



LIBRARY & ARCHIVES TREASURES

By David R. Grinnell, Chief Archivist

William C. Frederick's Stained Glass Slide Collection

Some of Western Pennsylvania's houses of worship are adorned with complex architectural features, while others are understated in their simplicity, but both styles can impart a sense of the space's special purpose. Many of Pittsburgh's worship spaces boast stained glass windows created by craftsmen with artistic knowledge extending back to Europe centuries ago. These jewels, also found in public buildings such as schools and in private homes, depict images of heroic and mythical figures, landscapes, seascapes, family shields, and geometric designs.

After the Civil War, the growth of industries such as copper, iron, steel, food processing, transportation, and the glass industry itself brought widespread prosperity. Many of the Pittsburgh's wealthy industrialists and businessmen financed the construction of large churches and lavish modern homes, complete with all the trimmings that showed

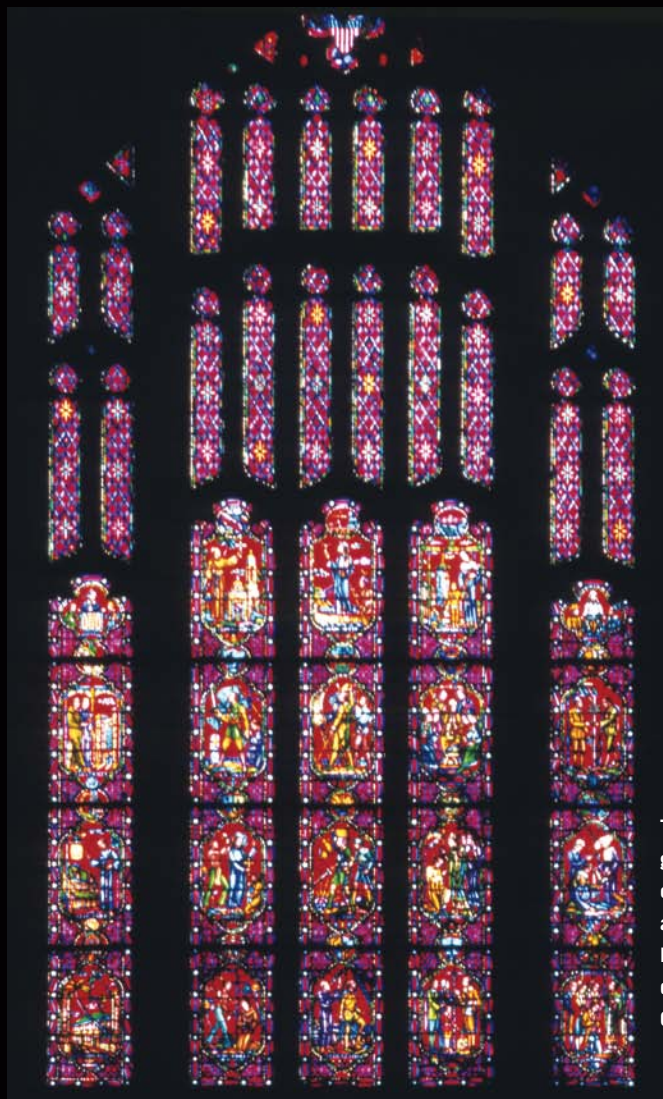


Seascape, artist unknown.

Dr. Edward Kropf Office, 820

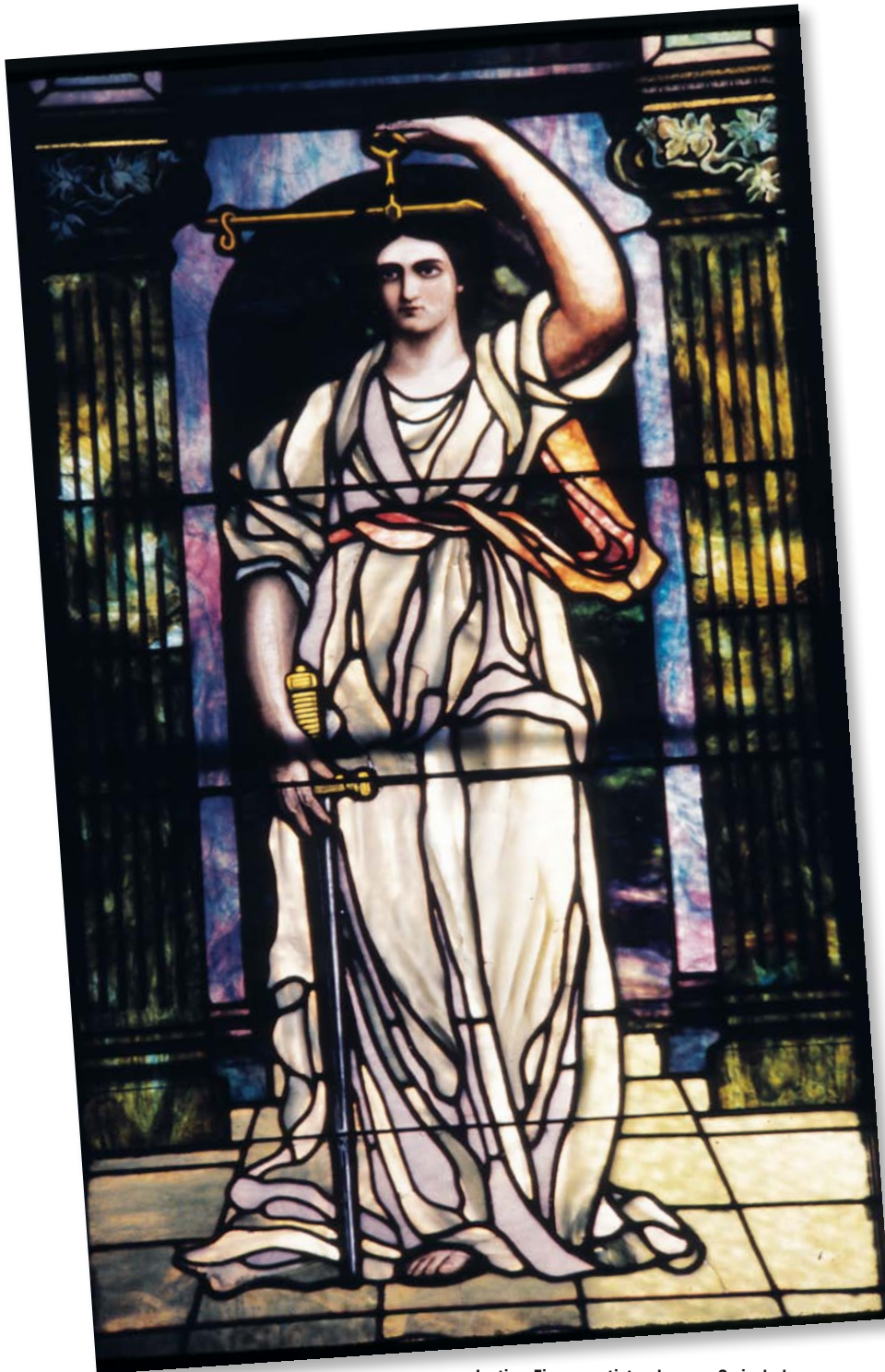
Cedar Avenue, North Side.

All images from the William C. Frederick Collection.



The third largest stained glass window in the world, created by George Sotter and installed at Sacred Heart Church in Shadyside, depicts the history of the Catholic Church in America.



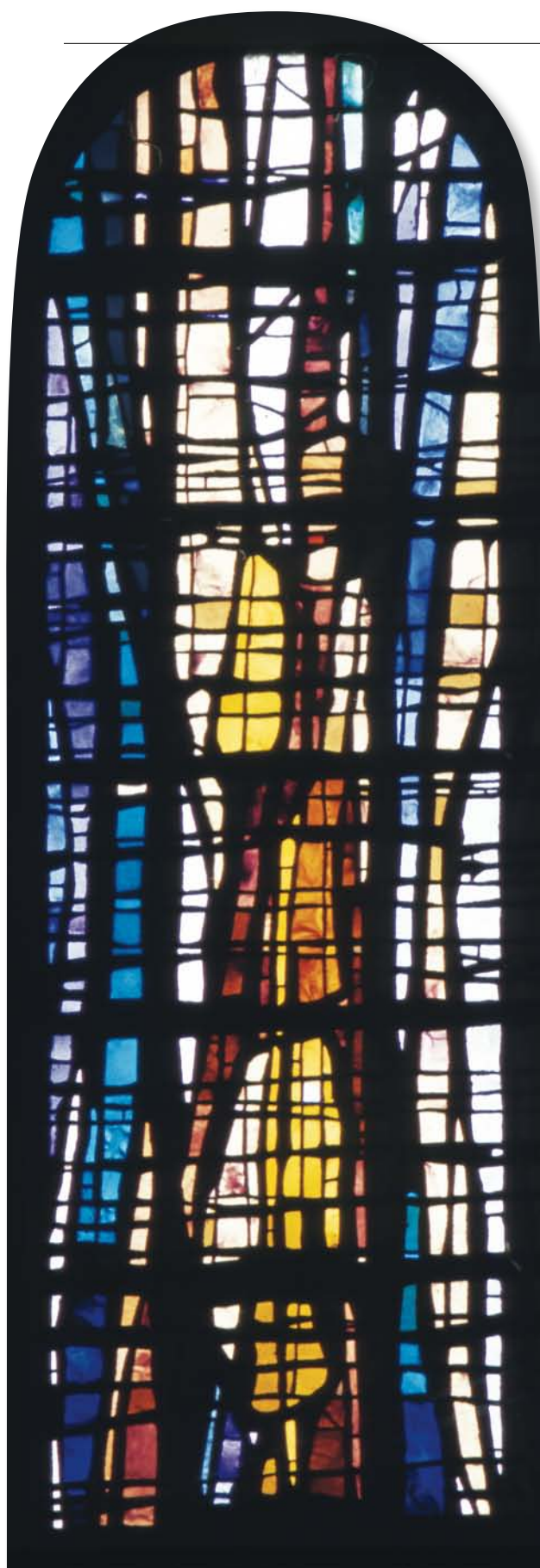


Justice Figure, artist unknown. Swisshelm School, 125 Whipple Street, Swisshelm Park. Building demolished 1976.

they had “made it.” With the window glass industry already well established and a demand for the creation of artistic windows, Pittsburgh became home to a burgeoning artistic community of stained glass artisans. The Rudy Brothers, Hunt Studios, Charles J. Connick, and William Willet all worked here at some time during their careers. In addition, the New York-based Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company created important installations in Pittsburgh that continue to inspire and delight.


Dr. William C. Frederick, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh’s Katz School of Business, was captivated by the beauty and exquisite craftsmanship of Pittsburgh’s stained glass windows and so began photographing them more than 30 years ago. Of particular interest were the many stained glass windows “invisible” to most people, those found in private homes. He created an album of some of his images as a gift to his mother in 1971. In the album’s introduction he wrote:

No photographic print, however well done, can match the true beauty of a stained glass window. This is due primarily to the nature of the glass medium



used in this form of art. Its beauty depends entirely upon one objective and one subjective element. The objective beauty of a stained glass window is due to the daylight that filters and sparkles through the small pieces of colored glass. A stained glass window of high quality will appear beautiful in both dim light and bright light, although the two moods may vary greatly. The subjective or personal element that imparts beauty to a stained glass window is the attitude of mind one brings to his viewing. This mood can vary from the sense of mystery and serenity that pervades a religious sanctuary to the fervor of patriotic pride that is invoked by viewing national heroes cast in the hallway windows of public schools. The artist who designs and crafts the window is keenly aware of these personal feelings that will be present in the minds and hearts of the viewers, and he chooses his colors to magnify such effects. So a mere photograph in a book lacks both

the brilliance and intensity of the daylight shining through the glass, as well as the sense of mystery, pride, or sympathy that can occur only by viewing the window in its original setting. The lesson is an obvious one—go to see stained glass windows if you can.

Although photographs don't always do justice to these magnificent pieces of art, Frederick's images are a lasting legacy for the many Pittsburgh windows that no longer exist. In the last 30 years, Pittsburgh has witnessed the demolition of many neighborhood structures. The whereabouts of the stained glass windows that once graced staircases, hallways, sanctuaries, and vestibules are often unknown; most, we fear, were tossed into the debris sent to landfills, leaving us to view these lovely works of art solely through the lens of Dr. Frederick's camera. 

The Library & Archives collects materials related to the history and culture of Western Pennsylvania. The Reading Room, located on the sixth floor of the Heinz History Center, is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Geometric design by Jean-Jacques Duval,
B'nai Israel Synagogue, East Liberty.**