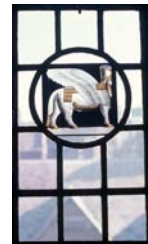


Brilliance All Around:
 The Stained Glass of Sterling and Its Maker
 By Gay Walker



(Presented substantially in this form,
 January 27, 2006, at the Sterling
 Memorial Library, Yale University)

Lizards stalk and monkeys swing, a ferocious Samurai jumps in fury, Columbus discovers America, Cicero addresses the senate, and the ancient Assyrian human-headed winged bull marches forward, all on a single floor of the Sterling Memorial Library. Filled with fascinating figures and scenes, the windows in the Library provide a rich tapestry of decoration, a running commentary on the accomplishments of human endeavor. Familiar to many generations of students, staff, and visitors, these images in glass deserve close attention, and their maker, G. Owen Bonawit, deserves the appreciation so many have felt for his artistry, whether his name is known to them or not.



During my career as a librarian at Yale (1972-1990), I occupied desks in five different rooms that contained these amazing windows and fell under their spell. I felt they belonged to me, as no doubt every denizen of this building has felt. They caught my attention, daily, and I absorbed them. They inspired me to carry out extensive research into the images, the artist, stained glass in the United States, American architecture, and the decorative arts. I could *almost* catch a glimpse of the artist -- when the little lizard in the window near my shoulder later popped up in a biblical scene from a New York church, when the room originally devoted to a special collection of natural history showed the birds in flight at the top of the window - the only portion that allowed the viewer to see clouds and brilliant blue sky behind, and when I noticed that the lunch room window showing Jack Spratt and his wife displayed leaded windows in the background that were absent the book illustration upon which it was based. I tracked down the sources for all the images I could in the 680 larger painted glass medallions. However, I still



have about 140 to identify, and those images have formed a subcontext to everything I have seen in books and in stained glass ever since.

Placing Sterling's windows in context is critical to their full appreciation in order to be aware of how unique and magnificent the decoration of *this* building is and how it happened to come about. The story starts with the creator of the windows, George Owen Bonawit, the setting at Yale with campus building plans, and the selected architect – James Gamble Rogers. Bonawit had become a specialist in secular stained glass art early in his career, with a studio in Manhattan in operation from 1915 through 1941. Although he was quite competent in producing religious glass, this time period encompassed the Decorative Arts Movement in America. Bonawit definitely rose to the challenge of creating stained glass decorations with appropriate subjects which today grace academic institutions, civic buildings, and private residences as *well* as churches, a success which only a handful of artisans attained. The stained glass Bonawit produced for these buildings was crafted in the traditional medieval manner while displaying secular subjects relevant to their settings.



I believe the best representative examples of Bonawit's work are at Yale in six of the Collegiate Gothic style buildings designed and built here between 1917 and 1934 by James Gamble Rogers, and most clearly in the Library. Based on the architecture of the medieval universities at Oxford and Cambridge, the Collegiate Gothic style symbolized the nurturing and spread of learning. Beyond Yale, architectural examples can be found at Duke, Princeton, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, West Point, Northwestern, and many more, including Reed College in Oregon, all built during the early part of the 20th century. Indeed, this architectural style encouraged the development of a decorative secular stained glass trend in America, one inspired by the English, Swiss, and Flemish domestic glass of the 15th and 16th centuries. These trends were at odds with both the glass and concrete functionalism exemplified by Frank Lloyd Wright and the new Art Glass Movement led by John La Farge and Louis Tiffany, which often focused on secular subjects but employed opaque or opalescent glass in very different styles.

James Gamble Rogers was a Yale graduate (class of 1889) and New York architect who trained in Chicago and Paris and took the obligatory European architectural tour which included the historic English colleges. Rogers discovered G. Owen Bonawit when he was looking for a craftsman to execute the window decorations in several of his early buildings.

Rogers chose Bonawit first for a 1921 commission to provide the decorations on French doors and windows in the renovation of the Edward S.



Harkness townhouse in New York City, originally built in 1906-08.

These early examples of Bonawit's domestic glass showed his creative flair for unusual composition, aspects of which would appear in later commissions: the flow of one design over several panes of glass; the selection of a variety of animal forms; the placement of marine life at the bottom and birds at the top of a window meant to distract from the



'non-view' outside; and the playful use of *trompe l'oeil* insects.

This commission established the patron – architect – craftsman relationship which was subsequently to be so important for Bonawit, Rogers, and Yale University.

That same year, Rogers selected Bonawit to produce the window decorations for Yale's gothic-style Harkness Memorial Quadrangle buildings. The style was critical as it set the general flavor of campus development at the beginning of a massive building phase, and it created a broad need for decoration in the more lavish gothic mode. The gothic style was suggested by the patrons of the Quadrangle buildings of Branford and Saybrook colleges: Mrs. Harkness and her son, Edward, who gave the funds in memory of her other son, Charles, who died in 1916. Both Harkness sons were Yale graduates. Confirmed by Yale's building committee, gothic was to inform the architectural heart of the campus in many of its individual college dormitories, the law school buildings, the hall of graduate studies, and the library.



This first Yale commission established Bonawit's reputation for secular stained and leaded glass in which he carried out the architect's belief that great variety of detail would provide both interest and an overall unity of feeling in the gothic building style. One leaded window in every dormitory room was decorated with a painted glass vignette relating to college life, such as the bladder-ball contest. These subjects were refreshingly creative and often humorous. For larger gathering rooms, Bonawit crafted decorative pictures in lead work



and painted glass panels, and created mosaic stained glass figures in both Branford and Saybrook colleges which relate stylistically to 15th and 16th century English stained glass work. One of these windows bears the only Bonawit-signed pane so far identified at Yale. The largest full-color mosaic stained glass window on campus was created by Bonawit for the Memorial Room of Harkness Tower. Its designs incorporated both full-length figures

and busts representing Cicero, Herodotus, Euclid, and others significant in the history of mankind's intellectual development.

Also in 1921, Rogers commissioned Bonawit to produce the sea-related subjects in the profusely-decorated windows of the Cunard Building, now part offices and part Bowling Green Station of the U.S. Post Office. In these two jobs, the Cunard building and Yale's Memorial Quadrangle, Bonawit refined his style,



confidently clarifying his line but giving the same close attention to detail along with a delightful sly sense of humor about subjects, both living and dead, that was shared with the viewer. He

employed mosaic glass: colored and painted pieces leaded together, along with the painted

pane. Many of these themes are also to be seen elsewhere in Bonawit's work.



During the 1920s, Bonawit's firm produced many forms of decoration for residences as well as institutions and commercial buildings. Products included Venetian mosaics and even heraldic banners. However, the firm soon concentrated on stained and leaded glass, and the leaded images that became trademarks for Bonawit's firm can each be seen in some form in the library: the hart from the firm's letterhead is in the cloister hallway, and the mermaid in an ad is in a leaded window high up above the guard's station outside the lecture hall.



The use of secular stained glass decorations in businesses, public buildings, schools, homes, and libraries was at its height in the late 1920s and early 1930s. There were other American stained glass artists working in this genre, notably Henry Hunt, Nicola d'Ascenzo, who crafted the windows in Yale's Calhoun College, Wright Goodhue, and Charles Connick. Most other artists, however, worked primarily with leaded mosaic stained glass while Bonawit specialized in the painted panel, or medallion. The glass panel, whether rectangular, circular, square, oval, or polygonal, eliminated the heavy leading lines and many small pieces of glass needed in mosaic work, and it allowed Bonawit freedom in his painting which took on a liveliness that emphasized the pictorial qualities of small designs. His work stands out as arguably the best of any similar work of that time, or, indeed, since.



By the late 1920s, the Bonawit firm was highly successful, and by 1934 it employed fifteen people, several of whom were designers. Bonawit executed windows for churches throughout his stained glass career, but his preference for secular subjects and his talent for designing decorations suitable to the style of the building were apparent in the extensive work carried out for academic institutions,

mostly in the early 1930s. Several of these jobs were awarded to Bonawit as the winner of design competitions.

At the same time, Yale's old main library in Dwight Hall, originally Dwight Chapel built in 1842, was badly overcrowded, and all available storage space in other nearby buildings was exhausted by the 1920's. Some of the library collection, in fact, was housed in Linsly-Chittenden Hall, the location for probably the best-known stained glass windows on campus, which are by Louis Comfort Tiffany.



Sterling Library's original basic plan was drawn up by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, a Boston architect who died in 1924, long before the 1930/31 final construction period. By this point Yale's Consulting Architect, Rogers stepped in with a free hand for the final plan and all the decoration. He is quoted as saying about the new group of buildings planned in the 1920s: the Hall of Graduate Studies, the Law School, and the Library, that, "by keeping the modern Gothic well under restraint, the style of the library will not be too much at variance with the architecture of the whole future group, and yet it will express the dignity and importance of the greatest building in the group." Rogers called in his favorite craftsmen for the major decorative media, and he worked in the style of the medieval master builder who encouraged his craftsmen to express their individual creativity in the decorations. Rogers combined this variety with the many differences in materials, building height, roof angles, and location to achieve "unity in diversity" which is a hallmark of the gothic style – along with a lot of windows to fill.

The Sterling Library resembles a European gothic cathedral with its 60-foot ceiling, the tall clerestory windows, the cloisters, the crossing, the side-chapels, the stack tower, and the circulation desk altar. In this commission, Bonawit was faced with a massive building full of large rooms that would be used intimately, where some windows would be at eye-level and nose-distance and so require delicate detail while others would be far above head-height but demand the free entrance of light. Instead of using full-color, often opaque glass pieces leaded together in the mosaic method to create designs as in cathedrals, Bonawit employed painted and stained medallions to produce a freer decorative effect, transmit



more light, depict appropriate subjects for the use of each room in an academic setting, and create images containing exquisitely-executed details for close-up viewing. Far-off windows were equally detailed.

Bonawit executed the library's glass decorations using many methods and styles. The painted medallions form the majority of the

larger glass decorations. All 680 were executed in a style similar to that of Flemish glass from the 15th and 16th centuries.

Thirty-eight painted designs extend over several panes in rooms 335 and 335A, originally a Special Collection room noted as decorated with “various type of



birds”. They recall Bonawit’s earlier Harkness House commission with its fish and bird scenes. The parapet outside these windows on the third floor obscures the view except towards the top, and it is quite wonderful to see clouds floating behind the flying painted birds on a sunny day, but yet there is intricate detail for close-up viewing.



There are 160 heraldic shields composed of small pieces of colored and painted glass leaded together installed in the main reading room and in the upper windows along Wall Street. Although they do not represent actual coats-of-arms so far as I can tell, they show the various heraldic devices and conjure up the right ambience of medieval society.



The Bonawit firm also painted some 2,424 small outline images in other leaded windows, many of them based on 15th century figures and Jost Ammon woodcuts of medieval crafts. A few of the small figures found in the administrative offices are *trompe l’oeil* insects meant to trick the eye, a direct descendant of medieval Flemish examples.

These 3,300 stained glass decorations were joined by many other decorations in glass created by Bonawit for Sterling. Twelve windows contained gelatin photographs, sandwiched between glass plates, of political figures important to the House Collection in Room 307, now removed to archives for preservation purposes; 324 small figures were painted in silver on the cabinet doors in the MSS & Archives room; and dozens of leaded windows and panels using clear glass were executed with more generic designs to be seen near the entrance vestibule, in the upper register of the cloister windows, and in the hallways of the second and third floor office and collections wing. Some leading in the original Rare Books Room, now MSS & Archives, was even gilded on the outside. All this was a huge undertaking, especially when one realizes that Sterling Library was only one of many jobs underway at the same time in the Bonawit firm, and it was all accomplished in less than one-and-a-half years.



The largest single window in the library is over the main entrance; it contains larger-than-lifesize, painted, stained, heavily-leaded, brass-covered male figures done in the Art Deco style of the 1930s. The decorations in this window, along with some of the heraldic shields in the main reading room and along Wall Street, are



the only exceptions to the rule of highly detailed work in every glass design. The figures represent wit, tolerance, wisdom, imagination, courage, and honesty, and show little painting beyond the features

and a minimal stain for the hair, though the leading is intricate. It is interesting to note that full-scale blueprint drawings are located for these windows in the physical plant files, the only such window drawings extant at Yale to my knowledge. But the figures in the blueprint were all female figures, an oversight corrected, perhaps, for an all-male institution at the time.

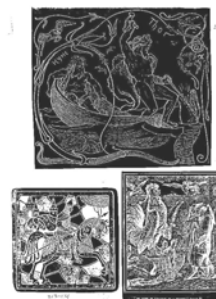
In 1928, Rogers discussed the lavish ornamentation of the Sterling Library as follows: “As a general scheme the main or entrance hall will contain in its decoration the history of the Yale Library, but the decorations in other places will symbolize the history and universality of the libraries of the world.” This is especially true of the external ornamentation of the building, but it is also carried out in windows in many of the public areas and large rooms where there are watermarks, images of historical libraries, and the scribes and authors of early written works. In their entirety, the windows describe the whole world of learning.



The subjects of the library’s painted medallions varied widely. For instance, a Japanese warrior/actor dances in Room 333, Rabelais’ giant horse from *Gargantua and Pantagruel* rears in Room 210, and the Tartars invade Europe in Room 311. The great majority were based on book illustrations chosen by a library committee. This committee was composed of members



from the Dean’s Office, the architect’s firm, the University Secretary’s office, and the library. However, it appears that Mary Withington, a scholar as well as a most efficient administrative assistant to the librarian, Andrew Keogh, did most of the work. Miss Withington and a few of the reference librarians identified and tracked down illustrations from books appropriate to the planned function of each room, and they received input from other committee members who reviewed and approved selections. Unfortunately, they documented the books used to provide the illustrations in only about 150 instances, the great majority of images remaining unidentified, and a good many designs being entirely left up to



Bonawit. Negative photostats of many illustrations exist in the library's archives, but not all sources are identified yet in spite of my best efforts. And I assume that many of the Bonawit-designed images also came from books.



Of all the rooms in the library, especially on the upper floors, only a handful serve the same purpose today as they were planned to serve, notably the American Oriental Society Library in Room 329,



and the Babylonian Collection in five rooms, 323 through 327. These contain, for instance, an image from an Arabic manuscript of the *Fables of Bidpai*, Sennacherib's human-headed winged bull from Ninevah, and a Phoenician galley ship from Layard's *Monuments of Ninevah*.



Although based directly on illustrations, the painted designs captured the spirit of the original while providing a coherent overall unity of appearance due to the artist's control over technique. Edmund Dulac was the artist of the wonderful "Omar under the bough" scene in the Sterling Spoon, the staff lunch room. The major change here was from a

night-time scene to day-time. Also in the Spoon are Randolph Caldecott's "Queen of Hearts" with her tarts, and Maxfield Parrish's Cook. This illustration originally appeared as a Christmas cover for the 1895 *Harper's Weekly*, which I stumbled across as I was browsing through a Parrish biography at Whitlock's Book Barn. Also, the Jack Spratt image from a 19th century nursery rhyme book introduced leaded windows behind the couple in the stained glass version.

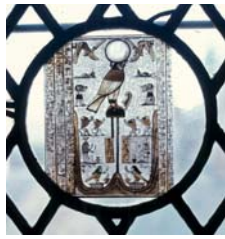


The image of Reynard the Fox is much simplified in the window version in room 213A, while the figures are fewer and rearranged in Lewis Carroll's Alice and the Duchess in room 215, originally an English seminar room. One of my favorites is Helena from *Midsummer Night's Dream* from an Arthur Rackham illustration. The romance languages are represented by such classics as Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, with an illustration by



Maurice Leloir that can be found in room 210. An image from the *Book of the Dead* of Ra the hawk in room 329 is a good example of how much detail the window paintings can encompass.





All illustrations chosen by the committee were generally in books in the library collection at the time of the new building construction in 1929-30. However, images in auction and sales catalogs were also used, so the possibilities were endless. One of the identification problems was demonstrated by the window in room 322 showing President Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The illustrations I found were from both an engraving and a painting of the event. It became clear that the window image was based on the engraving because of the position of Lincoln's fingers which differed from the pose in the painting.



Some images were needles in haystacks, such as those taken from English brass rubbings, although the knight from a Wall Street window is of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick in the 1440s. Sometimes an image is given a more complex setting as in the ordeal of cold water in room 319, and sometimes selectivity is exercised on the components of the scene. Bonawit chose to focus on the hero

of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad* in a window in room 219, an American literature study room. Some subjects required a good deal of interpretation by the glass artist. The scene of the Annunciation with the shepherds on the courtyard side of the entrance hall was taken from an historiated initial, approximately 1" by 1 1/2" in size, found in a French *Psalter*. Others have some fascinating history behind them. All of the window designs along the Wall Street side



of Sterling were noted simply as showing scenes from "Medieval Life". Three window images are taken from the story of Saint Guthlac. They are based on the *Guthlac Roll* which consists entirely of large images in medallion shapes believed to be the earliest renditions of stained glass window models from the 12th or 13th century, although the original windows have been lost. It follows the story of a soldier who renounces his military life to pursue a religious career and



finds an abbey in Lincolnshire. One of my favorites in the Wall Street windows is the image of acrobatic horses in the ante-room to the Lecture Hall which comes from a miniature in the beautiful *Luttrell Psalter*, now in the British Museum.

A large number of stained and leaded images are taken from watermarks in early papers, including those in most of the work spaces on the first floor of Sterling and in the third floor hall windows which are leaded designs only. All were based on illustrations from a major French watermark reference work by Bricquet.



One of the aims of the architect was to make Yale's Gothic buildings appear realistic down to the smallest detail, thus the empty niches in certain areas that recall the sacked cathedrals of Europe. Also, some of the windows are leaded as if they had been broken and then mended, although the leading lines conveniently miss every figure and are oddly unlike most natural glass break lines. All eight windows in room 212, showing images from the *Speculum humanae salvationis* presented by Eli Yale as the college's first manuscript, display these mended panes.



Many designs were created entirely by Bonawit, and these often show an Art Deco influence as in those in the original Periodical Reading Room, now the Newspaper Reading Room, which depict symbols of periodicity and in his medical/dental subjects located in Room 509, originally a Medical Seminar room.



Bonawit produced painted glass medallions for the upper floors of Yale's Sterling Memorial Library for \$25 apiece. These medallions, usually measuring on average 10" by 15", were delivered to another New York firm for mounting in the leaded windows before installation. The Slavic Reading Room on the fourth floor, Room 406, originally housed the Penniman Memorial Library of Education, and one of the many education topics in their windows shows the Hopkins Grammar School in 1700. The structure was one of those demolished when Sterling was built and so has extra meaning for the library beyond the fact that many Yale students attended it.



The huge amount of leaded, stained, and painted glass produced for the ground and first mezzanine floors was also installed by the Bonawit firm and accounted for most of the more than a quarter of a million dollars paid to Bonawit by the University in 1930 and 1931. In fact, the windows and decorated glass



provide by far the greatest amount of decoration in any media in the building. Bonawit was one of the four artisans chosen by Rogers who were not required to submit bids in competition with other firms but invited to submit estimates. The others were Samuel Yellin, who made the impressive decorative ironwork on all the doors, vents, and gates; René Chambellan, the stone carver of the Sterling entrances, ceiling bosses, corbels, and the many other carved panels and statues found all over inside and outside this building – he also did work for other



James Gamble Rogers' building, such as the Harkness Memorial Quadrangle, as well as for Rockefeller Center; and Professor Eugene Savage, Yale's Dean of Fine Arts, the painter of Sterling's image of "Alma Mater" behind the circulation desk and of the murals in the Butler Library at Columbia University. All other work on



the building required competitive bids, and the contract was usually awarded to the lowest bidder. Low-bid work included the wonderful wood carving, particularly apparent in the Arts of the Book Room, behind the circulation desk, and just inside the reference reading room, and the plaster work in many of the public rooms of Sterling.

The actual technique of crafting the glass medallions consisted of painting the design on the inside of the glass with a vitrifiable paint made of ground glass, a metallic oxide to give color, a liquefier, and a flux so the paint would fuse to the glass surface before the base melted. Bonawit made use of several medieval methods to give shading and texture. The most widely-used was termed "stick-work," where a matte wash of colored paint was applied over an area and the



highlights were then brushed or scratched out. You can see the stick-work on both Goliath's breastplate and the shepherd's hat in the full-color scenes along the courtyard side of Sterling's entrance hall. A textured matte wash was also employed for backgrounds and shading. Both techniques were compatible with the finely detailed work needed on panels to be installed at eye-level,



although equal care was lavished on the glass decorations wherever they were to be installed. A silver oxide or silver chloride was applied to the outside of the glass; when fired it gave the "stain," a yellow color which ranged from pale lemon to orange, depending on the concentration. Sometimes an over-wash was used to give a patina of age to the image as well. Only six windows, located in the nave along the cloister courtyard, contained full-color images, but they are also very detailed and precise. These images include two annunciation tableaus and several Persian scenes, all from miniatures in illuminated manuscripts owned by Yale. Ground glass colors were used in the painting on the inside of the glass along with the stain on the outside.



Yale's Hall of Graduate Studies, another of Rogers' buildings with stained glass decorations by Bonawit, was completed in 1932.

It contains several hundred painted panes along with many heraldic shields and leaded designs. Most of the images represent various aspects of the fields of knowledge covered by the curriculum of the Graduate School and are less restrained in style than those in the



Library. Bonawit was evidently given freedom to create imaginative designs in broad subject areas, there appear to be no records indicating a more involved selection procedure. A few were similar



to other artist-designed images in the library, and most were quite creative, a few taking unusual perspectives on subjects, some extending outside the bounds of the pane, and many touched by an Art Deco flavor.

Bonawit also crafted window decorations for several of the residential colleges at Yale which were built during the early 1930s, including decorative leaded windows for Trumbull College in 1932/33, painted panels for Berkeley College in 1934, and painted panels and special glazing for Jonathan Edwards College in 1932. When the Harkness Memorial Quadrangle was divided into Branford and Saybrook colleges in 1932/33, Bonawit executed the special glazing for the alterations. Although Rogers served as the architect for the Yale Law School, Bonawit was unable to take on the window decorations there given his heavy workload, and one of his designers, working separately at that point, carried out most of the glass work in the same style, in a few cases even using the same images.



Beyond Yale, Bonawit produced secular window decorations for the Charles Deering Library built by Rogers at Northwestern University in 1932. The subjects of these painted panels were selected and designed entirely by Bonawit, who did considerable research for each design. However, he no doubt had instructions to include the two images of the McCormick-Deering combine harvester which must have helped fund the building. These images, as described in Bonawit's notes deposited in the Northwestern Library Archives, reveal the artist's wide-ranging knowledge and careful attention to detail.



Many other commissions were carried out: one being of Greek motifs in gold-leaf for Girard College, a Philadelphia boys' school, in 1932, the contract awarded through a competitive contest. In 1939, Bonawit completed a commission for Connecticut College in New London in their Harkness Chapel which displays a number of unusual aspects for a chapel, but note the Harkness connection and that the architect also happened to be James Gamble Rogers. Bonawit's glass was also commissioned for the Palace of the King of Siam in Bangkok and for the United States Embassy Building in Tokyo. Duke University hired Bonawit to create windows for their Chapel in 1931/32, and it was estimated that the number of glass pieces used was "probably over a million." The Bonawit Firm crafted larger-than-lifesize figures for the 72 windows in the chapel while it produced grisaille work for the Memorial Chapel's windows.

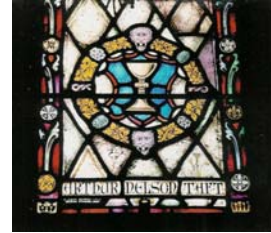


In 1939, Bonawit was commissioned to create 47 decorated windows for the SE Missouri Teachers College, now University, in Cape Girardeau. These again demonstrated Bonawit's talent at crafting locally appropriate subjects with his Mark Twain and early



Missouri historical images, although the majority were printers' marks, many of which he used in other settings, such as the Taft School for Boys in Watertown, Connecticut.

Bonawit did execute much ecclesiastical stained glass throughout his career, and although he preferred secular subjects, his larger windows of religious subjects were colorful, sensitive, and competitive with the work of his peers. Some examples can still be seen in Grace Episcopal Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado, and in New England in the old Trinity Church in Concord, Massachusetts. He created several large windows for Temple Emanu-El on Fifth Avenue in New York City, the Hugenot Church in Pelham, New York, a Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, North Carolina, and the Church of Bethesda-by-the-Sea in Palm Beach, Florida.



One of Bonawit's last commissions came in 1940/41 with the spectacular stained glass for the five large tower windows in the Church of the Ascension on Fifth Avenue at 10th Street in New York City. Using the medieval full-color mosaic pieces of glass in deep blues, rich reds, and bright yellows, Bonawit painted the figures in the medieval style with strong-lined features, staring eyes, and Byzantine draperies. The windows contain 123 scenes from the Story of Creation to the Story of Judas Maccabeus, each identified with the Biblical reference. The format of the scenes strongly suggests the medieval windows of Chartres Cathedral although the design scheme does not exactly duplicate any of those used at Chartres. Bonawit also provided the decorated windows for the chapel. Each window is signed by "G. Owen Bonawit, Designer and Maker" and dated. According to the church secretary, he installed them himself and was probably working alone by this date. In the scene from Samuel 17:49, the lizard is twin to the one in Room 335 in the Sterling Library, painted about eight years earlier.



The mainstream of the American stained glass tradition was ecclesiastical work, and this change in emphasis from the secular to the religious probably resulted from the declining demand for domestic window decorations in the 1930s with the development of the new, more streamlined architectural styles. Remember, Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House of Chicago was built in 1910 and Fallingwater dates to 1935. Also, the severe economic conditions of the Depression in the 1930s limited decorative work in all residential and commercial buildings and forced many stained glass craftsmen out of business. Many others left the field with the start of World War II when materials were restricted and studio workers drafted, so Bonawit lasted a reasonably long time in a difficult business.



Born in 1891 in Brooklyn, Bonawit learned the stained glass business from his uncle, Owen Bowen, partner of Otto Heinigke, both well-known craftsmen in the medieval mode of the more traditional ecclesiastical field. As a child, the young Bonawit became familiar with design work through his father, who was a freelance designer with a talent for drawing that was clearly passed on to his son. Associated briefly with Henry Wynd Young in his stained glass studio, Bonawit's early work appeared in windows signed "Young and Bonawit", including designs from the House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, dating from 1914/15. By 1918, Bonawit had set up his own studio in Manhattan with various family members listed as officers.

After his parents retired to Ridgewood, New Jersey, Bonawit moved there as well and installed a delightful group of decorated windows in his house, many of which echoed his work elsewhere, and no doubt pleased his two children with images from the Old King Cole nursery rhyme. Active for 25 years in the stained glass field and a figure in the stained glass trade association, he nevertheless kept a good deal to himself. While his peers did not know him well, from all reports they greatly respected his work. Bonawit abruptly left New York City and the glass business in 1941 at the age of 50 following a domestic upset and divorce.



When Bonawit closed his New York studio, it was reported that he destroyed his records and sold whatever decorated glass remained. Upon leaving New York City, he joined the U.S. Armed Forces in the Camouflage Section and ended up in Phoenix, Arizona. While working as a professional photographer for the U.S. Government, he documented the building of the Parker Dam. Bonawit later lived in White Sands, New Mexico, where he continued his photographic work on the testing programs for the Government, returning to Phoenix upon his retirement. He later moved to Miami, Florida, and died there in December of 1971 at the age of 80. Although I was unable to make contact with family members other than his sister during my researches, by serendipity his daughter contacted me several years ago and provided some wonderful portrait photographs and more details about his New Jersey home.



Unique in his versatility, in the high standards of quality maintained by his firm, and in his ability to design in many formats and styles with lively charm, Bonawit was recognized by his peers as one of the most talented craftsmen and artists of his time. It is apparent to me that the Sterling Library windows represent the finest examples of Bonawit's brilliant work and certainly the most extensive. I

have taken great pleasure in living with these stained glass decorations at my shoulder for almost two decades, and I hope many more generations of students, staff, and visitors will truly study these charming window decorations and feel the same.

