

ARTISTRY IN GLASS; THE UNDISPUTED MASTER, OUR OYSTER BAY NEIGHBOR

By Judith A. Spinzia

Judith Spinzia is the former president of the Long Island Studies Council. Since her retirement to Central Pennsylvania, she continues to find time, while pursuing projects "long set aside," to research and write about Long Island and the stained-glass windows of Louis Comfort Tiffany, always a special fascination.

The most recent work by Mrs. Spinzia is a collaboration with her husband Raymond, Long Island's North Shore Families and Their Estates. This four-volume database is on deposit at the Long Island Studies Institute, Hofstra University, for use by researchers interested in the estate era on Long Island. An article, "Gatsby: Myths and Realities of Long Island's North Shore Gold Coast," also co-authored by the Spinzias, appeared in the 1997 Nassau County Historical Society Journal.

Who was this Louis Comfort Tiffany? The question eventually arises in the minds of members of each new generation, who pass by the remnants of *Laurelton Hall* or view Tiffany's power house smoke stack with its stained-glass insets, inspired by the art of Islam, from the beach at the foot of Laurelton Beach Road or from a boat out on the bay. The answer all too often is a superficial, "Oh, you know, the man who made the lamps." There is so much more to this extraordinary artist who, together with a handful of "opalescent era" stained-glass artists, pioneered an

extraordinary American art form. The lamps, you ask? No, not the lamps! In fact, the manufacture of the lamps was a savvy business decision to use up the glass pieces left over from the ecclesiastical division. The lamps were an artistic embarrassment to Tiffany who supposedly neither spoke nor wrote about the objects which, ironically, brought the greatest profit to his firm.

Louis Comfort Tiffany died in 1932, by which time his art had fallen from favor. America and Americans had been changing in the late 1920s and 1930s. The nation endured the Depression and was hurtling toward a conflict in Europe again. The great, complex, allegorical ecclesiastical windows were "old-fashioned." Even the lamps were discarded to make way for "the new look." The eclectic, but fascinating, home which he designed in Laurel Hollow was destroyed by fire; its contents lost or dispersed to collections or museums or the ash heap. It seemed that Louis Comfort Tiffany was a forgotten talent.

The renewed interest in his art and his art form is heartening, especially to someone who has

learned to understand the complexity of his stained-glass images. In addition to his stained-glass legacy, many of his paintings survive and had he chosen to be a painter, instead of experimenting with glass to the glorious ends which he achieved, he would have succeeded as a painter and would still be acclaimed.

Long Islanders can be very grateful that the magnificent ecclesiastical windows that the artisans of Tiffany Studios created have not been destroyed



Louis C. Tiffany seated in one of his gardens, characteristically dressed in a white suit, a habit which necessitated changing suits three or four times a day.

or replaced by congregations, as is the fate of so many of these treasures throughout the country. They are still here for the public to enjoy and Tiffany did believe strongly that art should be accessible to all economic levels of society. Ninety-three have been identified and are listed in an appendix in the 1991 revised edition, *Long Island: A Guide to New York's Nassau and Suffolk Counties*. They are close at hand to inspire awe and to reaffirm the "artistry in glass" that was created by Tiffany and by those under his supervision, for nothing left his studio without his approval. There is a significant artistic difference if one closely evaluates commissions completed after 1916, after Tiffany's personal involvement in the design of ecclesiastical windows had ended with his retirement to Laurel Hollow and the establishment of his art school. Those completed by Westminster Memorial Studios after the 1932 bankruptcy of Tiffany Studios, using Tiffany Studios cartoons and glass and fabricated by former Tiffany artists and artisans, lack the lush, almost voluptuous, quality and are little more than lifeless mechanical ghosts of the original idea; ghosts that do not bring light to life.

The following chronology should help answer the question as to who was this Louis Comfort Tiffany and, hopefully, whet your appetite for pursuit of the artistic genius of the man. You will never look at glass or light the same way again; I can promise you that!

LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY: A SELECTED CHRONOLOGY
Relevant To the Man, His Work, and His Oyster Bay, Long Island Home

1848 Louis Comfort Tiffany was born in New York to Charles Lewis and Harriet Young Tiffany on February 18th. His father was a founding partner of Tiffany and Young which became Tiffany and Co. in 1853.

1865 Tiffany left school at seventeen years of age, choosing not to continue with formal education but to study painting instead. He had studied at Hushing Academy on Long Island and Eagleswood Military Academy in Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

1865-66 Tiffany toured Europe; the first of many visits.

1869 Tiffany lived in a studio at the 23rd Street Y.M.C.A. in New York City, across from the National Academy of Design.

1870s He continued to pursue a career in oil painting after returning from Europe, exhibiting regularly at the National Academy of Design, New York City.

1872 Louis married Mary Woodbridge Goddard (1846-1884), known as May.

1873 The first of their four children was born; Mary Woodbridge [Lusk] (1873-1963), Hilda Goddard (1879-1908), and Charles Lewis, II, (1878-1947),

survived to adulthood. Charles and his sister Mary, who married Dr. Graham Lusk, maintained homes in Laurel Hollow.

1875-77 Experiments continued at the Thill glasshouse in Brooklyn with the goal to eliminate the need for paint on windows. Drapery glass was developed during this period.

1878 Tiffany's first ecclesiastical figure window was installed in St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Islip, Long Island. The window was originally installed in the 1847 clapboard church which preceded the present Norwegian *stavkirke*. The window, *St. Mark*, was removed from the 1847 church and reinstalled in the 1880 church. In 1895 it was replaced by the nine lancets, presently in the church apse, by Tiffany and at his expense. The whereabouts of the original figure window is unknown.

Tiffany opened his first glasshouse under the supervision of Andrea Boldini of Venice. It burned down, as did his second glasshouse.

1879 L. C. Tiffany & Associated Artists was formed--Louis Comfort Tiffany, Samuel Colman, Lockwood de Forest, also a resident of the Town of Oyster Bay, and Candace Wheeler.

An abstract window was designed and installed in his apartment in the Bella Apartments in Manhattan.

1880-83 Tiffany's experimental work continued at the Louis Heidt Glasshouse in Brooklyn. John La Farge was also conducting experiments at Heidt at the same time.

1880 The trefoil pebble glass window was installed at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Islip, Long Island, at the same time that the first St. Mark (1878) was transferred to the new stave church.

Tiffany was granted two patents on November 25th for variations on the opalescent glass techniques originally developed by John La Farge, who first incorporated opalescent glass into windows. La Farge's patent was granted on November 10, 1879.

1882-83 L. C. Tiffany & Associated Artists redecorated several rooms and a corridor of the White House, Washington, D.C., by invitation of President Chester A. Arthur, who, incidentally, summered in Sag Harbor during his presidency.

1882 Tiffany continued interior design as Louis C. Tiffany and Co. while Candace Wheeler and her decorating associates became Associated Artists.

1884 Louis' first wife, May, died.

1885 Tiffany formed The Tiffany Glass Company Inc., New York City.

The Flower, Fish, and Fruit window was designed for the Garret home in Baltimore; one of

Tiffany's earliest floral commissions, now in the Baltimore Museum of Fine Art, Maryland. Tiffany liked it well enough to recreate it in his *Laurelton Hall* home on Long Island.

1886 Tiffany moved into the Romanesque mansion, which he designed with Stanford White, on the northwest corner of Madison Avenue and 72nd Street where he installed several windows including the *Magnolia* window, a triptych, which is now on display in The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, Winter Park, Florida, as is the magnificent

Butterfly window which responds to both transmitted and reflected light. The latter had also been in the 72nd Street home.

Louis married Louise Wakeman Knox (1851-1904). Three of their four children survived to adulthood; twins, Julia de Forest [Parker; Weld] (1887-1973) and Louise Comfort [Gilder] (1887-1974), and Dorothy Trimble [Burlingham] (1891-1979). Louise and her husband Rodman Gilder and Dorothy and her husband Dr. Robert Burlingham, maintained



The Townsend Jones Memorial window, Annunciation, St. John's Episcopal Church, Cold Spring Harbor, designed and fabricated by Tiffany Studios. Extensive use of opalescent glass and extravagant plating make this window one of the most beautiful in the Town of Oyster Bay.

homes in Laurel Hollow while Julia and her second husband Francis Minot Weld lived in Cold Spring Harbor.

1888 The Kempner Memorial window, *Christ Leaving the Praetorium*, was installed in St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It is believed to be Tiffany's largest figure window.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE
NEXT ISSUE OF
THE FREEHOLDER

ARTISTRY IN GLASS; THE UNDISPUTED MASTER, OUR OYSTER BAY NEIGHBOR, PART II

By Judith A. Spinzia

We now offer our readers the conclusion of Mrs. Spinzia's article on Louis Comfort Tiffany. In addition to this article, we are greatly indebted to the Spinzias for an exhaustive bibliography on Tiffany and his art which is available for researchers at the Historical Society's headquarters. All photographs in this article are courtesy of Raymond Spinzia.

LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY: A SELECTED CHRONOLOGY
Relevant To the Man, His Work, and His Oyster Bay, Long Island Home, Part II.

1890 Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company was formed from The Tiffany Glass Company and Louis C. Tiffany & Associated Artists.

Tiffany built a summer home, *The Briars*, at Oyster Bay, Long Island. The home was later owned by Tiffany's daughter Mary Woodbridge Tiffany and her husband, Dr. Graham Lusk.

1892 The earliest of several multi-paneled windows called *Four Seasons* was exhibited in Paris. It is now in the collection of The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, Winter Park, Florida. The later, and more impressionistic, version of the *Four Seasons* was created for the home of Walter Jennings, *Burrwood*, in Lloyd Harbor. Those four windows also survive and are in a private collection.

1893 Tiffany built a glasshouse in Corona, Queens. Although the first building

burned, the second building still stands today at the corner of 44th Ave. & 97th Pl. It was managed by Arthur Nash of Stourbridge, England. Dr. Parker McIlhenny, a chemist, also worked full-time with Tiffany.

The sanctuary lamp hanging in the nave of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Troy, New York, was part of the Columbian Exposition display which Tiffany brought to Chicago. Several windows, including *Feeding the Flamingos* now in The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art collection, Winter Park, Florida, and the 1893 *Minne-ha-ha* window now in the Public Library, Duluth, Minnesota, were included. The extraordinary Byzantine Chapel was also displayed.

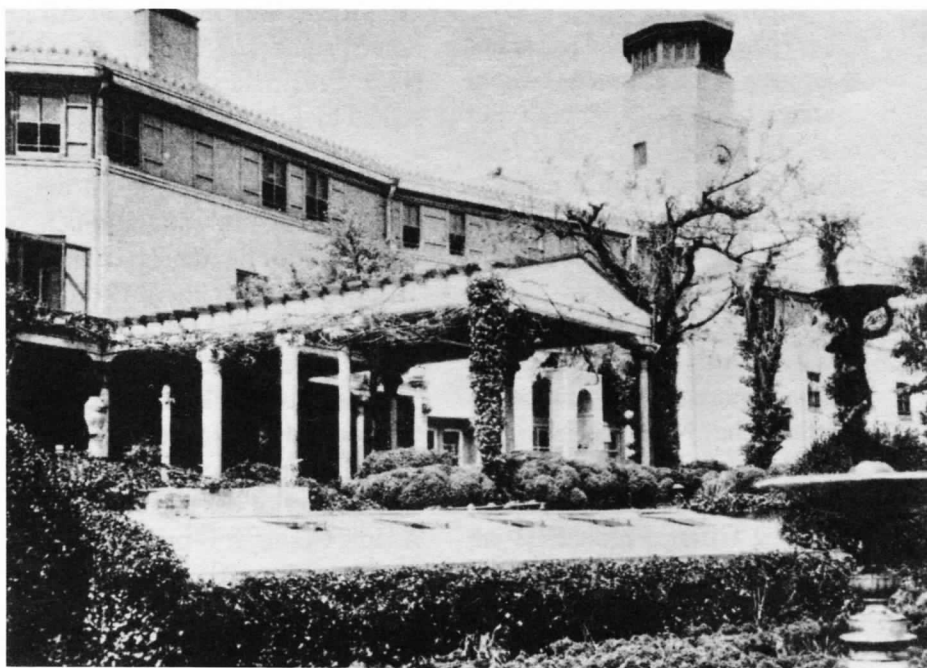
Tiffany's glass manufacturing was divided into Stourbridge Glass Co. and Allied Arts Co.

1894 Application was made to the United States Patent Office to patent the trademark "Favrile."

1895 The 9-paneled impressionistic apse window, *St. Mark*, in St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Islip, Long Island, was designed and installed. It replaced the 1878 St. Mark window. The Redmond Memorial window, *St. John*, was installed in the same church.

1897 During this peak design year, 200-300 tons of glass in 5,000 colors were stored in the Corona facility and, therefore, available for design.

The first list of window commissions was published.



Laurelton Hall, Tiffany's second mansion in Laurel Hollow; designed by Tiffany in an eclectic style using elements of North African and Art Nouveau styles, it was completed in 1904. It was destroyed by arson in 1957.

1898 The Johnson Memorial window, *Choir of Angels*, over the south transept of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Islip, Long Island, was installed.

1899 The Hyde Memorial window, *Recording Angel* and the Peters Memorial window, *Floral Design*- a magnificent lily and pansy Resurrection window- were installed at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Islip, Long Island. The latter was badly damaged in the fire of December 1899. It was restored by Jack Cushen.

The Chittenden Memorial window, *Education*, was installed in the Chittenden Library at Yale.

1900 Thin, neat leading and the increased use of copper coming replaced the heavy leading of the 1880s.

The Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company was renamed Tiffany Studios.

1902 Louis was named design director of Tiffany and Co. after the death of his father.

The Cryder Memorial window, *Sir Galahad*, in St. Andrew's Dune Church, Southampton, Long Island, was installed.

The glasshouse at Corona was renamed Tiffany Furnaces.

1903 The Northrop Memorial window, *The Vision of St. John*, in the Bowne Street (Reformed) Church, Flushing, NY, was installed; designed by

Agnes Northrop in memory of her father.

1904 The floor-to-ceiling opalescent glass screen by Louis C. Tiffany and Associated Artists for the White House was ordered destroyed by then President Theodore Roosevelt, Tiffany's Long Island neighbor.

Louis' second wife, Louise, died. *Laurelton Hall* was completed in Laurel Hollow, Oyster Bay, Long Island, overlooking Oyster Bay. Louis and his children moved into the mansion.

1906 The Frederic Betts Memorial window, *Landscape*, in St. Andrew's Dune Church, Southampton, Long Island, was installed.

1907 The Farnham Memorial window, *Angel with Landscape*, was installed in All Saints' Episcopal Church, Great Neck, Long Island; designed and signed by Edward P. Sperry.

1909 Tiffany designed the stained-glass fire curtain which was installed in the National Theatre, Mexico City in 1911.

The Tree of Life landscape was installed in the Sage Memorial Chapel of the First Presbyterian Church, Far Rockaway, NY, in a Gothic interior designed by Ralph Adams Cram. It is one of his largest landscape commissions.

1910 *A Partial List of Windows* was published; updated but incomplete.

1914 *The Bathers* window was created without flesh painting and installed in *Laurelton Hall*.

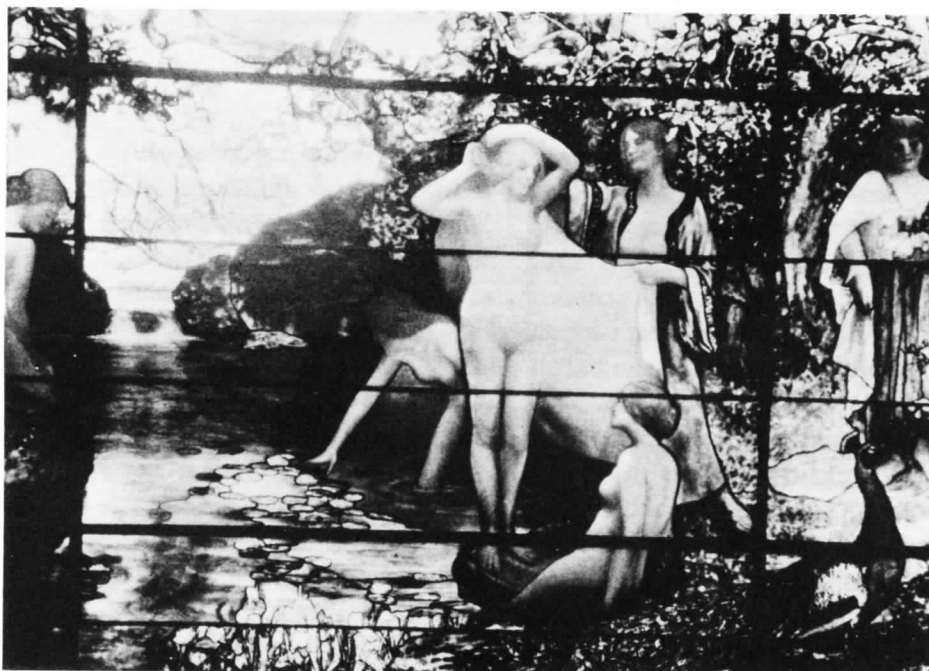
The Artwork of Louis C. Tiffany was privately published by Doubleday, Page, and Company, Garden City, Long Island. Tiffany dictated it to Charles de Kay. Few copies were printed and fewer survive.

1915 Nicoll Memorial window, *Blessed Are the Pure in Heart*, was installed in St. Andrew's Dune Church, Southampton, Long Island.

The Dream Garden mosaic mural was installed in the lobby of the Curtis Publishing Company, Philadelphia, PA. This was a joint venture with Maxfield Parrish, whose painting was used to make the cartoon for the mosaic.

1916 Remains of the Byzantine Chapel, damaged by water and mold after being sealed up by Ralph Adams Cram in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City, were retrieved by Tiffany and reinstalled at *Laurelton Hall* on Long Island. Surviving portions are in the collection of The Charles Hosmer Morse Museum of American Art, Winter Park, Florida.

Tiffany's last personal involvement in the design of ecclesiastical windows is thought to be in reference to those placed in a Brooklyn church, since destroyed by fire.



The Bathers; created in 1914, this window represented the pinnacle of Tiffany's quest to eliminate all painting from his stained-glass windows. Referred to as "Saturday Night" by the Tiffany children, it included no external painting. It was installed in Laurelton Hall among others of his favorite windows and was lost as firemen tried to extinguish the fire that destroyed the mmansion in 1957. Only one other example of this advanced technique is known to have survived.

The battle with the Town of Oyster Bay, the residents of Oyster Bay, and his immediate neighbor over Tiffany's claim to riparian rights finally ended. His further claim to five underwater acres and the building of a seawall and breakwater resulted in a court reversal of the rights previously awarded. In June 1916 Tiffany blew-up the breakwater and flooded the beach, terminating the village's plans to recreate the public beach and picnic grounds, which had been on the site before *Laurelton Hall* was built, and add 35 public bathhouses to the beach directly below *Laurelton Hall*, adjacent to the present beach at the foot of Laurelton Beach Road.

1917 Aldrich Memorial window, *Jesus' Presentation in the Temple*, was installed with mosaic inscription work in Christ

Episcopal Church, Sag Harbor, Long Island.

1918 Last major contract for decorating was undertaken at the Presidential Palace, Havana, Cuba.

Tiffany formed the Louis C. Tiffany Foundation through which he established a school for young artists on the grounds of his *Laurelton Hall* home. The Madison Ave. offices of Tiffany Studios were sold to provide for this.

1920 The Corona glassworks became Louis C. Tiffany Furnaces, Inc. with Arthur Nash's son, A. Douglas Nash, in charge. Tiffany and the senior Nash retired from active supervision. Principally, Favrile art glass was produced during these last years.

The art school at *Laurelton Hall*, under Tiffany's personal supervision, began operation.

1924 Tiffany Furnaces closed. Commissions completed after this date used excess glass which remained.

1925 Landscape window was commissioned by Mr. Towle, a later studio fabrication; now in the American Wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (gift of the de Forest estate).

1928 Tiffany withdrew financial support of the Louis C. Tiffany Furnaces Inc. completely. It failed shortly thereafter.

1932 Tiffany Studios, then under the direction of Joseph Briggs, filed for bankruptcy.

1933 Louis Comfort Tiffany died on January 17th, one month before his 85th birthday at his 72nd Street home in New York City. Sarah Hanley (d. 1958), who had come, as a nurse, to care for him during a kidney ailment some twenty years before, remained as his companion to the end of his life. She became a credible artist under his tutelage. Sarah always dressed in yellow, Louis' favorite color, and lived in a house which Tiffany had had built for her on the Tiffany property.

1930s The Westminster Memorial Studios, formed by former employees including Agnes Northrop, completed many of Tiffany Studios' remaining

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commissions. These include the MacKenzie Memorial window in the Bowne Street (Reformed) Church, Flushing, NY.

1946 The contents of *Laurelton Hall* were sold at auction by the Tiffany Foundation to provide for art scholarships. Art scholarship support is still available

through this foundation although no art school exists today.

1957 *Laurelton Hall*, Tiffany's home in Laurel Hollow, Long Island, burned. Many windows, including *The Bathers*, were still in the mansion and were destroyed.

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