

Art Glass Windows in Mormon Architecture

Allen Roberts / Photography by Duane Powell

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Allen D. Roberts is a native of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and resided in California before settling in Utah. He received a B.A. degree in Art and Design from Brigham Young University in 1973 and is currently working on master's degrees in architecture and history at the University of Utah. After working in the architectural profession for five years, and compiling an extensive "Survey of L.D.S. Architecture, in Utah 1847-1930," Allen became the Architectural Historian for the State of Utah, which position he now holds. He is currently working on a preservation policy for historic buildings owned by the Church.

Duane Powell filled a mission to Texas, graduated from the University of Utah in graphic design, and is presently studying photography at the University of Illinois. He and his wife, Dianne, have one daughter, Sarah Jane.

Mormon architecture, unlike the architecture of longer established Catholic and Protestant churches, has never been characterized by the extensive use of art glass windows. The process of designing, painting and fabricating art glass windows is long and difficult and requires greater technical expertise than could have been developed before the coming of the railroad to Utah in 1869. Consequently, before art glass could be imported from the Eastern United States and Europe, no decorative windows were to be found in Mormon

meetinghouses and tabernacles. With the construction of a large number of spectacular Gothic-styled tabernacles and temples in the late 1870's, a need for art glass windows became apparent.

Initially, designs and general specifications for windows were sent abroad where the glass for scenes depicting the Savior, the First Vision or other gospel themes was cut, painted, fired in kilns (to fuse the paint to the glass), and returned in individual pieces to Utah by train where local glass workers would assemble mullioned frames and fabricate each intricate network of lead and glass. Sometimes even the designs were done by "gentle" artists or simply selected from catalogues — thus the presence of a few anemic and haloed depictions of Christ in some old Mormon meetinghouses.

One of the first art glass designers and fabricators in Utah was Wellington B. Stafford, who received expert art glass training in Canada. While working for John Bennett of Bennett's Paint and Glass (formerly Sears and Little), he trained Harry Kimball, who fabricated the beautiful First Vision windows in both the Salt Lake 17th (1907) and 2nd (1908) ward chapels. The glass was painted and fused in Wisconsin by the La Cross Glass Company. The prototype for these windows is found in one of the sealing rooms in the Salt Lake Temple. We have no record of who designed the exquisite First Vision window in the temple, but it may have been H.L.A. Culmer, a prominent late pioneer artist who, with his two brothers, operated a short-lived art supply store in the late 1880's. The Culmers specialized in importing and making art and stained glass, but were not sufficiently skilled to create the temple masterpiece which was made by the Tiffany Brothers in New York.

Among the old extant Mormon art glass windows is the bay window in the Millcreek Ward meetinghouse (1869-76). Not included in the building originally, the pastoral scene of the Savior was made in Indiana and sent to Salt Lake City where Bennett's assembled the window on site.

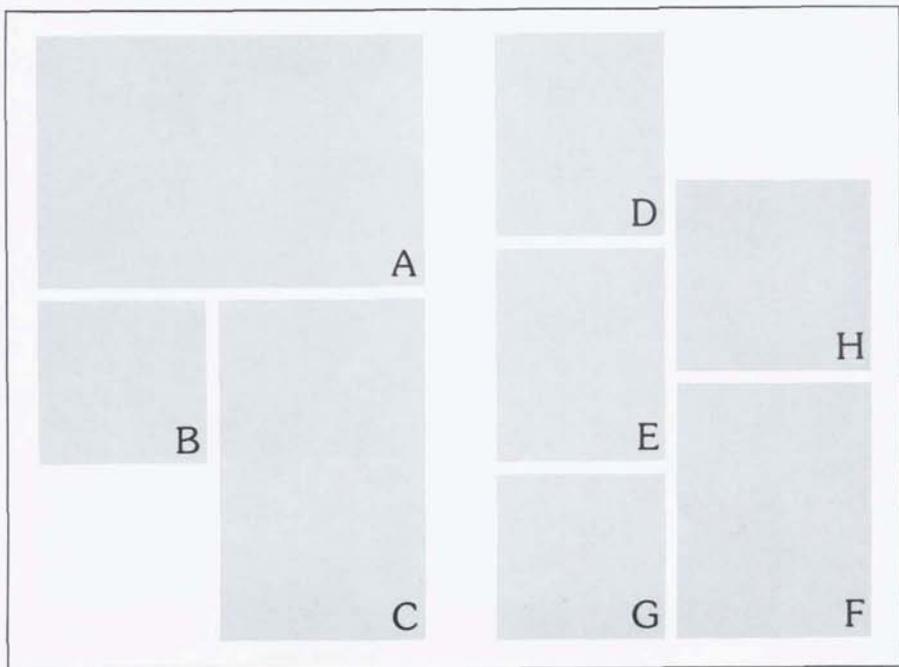


Diagram of pages 12 and 13

A Salt Lake 2nd Ward

Although very similar to the 17th Ward window, the 2nd Ward window is the most colorful and elaborate of the two. The two geometric side panels are replaced here by a continuation of the grove. This horizontal emphasis, together with the depiction of the Father and Son suspended only slightly above the ground, portray a more personal representation of the First Vision.

B Salt Lake 2nd Ward Detail**C Salt Lake 17th Ward**

Patterned after the First Vision window in the Salt Lake Temple, this 12 by 22 foot Gothic window was taken from the 1907 meetinghouse when it was razed, and included as the main design feature of the new chapel built in 1971. Bennett's provided all but the three central panels which were imported from out of state.

D Murray First Ward This

unusual window is quite Catholic or Protestant in character. The darkly pigmented and haloed Christ appears to be knocking on a heavy wooden door, perhaps a prison door — making allusion to an unidentified scriptural event.

E Murray First Ward Detail**F Salt Lake 10th Ward**

Befitting the flamboyant neo-Gothic Revival architecture of the 1909 meetinghouse is this exquisite tudor-arched window depicting the Savior with a pleading gesture, "Come Unto Me." Both the design and the window itself were imported from Wisconsin and assembled by Harry Kimball and John Bennett of Salt Lake City on the site.

G Salt Lake 10th Ward Detail**H Salt Lake 10th Ward** Detail

Preceding pages: **Salt Lake 17th Ward** Detail

