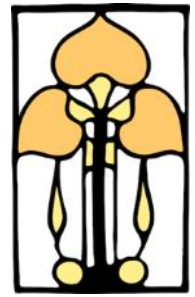


# FRIENDS of HISTORIC SECOND CHURCH

## THE HERALD

Volume XV, Number 3

Fall 2021



### DECORATIVE METAL WORK BY JAMES A. MILLER *by William Tyre*

The metal screens to either side of the pulpit that conceal the pipes of the organ are an essential part of the overall design of the sanctuary. They display decorative motifs that unite them with other elements in the space, creating a total work of art known as a *gesamtkunstwerk*, as envisioned by architect Howard Van Doren Shaw. In this article, we will examine the firm responsible for their fabrication, discuss significant work they did for one of the most important architects of the period, and explore a probable source of inspiration for their design.

#### James A. Miller & Bro.

The pair of identical screens was fabricated from Shaw's design by



*Second Presbyterian Metal Organ Screen*

the firm of James A. Miller & Bro., which was paid \$598 for its work. Each screen is composed of a large

grid representing a trellis upon which meandering grapevines soften the lines. The grid itself mimics the design of the ceiling, with rosettes of Tudor roses and pomegranates substituted for the ceiling bosses. The grapevine itself is a common motif seen throughout the sanctuary in wood, plaster, and decorative painting. Sheet copper was used as the base metal, which was stamped, reinforced with wire, brass plated, and then assembled with rivets.

James Alexander Miller was born in St. Charles, Illinois in 1850 to immigrant parents from Scotland. He came to Chicago to learn the roofing trade, working as a journeyman until 1874 when he was made a partner in the long-established firm of A. Knisely & Co. In 1889, the firm became James A. Miller & Bro., a partnership of brothers James A. and Robert B. Miller. By this time, the firm had moved its headquarters to Clinton Street between Monroe and Adams, and the facility expanded through the years as business increased.

It was in 1889 that Miller received a major commission for the copper roofing, flashing, skylights, and other metal components of the Auditorium building, designed by Adler & Sullivan. Two years later, Miller was awarded the \$54,000 project to install aluminum bronze roofing on the main dome and the four smaller domes of the Administration Building at the World's Columbian Exposition, designed by Richard Morris Hunt. Other commissions of the period included McVicker's Theater and the massive Federal

Building and U.S. Courthouse in Milwaukee.

#### Frank Lloyd Wright

Architect Frank Lloyd Wright would have become acquainted with Miller's work during his time at Adler & Sullivan and throughout the construction of the Auditorium building. During the 1890s, after leaving Adler & Sullivan, Wright began experimenting with the design of decorative objects made from sheet metal, which he then turned over to Miller for fabrication. In an article entitled "In the Cause of Architecture, VIII: Sheet Metal and a Modern Instance" for the October 1928 issue of *Architectural Record*, Wright wrote:

"At that time, I designed some sheet copper bowls, slender flower holders, and such things for him (Miller), and fell in love with sheet copper as a building material. I had always liked lead, despised tin, wondered about zinc, and revolted against galvanized iron as it was then used in Chicago quite generally as a substitute for granite."

Among the earliest sheet metal objects produced were the slender flower holders, also known as weed holders in recognition of Wright's fondness for displaying long, spindly weeds and dried grasses. The vases were nearly 30 inches tall and sat on a base barely four inches wide. Wright displayed the vases in both his Oak Park studio and Taliesin, his home in Spring Green, Wisconsin. They also appeared in other prominent commissions including the Susan Lawrence Dana House in Springfield, Illinois and Falling Water in Bear Run,

Pennsylvania.

Miller produced at least two lamps for Wright. A 22-inch table lamp, of which only three are known, features a tapering octagonal form with a mica shade. A surviving hanging pendant lamp of sheet copper, measuring 21 inches in height, is inset with faceted colored cabochons. What is most surprising is that the plaque set inside of the lamp door gives Miller top billing; it reads:

JAMES A. MILLER & BRO.  
COPPERSMITHS CHICAGO  
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT  
DESIGN

Miller’s best-known work for Wright is a copper urn, measuring about 18 inches in diameter and height. There are ten known examples, of which one, originally made for the Edward C. Waller House in River Forest, is now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Its website notes:



Wright Urn Weed Holder and Lamp

“This copper urn is Frank Lloyd Wright’s finest design in metal. The bold, spherical form with its rhythmic geometric decorative scheme of circles inscribed within squares, framed by lozenges, eloquently expresses his distinctive artistic vision . . . The urn reflects Wright’s engagement with the Arts and Crafts movement as well as his belief that architecture should be a gesamtkunstwerk – a total work of

art. It was conceived as an integral part of his Prairie style architecture.”

In his 1928 article for *Architectural Record*, we find a rare example of Wright commenting on the craftsmen he engaged:

“Since first meeting, thirty years ago, James A. Miller, a sheet-metal worker of Chicago, who had intelligent pride in his material and a sentiment concerning it (designing a house for himself at one time he demanded a tin-floored balcony outside his bedroom window in order that he might hear the rain patter upon it), I have had respect for his sheet-metal medium.”

**Holy Trinity Church Sloane Square**



Holy Trinity Church Sloane Square Screen

Holy Trinity Church in London has been dubbed the “Cathedral of the Arts and Crafts Movement.” The building is the work of architect John Dando Sedding, who trained in the offices of G. E. Street, where William Morris and Philip Webb also trained. The great east window, designed by Edward Burne-Jones, is the largest window ever made by Morris & Co., and it features, amongst many others, the same figures of St. Cecilia and St. Margaret seen at Second Presbyterian Church.

After Sedding’s death in 1891, work on the interior of Holy Trinity was continued by architect Henry Wilson, an important figure in the Arts & Crafts movement. By the mid-1890s, he was designing metalwork, church furnishings, and later went on to design the bronze doors for

the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. In 1899, he designed brass screens for Holy Trinity, including one behind the altar in the morning chapel, that are remarkable for their beauty and for the similarity of their overall design to the screens that Shaw designed for Second Presbyterian. Fabricated by the English artist and metalworker Nelson Dawson, the screens incorporate a nearly identical grid structure with rosettes at the intersections, and a freely interpreted design of grapevines. Shaw traveled to England during 1900 and studied many sites to inform and inspire his design for the new sanctuary at Second Presbyterian. The similarity of the screens in both churches strongly supports the fact that Shaw was aware of Wilson’s design at Holy Trinity.

**Conclusion**

James A. Miller enjoyed a long and successful career spanning more than five decades. He resided in a handsome Hyde Park residence at 5520 S. Woodlawn Avenue, and maintained a summer home, Shorewood, in Lake Forest. He died in 1929 at the age of 79 and was interred at Oak Woods Cemetery in Chicago. Along with the iconic pieces created for Frank Lloyd Wright, the brass screens at Second Presbyterian Church form an enduring part of his artistic legacy.



Miller Advertisement, 1896

### ST. PAUL RESTORATION UPDATE

*by Nate Lielasus*

The St. Paul restoration is well underway and Friends has been receiving frequent updates on progress from Venturella Studio. As the restoration progresses, we are learning new things about the window and, with the guidance of Venturella Studio, Friends is making decisions about the work to balance the competing goals of restoring the window to its original look and maintaining as much original material as possible.

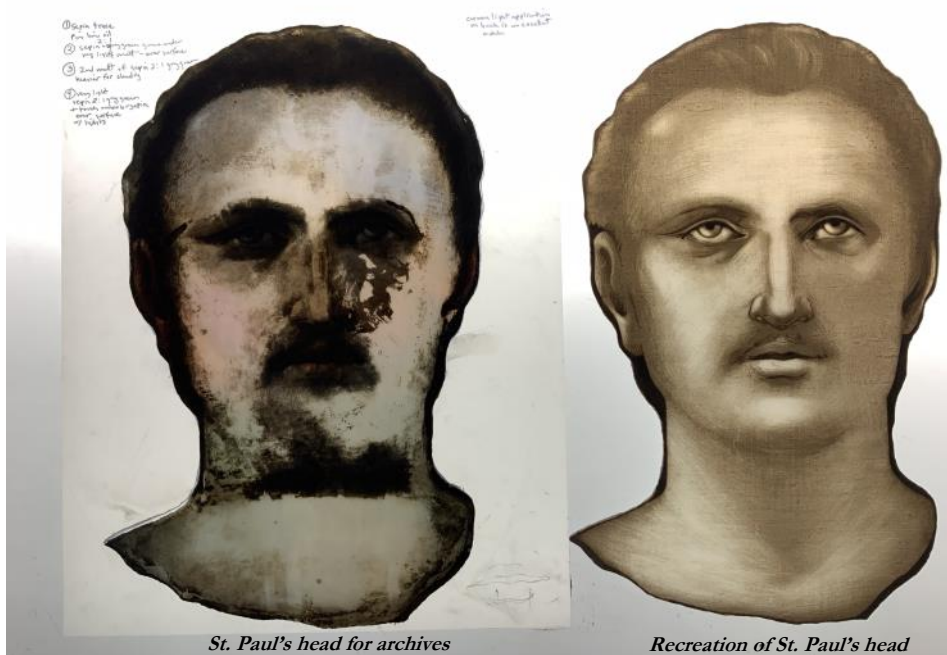
When Tom Venturella and Jim Murphy started the restoration process, the first thing they remarked on was the amount of dirt and grime on the window. This window was even dirtier than the Peace window. Dirt had filled the cavities between panes of glass. Much of the window scene was obscured and darkened due to this accumulation.

The first decision we faced in the restoration was what to do about some backplates that had turned from light gray to violet over time. Exposure to sunlight caused a chemical reaction in the manganese in the glass. The color shift in the back plating is most noticeable behind light colors - white robes appear pinkish. When Venturella Studio was working on the Tiffany windows for First Presbyterian of Lake Forest, the same condition was discovered. At Lake Forest, the decision was made to replace the backplating with new gray glass to achieve the original aesthetic. After much discussion, Friends has decided on the same approach. The original glass will be archived, and new gray glass installed.

As anticipated, the painted glass face and hand of St Paul are in terrible condition and it is not possible to restore them to original condition. It appears that St. Paul's face went through an earlier restoration.

Additionally, there is evidence that St. Paul's head was removed and reset at some point. After discussion, it was decided to archive the original glass and move forward with new replacement pieces that will replicate Tiffany's original St. Paul face.

We are excited to share this restoration process with all of our donors and friends and will continue to send out progress updates as new discoveries come to light and new milestones are reached.



***Friends of Historic Second Church gratefully acknowledges the following memberships, donations, and contributions from August 8, 2021-October 27, 2021.***

**\$10,000 - \$24,999**

The Donnelley Foundation.  
The Barbara C. & Thomas E. Donnelley Fund  
Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

**\$5,000 - \$9,999**

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## FRIENDS RECEIVES A SAVE AMERICA'S TREASURES GRANT



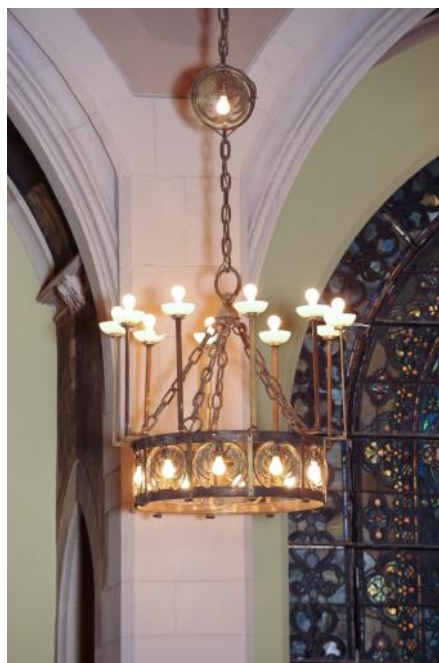
*Tree of Life Mural,  
Photo credit: Martin Cheung*

We are thrilled to announce that Friends has been awarded a prestigious Save America's Treasures grant from the National Park Service and the Institute of Museums and Library Services. The \$256,364 grant will support nearly half of the

cost of the conservation of the large 1903 Bartlett *Tree of Life* mural at the front of the sanctuary and the surrounding chancel artwork, including the heralding angel statues, the metal organ screens, the mural arch, and the light fixtures. This, Friends' largest project to date, will begin in the Fall of 2022 and will take four months to complete. Additional gifts are still needed to reach the total project cost, \$547,500. Please consider a gift for the *Tree of Life* campaign. [Online donation form](#) or mail a check to Friends of Historic Second Church, 1936 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60616.

## A DRIEHAUS FOUNDATION GRANT TO STUDY THE BALCONY CHANDELIER WIRING

With a grant from the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, Friends will undertake a feasibility study to determine the scope of work to remove, conserve, repair, rewire and reinstall the balcony crown chandeliers. The study will include the actual work on one chandelier. The wiring is the original cloth and knob wiring installed in 1901 at the time of Shaw's restoration of the sanctuary. A similar study of the lighting on the first floor revealed steel conduit, thus making it much easier to remove the old wiring and install new wiring. We hope to find similar conduit on the balcony level. The chandelier feasibility study will be conducted during Winter 2022.



*Balcony Chandelier  
Photo credit: Martin Cheung*

## FIRST FLOOR LIGHT FIXTURES NEED YOUR HELP

The under-balcony light fixtures are some of the loveliest light fixtures in the sanctuary. Each of the thirteen fixtures consists of a 4' rectangular art glass panel divided into three sections. Each section contains a curved string of pomegranate seeds encircling an exposed light bulb. The design is attributed to Howard Van Doren Shaw. The fixtures were crafted by Willy H. Lau. They date to Shaw's original 1901 redesign and still contain the original cloth and knob wiring. After 120 years they are in great need of restoration: cleaning, repair and rewiring. A 2021 feasibility study conducted on three of the fixtures showed the steps needed for their restoration. Now the remaining ten fixtures need our attention. Please consider a gift of \$2,500, which will cover the cost of the restoration of one fixture. Which one would you like to restore?



## TAX INCENTIVE MAKES GIVING EASY

Federal legislation provides tax incentives for seniors over 70 ½ to donate to their favorite non-profit without triggering any federal income taxes. A person can make a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from an individual retirement account (IRA) directly to a charity rather than withdrawing the money and paying taxes on it. Seniors can plan their giving over the course of a year and avoid paying taxes on charitable giving. We hope our supporters who are seniors will keep Friends in mind as they plan their required minimum distributions for 2021. Please consult your financial advisor for rules and further information.

## SUPPORT FRIENDS WITH AMAZONSMILE

Friends has joined AmazonSmile, a website which allows non-profit organizations to receive donations from a 0.5% portion of sales made on the popular shopping website. To donate via AmazonSmile, visit: <http://smile.amazon.com/> and select Friends of Historic Second Church at the prompt.

**KEEP THE MOMENTUM GOING! MAKE A GIFT TO FRIENDS' 2021 ANNUAL APPEAL**

It has been an unusual but productive year! Our programming, mostly online, has reached a wider audience. We have found ways to welcome visitors safely. And our restoration work has gained momentum, with work beginning on the 1895 Tiffany St. Paul Preaching at Athens window, rewiring and cleaning light fixtures, and receipt of a prestigious 'Save America's Treasures' grant for the restoration of the *Tree of Life* mural and surrounding artwork.

Your help is needed to keep this momentum going.

Please consider sending a gift to Friends' 2021 Annual Appeal. By donating, you will become a participant in the restoration of one of Chicago's architectural treasures.

Thank you.

**ANNUAL APPEAL FORM**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclosed is my gift to the 2021 Friends Annual Appeal in the amount of:

\$50    \$100    \$250    \$500    \$1,000    \$2,500    Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

My donation is in memory of: \_\_\_\_\_

My donation is in honor of: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No You may acknowledge my contribution in Friends' publications.

\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_ No Please send me information about membership.

If you wish to discuss sponsoring a restoration project, contact Friends of Historic Second Church at 1-800-657-0687.

Please return completed form with check made payable to:

Friends of Historic Second Church 1936 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60616.

Or online at [www.historicsecondchurch.org/donate](http://www.historicsecondchurch.org/donate).

Memberships and gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Friends of Historic Second Church is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.



**FRIENDS of  
HISTORIC SECOND CHURCH**

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Chicago, IL 60616

Phone: 1-800-657-0687

E-mail: [info@historicsecondchurch.org](mailto:info@historicsecondchurch.org)

Web: [www.historicsecondchurch.org](http://www.historicsecondchurch.org)

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Contributors: Ann Belletire, Heather Kendall,  
Nate Lielas, Linda Miller, and William Tyre.

**THANK YOU FOR  
ANOTHER WONDERFUL  
YEAR!**

**Graceland Cemetery  
Tour  
August, 2021**

Photo of attendees near  
Howard Van Doren Shaw's  
marker.

Tour lead by William Tyre,  
Executive Director and  
Curator of  
Glessner House



**SECOND PRESBYTERIAN  
PUBLIC TOUR  
SCHEDULE:**

Saturdays:  
11:00-1:00 pm

Sundays: 12:15 pm  
(after worship service)

Or call  
1-800-657-0687 to arrange a  
private tour

*Friends of Historic Second Church  
is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit  
corporation. All donations are  
deductible to the extent allowed by  
law.*

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS! PROGRAMMING COMING IN 2022**



***Black Heroes of Fire***

February 27, 2022

2:00 pm

Admission: Free

In-person event

1936 S. Michigan Ave  
Chicago, IL 60616

**Mission Statement**

*To preserve and restore the art and  
architecture of Chicago's land-  
mark Second Presbyterian Church  
and to engage neighbors and the  
world in sharing our passion for  
its beauty and significance.*