac V. D. Reeve, who had served on the church's Board of Deacons. Along with its adjacent mate, the Plymouth Colony Window, the Pilgrim Window offers a compelling illustration of Connick's attitude toward picturing America's colonial past.

The window consists of three trefoil-arched lancets glazed with diamond-shaped quarries of slab glass in the palest tints of blue, green, yellow, and rose. In the center lancet is the figure of John Robinson, one of the fathers of American Congregationalism, standing above the seal of the City of Leyden in the Netherlands, the Pilgrims' home before crossing the Atlantic. Clustered about his head are the words "More Light and Truth will break forth from His Holy Word." A star above and a lighted candle near Robinson's feet reiterate the theme of emanating radiance. At the bottom of the window a Pilgrim family reverently approaches a meetinghouse.



*Pilgrim Memorial Window, Plymouth Congregational Church, Minneapolis  
Image courtesy of Plymouth Congregational Church. Glenn D. Griffin, photographer.*

In the lancet on the left, a medallion depicts William Brewster, leader of the colonists, giving thanks for the safe voyage of the Mayflower. Small images include symbols of male and female industriousness: a Pilgrim father armed with a hunting rifle is paired with a spinning wheel, respectively. The right lancet bears a medallion of the first governor of the Plymouth Colony, William Bradford, who records his meeting with Massasoit, chief of the Wampanoag Indians, in a book labeled "The History of Plymouth Plantation." The narrative of peaceful settlement is reinforced by smaller images of an Indian with a peace pipe and an empty powder horn.

Connick was no stranger to this kind of imagery. He had already featured early American notables in a number of church windows and, as he wrote to Harington Beard of the church's building committee, "The idea of celebrating character and spiritual power in figures that approach our own time as well as that of the apostolic era, appeals greatly to me".<sup>1</sup> While entirely descriptive of this church's denominational origins, such images - candles and spinning wheels, sturdy settlers carrying muskets, and friendly Indians bearing peace pipes - were also part of the vocabulary of the Colonial Revival, a style of architecture and domestic interior furnishing that was ascendant during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the United States.

Like the Classicism of the ancient world, motifs from the colonial past have been revived many times and served many purposes. At the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia a reconstructed "colonial kitchen," complete with spinning wheel and costumed interpreters, was mobbed with visitors and served to underscore the overall theme of the exhibition, that American industrial progress was based on the diligence of a small band of early Anglo-Saxon settlers rather than on subsequent waves of multi-ethnic immigration. During the last decades of the 19th century, representations of colonial life often acquired a highly romanticized and sentimental gloss. Novels and paintings, such as F. D. Millet's *A Cosy Corner* (1884, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York), portrayed quaint "Old Tyme" domestic settings peopled with ladies in fanciful colonial dress surrounded by rustic butter churns, brass warming pans, and dainty blue and white china, and many homeowners enthusiastically followed this model.

During the 1920s and 30s, popular interest in the Colonial Revival became even more widespread. While some writers, architects, and artists continued to interpret it freely, others sought to shed a more serious, and more historically accurate, light on the early years of the national past. Books like *In the American Grain* by William Carlos Williams debunked earlier hagiographic accounts of America's founders. Architectural journals increasingly featured measured drawings of colonial buildings and the professional restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, with its subsequent licensing of "approved reproductions" of paint colors, lighting fixtures and hardware, had a decisive impact on interior design.

Connick despised the saccharine pictures of "Early American" play-acting. His commitment to historical authenticity can be seen in every aspect of the Pilgrim window, from his choice of a calligraphic uncial script for the lettering to his use of slab glass of varying thicknesses and textures clearly punctuated with pontil scars, such as might be found in a window of the 17th century. According to notes in the studio's archives, Connick consulted the most up-to-date sources of historical scholarship for details of costume and artifacts. These included *The Pilgrim Fathers from a Dutch Point of View* by the Netherlandish historian Daniel Plooi, published in 1932, the year the window was made, as well as *The Pageant of America*, a 15-volume study published between 1925 and 1929 that integrated lengthy essays by eminent historians with profuse illustrations.

Surviving correspondence also documents Connick's dedication to original sources in his negotiations with the donor and church authorities. By June of 1931 a design had been approved, but when a small dispute ensued over the images in the right lancet, Connick was quick to defend his documentation. "I am sending herewith a photograph of the completed cartoons for the Reeve memorial window," Connick wrote in July. "I am including a photograph of the design so that you can see just how we have developed it. For example, the Candle replaces the Lamp as being more significant of the period, and the small figure of the famous Indian, Massasoit, replaces the rather too obvious powder horn."<sup>2</sup> But General Reeve, a military man, liked the powder horn. Connick conceded and replaced it, but insisted on retaining Massasoit, "as Bradford especially mentioned him in his accounts. I have a very precious old book by Bradford, *Records of the Plymouth Colony*, which has served to excellent purpose."<sup>3</sup>

Connick again appealed to Bradford's account in his final skirmish with the church, this time with Dr. Dewey, the minister. Dewey wrote to Connick the day after the window's dedication to thank him, noting that the donors were very much pleased. Nevertheless, he objected to what he described as the "austere, somewhat cadaverous countenance" of Robinson and asked that Connick change the face to be "more pleasing" and of "greater appeal to young people."<sup>4</sup> Connick was swift to defend his sources and to emphatically distance himself from the sentimental excesses of the early Colonial Revival: "I am fortunate enough to have a rare copy of the volume devoted to the 'Plymouth Plantation' by Governor Bradford, and it was through my study of that more than from any other source that I got my conception of Robinson. That is a conception to be presented in the design of stained glass, rather than in the pictorial portrait.....The characteristics of Robinson that can be symbolized in his face are earnestness, sincerity and fortitude, with only a suggestion of gentleness. For I abhor and deprecate the sort of modish sweetness that often characterizes a glass man's intent to go beyond his real medium."<sup>5</sup> The face of John Robinson has remained unchanged, and as authentic as Connick could make it.

<sup>1</sup> 11/5/1931, C to Harington Beard. All correspondence from the Connick Studio archives, Fine Arts Department, Boston Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> 7/29/32, C to Joseph Kingman, head of the memorial committee.

<sup>3</sup> 8/12/32, C to JK. Bradford's account, *Of Plimoth Plantation*, was discovered in the Bishop of London's library in the 1850s and first published in London in 1856. It was returned to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1897 and published in Boston the same year. It is not known what edition Connick owned.

<sup>4</sup> 9/26/32, Rev. Harry P. Dewey to C.

<sup>5</sup> 9/29/32, C to HD. Joseph Kingman subsequently wrote to Connick "I think you answered Dr. Dewey very wisely..." (10/13/32, JK to C).

Judith A. Neiswander, Ph.D. is an independent scholar and author on architecture, decorative arts, material culture and domestic life. Her books include *The Cosmopolitan Interior: Liberalism and the British Home, 1870-1914*, Yale University Press (2008) and *Stained and Art Glass*, Intelligent Layman Publishers, London (2005), co-authored with stained-glass artist Caroline Swash. She has held curatorial positions at the Harvard University Art Museums and The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, taught the history of architecture and interior design at the University of Minnesota and edited the interior design sections of the 32-volume *Dictionary of Art* (1996). While living in the UK during 2003-2004 academic year Dr. Neiswander was a Research Fellow at the Stained Glass Museum in Ely. She has published widely on various topics in British and American art and architecture.

See *Connick Windows* June 1996 and October 1996 for an overview of Connick stained glass windows in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

■ The Connick Foundation's Orin W. Skinner Annual Lecture this Fall will be in conjunction with Back Bay Historical's Thomas Tunno Forbes Lecture. Albert Tannler, Historical Collections Director of Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, will speak on "Windows are Architecture": William Morris, Viollet-le-Duc, and the Artistic Journey of Charles J. Connick" at Church of Our Saviour, Longwood (25 Monmouth Street, Brookline) 2pm on October 18, 2009.

■ The Albert M. Tannler lecture, *Classical Perspective, Industrial Art, and American Gothic*, delivered on June 21, 2009, as one of six events in the program "Charles J. Connick: World-Class Stained Glass in Pittsburgh" is now available on the Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation web site. The direct link to the lecture can be found on the Connick Foundation web site [www.cjconnick.org](http://www.cjconnick.org).