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Artistry in Glass; The Undisputed Master, Our Oyster Bay Neighbor

by Judith Ader Spinzia

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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 harbor.



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



*close-up of finial on smoke stack minaret
of power house pictured above*

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, Long Island, 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 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 2009 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 and bibliography 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*

Judith Ader Spinzia

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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 Flushing 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.



Louis Comfort Tiffany

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 Woodridge 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.



St. Marks Episcopal Church, Islip, NY

1847 St. Mark window [note lion to left] installed in the 1847 building

center panel of 1895 nine-paneled apse window complex in present stavekirke structure

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 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.

- 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 Laurel Hollow, Long Island. The home was later owned by Tiffany's daughter Mary Woodbridge Tiffany and her husband, Dr. Graham Lusk.



The Briars

- 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 Avenue and 97th Place. 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, were designed and installed. These 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.
- 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 1989. 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.

*Cryder Memorial window,
St. Andrew's Dune Church,
Southampton, NY*



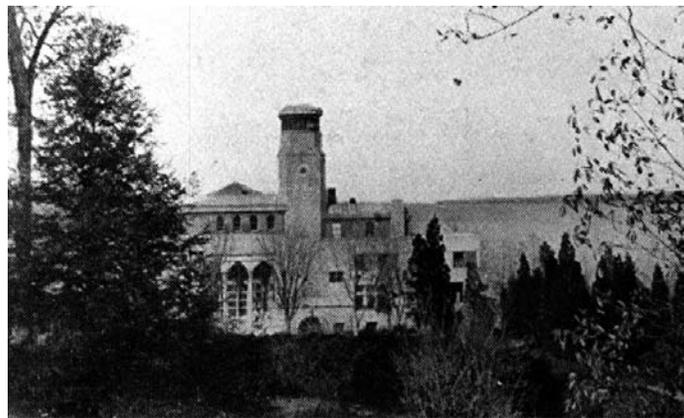
The glasshouse at Corona was renamed Tiffany Furnaces.

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, Long Island, overlooking Cold Spring Harbor. Louis and his children moved into the mansion.



Laurelton Hall

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 external 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.



The Bathers

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, where it has been restored.

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 battle with the Town of Oyster Bay, the residents of Oyster Bay, and his immediate neighbors 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 the beached schooner which he had been using as a beach house, flooding the beach. This dramatic reaction, on Tiffany's part, to the court's decision effectively terminated the village's plans to recreate the public beach and picnic grounds, which had been on the



the shoreline of Oyster Bay, the subject of Tiffany's riparian rights battle

site before *Laurelton Hall* had been built; plans which included the building of thirty-five public bathhouses on 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 Avenue 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.



Tiffany Furnaces, Corona, Queens, NY

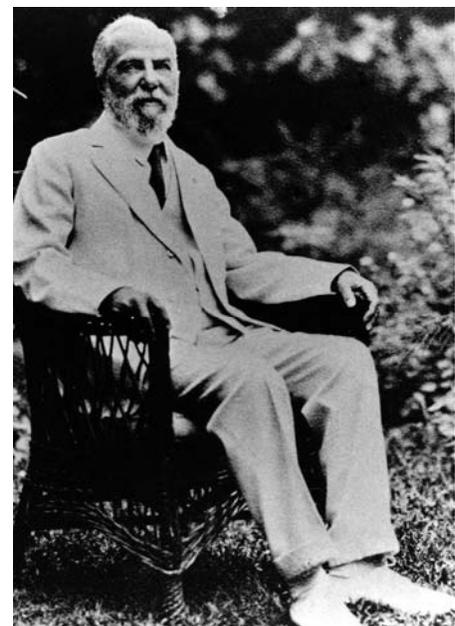
1924 Tiffany Furnaces closed. Commissions completed after this date used excess glass which remained.

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 Furnace, 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.



*Louis Comfort Tiffany
in his signature white wool suit*

- 1930s The Westminster Memorial Studios, formed by former employees including Agnes Northrop, completed many of Tiffany Studios' remaining 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. *Laurelton Hall* was owned by Mrs. and Mrs. Thomas J. Hilton at the time of its destruction.



Laurelton Hall, March 7, 1957

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For further information on the Tiffany estates, *The Briars* and *Laurelton Hall*, see Spinzia, Raymond E. and Judith A. Spinzia. *Long Island's Prominent North Shore Families: Their Estates and Their Country Homes*. vol. II. College Station, TX: VirtualBookworm, 2006 – Tiffany entries.

For information and Long Island locations of ecclesiastical commissions of Tiffany Studios, see Spinzia, Raymond Edward, Judith Ader Spinzia, and Kathryn Spinzia Rayne. *Long Island: A Guide to New York's Suffolk and Nassau Counties*, 3rd edition. New York: Hippocrene Publishers, 2009.

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