

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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LUMINARIES IN THE FIRMAMENT

When Jesus entered the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of man is?" They said, "Some say, John the Baptist; others, Elijah, others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He asked them, "But you, who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of John, because it was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you but My heavenly Father. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against her. I will give you the keys for the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you allow on earth will be allowed in heaven." Then He forbade the disciples to say to anyone, "He is the Christ."

Matt. 16:13-20

In this devotional window as in most pictures of St. Peter, he is shown holding the keys to Heaven. In the scriptural accounts of the Passion, Peter's show of loyalty was followed closely by his denial and repentance. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, the cock shall not crow Till thou hast denied me thrice." (John 13:38) is familiar to all. Following the ascension of Christ, Peter traveled throughout Asia Minor preaching the word of the Savior particularly centering His activity around Antioch. In due course of time he went to Rome where he probably formed the first Christian community here. Eventually the emperor accused Peter of having cast a spell over one of his favorite persons. Peter's friends feared for the Apostle's life and urged him to flee Rome. He eventually agreed to leave but on his way through a vision of Christ, Peter asked, "Lord whither goest thou?" Jesus answered "to Rome, to be crucified anew." Taking this as a sign, Peter returned to Rome where he was arrested, imprisoned and subsequently scourged and crucified head downward. This being done at his own wish, for he did not consider himself worthy to die in the same manner as Christ.

With all this as background, perhaps we can more fully appreciate this life size portrait of St. Peter which is located with a northern exposure at Christ Episcopal Church in Albion. As St. Peter supposedly lived to teach and preach a goodly number of years after Christ, he is portrayed as being an older man with grey hair and beard. Naturally, he is canonized with a halo and along with the keys to heaven, is also holding an open book representing the New Testament. St. Peter is clothed in a white robe suggesting purity and a purple mantle with a golden lining. The purple is a color associated with martyrdom which is certainly symbolic here. The golden color suggests the goodness of God. Peter is posed in an ethereal landscape-framed within a baldachino. Innumerable plants and vegetation appear in the foreground and middle ground with various meanings including: laurel which symbolizes triumph and eternity and acacia which is a symbol of immortality of the soul. In the background are palm trees which are a symbol of spiritual victory and righteousness. Thus the palm suggests the martyr's triumph over death.

In the apex of this window we note a design based upon entwining Fleur de Leis, a symbol of purity. In the base of the window we notice the title and below that more Fleur de Leis and a scroll with the following information: "Gift of Ellen Wall Ramsdale In Loving Memory of Her Husband W. Crawford Ramsdale 1856-1921." When Ellen Wall Ramsdale died in 1928 she left \$1,000.00 stipulating that it be used to purchase a memorial window for her late husband. Consequently, Ellen Ramsdale's niece, Elizabeth Butler Brown and grand niece, Marcia E. B. Hart, as two immediate survivors, were privileged to select this memorial.

Since other figural windows had already been designed and placed in Christ Church by Leo P. Frohe of Buffalo, his studio was selected for this commission in 1929. Marcia Hart recalls traveling to Buffalo with her mother so they could select an appropriate design. She indicated that they wanted a warm, rich color scheme to contrast with the brighter and predominately yellow tones in the adjoining St. John Window (1889). Marcia says, "We didn't pick out St. Peter because he was St.



Peter." Instead, Mr. Frohe showed them pictures of various biblical characters and innumerable hand gestures. Between them, they picked out various features they liked to arrive at this particular design. Indeed, the color scheme is quite distinctive that rich blues predominating along with purple, greens, some gold highlights, and touches of ruby throughout which particularly dominate at the apex.

W. Crawford Ramsdale was born in Saratoga County and came to Orleans County at an early age. He was a graduate of the University of Rochester in 1879 and engaged in the practice of law in the firm of Ramsdale and Church. He was widely known in Democrat Party politics serving first as Clerk of the Board of Supervisors and then receiving an appointment as County Treasurer in 1890 to fill an unexpired term. In 1896 he was elected County Judge and Surrogate which office he held until 1901. In 1907 Judge Ramsdale was elected Orleans County District Attorney serving until 1910. He was also widely known in civic and fraternal organizations and was considered "a man of sound heart and sterling integrity ..."