

## **Stained Glass Restoration Project**

The Episcopal Christ Church in Manlius owes its survival to bold transformations throughout its long history and is, even now, in the midst of yet another. The stained glass windows are slowly being removed and restored thanks to the generosity of a single, anonymous donor who has financed the \$212,600 project in its entirety. This amount might not have been raised in time to save the windows from catastrophic damage.

Organized when Thomas Jefferson was president, in 1804, parishioners met in the old schoolhouse until the first church structure was built in 1813. Originally located further up the road on the grounds of the cemetery, the church's once vigorous membership had fallen off and by 1831, it was broke and the Vestry desperate for a solution.

Twice it was put up for sale, and both times there were no offers. Armed with what can only be courage, vision and most of all, faith, the Vestry voted to roll it down the hill on logs. And on October of 1832, they achieved the unthinkable "With the bell hanging and stoves standing, without racking the joints, or jarring off so much as a square foot of plastering."

It wasn't until February of 1867 that the first stained glass window was installed. Located behind the altar, the Taylor Memorial window depicts a sandaled St. Luke. Constructed in Buffalo by William Meyers it is a memorial to Dr. William Taylor, a prominent physician who died on September 16, 1865. This image was chosen because the Apostle St. Luke is the patron saint of physicians.

Also in progress is the American-made Babcock Rose window installed in 1911 on the south loft wall as a memorial to Lewis Babcock who died in 1901, thought to be a son of Theodore Babcock, a rector of Christ Church who served from 1883 to 1900. Most of the memorial windows were all ordered in 1889, with the donors being asked to choose designs that would work together.

None of these windows have been touched since they were installed and all are dulled by dirt accumulated over a century. The lead joining the stained glass pieces on the St. Luke window was badly deteriorated and the Babcock Rose window was beginning to bow. It is not just weather that takes its toll, but the weight of the window itself becomes its enemy as the glass starts to bow and then crack.

Only experts in the highly specialized field of stained glass restoration could manage such a project and we were lucky to find them here in Syracuse. The Brennan Stained Glass Studio, owned by Scott Brennan removed the first windows in July, gradually replacing those as they completed them and then removing the next four until all twelve windows are completely restored by the fall of 2014.

Syracuse has had a long history of stained glass restoration. It was once the home of the formidable Henry Keck Studio founded by its namesake in 1913. Mr. Keck was a German immigrant who became an apprentice at the age of twelve at the famed workshop of Louis Comfort Tiffany where he learned the craft of glass cutting and glazing. Upon his death in 1956,

Stanley Worden who had joined the company in 1922, became its new director and remained so until the company closed in 1974.

With the void left by the closing of the Keck Studio, Scott's father, who was a commercial glazier but also known as a talented artist, was getting calls to fix stained glass. So, in 1975, Bruce and his wife, Rosemary founded Brennan Stained Glass Studio to meet the immediate demand. Scott's father died very early in the business and so Scott and his mother kept it running, dropping all of the other architectural glass and focused just on the stained glass. And 26 year old Scott went to apprentice with Mr. Worden.

Scott smiles as he warms with the memory of this time and his affection and respect for the man he still addresses with formality is evident, "My training, under Mr. Worden, who was Mr. Keck's protégé for 50 years, consisted of going to his house 5 years in a row on a Friday with \$100 and a carton of cigarettes because he smoked like a fiend and he would now give secrets that he would never, ever have given away while he was in business. And they are secrets. I mean there are not 100 people in the country that know how to do it. There are still only 20 firms in the country that can do this work – excel at this."

Visiting the Brennan Stained Glass Studio would be like visiting another century were it not for the radio playing music in the background. Here you will find stained glass in various states of repair laid out on long tables where they are being meticulously restored using the simplest of tools. There is nothing "high tech" here unless it is the large kiln in the back room.

The glass pieces are being removed and then re-leaded with something called "lead came" an alloy created with lead, copper, tin, antimony and bismuth and formed into flexible strips. These strips join the pieces of glass into the design and have channels into which a bond material is inserted to keep the glass in place and then soldered into the piece as a whole. To call this process painstaking is an understatement.

Each segment is then measured so that the window will fit back into its frame; even being off by a fraction will result in throwing the whole window off. Reinforcement bars are in place to relieve the weight of the window and prevent bowing are being replaced and in some cases, additional ones will be added to each window.

Where the glass is broken, Brennan Studio can actually create new pieces made to an exact replica of the broken pieces. This is where the mechanics of the restoration meet the artistry. The painted details that are applied to the interior of the glass are not actually paint, but are made up of ground glass so fine that it becomes a powder. The powder is put onto the glass and then placed into the kiln where it fuses the color onto the glass at 1,300 degrees. Kilns like the one in the Brennan studio are accurate to within 2 degrees whereas in the old days they would simply look at them and see if they were red enough.

Restoration of the windows is only part of what will be done. Just as important are the new aluminum frames that will be placed on the outside of the window to protect them. Scott goes on, "What we do now in every church is we don't use plexi or lexan, we take what's put on the

windows of your car, laminated safety glass. It will break, but it stops the projectile. So this is the preservationist's glass of choice.”

The design for the new frames will follow the outline of the window pattern, and will be fabricated by custom frame designer in Jamaica, NY, J. Sussman, Inc. one of two companies nationwide that does this work.

Extreme care has to be taken with every phase of the operation, starting with the scaffolding that allows them access to the windows. “That’s why it costs money because just to GET to these windows, you see is really difficult. Because you’re handing down a \$300,000 window and you’ve got everybody’s faith in you and that’s a huge responsibility. It’s important.”

And he understands the historical nature of his work, “Our philosophy is that there are 300 people possibly looking at that work every week. That window is going to be out one time every 100 years – why skimp? And the pricing gives you everything you need. The top quality materials, that frame company is the best. Everything is the best because that’s what we do. And that’s what we’re so proud of because in every church’s life, every 100 years comes big decisions.”

The congregation had its first glimpse of what the complete restoration will look like with the return of the completed St. Luke window in September. The glass was clean and sparkling so that the movement of the leaves could be seen through the glass. It was a privilege to view the window as it was seen by the people in 1867.

Christ Church remains a thriving community and called its first female rector, the Reverend Dena Cleaver-Bartholomew, in 2009 whose thought-provoking sermons are illustrated with quotations from literature or sometimes rock music lyrics.

The old Hospitality House and adjacent residential property were razed in 2008 and replaced by a brand new community center which hosts meetings, First Friday dinners, rummage sales and an annual Christmas Mart where hand painted wooden Christmas ornaments have been sold for the past sixty years. What better way can Christ Church honor its past than to continue to write its history?