

## **HILLIS HALL WINDOWS**



*Velazquez, J. S., The Valiant Woman Window, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY*

### **Description-Tiffany Stained Glass Window I-The Valiant Woman**

Plymouth is fortunate to have three Tiffany windows. *The Valiant Woman* window is the first one encountered as one enters Hillis Hall to the right. The dominant figure is a young female. She stands on the right elevated above an ethnically and racially diverse crowd. *The Valiant Woman* is framed by an elegant lancet which arches over her head gracefully encompassing the capital to the pillar and cypress trees above. She appears as a prophetess/deaconess of the early Christian Church.

With a raised hand gesturing to heaven, she addresses a multitude that has gathered to hear her words. She stands on what seems to be the portico of a temple flanked by white marble Corinthian columns. Above her, one can see the crown of Christ flanked by two elegant angels in billowing white robes. The scene takes place in the Middle East at sunset.

Between the prophetess and the diverse group of worshipers, we see the setting sun with the luminous shades of gold and red. In the distance beyond the gathered multitude, tall cypress trees (symbols of eternal life) are seen dominating the left side of the composition balancing the pillars to the right. The prophetess, as well as the assembled worshipers, are dressed in the robes and turbans of the early Christian period. Unlike the later church that came to exclude women in leadership roles and relegate them to the faceless congregation, the Early Christian Church welcomed female leaders.

The Bible provides ample evidence of faithful women including the three Marys, who were followers of Jesus, present at the crucifixion, and the first to witness Christ after the Resurrection. Ongoing scholarship is reshaping what we know about the early church and shedding light on the many roles that women played in the worship of the Early Church (King, 1998).

The letters of Paul dated to the first century CE include references to women who were prominent leaders in the Early Christian Church. In an example found in Romans 16, 3-4 Paul thanks Priscilla and Aquila for their services. The Christian women of the Roman Empire had to be committed and courageous since their adherence to Christianity made them vulnerable to the same punishment meted out to men, including imprisonment, torture, and death.



*Velazquez, J. S., Tiffany, The Valiant Woman Window Detail, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY*

Surrounding the listeners and below them we see exquisite flowers amidst blades of grass. Brilliant yellow daffodils, signature Tiffany flowers, occupy the lower register. Tiffany was particularly fond of daffodils and used the motif often throughout his work. Note the variegated coloration in each petal graduating in color from pale to concentrated yellow at the center.

It is evident that some truncation took place in the overall schema of the scene. It is believed that about 12" of glass was removed from the original design to allow for the smaller scale of Hillis Hall. Their absence does not mar the beauty or the artistry of Tiffany's creation. Below the daffodils, we see the dedication. The inscription reads "The woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her the fruit of her hands and let her own words praise her the gates" (Proverbs, 31-29). The window was dedicated to the memory of Elizabeth G. Shelman." Unfortunately, documentation has not yet been discovered on the identity of E. G. Shelman.



*Photography by: Velazquez, J. S. Tiffany, Life of Christ Stained Glass Window, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY*

## **Tiffany Stained Glass Window 2 – Life of Christ**

On March 18, 1890, The Brooklyn Eagle ran an article on the *Life of Christ Window* stating that when complete it “would be, perhaps, the most magnificent of any window in the city (BDE, 1890, p. 6). The window was commissioned by Mr. S. B. Chittenden, who dedicated it as a memorial to his parents, the late Simeon Baldwin, and Mary Hartwell Chittenden. The concept of this Christological window is attributed to a collaboration between Mr. Chittenden and the Rev. Doctor R. S. Storrs. Louis Comfort Tiffany created a design of two vertical panels with six scenes from the life of Christ.

Tiffany considered the window of such importance that he decided to personally direct and supervise the work rather than relegate it to the craftsmen on his staff. He personally saw to the installation (BDE, 1890, p.6).



*Velazquez, J. S., The Three Marys at the Empty Tomb, detail of Tiffany's Life of Christ Window, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY*

The six images (three on each panel) include iconic Christological scenes including the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, Christ praying on the Mount, the Three Marys at the Empty Tomb, and the Ascension. Surrounding each scene is a twisted rope design surrounded by brilliant blue and green raised glass making it appear as if the window is encrusted with rare emerald and sapphire gems. The window is known for the brilliant color and the jewel-like quality of the glass. At the time of its installation, the window cost, the then exorbitant sum, of \$4000.00.



*Velazquez, J.S. Tiffany, L.C., Resurrection Angel Window, Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, NY*

### **Tiffany Stained Glass Window 3 – Resurrection Angel**

The third window consists of two lancet panels. On the left panel we see a magnificent angel who dominates the scene with her majestic wings and delicate draperies. On the right, we see a distant, delicate sunrise with its many shades of pink, gold, and blue. Below this, we see a field filled with blooming white lilies. White lilies are symbolic of purity, Easter, and the Resurrection. Surrounding the lancet panels are roundels of white daisies. The two lower panels have wreaths of flowers and festoons of green foliage. Below these is the dedication, which reads “In loving memory of Mary Read Haddock Cotton.” Perhaps a descendent of the well-known

Cotton theologians he is mentioned in the 1902 Social Registry as residing in New York (SR, 1902, p. 99). In this window, we see the beauty of the opalescent glass with its striated translucence. Tiffany, along with La Farge, was among the first to use the technique, known the world-over as “American Glass.”

### **Ethnic Diversity and the Importance of Female Figures in the Tiffany Windows**

When comparing the Lamb Studio windows of the sanctuary to the Tiffany windows in Hillis Hall, one is immediately aware of the complexity of Tiffany’s designs. Rather than one continuous narrative, we have registers and compartmentalized images that are at once part of the greater composition as well as distinct from one another. These composite parts of the design coalesce into a harmonious blend of related components.

The next thing that strikes one is the ethnic diversity. This is in stark contrast to the patriarchal, Anglo-Saxon, male-dominated narratives found in the Lamb Studio windows, which with one exception, unfold in a series of scenes where women are often ancillary and anonymous accessories. There is only one Lamb Studio window dedicated to women. Not surprisingly, it is the educators’ window since teaching was one of the few professions considered acceptable for women during the early twentieth century.

In both the *Valiant Woman* and *Resurrection Angel* windows, it is the female figure that dominates. Tiffany was very aware of the creative abilities of women and employed several female artists in his studios. Recent research at the Queens Historical Society in Flushing, NY has uncovered hundreds of names of women artists who worked in the Tiffany plants under Clara Driscoll (1861-1933), the art director of the plant

(Hofer, Gray, Edelberg, 2013). The so-called “Tiffany Girls” were employed to select and cut the glass that was used for the Studio’s windows, mosaics, and signature lampshades (Hofer, Gray, Edelberg, 2013).

### **Otto Heinigke (1850-1915)**



Otto Heinigke was a well-respected artist known for his paintings, mosaics, and stained glass windows. A first-generation German American, from a long line of artists, he was born on Atlantic Avenue, graduated from Brooklyn Polytechnic University, and was a life-long resident of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Heinigke is considered one of the most prominent leaders in the American stained glass revival movement of the late 1880s and early 1900s and is credited with developing a unique stained glass window style that combined the traditional European technique of painted pot metal glass with the contemporary opalescence known as “American Glass.” “Heinigke’s personal style made an indelible mark on the history of stained glass” (An Architectural Guidebook to Brooklyn). Among his masterpieces are:



*Dodransbicentennial Essay Series | 10 | May 12, 2022*

- The Statue of Liberty stained glass window *Liberty Enlightening the World* (1908) located at The Columbia University School of Journalism, NY, NY
- Windows at St John the Divine, NY, NY
- Window Cycles at The Congressional Library, Washington, D
- Stained glass panel at the Metropolitan Museum of Art
- The ceiling mosaics in the Woolworth Building (Gilbert Cass, 1913) and
- Windows at the Old Reformed Church, Park Slope, Brooklyn

**Henry Holiday (1839-1927)**



Henry Holiday (a.k.a. Henry George Alexander) known as the “last Pre-Raphaelite” was a well-known English artist, illustrator, sculptor, and writer. He was born in London and educated at the prestigious Royal Academy where he studied painting. Holiday was associated with the *Pre-Raphaelite Movement* working alongside Gabriel Rossetti, Edward Burne-Jones, Holman Hunt, and William Morris in the 1860s. He began his stained glass career as a designer in 1861 working for the renowned Powell Glass Works where he produced 300 works, many of which were commissioned by American clients. His stained glass work can be found in England, in Continental Europe as well as in the United States, most notably, Worcester College, Oxford University (1865) and Westminster Abbey (1868).

Holiday was a friend of the famous author Lewis Carroll (Alice in Wonderland) and was commissioned to illustrate Carroll’s work among which is *The Hunting of the Snark*, published in 1874. He is also credited with having written the informative “Stained Glass as an Art” in 1896. His most famous painting is *Beatrice Denying the Salutation of Dante* (1883) at the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool.



*Henry Holiday The "Lost Window"*

### **The Lost Holiday Window**

Considered lost for decades, the recently “discovered” The Faith/Charity Window is considered one of the artist’s best. Documentation of the window in extant studies identifies it simply as being “in a church in Brooklyn.” The Holiday scholar and author (George Bryant) of an upcoming Henry Holiday book (due out this year) recently (April 2022) visited Plymouth to photograph the window to be included in his publication. The author traveled from Philadelphia to document the window’s existence. The scene, once thought to be from Tiffany’s Studio, is filled with green foliage which surrounds the entire composition.

*Dodransbicentennial Essay Series | 10 | May 12, 2022*

Within the sinuous circles of vines, we find the female personifications of Faith and Charity. The white lilies, so often seen in Tiffany windows on the lower level, no doubt led to the misidentification.

Additional information and notes about the donors and memorials of some of Brooklyn's most prominent citizens will appear in the upcoming book-*Facets of Freedom, the Stained Glass Windows of Plymouth Church*.