



Our Windows

A Guide to the Historic
Collection of Tiffany Windows



ARLINGTON
STREET CHURCH
Unitarian Universalist

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Tiffany window?

A Tiffany window is one created by Tiffany Studios, the company founded by Louis Tiffany in the 1890s.

Who was Louis Tiffany?

He was the son of Charles Tiffany, founder of the famous jewelry firm Tiffany & Co., which still exists. Tiffany Studios, however, went out of business shortly after the death of Louis Tiffany in 1933.

When were the windows installed?

Between 1899 and 1929. The church was dedicated in 1861. Almost 40 years later, in 1898, the congregation asked Tiffany Studios to design a set of twenty stained glass windows for the sanctuary. While executed over the next 30 years, they were all designed at the same time, creating a unique set.

Why are there windows with no stained glass?

The sixteenth window was installed in 1929, the year of the stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression. Tiffany windows were very expensive, and there was no money available for new windows for a number of years.

By the time money was again available, Louis Tiffany had died and the tons of unique Tiffany glass in warehouses in New York City had been destroyed. After 1937 it was impossible to create a genuine Tiffany window. A decision was made not to install windows of inferior quality.



GREAT SKILL AND PERFECTIONISM

The most distinctive aspect of any Tiffany stained glass window is the great skill and craftsmanship that went into its making. We are fortunate to be able to get close enough to our windows to observe the perfectionism with which they were created. They are far more complicated than they might seem

at first glance, and are certainly worth looking at closely. For instance, you might want to examine the hem of the robe of the musician on the left side of *The Madonna of The Flowers*. You will find it has an embroidered edge that can only be observed from a few inches away. No other stained glass maker would have bothered to include detail that would have most often gone unnoticed.

“PAINTINGS IN GLASS”

Louis Tiffany began his artistic career as an oil painter. When that failed to bring him the celebrity he sought, he formed a company he called Tiffany and Associates and, using his father’s connections with the rich and famous in New York City, he succeeded wildly, by anyone’s standards, as an interior decorator. The pinnacle of this success was marked by a request from President Chester Arthur to redo several rooms of the White House. It was during this phase of his career that Tiffany became fascinated, to the point of obsession, with stained glass as a medium of artistic expression. He is credited with virtually reinventing this art that dates back to the great medieval cathedrals of Europe. His stated goal was to combine both the fine arts and the decorative arts to produce what he called “paintings in glass.”

CONFETTI GLASS

When he became interested in stained glass, Tiffany made a trip to Europe where he studied records left by the great medieval stained glass artists. He also travelled to Italy, where he visited Venice, one of the great centers of glass blowing. Here he found a technique called “confetti glass” which he adapted to his own purposes. Confetti glass is created by shattering tissue-thin sheets of colored glass on a metal-topped table, then laying over the resultant shards a sheet of molten glass of another color. If you look among the branches in many of the trees in our windows, you will find that confetti glass has been used to create the impression of tightly-packed blossoms or foliage.

IRIDESCENT GLASS

While he was in Europe, Tiffany also came across glass produced by the ancient Romans, which has an iridescent sheen which fascinated him. No one was sure whether the iridescence was an effect created

intentionally by the Romans, or the result of the glass having been buried for several thousand years, but Tiffany was so taken by it that when he returned to the US, he set his chemists and glass blowers the task of recreating it in modern glass.



3-D EFFECTS

The folds in the robes of the figures depicted in our windows are actually in the glass. As it came through the rollers, a sheet of molten glass was seized with metal tongs, then twisted and turned to represent draped fabric. This is a distinctive feature of Tiffany windows and is called

drapery glass. Most other stained glass artists create this kind of detail by painting onto the glass with black paint, which darkens the windows.

SOFT COLORS

The magnificent stained glass windows of the great cathedrals of Europe were created using glass tinted in primary colors, intense blues, greens, reds, and yellows. Tiffany chose a different palette of colors to produce his “painting in glass,” one that consisted mostly of pastel colors, with more vivid primary colors reserved for accent. (Notice the effect created by the sparing use of red in *The Sermon on the Mount*.)

OPALESCENT “FAVRILE” GLASS

The generic name for the type of glass used by Tiffany Studios is opalescent glass, which sometimes takes on the appearance of mother-of-pearl. Since most of the color and detail in a Tiffany window is created in the glass, not painted onto the glass, the windows often seem to glow, even in dim light. Much of the glass in a Tiffany window has an iridescent sheen, which heightens the luminous effect, especially of the sky. Tiffany coined the term favrile glass for the unique types of glass he invented and/or developed for his windows.

LAYERS

There can be as many as six or seven layers of glass in a Tiffany window. This technic permitted a greater depth of color than did a single layer, as one finds in most other stained glass windows. If you look under of arm of the magnificent angel in the window entitled *The Message of the Angel to the Shepherds*, you can actually see the Star of Bethlehem through the angel's robe. To achieve the mother-of-pearl effect, Tiffany Studios would employ a surface layer of white milk glass, and place behind it several layers of marbled red, green, and/or blue glass. (They used this technique to stunning effect in *Jesus Blessing the Children*.)

BORDERS & SIGNATURES

Each of the scenes in our windows is surrounded by an intricate border in high art nouveau style, characterized by natural shapes and forms, such as leaves and flowers, as opposed to geometric forms. Tiffany Studios took the acanthus leaf from the beautiful Corinthian columns in our sanctuary and used it as the basis for the scroll that fills each border, brilliantly tying together the Greco-Roman interior of the sanctuary and the very 19th century style of the windows.



Tiffany windows are usually signed somewhere in the lower right-hand corner. Most of ours are signed Tiffany Studios.

FACES, HANDS, AND FEET

The faces, hands and feet of the figures, so graceful and elegant, were painted onto glass panels by an expert who specialized in this form of expression, then fired to produce a virtually indestructible, translucent, enamel-like surface.

DEDICATIONS

Our windows were paid for with funds donated in the memory of a former member of the congregation. Each window contains a small memorial panel, some listing only the initials of the deceased.



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