

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

O Varus, plant no tree in preference to the sacred vine"

Horace 65 - 8 BC

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His cherished planting."

Isaiah 5:7

I am the true Vine and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit He prunes away, and whatever bears fruit He prunes so that it may bear more fruit...

From the vine, you are the branches, He who remains in me, and I in him bears much fruit."

John 15: 1,2,5

My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;"

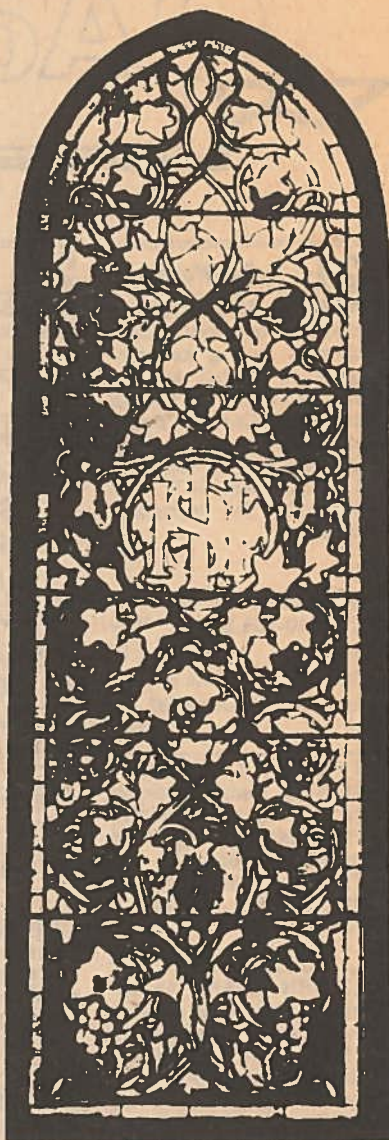
Julia Ward Howe 1819-1910

Our eleventh subject in a series on stained glass windows in Orleans County Churches is from the Pullman Memorial Universalist Church in Albion. As entwining are the tendrils of the grapevine presented here, so also are its innumerable references throughout the history of literature. The far reaching and subtle aspects of the vine, the grape and ultimately the "...wine that maketh glad the heart of man." Psalms 104:15, are fascinating for their deep-rooted symbolic and metaphorical uses. St. Jerome, in a letter, wrote "For they wished to fill the winepress of eloquence, not with the tendrils of mere words, but with the rich grape juice of good sense."

From "The Fox and the Grapes" in "Aesop's Fables", to two toxic grapes from Chili more recently, the symbology of this window remains ever timely and universal. Samuel Eliot Morrison (1887-1976) has written "In America particularly, the grapes of wrath have not yet yielded all their better vintage." But in answer to this, Americans sing "Glory, Glory Halleluia His truth is marching on."

Nestled in the center of this window are the letters IHS which is a symbol derived from the first three letters of the Greek word for Jesus. In modern times this has become to mean "In His Service". By His example it is expressed in Galatians chapter 5: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, generosity, fidelity, gentleness, self-control." Likewise Mary Baker observed "As Truth demands, this living Vine Ye demonstrate." To me, this is the intended meaning of the window in as much as He has stated "I am the vine." For many, the grapes symbolize wine in Holy communion. However, many Unitarian Universalists would esoterically see the grapes as symbolizing a personal communion only in the attitude of the Spirit.

Previous articles on windows have dealt with figurative images. This window however, is no less important. In fact, it is one of the only examples of ecclesiastical art in the Art Nouveau style in Orleans County. The window was designed by the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company of New York. It has an almost identical mate, both of which are located either side of a much larger window of the Prophet. Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933) was present for a day or so in 1894 to oversee the installation of many windows at the Pullman Memorial Church when it was being completed. It was Louis Tiffany, painter, decorator and glass designer who helped propagate the Art Nouveau style as much as any American craftsman of the period. Art Nouveau, which became an international style between 1895 and 1915, was a reaction to



(Photo by Dr. James Orr)

an ever pressing industrial age and earlier frivolous Victorian forms. The characteristics of this style are whiplash lines. Everything is usually curvilinear because designs are almost solely based upon nature which was accentuated. The grapevine window is no exception. Note the aforementioned characteristics in the linear quality of the vine. Like many Tiffany windows of this type, it is darker in the bottom and blends into lighter shades at the top. Naturalistic colors are used as the grapes appear to be a dark rich purple, the leaves vary in shades of greens, while the vines are variegated brown tones. The background consists of dark blue at the bottom blending into pale green in the apex.

Art Nouveau designers such as Tiffany wanted to return handcrafted quality to the arts which they felt the Victorian age had forgotten. Therefore, the glass in this window was rolled out by hand, not machine. Thus various thickness occurs in each piece. By doing it like this, variegated shades of light are then transmitted through to create artistic effects such as shading. No part of this window is painted. Any shadows therefore, are directly in the glass. Tiffany saw his windows as expressing an artistic integrity between the relationship of the glass and the subject. For example, the grapes were not merely painted on, they were practically the grapes themselves with the Tiffany techniques.

Big beautiful, luscious grapes! And as Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899) put it "...growing purple in the kisses of the autumn sun."

This and all the other Tiffany Windows at the Universalist Church may be seen on Saturday, June 3 from 11-5 during the tour of historic homes presented by the Cobblestone Society.