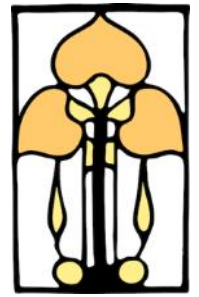


FRIENDS of HISTORIC SECOND CHURCH

THE HERALD

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THE ALMINI COMPANY, CHICAGO HISTORY, AND INTERIOR DECORATION *by William Tyre*

The recent restoration of the two lunette murals in the narthex has brought much deserved attention to the interior decorators, Almini Company. The firm was among the most prominent of the contractors selected by Howard Van Doren Shaw in 1901 to realize his decorating scheme for the sanctuary and adjacent spaces. In this article, we will explore the founding and growth of the firm, its contribution to Shaw's plan, and how an unrelated venture by the predecessor firm preserved an important piece of the church's early history.

ORIGINS

The story of the company begins with Peter M. Almini who was born in Sweden in 1825. When Almini was fourteen years old, he embarked upon a twelve year journey studying under various painters and artists, perfecting his skills in decorative and fresco painting. After two years working as an assistant in the decoration of the palace of the King of Sweden, he left his native land, and by the end of 1852 had settled in Chicago. In 1855 he formed a partnership, Jevne & Almini, with a recently arrived Norwegian immigrant and fresco painter, Otto Jevne. The firm was responsible for the interior decoration of many of Chicago's most prominent buildings until the Chicago Fire of 1871, when the firm was burned out, and each man established his own business.

CHICAGO ILLUSTRATED

In 1865, Jevne and Almini

launched a venture that resulted in what is generally regarded as the most important and comprehensive visual record of Chicago prior to the Great Fire. Joining with three lithographers, they formed the Chicago Lithographing Company, for the purpose of launching a venture, *Chicago Illustrated*, which would serve as an illustrated history of Chicago and "a history of the more important and striking evidences of the City's improvement and enterprise." The work was to be issued in 25 parts, priced at \$1.50 each, containing four hand-tinted lithographic views of

the *Chicago Tribune*, was engaged to write the accompanying text.

The first installment of *Chicago Illustrated* was issued in January 1866 and contained lithographs of the Chamber of Commerce building, the Tremont House hotel, the Grand Central Depot, and Second Presbyterian Church. An original framed copy of this lithograph, on permanent loan from the Presbytery of Chicago, is on display in the church, providing visitors with an excellent view of the prior home of the congregation at the northeast corner



January 1866 lithograph of the "Spotted Church"

public buildings, churches, thoroughfares, the river and harbor, railroad depots, and other points of interest. Louis Kurz, one of the partners of the Chicago Lithographing Co. was the artist, and James W. Sheahan, a journalist for

of Wabash and Washington. Known as the "Spotted Church" for its use of a type of limestone with bituminous tar deposits, the building was occupied until one week before the Great Fire. Ultimately, only thirteen installments of *Chicago Illustrated* were issued,

containing a total of 52 illustrations. The business venture was not a success, and many of the copies which did not sell were eventually bound together into single volumes. In the 1920s, over half of the original lithographs were reissued as enlarged aquatints produced by Raoul Varin in Paris. Today, both the original Jevne & Almini lithographs and the later aquatints by Varin remain highly collectible.

POST-FIRE HISTORY

Jevne & Almini's business was destroyed in the 1871 fire, at which time the firm of P. M. Almini & Co. was formed with Charles A. Bourne as the unnamed partner. Col. R. H. Stewart, who had started with the firm in the mid-1860s, was placed in charge of executing important contracts in Chicago and across the country. On January 1, 1887 Bourne retired, and the firm was reorganized as Almini Company, with Peter Almini serving as president and treasurer, and Stewart as secretary and manager. Shortly before Almini's death in October 1890, the firm was reorganized with Stewart as president and Paul Schubert as designer and superintendent of decorations. An article published shortly after Almini's death noted that the firm "did every important piece of decorative work that was executed in Chicago and throughout the Northwest" including three thousand churches and residences in all parts of the country, the Board of Trade, the Town of Pullman, several public buildings in Milwaukee, the Georgia State House, amongst many others. The company was located for many years at 107 Wabash Avenue (now 22 N. Wabash Ave.) and appears to have gone bankrupt shortly before World War I.

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN

The report of the Board of Trustees, dated December 30, 1901, shows that Almini Company was

paid a total of \$2,421.55 for decorating the interior of the church. This was a considerable sum, nearly equaling the amount paid for the fabrication and installation of the pews, and more than double the amount paid for the design and installation of the electric lighting fixtures.

The most conspicuous works of the firm are the two large lunette murals on the north and south walls of the narthex. Each features a beautifully stenciled intertwining vine pattern in gold containing pomegranates set against a stunning aqua background. Six excerpts from the Bible – starting at the top of the south mural and ending at the bottom of the north – read as follows:

Rejoice Evermore (I Thessalonians 5:16)

Holiness becometh thine house O Lord for ever (Psalm 93:5)

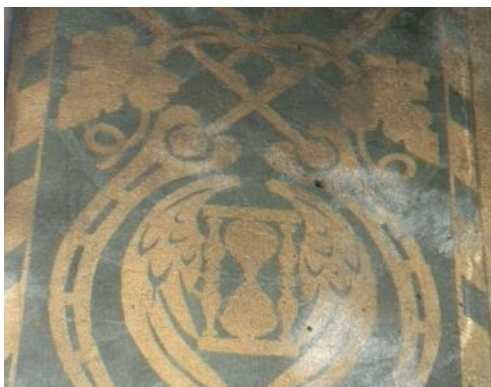
You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my Sanctuary (Leviticus 19:30)

God is Love (I John 4:8)

Behold I stand at the door and knock (Revelation 3:20)

Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37)

The firm also executed large bands of stenciled decoration on the front and rear walls of the sanctuary. This repeating design was centered by the image of an hourglass, wrapped within a pair of angel wings, and framed by stylized intertwining grape vines. The front wall was repainted in 1903 with the present Tree of Life mural by Bartlett. (A small portion of the original Almini design survives behind the



Section of stenciled decoration from behind organ

organ pipes, see illustration). The back wall, surrounding the Ascension window, was repainted at an unknown date with simple bands of painting, probably after the original was water damaged.

Other decorative painting executed by the firm included the large angel



*Ceiling boss of a turtle
Photo by Martin Cheung*

brackets supporting the chandeliers, additional scriptural passages beneath the clerestory windows (now painted over except for a small section recently revealed at the northwest corner of the sanctuary), stenciled decoration on the ends of the roof trusses, the charming variety of bosses on the ceiling, and stenciled grape vines on the upper walls of the north and south parlors (of which one small section has been revealed).

Although a significant portion of the original Almini decoration has been painted over through the years, when fully restored, its significance to Shaw's master plan for the interior will be fully revealed. The recent restoration of the narthex lunette murals is an important first step in realizing this goal.

MAKING AN IMPACT WITH A LEGACY GIFT

Have you always wanted to make sure that the stained glass windows or Bartlett murals are restored and continue to be maintained in the future? A legacy gift is one means of making this happen. It also means your support of the mission of Friends of Historic Second Church would continue into the future and help us for many generations to come.

We welcome legacy gifts in many forms:

- A gift under your will or living trust
- A gift from your IRA required distribution
- A gift of securities
- A gift of life insurance
- A gift of retirement plan assets

Friends has established the River of Life Society to acknowledge those individuals who have provided us with a legacy gift. Society members will receive honorary life membership in Friends and will not be required to pay annual membership dues. Special events will also be planned for members of the Society. We sincerely hope you will consider including us in your plans. We can help you plan your gift in a way that achieves personal satisfaction and maximum tax benefits. Please contact Heather Haberaecker at Friends of Historic Second Church, info@historicsecondchurch.org, or 800-657-0687 if you wish to discuss providing a legacy gift. We hope to hear from you.

UPCOMING EVENT - MEMORY IN GLASS

**Saturday November 16, 2019
10:00 am to 12:00 pm**

Admission:

\$25 per person
\$20 for members of Glessner House and Friends of Historic Second Church
Purchase tickets at www.glessnerhouse.org

This event is in partnership with



Photo by: Mark F. Heffron

The second half of the 19th century saw a dramatic rise in the use of leaded glass windows. The beauty of the windows, combined with the ability to customize them to the donor's wishes, resulted in their popularity as memorials.

This lecture and tour will focus on a significant collection of memorial windows at Second Presbyterian Church of Chicago. The factors resulting in the increased use of leaded glass during the 19th century will be examined, as will the innovations that led to this growth by national figures such as Louis Comfort Tiffany and John La Farge, and others.

Finally, the donors themselves, and those for whom the memorial windows were given, will be discussed, including such prominent names as Marshall Field, George Pullman, Silas Cobb, Timothy Blackstone, and John Crerar.

Friends of Historic Second Church gratefully acknowledges the following memberships, donations, and contributions from May 20, 2019-September 19, 2019.

\$5,000 - \$9,999
Christian Vinyard

\$1,000 - \$2,999
Anonymous
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In Memory of Julio Cesar Rios:
Deneen Marie Bryce
In honor of William Tyre

In-Kind Donations:
Bill Crawford
Dylan Crawford
Driehaus Museum
Paul Myers
Steve Trombetta
Minute Man Press

NARTHEX LUNETTES CONSERVATION

Originally painted in 1901 by Almini Company, the murals have been compromised by a heavy layer of dirt and grime with decades of airborne pollutants from fossil fuel heating, candles and other airborne accretions making the design and text illegible.



*South
Narthex
Lunette
Mural Prior
to Restoration*

Parma Conservation performed the conservation work. As the murals are painted on lime plaster they needed to be consolidated. This means the internal calcium carbonate and sand was stabilized with a mineral soluble acrylic resin, diluted in an aromatic hydrocarbon solvent. The consolidate was applied by brush to the surface and allowed to penetrate into the plaster substrate.

Once the surface was stable, a micro-emulsion cleaning gel was used to remove dirt and grime. The cleaner was brushed to the surface and then removed with dry cotton swabs, along with surface dirt that dissolved into the gel cleaner. This process was repeated until the surface was clean, revealing the original palette. Overpainting from previous restorations was removed during the process and areas of loss in the painted surface were filled with gesso.



*South
Narthex
Lunette
Mural
After
Restoration*

The murals were varnished with a non-yellowing varnish and areas of previous paint loss were color matched and in-painted with Gamblin Conservation Colors. A final coat of Golden MSA Satin varnish was applied to preserve the work.

If you have not seen the conserved murals, now is a great time to come see the dramatic transformation!

ALL FIFTY STATES

Friends enjoys hosting guests from locations down the street and around the world. We have toured guests from sixty-one countries, including Romania, Bosnia, Venezuela and Singapore. And until recently, we had seen guests from forty-nine states. That elusive fiftieth state was Delaware. But during the national Arts and Crafts conference hosted by *Initiatives in Art and Culture* that visited Second Presbyterian in September, a guest from Delaware participated and toured the church. We now proudly boast visitors from all fifty states!

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.

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 minimum distributions for 2019. Please consult your financial advisor for rules and further information.



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Facebook

FRIENDS' ANNUAL APPEAL 2019

We are passionate about our mission of restoring Chicago's only National Historic Landmark church and engaging large audiences in sharing its beauty and significance. We have made great progress in meeting our twin goals of restoration and education. This year we celebrated Howard Van Doren Shaw with numerous programs and restored the very dingy murals in the narthex. We hosted more visitors than ever before. The magazine *Stained Glass Quarterly* featured the restoration of the Tiffany Peace window. All of this was made possible by your support.

But there is so much more to do: another Tiffany window, murals, light fixtures and a more diverse program. In 2020 we will be honoring Frederic Clay Bartlett. Won't you help us bring these plans to life by making a donation?

Please consider sending a gift to Friends' 2019 Annual Appeal today. With a donation you will join in the excitement of 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 2019 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.

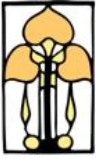
If you wish to discuss sponsoring a restoration project, contact Friends of Historic Second Church at 1-800-657-0687.

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.

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**

1936 S. Michigan Ave.

Chicago, IL 60616

Phone: 1-800-657-0687

E-mail: info@historicsecondchurch.org

Web: www.historicsecondchurch.org

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- Karen Oliver, *ex-officio*
- Heather Kendall *Administrative Manager*

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

Open House Chicago

Saturday October 19, 2019 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

Sunday October 20, 2019 12:30 pm to 5:00 pm

As part of the Chicago Architecture Center's annual festival, come see our hidden gem with the many architectural treasures inside; it's one of the 250 sites open that weekend.

Admission: Free

Basement to Belfry

Saturday October 26, 2019

10:00 am to 12:00 pm

Architect Nate Lielasus will provide a Basement to Belfry tour of the church. During this popular tour at Second Presbyterian, guests will be given a behind the scenes look at areas of the church not typically visited on regular tours, from the basement dirt floor to the charred roof timbers. The tour will focus on original architectural features from the 1874 construction and evidence of changes during Shaw's reconstruction.

Please note there are stairs, uneven ground, and several small spaces.

Admission: \$20 for non-members and \$18 for members of Friends

To purchase tickets go to historicsecondchurch.org

**SECOND PRESBYTERIAN
PUBLIC TOUR
SCHEDULE:**

Wednesdays:
1:00-3:00 pm

Saturdays:
11:00-3:00 pm

Sundays: 12:15 pm
(after worship service)

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

Mission Statement

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

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