



Episode 902, Story 3 – Tiffany Window

Gwen Wright: Our last case examines a watercolor for clues about a master of American design. It's 1892 and Louis Comfort Tiffany is dreaming of a brilliant future. In less than a year, millions will churn through the Chicago World's Fair, eager to see the latest wonders in science and arts. Tiffany knows that success at this exhibition, with his revolutionary stained glass, will shout his name across the United States. But his preparations suddenly come to a halt, when the glasscutters union goes on strike. With the fair looming, how will Tiffany aid disaster? Now a man from Kalispell, Montana wonders if a family heirloom might be a part of Tiffany history.

Brian Frey: I had always heard this was my great-great grandmother's favorite window, and I want to find out what that means.

Gwen: I'm Gwendolyn Wright, and I'm meeting Brian Frey to ask him about his water color and his family lore.

Hi. So this is what you wanted to show me?

Brian: Yes, this is it. It's a watercolor done by my great-great-grandmother, Anne Weston. This has been in our family for as long as I can remember.

Gwen: Brian says Anne was born in the middle of the 19th century, and adopted as an infant by a family named Vanderlip. She grew up in New York, and moved to Duluth, Minnesota after marrying a doctor named John Weston.



Brian: She was a designer for Tiffany Studios, and we believe that it is a design for a window that she may have done.

Gwen: Did she do other stained glass windows?

Brian: I do know that she did the Minnehaha window that's in Duluth.

Gwen: Well, tell me exactly what you'd like me to find out about this drawing.

Brian: I'd like to know if it ever was actually made into a window and just anything else that you can tell me about Anne.

Gwen: Well, I look forward to tracing this and finding out more about a woman artist at the turn of the last century.

It makes sense this was a window. There's a frame around the hole, and it's divided into three vertical panels, what's called a triptych, usually a religious window or painting. This, however, appears to be an abstract design with swans and water. Brian's given me permission to remove the frame. I was hoping there'd be some writing on the back. Unfortunately, I don't find anything other than remnants of some kind of glue. By and large, this is an example of what's called "art nouveau." Art nouveau was a stylized artistic movement that emerged at the end of the 19th century. Partly a reaction to cheap mechanization of the industrial revolution, this "new art" emphasized skilled craftsmanship, and is characterized by the use of luxuriant curved lines such as those found in nature.



Most people know Tiffany's name through his lamps, but they're only one part of the arts that he produced, which ranged from furniture and textiles, through lamps, stained glass windows, and jewelry. And all of it, with luscious colors. Tiffany wanted to produce exquisite handcrafted works that accentuated the uniqueness and beauty of each piece. Son of a famous jeweler, he was both an artist and businessman. He once said, "we are going after the money there is in art. But art is there, all the same."

Here's the Minnehaha window that Brian mentioned. "For the Minnesota Building at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, designed by Mrs. Anne Weston, from Duluth." But I don't see any other reference to Anne.

One of the reasons Tiffany's name is familiar to so many people is he produced a vast amount of work. Literally thousands of his windows throughout the United States, finding the one that matches this drawing may be quite a challenge. A census search reveals that in 1880, Anne was living in New York with her father. It looks like she married John Weston in 1888, and had moved to Duluth by 1900, but none of the records list a profession. When did she work for Tiffany, and was this, in fact, a preliminary design for Tiffany glasswork? I'm meeting Paul Doros of the Tiffany Studios Research Center at a church in Manhattan.

Paul Doros: Nice to meet you, Gwen. We're in St. Michaels Church and the window is called St. Michaels Victorious in Heaven. It was made in 1895 by Tiffany Studios, and it's a magnificent work made it the height of his career in making windows.



Gwen: Paul explains how Louis Comfort Tiffany was eager to put the gilt on the Gilded Age. Who were some of his clients?

Paul: The most famous ones were the robber barons, the new American aristocracy. Andrew Carnegie, Rockefeller, the Vanderbilts he worked for. He did Mark Twain's house. He did the White House for Chester Arthur in 1882. He believed that if he sold to the wealthy he could publicize it and the taste would trickle down to the masses.

Gwen: Paul explains that one of Tiffany's innovations was using the traditionally religious art of stained glass for secular purposes.

Paul: He wanted to educate the American public as to what was good taste, also raising glass to the same level as painting. To create the same effects that an artist could do, as a painter could do. He could do in glass.

Gwen: I'm trying to figure out if this drawing was made into a window.

Paul: Well my first instinct, impression, would be that it would be a domestic window. It's not a religious scene. I have never seen anything like this made by Tiffany Studios.

Gwen: How extensive are the records?

Paul: Unfortunately, all the records were thrown out or discarded in early 70's, so that treasure trove is missing.



Gwen: Well, this drawing was made by a woman named Ann Vanderlip who later became Ann Weston when she married. Have you ever heard about her working for Tiffany?

Paul: Not off hand, no I haven't. Tiffany was very reluctant to advertise or publicize who his artists were, part of the marketing which is sell the Tiffany brand and he didn't want any interference from any of his employees in that regard. But his responsibility was to improve all the designs that went out.

Gwen: But Paul may have a lead.

Paul: Tiffany did have many women artists and designers in the studios, so many that they were later known as the Tiffany Girls.

Gwen: He tells me of a recent discovery made by art historian, Nina Ray. Before speaking to Nina, I want to learn how Tiffany might have made our abstract design into a window. Tom Venturella is both a restorer of Tiffany windows, and a stained glass artist, himself.

Tom Venturella: Full-sized drawings are made of every one of these openings, six in this particular case. Those are called the cartoons.

Gwen: Each piece in the design was numbered. Then one copy of the cartoon served as a guide. A second was cut up like a puzzle making templates for cutting the glass.

Tom: Then that's where the selectors and the cutters come in.



Gwen: Tom explains that selectors and cutters were very important because of the extraordinary variations in one of Tiffany's innovations, opalescent glass, in which multiple colors are fused together.

Tom: It means its handmade glass. It's extremely important for Tiffany to understand how light plays with this glass, off the surface, and through the glass.

Gwen: Workers would then choose the best place, and cut the glass to match the template.

Tom: The tool they would have used was probably a diamond cutter.

Gwen: Then the edges of the piece were wrapped in copper foil and placed in the guide. Once the design was assembled, the pieces were fixed into place. Tiffany could enhance the sense of depth and movement in his designs by stacking the glass in layers or plates to create effects like foliage or water.

Tom: I can show you the fishbowl here, which has a similar feeling, where the two fish are in this bowl, but they're actually swimming here. And the entire thing is covered with a full sheet of a clear rippled water glass.

Gwen: It's like the water at the bottom of our drawing. You see the surface, you see underneath, you see light on different places, and you even get the impression of the swan's feet underneath. Ah, that's how he would do it.



My next stop is with Nina Gray at the Lillian Nassau Gallery. She and a colleague recently uncovered a cache of letters that illuminate the lives of a previously obscure group of women. They were known as “Tiffany Girls.” Tell me about the Tiffany Girls. What was their background in?

Nina Gray: The women who worked at Tiffany Studios were largely middle class, upper middle class and they would have trained under professional artists and then they would have gotten work in art studios and places like Tiffany Studios.

Gwen: Do you know what year Tiffany first hired a woman?

Nina: There were very few women in the 1880’s who were working at Tiffany but in 1892 just as Tiffany is preparing for a huge exhibition display in Chicago at the World’s Columbian Exposition all of the male glass workers in New York go on strike. So he went and hired women from art schools.

Gwen: The women were denied membership in the male-only union. Tiffany thought they had superior color sense and manual dexterity, he later defended the women against union efforts to have them fired.

Nina: So within a couple of years, there were as many as 35 women in the department.

Gwen: The Tiffany Girls’ work was principally to select and cut glass, a vital creative step of the design process.



Nina: It opened up a whole new exciting field for these women because traditionally the only occupations that women could have were nursing and teaching.

Gwen: I show her Anne's swan drawing. Though the image isn't familiar, the materials and format are. We compare it with another design.

Nina: But I specially wanted to show you this. This is another watercolor.

Gwen: Now I just noticed something that the drawing paper is, I think, exactly the same size as the paper that Anne used. And it's mounted on another piece of paper and some of the information is down there, so we may have some information that was cut off when she mounted it in here.

Nina: Absolutely.

Gwen: Now, when you were doing your research on the letters of the Tiffany Girls, did you find any mention of Anne?

Nina: I didn't find any mention of Anne because the letters that we found begin around 1897.

Gwen: But Nina has a lead of her own. Several years ago she says she read some research, by an art historian in Minnesota. So I'm bundling up and following Anne's Weston footsteps from New York to frosty Duluth, Minnesota. I'm meeting art historian and curator Wade Lawrence at the First Presbyterian Church, home to several of Anne Weston's windows.



Hi, Gwen Wright, nice to meet you.

Wade Lawrence: Nice to meet you.

Gwen: I'm eager to learn more about Anne. What can you tell me about her work with Tiffany?

Wade: Her father must have been a friend of Louis Comfort Tiffany. He was one of the founding trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Anne Weston exhibited art at the National Academy of Design, so they ran in the same circles. We don't know exactly how she started working for Louis Comfort Tiffany, but it had to have something to do with her family connections. She began working around 1884.

Gwen: So she was involved with Tiffany glassmaking very early on.

Wade: Yes, the 1880s were an early phase of the stained glass production at Tiffany Studios, so she was involved at the very beginning.

Gwen: Wade says Anne held many jobs at Tiffany, eventually becoming a designer. There are even indications she ran the first incarnations of the women's glass department. How many windows do you know of that she did here in Duluth?

Wade: I've been able to attribute 13 windows in Duluth to Anne Weston, including these here at First Presbyterian.



Gwen: Well, I'm eager to show you this drawing. Tell me what you think?

Wade: The subject matter is unusual with the swans and the peacocks, the composition itself is quite complex. It's unique in all of her work.

Gwen: Have you seen a window based on this drawing? What Wade tells me next sheds a special light on Brian's great-great grandmother. I've asked Brian to meet me in Duluth's historic Union Depot, which houses some of Anne's most important work, including the Minnehaha window.

Brian: It's breathtaking. It's a beautiful, gorgeous piece of work.

Gwen: Come with me.

Brian: Okay, alright.

Gwen: I tell Brian that Anne had held high-level positions with Tiffany, and was a pioneering figure among the so-called Tiffany Girls.

Brian: That's incredible!

Gwen: I do have something interesting to show you.

Wade: This is it. It's one of Anne Weston's portfolios.



Gwen: How exciting! Wade has not found a window based on Anne's drawing, although he believes it may be awaiting discovery, most likely in a private home.

Wade: These are design drawings for windows that she designed, many of which were made, including this one, which is that window there.

Gwen: Absolutely!

Wade: For many years, this was attributed to Anne Weston, and this drawing proves that it was her window.

Gwen: So there's constantly new information. We may still be able to find if this was made into a window and where it is.

Wade: Absolutely.

Gwen: This is a portfolio of Anne's work.

Brian: Oh, wow. That's amazing. For all these years, she was just a great-great grandmother and that, you know, she's still that, but she's so much more, and so much more to a lot more people than just our family.

Gwen: If you've seen this window or have additional information about Anne Weston, please contact us. We'll post new information on the History Detectives website.