



Beverly Heights  
Presbyterian  
Church

# scattered seeds.

THE NEWSLETTER

May 2019



## Heavenly WINDOWS

### 7-YEAR PROJECT NEARS ITS END

BY KATIE DOYLE

Have you noticed any windows missing from our church? No, they weren't stolen. Eight stained-glass windows from our "vestibules" – the stairwell entrances which face Washington Road – were lawfully removed in February for renovation.

Installed when the church first opened in 1930, restoration of the vestibule windows is the last chapter in a seven-year journey. When the renovated windows return in late summer, it ends a process which began in 2012 to fully restore all of the stained-glass windows in our church.

Just counting the windows installed in 1930, that's more than 14,000 individual pieces of glass which have been restored. There are likely thousands more pieces from the additional installations of the transept and chapel windows in 1953 and 1957, respectively.

Funds for this restoration were provided by the Next Step capital campaign. To date, about \$225,000 and more than 3,000 man-hours have been invested restoring the windows to mint condition and repairing leaky panes. The need was obvious and imperative: bowed windows and broken glass no longer withstood gusty winds and heavy rainfall.

Scattered Seeds has watched the vestibule restoration process unfold, as the capstone of this lengthy windows project, to answer the question: What exactly occurs when fragile works of beauty and utility undergo restoration? Plenty, as you are about to learn. —→



*The Apostle John, whom Jesus loved, as seen in the north transept window, in the upper lefthand window panel. The window was originally installed in 1953 when our church was enlarged and the transepts were added. It is called the Apostles' Window and has three panels, each showing four apostles. It was renovated by Renaissance Glassworks as part of our window restoration project. In the photo to the left, John holds a chalice with a serpent emerging from it, which is a typical motif used by artists to depict John.*



PHOTO 1

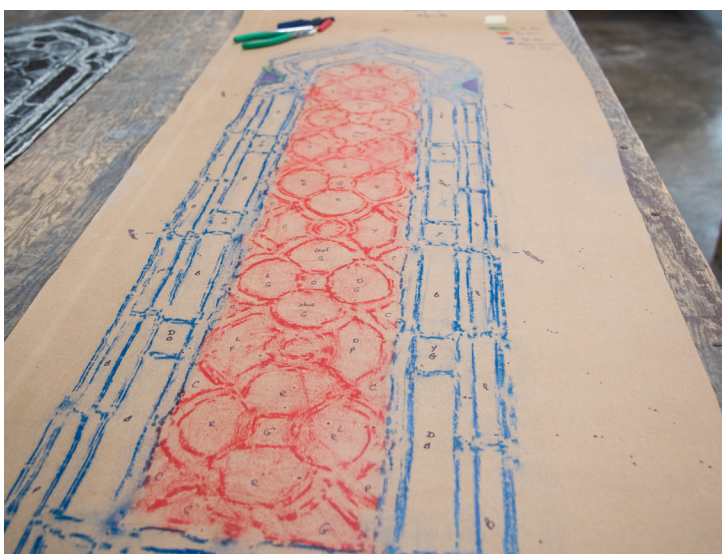


PHOTO 2



PHOTO 3

This meticulous work was undertaken by Renaissance Glassworks and its owner, H.B. Mertz. A man of wide-ranging interests, H.B., a member and elder of Beverly Heights, is a Penn Law School grad turned entrepreneur who plays drums in the contemporary worship band. He leapt into the stained-glass business 29 years ago when, after leaving the practice of corporate law, he bought the business which became Renaissance Glassworks.

The process begins in the basement studio of a nondescript brick building on Route 19 in Peters Township. Out front, the “Mattress Discounters” store upstairs is the sole indicator you have arrived at the place where our windows have been remade.

## It's painstaking work. Each vestibule window has 239 separate pieces of glass.

Inside that building and downstairs, our guide is Mike McElhattan – Renaissance Glassworks’ resident artist, glazier and studio manager. An art major at California University of Pa. in the 1990s, Mike signed up for a stained-glass class to round out his art education. When the professor abruptly quit, one of Mike’s classmates suggested he contact H.B. for an introduction to stained glass. Mike’s been working for H.B. ever since.

It’s painstaking work. Each of our eight vestibule windows has 239 separate pieces of glass. Mike will touch each piece at least five times. This means the vestibule windows will have 9,560 total “touches.” The “Life of Jesus” window at the rear of the sanctuary has 4,171 separate pieces – for it, Mike had more than 20,000 “touches.”

Mike has short, jet-black hair and a youthful appearance, but don’t let that fool you. He practices his craftsmanship with a surgeon’s precision, carrying on the ancient traditions of stained-glass artisans stretching back for centuries.

His eye carefully notes artistry, subject matter and craftsmanship. He uses mostly hand tools and hand power. The only electrical-powered tools are a soldering iron; a shop-vac; the kiln to fuse paint; the lights overhead and on the light tables; the fan blowing away fumes; and the shop’s sound system for his playlist.

When Mike removed the eight vestibule windows over two days in February (shown in [Photo 1](#)), they were taken out in one piece, along with the inside wooden frame.



In the shop, Mike first makes a rubbing of each window on heavy brown paper ([Photo 2](#)), outlining each piece of glass and each “came,” which is the grooved lead strip between pieces of glass holding the window together. Mike marks the color of each glass piece and the thickness of each came.

Old comes become soft and torn. Mike uses special pliers to remove the comes – gently pulling and tearing it away, and throwing it into a recycling bucket. As he lifts out each piece of glass ([Photo 3](#)), he lays it carefully on a large glass tray, always, always, keeping each piece in its place in the window’s design.

Now it’s time for a two-day bath of tap water to soften accumulated dirt and the cement which holds the comes in place. No soap!

Once the glass has been bathed, Mike uses a razor blade, super-fine steel wool and a soft rag to clean each piece, keeping the window’s original design intact ([Photo 4](#)).

If glass is cracked or missing, Mike replaces it with new glass – matching the previous color and texture. Renaissance Glassworks has an extensive collection from past projects, from manufacturers around the world.

Because most of our glass has intricate stenciled designs, replaced glass must replicate those designs. As cutting a stencil results in a very sore hand, Mike saves every stencil he’s ever cut. You’ll see “Beverly Heights” ([Photo 5](#)) on quite a few of them on the shop’s bulletin board.

Stenciling on stained glass is backwards from what we’d expect. The entire piece of glass is painted. Once it dries, Mike places the stencil over the glass and uses a stiff-bristled brush to remove paint that is not covered by the stencil. Newly painted pieces go into a kiln and bake at 1,200 degrees Fahrenheit, fusing the glass paint to the new glass.

The work to wrap new comes takes at least two days for each vestibule window. Mike tapes the paper rubbing to the work table and assembles the window on top of it, wrapping the came as he fits in the adjoining glass and mitering corners ([Photo 6](#)). When all the comes are in place, he solders each joint.

The cementing process takes another day. A thin putty is spread over the entire window and brushed into every crevice where the came meets the glass. Then a chalk dust is applied over the window to soak up oils from the putty. Once the dust is cleaned, the result is a window that’s tight in its frame. The lead has a dark patina from the cement’s residue.

Our vestibule windows fit snugly in decorative wood frames, cut and carved in 1930 to the curved shapes of each window. Later this summer, after carpenter Jason Walling has refinished and repainted the wood framing outside each window, Mike will reinstall these windows.

When they’re back, take time on a sunny day to view these treasures. Can I let you in on a secret? Two of them have minor peculiarities that have been there for 89 years. Can you find them? Hint: Look at the quatrefoils (four-lobed designs). Are all the lobes the same color?

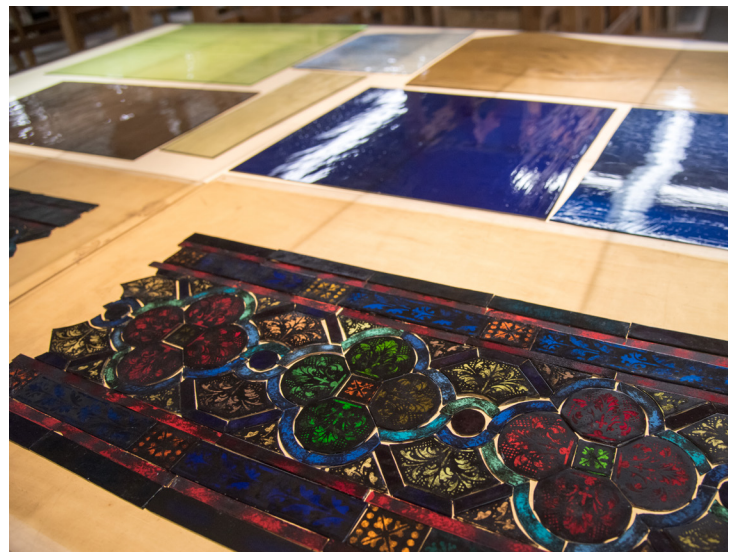


PHOTO 4



PHOTO 5



PHOTO 6

# milestones

BY TOM O'BOYLE

Sunday, June 15, 1930, was a landmark day for Beverly Heights Church. The first service was held in our new building and the first baby was baptized.

Recently, that baby boy got in touch with us. Then 8 months old and now 89 years young and living in a retirement community in North Carolina, Andrew Donaldson "Don" Robb III has a lively mind and spry spirit.

He resided there with his wife, Eleanor Cramer Robb, until her passing on Palm Sunday, April 14, at the age of 90. Eleanor was a Pittsburgher too, growing up in the Aspinwall area. She got a nursing degree from the University of Pittsburgh in 1951 and was a nurse before and after marrying Don in 1954. She loved the Lord, was radiantly cheerful and as a lifelong singer, frequently hummed hymns, according to her obituary.

The couple raised three children and would have celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary on June 5. Don and Eleanor were a husband-wife Presbyterian missionary team stationed first in Alabama, then abroad in Colombia and Venezuela for 20 years before returning to Alabama in 1979. They relocated to Grace Ridge Retirement Community in 2005.

A quick check of our baptismal records (thank you, Michelle Balfe!) verified that baby Don Robb was indeed the first child baptized in the new Beverly Heights Church, on June 15, 1930, the same day the church opened its doors (that's the same day pastor Nate was born, 46 years later). There have been more than 1,400 baptisms in our church since the first, Michelle confirms.

After reading Don's 45-page memoir which he'd sent to Amy Lucas, entitled "Under the Shadow of the Almighty" (taken from Psalm 91), we talked on the phone.

It turns out Don had grown up at 126

Hoodridge Drive, which made us neighbors (a few generations removed). Louise and I have lived at 107 Hoodridge for almost 30 years, across the street and five houses up from 126.

Don was born Oct. 16, 1929. The great stock market crash of 1929 was just days away.

But even during the Depression, life for little Don on Hoodridge Drive was idyllic. He played

United Presbyterian Church, formed 90 years ago this July 10th in 1929. Ground was broken on the new church in August and the cornerstone was laid in November. We worshipped in the Edwin Markham School until June of 1930, when the building opened.

The Robbs sat on the left side of the church facing the pulpit, about halfway down, Don recalls, by the stained-glass window.

His first Bible classes were taught by women from Beverly Heights, in their homes, after the school day at Markham.

"Beverly Heights was the center of my universe," Don said.

In the summer of 1945, following 10th grade, Don went with church friends Bill Coltman and Jim Jewell to the annual two-week Algonquin Canoe Trip at Pioneer Camp in Ontario, Canada. He heard God's call to become a missionary that summer. Canoe mates Bill, a pilot, and Jim, a surgeon, also later did missionary work.

After Don had graduated from Mt. Lebanon High School in 1947, he seldom returned once his parents moved away. He went on to Lehigh for college and Princeton Seminary for his theology training. But he credits Beverly Heights for introducing him to Jesus and changing the trajectory of his life.

"Beverly Heights was a foundation in my formation as a disciple of Jesus," Don writes. "How wonderful it is that you have a vital, Christ-centered ministry in Mt. Lebanon. Thank you for this long-distance fellowship in the Lord that has been a joy to me."



*Don Robb, 2 years old, with mother Anna in 1932*

in the empty lot where our house now stands; delivered The Pittsburgh Press in the afternoon; was a Boy Scout in Troop 84 which met at Beverly Heights; trapped rabbits during World War II to keep them out of the neighborhood "Victory Garden"; and tied clothesline around his bicycle's back bike tire to improve winter traction riding to and from school.

His parents, Andrew Donaldson Robb Jr., a banker at First National Bank of Castle Shannon and his wife Anna, were founding members of the new Beverly Heights

