



An Executive Summary: Historical Research of the Tiffany Windows American Red Cross Summer 2022

Overview

The American Red Cross national headquarters has a work of art in the form of three stunning stained glass window panels at its national headquarters building in Washington, D.C. Created by the Tiffany Studios and installed in 1917, these windows were funded in part by the Woman's Relief Corps (representing the women of the North) and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (the UDC, representing the women of the South). They were designed to symbolize reconciliation and unity following the Civil War.

As part of our organizational commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and given that these windows were partially funded by the UDC, the Red Cross sought to fully understand the background and inspiration for these windows. To undertake this work, in 2021, the Red Cross contracted two esteemed historical researchers, Dr. Karen Cox, a well-known authority on the UDC, and Elizabeth DeRosa, a top scholar on glassworks of the Tiffany Studios. For nine months, these two experts studied Red Cross records, media reports from that timeframe, UDC archives, and documents from Tiffany Studios to understand more about the intentions of Mabel Boardman, then the executive secretary for the Central Committee of the Red Cross, and the lead in the construction and design of the Red Cross headquarters building.

The collective findings of these two researchers yielded detailed reports on the creation, vision and funding for the Red Cross building and windows, the role of Tiffany Studios, and the extent of the involvement of the UDC.

The Red Cross National Headquarters Building — Timeline and Origin

By the early 20th century, the U.S. had many memorials across the country dedicated to men who had served in the Civil War, but none dedicated to women who had selflessly supported the war. Inspiration for a permanent Red Cross headquarters building began with Union Civil War veteran James Scrymser, who aimed to construct a memorial to honor the sacrifices women made during the war.

According to James' memoirs, the concept of a Civil War memorial to women began as a project among northern Civil War veterans and did not originally include women from the South. The focus of the memorial shifted in 1911, with an appropriation of federal money for the land and the building. Through the insistence of Senator John Sharp Williams, a congressman from Mississippi, the memorial would honor both women of the North and the South.

With James' dream and Mabel's persistence, along with government appropriation and private funding, the Red Cross headquarters building took shape, and today stands on 17th Street, NW, in downtown Washington, D.C.

The Tiffany Windows: A Focus on Medievalism

Mabel had an unwavering vision for the building, but the stained-glass Tiffany windows she wanted were not in the original budget and required additional fundraising, which Mabel accomplished through monies raised in part from the Woman's Relief Corps, the UDC and other donors.

The images and themes in the windows were centered around mercy, hope, faith, wisdom and love. They were medieval in nature, based on a resurgence in popularity of these themes during the late 19th century, and a style of glass work that Tiffany Studios were known for at that time. The design was based primarily on Mabel's vision of aiding a wounded soldier and the image of St. Philomena in the panel on the left, but she sought advice from Senator Elihu Root of New York specifically for the middle panel. Senator Root suggested Una from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, a poem written in 1590 that was resurging in popularity at that time.

The medieval imagery of Una, as well as the knight on horseback and the fallen soldiers surrounding him, represent the idea of mercy, and suggest that even in the chaos of battle, there is always time to help the wounded. The Red Cross knight in the center panel represents the popularity of late 19th century medievalism, functions as a design element, and complements the fallen soldier receiving aid during the battle. The panels on either side represent the concept of virtuous women and the building's dedication.



Thematically, Tiffany artisans were challenged to unite the three panels into one cohesive story. They accomplished this by adorning the female figures in every panel in similar robes, all carrying banners and marching in a procession toward the battlefield in the center panel.

These Tiffany windows are a unique, custom design created specifically for the Red Cross as a symbol of unity for all Americans. Early in the 20th century, Tiffany artisans were skilled and detailed craftspeople; the layering of the glass, depth, color, and shading created by folds in the glass were all unique to Tiffany artists.

Window-by-Window Specifics

- The panel on the left was donated by the Woman's Relief Corps. The central figure is St. Philomena, who was noted for her healing powers. She is surrounded by attendant maidens who symbolize love, compassion, hope, mercy, faith and charity.
- The center panel – donated by the women from the North and the South – portrays an army of knights in armor carrying spears and mounted on horses as they head into battle. The central figure carries a large flag with the Red Cross emblem in the center. Near his horse's feet lies a fallen warrior receiving food and aid from a faithful comrade. The window expresses that even in the onrush of battle, there is still time to help the wounded.
- The third panel was donated by the UDC. The central figure is Una from Edmund Spenser's highly allegorical poem *The Faerie Queene*. Una represents truth. Her attendants carry a cross and a lamp symbolizing wisdom and a banner with a heart for love. A young woman kneels in front of Una holding a shield that bears the Red Cross emblem.

Conclusion

The collective findings of these two renowned researchers found that, while partial funding for the windows was donated by the UDC – whose historic views are not reflective of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross – there is no indication that the UDC directed or had any voice in deciding the themes for the design of the Red Cross Tiffany windows. Rather, the use of medieval characters and themes were a popular and oft-used artistic treatment of the Tiffany Studios; similar artisanship by Tiffany Studios appeared in numerous churches, synagogues and private homes during this same period. Further, the collective analysis confirmed *that the window images were not indicative of any racist motives*.

While the windows and their content were intended as a gesture to bring the North and the South together, that reconciliation was not yet for the formerly enslaved or Indigenous communities during this time.

As an organization committed to transparency, and to our Fundamental Principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality, the Red Cross is proud to have conducted this important research.