

ARCHIVIST'S REPORT ON THE COLSTON WINDOW IN THE NAVE

The following report is intended to be a summary of an examination of materials held in the Christ Church Cathedral Archives and of attempts to explore the topic further by means of other research, primarily on the internet. The text is free of footnotes. The materials used, however, are available for examination by any interested person. The report is intended to be informative, but not conclusive, of the issue before the Vestry.

PART I: THE COLSTON FAMILY

Colonel Edward Colston (1844-1928), to whom the Colston window is dedicated, came from a prominent Virginia family. His grandfather fought in the War of Independence, and his father fought in the War of 1812. One of his grandmothers was the sister of Chief Justice John Marshall. His father was a member of both the Virginia House of Delegates and the U.S. House of Representatives. The family owned slaves. The 1850 slave enumeration showed that his father owned 21 slaves – 11 males and 10 females – and had real estate assets of \$75,000. The 1860 enumeration listed his mother (his father died in 1852) as owning 10 slaves – 9 males and 1 female -- and had real estate assets of \$90,000. In the 1870 census, the value of real estate had been reduced to \$28,500.

Colston was raised in Berkeley County, Virginia (now West Virginia), and attended private Episcopal schools. At the outbreak of the Civil War, both of his older brothers joined the Confederate Army. Raleigh T. Colston rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, and died after being wounded in battle in 1863. William Colston rose to the rank of Captain. Although severely wounded twice, he survived the war. Edward, who was attending school at Washington College at the time, convinced his mother to let him enter the service at the age of 17. He served, as a private, in the Second Virginia Cavalry. Three days before Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Edward was wounded at the Battle of Sailor's Creek, losing his left arm. He returned to Washington College (now Washington and Lee University) where he received a law degree in 1867.

Upon the suggestion of a cousin, Colston moved to Cincinnati in 1869 and was admitted to the Ohio bar in 1870. He joined a firm headed by a former governor of Ohio and rose to be one of the most successful and prominent trial attorneys in Cincinnati. He also became known as Colonel Colston – an appellation probably due to his Virginia background and certainly not his war service. During World War I, he organized the Patriotic Society of Cincinnati in support of the war effort. He was also a trustee of the Law Library of Cincinnati, President of the Queen City Club, and a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society. At the time of his death, he was the President of the Cincinnati Bar Association. He was a long-time member of Christ Church, serving on the Vestry for 30 years, as chairman of the Finance Committee, and as a Trustee of the Endowment Fund.

Colston was married twice. His first wife was Sally Coles Stevenson, the second daughter of Virginia-born former Kentucky Governor and Senator John W. Stevenson. They had four daughters, two of whom reached adulthood – Judith and Sally Colston. After the death of his first wife in 1890, he married Governor Stephenson's eldest daughter Mary Winston Stevenson. They had no children. Mary died in 1917.

Edward Colston died suddenly on September 20, 1928 – an event making first-page news in Cincinnati. His burial service was at Christ Church with Rector Frank Nelson officiating. Internment was at Spring Grove Cemetery. On November 2, 1928, the Vestry adopted a two-page Memorial to Colston, noting his Confederate service, but emphasizing his civic accomplishments and high character. Similar tributes were made by the local papers, the Cincinnati Bar Association and Chief Justice William Howard Taft.

Although his daughter Sally would marry, Judith did not. Her considerable inheritances from both her father and his second wife provided for a comfortable life in Cincinnati society. She was a life-long member of Christ Church, serving on various committees open to women and contributing much financial help. She also served as President of the Colonial Dames in Ohio, on the board of Children's Hospital, and, during World War II, organized the Cincinnati Unit of Bundles for Britain. Strong in spirit and personality, she was a force to be reckoned with. She died in 1969. Bishop Henry Hobson conducted the funeral service at Christ Church. She is buried at the Colston plot at Spring Grove along with her father and his two wives.

PART II: BISHOP WILLIAM MEADE

Meade likewise was the son of Virginia gentry. His father was an aide to George Washington during the Revolutionary War. He graduated as valedictorian of his 1808 class at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) and was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1814, and became the Third Bishop of Virginia in 1841. He also served as the President of the Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria from 1842 to 1862.

Meade was opposed to slavery although he did not consider it to be a sin. He freed some of his own slaves, but concluded that freedom alone was not enough. For that reason, he became very active in the American Colonization Society which advocated the purchase of slaves for resettlement in Africa. He opposed the succession of Virginia in 1861, but firmly supported the Confederacy after the Union invaded Virginia. He became the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church of the Confederacy because he had the most seniority of the southern bishops. (Presiding Bishops were not elected until 1926. Before that it was based on the date of consecration.) That tenure was short-lived, however, as he died in March 1862, less than a year after the Civil War began.

Another of Meade's major contributions was the publication in 1857 of his two-volume *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia* – a treasure trove for genealogists. Various members of the greater Colston family are referenced in the books, but there is no detailed discussion of the family *per se*.

PART III: THE COLSTON WINDOW -- ORIGINS

Less than four months after Colston's death, Judith Colston wrote a letter to Rector Frank Nelson requesting permission to install a memorial window to her father "immediately south of the window installed to the memory of Dr. and Mrs. Foster." In its meeting on January 4, 1929, the Vestry granted that request, but stated the location of the window "would be a matter of adjustment between herself and the Rector." In February, the Rector reported that an agreement had been reached on the location. The design of the window was presented to and approved by the Vestry in its meeting on January 3, 1930. If there was a discussion, it was not recorded. The Rector reported in October 1930 that he had

visited the manufacturer of the window (Connick) while in Boston. The window was installed and then dedicated on December 21, 1930.

Almost immediately, Judith asked if the window could be moved “because of the poor light in its present location.” The Committee on Buildings reported a bid in April 1931 for lighting the window, but that was postponed “until the effect of painting the surrounding walls had been determined.” The matter was resolved in October 1931 when the Committee reported that two sections of the east and west walls had been painted and that “[e]xterior Barrelled Sunlight paint was used for the purpose of reflecting light through the new Colston window.”

PART IV: THE COLSTON WINDOW – DESCRIPTION

All of the older stained glass windows in the nave were originally installed as single windows made up of two lancets. When the new church was built in 1957, the lancets were reinstalled as separate windows. As a result, each window must be viewed with another window in mind. The Colston window, as a result, is really the two windows located nearest the Chancel on the east wall.

The following description of the Colston windows is taken from a booklet prepared after the new nave was dedicated in 1957:

The two windows nearest the organ loft are the only ones in the church . . . whose theme is the Old Testament. They were designed from Micah 6:8 (“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”) and from the opening verse of the Fifteenth Psalm (“Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle?”).

Each of the two windows contains three medallions, and every medallion tells a separate story. . . . From the top down: “Enoch walked with God” (Genesis 5:24); “David finds Saul asleep” (I Samuel 24); and “The Judgment of Solomon” (I Kings 3:16-28).

The second series shows “An angel cleansing the lips of Isaiah” (Isaiah 6:6); “Moses giving the Commandments” (Exodus 32:15) and “Daniel in the Lions Den” (Daniel 6:22). The intermediate symbols among the tracery show the virtues: Faith, Charity, Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude.

The bases of these two windows contain interesting and unusual figures. In one is Saint Joan of Arc (France) and Saint George (England) and in the other General Robert E. Lee and Bishop Meade of Virginia. “They were all of them saints of God.”

A fuller description of the “four interesting and unusual figures” is as follows:

Joan of Arc is dressed in blue with a halo around her head. Her left hand is over her breast and the right arm is straight at her side. Below her is a sword encircled with a golden crown and with a fleur de lis on either side.

St. George is wearing blue full-body medieval armor with a golden helmet and a halo. His right arm is straight beside his body, and the left hand rests atop a shield bearing a Christian cross.

Lee is in a blue uniform with his right hand over his chest and his left hand resting on the hilt of a sword the tip of which appears to rest on the ground.

Bishop Meade is in clerical clothing. His left hand holds a Bible against his chest while his right hand is raised in a blessing.

All figures face outward. Their names are inscribed in vertical letters which are cut off at the bottom of the frame. Between the two figures in each window is a pane showing the windows are dedicated to Edward Colston by his daughter.

PART V: DISCUSSION

Although the attention of the congregation is focused solely on the figures of Lee and Meade in the Colston window, one might ask if there is a theme connecting all four figures. If such a theme exists, it would seem to be the interaction between military and religious duties. Joan of Arc was a French peasant teenager called to serve her God. Although she claimed never to have killed anyone, she answered the call by helping to direct the actions of the French army against the English. She was considered a heretic by the English and a saint by the Catholic Church. St. George was a Roman soldier who was martyred for refusing to disclaim his Christian faith. Lee was a soldier loyal to his State and a pious Episcopalian. Meade did not serve in the military, although he was forced to choose his loyalties at the outbreak of war. There are some similarities in their postures, *e.g.*, the arm over the chest, the hand resting on the shield/sword, the blue clothing. The facial features are blurred and there are no Confederate symbols in Lee's and Meade's portraits. Although Lee's uniform is blue, that may be because gray was not used at that time in stained glass windows. (Note the other windows from the same period in the Nave, and contrast them with the Minister's window at the rear of the church.)

Was there a family connection between the Colston family and those of Lee and/or Meade? It is clear that all were from prominent and influential Virginia families at a time when such status was important, although they do not appear to have been close kinship. Meade did mention in his *Old Churches* book that Edward Colston (probably our Edward's father) and he served as a committee of two on an issue involving the Virginia Theological Seminary. The connection with Lee may be more personal. In the tribute to Colston given by the Cincinnati Bar Association, the speaker recalled a story about the day Colston was wounded:

One of his comrades carried him from the place at which he was wounded to a more sheltered spot, and it may be interesting as an illustration of General Lee's thoughtfulness and consideration for the men under his command that shortly after his comrade had placed Mr. Colston in a temporary place of safety, behind a rail fence, Mr. Colston saw General Lee approaching, and desiring to avoid being made prisoner, he asked his comrade if he would not go and ask the General where he could be taken so that he might avoid this danger.

His comrade went to General Lee, who in response told him he thought if he would take Mr. Colston to a farm house, the position of which he indicated, there was a reasonable prospect of his escaping captors.

This story, perhaps embellished with time, clearly had to have come from Colston himself and was a fond memory of his. Colston probably also knew Lee after the war. At the time he studied for his law degree at Washington College, Lee was President of that small institution.

I also did online research in the archives of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* on both Edward Colston and his daughter Judith. Both are mentioned frequently on the society pages. I narrowed the search further to see if there was any connection between them and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) – the group that sponsored many of the Confederate memorials in the early Twentieth Century. Edward Colston was one of the speakers at the 17th annual convention of the Ohio Division, UDC, in 1918. At the same group's 24th annual convention in 1925, the newspaper reported that “many reminiscences of the South were recalled by Colonel Edward Colston.” He again spoke before that group in 1926 and was awarded its Cross of Honor. Despite many other hits on the UDC, I did not find any articles connecting Judith Colston to that group. In her obituary, the emphasis is placed on her membership in the National Society of Colonial Dames.

Colston was not one-sided on recalling his military services. According to one obituary, he met Judge Almon M. Warner, a Cincinnati resident and a Union officer also wounded at the Battle of Sailor's Creek. Because of this fact, the two shared a “staunch friendship” and arranged to dine together each year on the anniversary of the battle “and to talk over the old days, when they were fighting on opposite sides.” Colston's patriotism was also shown in his leadership in the Patriotic Society of Cincinnati during World War I. Perhaps that patriotism was too intense as he was a crusader against the teaching of German in the Cincinnati schools and an advocate for changing German-based street names.

The picture of Colston which emerges from the above is that of a man very proud of his Virginia roots and his service in a war which cost him the loss of a brother and a left arm. One obituary noted “he was a stately figure, and even in his old age he maintained the soldierly carriage.” After his death, his unmarried daughter honored him with a stained glass window. One may ruminate over the arching theme of the two windows or any relationship of the four figures, but it seems fairly clear that the figures of Lee and Meade are a tribute to his Virginia roots and military service.

Hopefully, this report will provide the background of the Colston Window. The inclusion of Lee and Meade was deliberate, although there is no evidence that it bothered the Vestry at the time of the windows' proposal and installation. Whether the above information is relevant today whether the window has taken on a meaning different from the time of its installation, or whether possible modifications, additions, or explanations could alter today's view of the window are matters now left to the Vestry.

Dennis Harrell, Archivist
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