

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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STAINED GLASS WINDOWS

Naomi said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; you return after her". But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to desert you by turning away from you, because wherever you go, there I will go; wherever you lodge I will lodge. Your people are my people and your God is my God; wherever you die I will die and there I shall be buried. Thus may God do to me and worse if anything but death separates you and me."

When Naomi saw her determination to accompany her, she said no more. They both walked on until they came to Bethlehem.

Ruth 1:15 - 19

The stained glass window which will be our subject this week is from St. Johns Episcopal Church in Medina, N.Y. The figural images represented in this century old window show Ruth at the left and her mother-in-law Naomi at the right. These characters are found in the Old Testament, Book of Ruth. For our purposes here we are only concerned about the first portion which is a story that relates how a famine covered the land and how a man and his wife and two sons journeyed to another country to escape starvation. While there, the two sons married two daughters of that land, named Orpah and Ruth. In a short time all the male members of this family died, leaving the mother and her two daughters-in-law without support. Naomi decided to return to her native land with her two daughters-in-law but on the way told them, "You go back, each of you to her mother's home." Orpah turned back as she was directed but Ruth refused saying as is painted on this window:

For: Whither: Thou: Goest: I: Will: Go: And:
Where: Thou: Lodgest: I: Will: Lodge: Thy: People:
Shall: Be: My: People: And: Thy: God: My: God:
Where: Thou: Diest: Will: I: Die: And: There: Will: I:
Be: Buried:

In this window Naomi and Ruth are seen on the road to Judah as though speaking to each other, Ruth having just uttered the words above. Naomi the older of the two, is shown with a staff or walking stick in her left hand while clasping Ruth's right hand with her own. Likewise, Ruth in a spirit of devotion, touches Naomi's shoulder.

Naomi is clad in a brownish grey robe which color suggests humility and mourning. Over this is a violet mantle with a dark green lining. Here the violet signifies suffering and the green hope. Ruth by contrast is in no way as somber in her attire. She wears a garment with bold and decorative horizontal stripes. These are red and yellow on a grey background. Over this is bright red cape fastened with a large jeweled clasp. The red here of course denotes love. An incidental detail is Ruth's very large golden earring which simply adds a bit of charm to this entire illustration.

The window's symbolism does not end with the figures as there are also trees, shrubs and flowers represented. In the background are large palm trees, the palm being a symbol of spiritual victory and righteousness. In the middle ground one may see laurel which symbolizes triumph and eternity. The victor in ancient contests was crowned with a wreath of laurel. The leaves never wilt but preserve their green color. Slightly lower down by Ruth's side, is also represented acacia which is a symbol of the immortality of the soul. Beneath this and to the left of Ruth's feet are daisies which symbolize innocence. A small cluster of Christmas roses also appears in the foreground of this lancet. This is a symbol of the Nativity and of Messianic prophecy.



J. Orr Photo

In the apex of the window is found a quarterfoil shape which in itself denotes the four Gospels according to Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. In the center of this is an anchor which is the traditional symbol of hope. The bottom portion of the window under the figures is simply decorative geometric design. The entire window is made of painted and/or stenciled glass which was fired in a kiln before leading the various pieces together. It is signed by the maker "E. Colegate New York." At the very bottom of the window in a border we find the following information: "To the glory of God and in memory of Delia Ann Fairman and Delia Ann Ives." This memorial window was given by Lewis J. Ives in

memory of his wife and her mother. Mr. Ives was a produce dealer and ran a business and warehouse on Main Street at the canal in Medina during the later part of the 19th Century. He was also a vestryman and warden of St. Johns Church. His selection of the Naomi and Ruth story was certainly an appropriate subject for a memorial to a mother and her daughter.

This memorial window also has a companion window both of which are located in the rear of the nave either side of the narthex leading into St. Johns Church. The companion window will appear in this column for a topic in the near future.