A Study of Residential Stained Glass: The Work of Nicola D'Ascenzo Studios from 1896 to 1954

Lisa Weilbacker

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A STUDY OF RESIDENTIAL STAINED GLASS:
THE WORK OF NICOLA D'ASCENZO STUDIOS FROM 1896 TO 1954

Lisa Weilbacker

A THESIS

in

The Graduate Program in Historic Preservation

Presented to the faculties of the University of Pennsylvania
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

1990

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CHAPTER 1
Methodology and Sources

With the death of Nicola D'Ascenzo in 1954, several of his drawings were left to the Philadelphia Free Public Library as the D'Ascenzo Memorial Collection, and ownership of the studio was eventually divided up among two surviving artists, Ralph E. Ohmer and David Bramnick. Ultimately, Bramnick's son, Alfred, bought out Ohmer and became the sole owner of the studio. Under Alfred's care, the contents of the studio were moved around to several locations within Philadelphia. Some of it was sold during the 1960s and 70s and the rest experienced partial deterioration due to smoke and water damage from a fire. By 1979, Alfred Bramnick began donating portions of the collection to The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Then after Bramnick's death, Betty Bramnick and executor, Mary Griffin, completed the donation of the collection to The Athenaeum in 1985 where it is known as the D'Ascenzo Studios Collection.

The D'Ascenzo Studios Collection comprises the surviving contents of D'Ascenzo Studios: cartoons, watercolor renderings, personal sketches, photographs, reference materials, books, business files, ledgers, scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, and a card catalog system. Due to limited storage space, the cartoons, which are
Due to limited storage space, the cartoons, which are full-scale charcoal drawings, were moved to the Balch Institute, Philadelphia. The rest of the collection remains in The Athenaeum's archives, uncataloged.

In the collection, there are over 4,000 renderings representing ecclesiastical, commercial, residential, and institutional designs made by the studio as studies and presentation drawings. They are either watercolor, pen and ink, charcoal or pastel renderings on rough card board. Many of the drawings are brittle and show the effects of smoke and water damage. Of the 4,000 drawings, approximately 230 represent residential designs. Aiding in the identification of these designs is usually a client name, design number or commission number inscribed on the back of each rendering. Also among the collection are numerous sketch books of pen and ink drawings depicting architectural details, figures, and ornamentation.

Only a dozen books survive from D'Ascenzo's extensive library collection of over 3,000 volumes. The twelve books donated to The Athenaeum include art history and American history references. Other reference materials in the collection include numerous illustrations of architecture, architectural details, artwork, and historic figures. The business files include surviving job correspondence, photographs taken by the studio of completed windows, studio advertisements, and the studio's annual
Christmas card designs.

At the studio, D'Ascenzo had three librarians to maintain his library, scrapbook of clippings, and the card catalog system. Newspaper, magazine and journal articles on D'Ascenzo and the studio were placed in scrapbooks and files of clippings. Unfortunately, the source, page number and author were usually eliminated. The card catalog is a complex filing system of information on 3x5 cards. A variety of subject headings are used to divide each job into categories. The subject headings include a listing of each commission by client, project architect, studio representative, type (i.e. residential, ecclesiastical, etc...) or location (i.e. state, city and country). Most of the information from each job was cross-referenced. For example, a particular commission would be cataloged under its location, client name, and type. The information on each card contains some or all of the following documentation: client's name, address, date, commission number, design number, architect, studio representative, window measurements, cost, and type of commission.

The Account Book lists commissions according to design number. The entries are set up to include, date, design number and "for whom." The date of the first entry is August 12, 1904, and the last one is recorded as 1959. The dating throughout the Ledger is sporadic.
The design numbers, however, are consistent and reveal that 7,840 different designs were made. The "for whom" column becomes dubious when discerning the type of commission. Many of the commissions are merely listed under the name of the architect or donor without any indication of whether the design is for a business, residence, or religious organization. Some entries reveal the architect and the client with an address while others simply give just a name.

Also in the collection is a listing of commissions arranged by a commission or order number. The entries are listed chronologically by commission number, however, there are many gaps within the numbering. For example, the first entry is commission #237 and the second is commission #950. Between commission number #950 and #1217, there are only five commissions recorded. As for the client and location columns, much of the information is ambiguous. The client is recorded as either the building name, donor, owner, architect, or simply a name associated with the project. The location column includes either an address, a city, state, country or again, an architect.

Another collection used for this thesis was Betty Bramnick's private collection of D'Ascenzo Studios papers. The collection consists of a scrapbook of clippings, D'Ascenzo's Address Book, a listing of books in D'Ascenzo's
personal and studio libraries, D'Ascenzo's list of books at the New York Architectural League, Keystone Appraisal Company's appraisal of D'Ascenzo's home in Germantown and the Summer Street studio, collected information concerning the Valley Forge Memorial Chapel, and additional D'Ascenzo Studios memorabilia.

Lastly, a key source for personal references and anecdotes was Mary Griffin, an artist who worked with Alfred Bramnick during the last years of the studio. As a stained glass artist, she provided insight into the techniques of making stained glass and her close association with the studio, provided historical information as well as interesting narratives.

A methodological approach to these sources proved problematic. Naturally, dealing with uncataloged collections, there is no record of what exactly is in the collection. Thus, I had to go through every box, drawer, and pile. Also, each individual source proved to be inconsistent. Dates, client names, location, etc., were often not recorded, which made it difficult to consolidate the information. The various collections used for this thesis were not comprehensive. Each was just a part of the D'Ascenzo Studios contents. Also, numerous D'Ascenzo windows, renderings, books, etc., were sold to the general public, hence, unavailable to study. Therefore, this thesis is an analysis of an artist,
his life, his thoughts, and his work based on the materials available to me through the The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Betty Bramnick, Mary Griffin and the local repositories in Philadelphia.

This thesis is organized in the following manner. Chapter 2 is a brief history of secular stained glass followed by the 19th- and 20th-century environment and attitudes toward the medium. In order to put D'Ascenzo and his studio in context, this chapter sets the stage in which D'Ascenzo came upon the stained glass medium and chose to pursue it. Chapter 3 discusses D'Ascenzo's educational development, the various influences on his career, and the establishment of his studio. In Chapter 4, D'Ascenzo's ideologies toward art, architecture, and the stained glass medium are presented and followed by examples of his work. Chapter 5 takes a close look at D'Ascenzo's residential commissions and analyzes his designs for leaded and stained glass windows. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes each chapter and Nicola D'Ascenzo's role in the history of stained glass.
ENDNOTES

1. According to D'Ascenzo's will, the Studio was left to his wife, Myrtle. Myrtle D'Ascenzo died on November 1, 1954, and soon after, the Studio was sold to David Bramnick and Ralph Ohmer. Will of Nicola D'Ascenzo, No. 1267 (November 14, 1950) Register of Wills, City Hall Annex, The City of Philadelphia Archives.


3. Information provided by Bruce Laverty, Archivist, and Gladys Brooks, Curator of Architecture at The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

The art of glass staining and painting began during the eleventh-century Romanesque and the twelfth-century Early Gothic periods of cathedral construction and culminated during the thirteenth century in France, England, Germany and Austria. Its initial usage was strictly ecclesiastical, serving both as religious celebratory decoration and as visual biblical instruction to the congregation. The medieval techniques used to fabricate stained glass windows were fully recorded by the German monk Theophilus in De Diversis Artium in the early twelfth century. This document established stained glass as an artistic medium and became a reference for future craftsmen.¹

By the fourteenth century, heraldic signs and portraits of the donors became popular subject matter in churches and later in residences. Panels of classical subjects from mythology, patron saints, and family or municipal arms were often found in medieval hall windows. These motifs displayed the history and social position of an important family. The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century made available new sources for window designs. Woodcuts and engravings of paintings...
by Raphael and other contemporary Italian artists were strong influences on glass painting. Craftsmen often copied these engravings onto roundels for both religious and secular buildings.  

Yet by the sixteenth century, the demand for the art form slowly diminished and was forgotten until the early nineteenth-century revival of the Gothic style. French architect and historian, Eugene Viollet-le-Duc (1814-1879) developed an interest in the Gothic period which eventually led to his personal restoration of numerous Gothic Cathedrals. His study of medieval stained glass resulted in an essay entitled "Vitrail" published in 1868 and later in a ten volume treatise entitled Dictionnaire raisonne de l'architecture francaise du XI au XVI siecle published in 1875. The book reveals Viollet-le-Duc's complete knowledge and understanding of the medieval stained-glass techniques used in French Gothic Cathedrals.  

Meanwhile, the Gothic mode for ecclesiastical as well as secular construction was revived in England. People such as John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812-1852) gave lectures on the medieval lifestyle and advocated the return of twelfth-and-thirteenth century art and architecture. By the 1840's, Gothic was regarded by some as the British national style, a better example of the country's heritage and architectural
history than the classical style of Ancient Greece or Rome. With the Gothic Revival came a resurgence in the arts of the period including the production of, furniture, metalwork, ceramics, textiles, books, and stained glass. 4

Initially, nineteenth-century craftsmen approached the stained-glass medium in much the same way as painting. They did not return to the traditional methods but instead painted their designs on the surface of a single pane of glass. However, Ruskin stressed the need to maintain the original medieval techniques. Adhering to Ruskin’s ideals were several British artists and decorators. Daniel Cottier (1838-1891) and William Morris (1834-1896) utilized the medieval techniques of stained glass while introducing a new figural style and composition in order to create a personal approach toward stained glass in the nineteenth century. Their artistic ideas promoted stained glass as an art form that soon gained popularity in Europe as well as in America. 5

Not until the writings of a British decorator, Christopher Dresser (1834-1904) was the stained glass medium extensively examined. In Principles of Decorative Design (1875), Dresser described decoration and ornamentation as a valid artistic expression. He devoted an entire chapter to stained glass which included a study of the medium as it was currently being used in England followed by a series of highly ornate, abstract and floral
patterns. This was the first chapter within architectural literature devoted solely toward the stained glass medium. Dresser encouraged the use of the medium as a significant decorative element and stressed its importance within an urban environment to insure a "lovely view." 6

Another British author and designer who was extremely influential in American interior design was Charles Locke Eastlake (1836-1906.) His book, *Hints on Household Taste*, published in 1868, was one of the earliest, widespread household art books published in England and America during the 1870s and 1880s. In an 1879 article, he considered ornamental and stained glass an appropriate household decoration. He even found it to be "ornament conducive to instruction." 7

The demand for decorative glass in America came with the introduction of the Gothic Revival from England and the movement toward the "Romantic" or "Picturesque" in residential architecture. The Gothic Revival and other Picturesque modes such as "Italianate" served as alternatives to the previously popular Classical styles. Andrew Jackson Downing, America's first landscape designer and architectural critic, wrote two books and a series of articles in order to "contribute something to the improvement of the domestic architecture and the rural taste of our country." 8 *Cottage Residences* (1842) and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) were widely
read and resulted in numerous editions even after the author's untimely death in 1852. For each design, Downing provided a description, plan, details, costs and suggestions for the arrangement of the grounds. "Design X, A Villa of the first Class, in the Pointed Style" from *Cottage Residences* reveals an elaborate Gothic dwelling for which Downing suggested "a bay window should be filled with rich stained glass, which would produce a mellow tone of light in this apartment, in admirable keeping with its character." Of the fifteen residential designs in the book, this is the only one suggesting the use of stained glass.

Alexander Jackson Davis, who supplied Downing with architectural designs, also offered pattern books such as *Rural Residences Consisting of Designs Original and Selected for Cottages, Farm Houses, Villas and Village Churches*. Davis, in 1833, designed "Lyndhurst," one of the finest examples of the American Gothic Revival for the merchant, William Paulding. Inspired by Lowthar Castle, the early house displayed an asymmetrical massing of stone that Davis later altered in 1864 for a new owner, George Merritt, to further enrich the irregularity and complexity of his design. The windows of the original structure were composed largely of leaded quarry glass (diamond shaped) with a spotting of colored and stenciled glass infills. Again, this was the only design of Davis'
suggesting the use of colored glass.\textsuperscript{10} Although there were other pattern books available suggesting the use of leaded quarry glass windows, Davis and Downing's were the first in America to promote the use of colored and decorative glass. These early pattern books by Downing and Davis helped to popularize a new "taste" in architecture and had an enormous influence over other architects.

\textit{Holly's Country Seats} by Henry Hudson Holly, 1863, contains thirty-four design sketches and descriptions of the architectural details. Of "Design No. 19" a suburban villa for Mrs. T. D. Wheeler of New Haven, Connecticut, Holly wrote: "The grand feature of this house, next to the hall, is, undoubtedly, the stairway, which occupies a large space at the left, and is well lighted by a stained glass window."\textsuperscript{11} This is the only mention of stained glass in the book. Yet Holly's next book, \textit{Modern Dwellings in Town and Country}, published in 1878, included an entire chapter on window glass, entitled, "Glass." Holly indicated where a stained glass window was most appropriate. He believed that only those windows "intended to give light and not in a position to command a view," were appropriate places to use stained glass with leaded sash. In particular, he recommended stair case windows and the upper sash of a window. He even offered proper subject matter; for the upper sash windows in a dining room, he suggested "designs of fruit, game, convivial scenes
and texts of good cheer furnish appropriate decorations."

The influence of the pattern books culminated at one event, the Centennial Exposition of 1876 in Philadelphia. This nationwide celebration brought together exhibitions of cultures from all over the world. Americans for the first time were exposed to the philosophies and fashions of an international community. The Exposition incidentally promoted eclecticism and exoticism in architecture and the decorative arts, including the "Queen Anne," "Stick" and "Shingle" styles along with a feast of ornamentation and decoration. Stained glass was represented at the Exposition as a key decorative feature to be used throughout the house.

The Brazilian Pavilion and the Centennial National Bank were designed by Philadelphia architect Frank Furness for the Exposition. Both structures featured stained-glass windows and decorative glass tiles on the exterior surface which glistened with a golden tone. Furness produced this effect by placing a layer of gold foil behind a piece of painted glass. Furness's structures implemented a creative use of glass as a decorative architectural element to further emphasize his personal, polychromatic eclectic style. From a practical perspective Donald G. Mitchell, chairman of the judges of industrial and architectural designs at the Exposition wrote: "This style of glazing is full of suggestion
to those living in cities whose rear windows look upon neglected or dingy areas or courts, where the equipment of a window with rich design would be a perpetual delight."\textsuperscript{15}

Following the Centennial, decorative windows evolved into a complex, luscious assortment of textured glass, jewels and color. The medium was found in every architectural pattern and ornamental design book as an embellishment to every interior and exterior surface. George Palliser's publications from 1876 to 1896 featured stained glass windows in fifty percent of the designs. In 1896, he suggested that stained glass could be used in other areas other than the stair case or for the upper sash. "The stained glass work introduced in all the windows above the transom is a new feature for this part and one which is to become very popular in all domestic buildings from this time forward."\textsuperscript{16}

In 1885 Roger Riordan, a writer on decorative arts, observed in the \textit{Art Amateur}: "Now everybody is familiar with its appearance....It is to be seen in doors, windows and skylights of private houses and in every variety of design."\textsuperscript{17} Mary Gay Humphreys, another writer on interior decoration featured in the \textit{Art Amateur} during the 1880s, advised the average homeowner on the uses of the stained-glass window. She wrote, "Odd windows, cut by the caprice of some owner or another that are
a source of annoyance to the present occupants...can often be transformed by colored glass decoration."  

She suggested the use of stained glass to embellish irregularly shaped windows rather than draperies. She also offered her opinion as to the most appropriate placement of the medium in a home. According to Humphreys, hall windows and stair landings, "only need color glass to throw a charm over the entire interior, the depth of hall giving that vista which so appropriately terminates in the play of light and color." As for libraries, she preferred stained glass, explaining: "Its subdued light is particularly grateful to the student."  

For those who could not afford decorative glass there were other less expensive alternatives to produce fashionable windows. P. E. Vacquerel espoused a type of imitation stained glass which one could make with the purchase of his book, *Stained Glass: By the Improved Process of Diaphanie* and instructions for the price of $2.50. Vacquerel provided a kit of sorts containing materials, instructions and over 170 patterns ranging from religious themes to abstract geometric designs. Basically, these were transfer designs on a transparent material that could be hung in any window. He promised that for a mere fraction of the cost "...any person of ordinary skill and taste (can) produce a decoration equal to the most beautiful and costly stained or ornamental
glass".\textsuperscript{21}

Henry Hudson Holly also sympathized with homeowners who could not afford stained glass. In \textit{Modern Dwellings}, he suggested that "a simple transparency suspended" in the center of a window produced a "good effect."\textsuperscript{22} He especially recommended this solution for renters who did not want to spend money on an apartment or house they did not own. A transparency, he claimed, could be removed in case the renter moved or a resident no longer desired the stained glass look.\textsuperscript{23} Another inexpensive alternative, which was popularized by catalog companies, was sandblasting. Sandblasting was a technique, "whereby glass could be decorated by applying a stencil to its surface and then subjecting it to the high-velocity projection of a fine stream of sand."\textsuperscript{24} This process produced a design with a frosted appearance on a clear glass background. Choosing a design for the window was as easy as ordering from the numerous catalogs available by the 1880s.\textsuperscript{25} These alternatives suggest the popularity of stained glass even to those of lesser means who, with a little creativity, could create a fashionable household.

Eastlake, an elitest designer, denounced such methods. In \textit{Hints on Household Taste}, he wrote: "The characteristic beauty of painted windows can never be even suggested by bits of colored paper gummed to the surface of glass. Such work as this may be the rage for a few seasons,
but sooner or later must fall, as it deserves to fall, into universal contempt." Eastlake, of course, promoted the traditional techniques of stained glass by suggesting that one should never substitute the artform with cheaper versions.

The earliest glass artisans in America were house painters and carpenters. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century, glass was an expensive product that few people had experience repairing. Often a house painter, carpenter or joiner knew how to repair windows, cut glass and set new panes—skills known as glazing. Yet as the demand for more and larger windows occurred, the glass trade evolved and the decorator/glazier was created. The local decorator/glazier adapted to the changing demands of homeowners and architects concerning the current trends in ornamental glass. Glaziers were often hired on a temporary basis, forcing them to travel to active construction areas. From project to project, they accumulated new ideas and techniques until the local decorator/glazier developed into a skilled glass craftsman.

The American stained glass artist, on the other hand, developed from the Gothic Revival and Arts and Crafts movement in England. William Morris, Daniel Cottier, Edward Burne-Jones, and Charles Booth among several others were early proponents of stained glass. Soon, they
developed personal, mature styles which brought the level of ornamental glass to an art form. In America, their high quality, innovative work was in great demand for both ecclesiastical and secular structures. Both Cottier and Booth had emigrated to the United States by 1875 and opened workshops in New York in order to reap the opportunities of the growing stained-glass market. Their impact on America introduced to artists and architects the artistic ideas of England and promoted a greater recognition of stained glass as an art form and as a significant decorative architectural element.  

Today the best known American stained-glass artists are John La Farge (1835-1910) and Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848-1933). La Farge initially intended to pursue a career in art until he traveled to France in 1873. At that time, he visited the French cathedrals and began his interest in stained glass as an artistic medium. His earliest windows, those from the late 1870's, reveal English techniques and strong influences from William Morris with respect to color and overall pattern. Rather quickly, La Farge became dissatisfied with the accepted qualities of pot-metal glass and explored a variety of materials and techniques. His experiments with variegated glass, layered glass, colored jewels, and varied textures led to new luminous qualities. Another of his contributions was the use of leading in various sizes and dimensions
to give the appearance of contours and brushstrokes found in a painting. La Farge manipulated the materials and techniques traditionally known within the stained-glass medium and raised them to a new level of artistic expression. 29

A cohort and leading rival of La Farge was Louis Comfort Tiffany. Tiffany, son of Charles L. Tiffany founder of a jewelry and silver company in New York City, initially pursued a painting career by studying with George Inness. Soon after, Tiffany explored the decorative arts and stained glass. Like La Farge, Tiffany experimented with opalescent glass and a variety of techniques and materials. By 1879, Tiffany made the decorative arts his profession with the creation of Associated Artists, a firm founded in partnership with Candace Wheeler, Samuel Colman and Lockwood de Forest. The firm, headed by Tiffany, designed entire interiors, addressing every aspect of the interior from the treatment of windows, ceilings, walls and floors to the design of furniture, lighting and ornamental windows.

Tiffany's highly prolific career resulted in a remarkable assortment of glass art. His experiments led to the patent of three types of combination glass and the noted favrile glass (which consisted of several layers of glass pressed together) as well as the creation of highly ornate stained-glass windows, lamps, jewelry
articles, and vases. Tiffany and his work became the premier creative forces in America regarding the decorative arts and the widespread use of stained glass.\(^{30}\)

Throughout the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, stained glass was extensively used in architecture. The variety of eclectic styles in architecture welcomed exotic interiors, rich embellishments, and highly ornate windows. For as long as this trend was popular, the use and existence of the stained-glass medium was secured.

At the turn of the century, the residential styles of some architects looked backward to early America for influence and ideas. The result was the emergence of the "Colonial Revival." Houses imitating the appearance of the eighteenth century expressed a sense of American nationalism and pride. The decorative window, which had nothing to do with the Colonial period, managed to stay alive. Local craftsmen adapted the stained glass window to the new architectural trends by incorporating Greek, Roman, and Renaissance elements on a more restrained, geometric background. These windows typically used wreath, ribbon, torch, festoons, and fleur-de-lis motifs with a limited amount of colored glass in order to blend stylistically with the unobtrusive neo-classical mode. Eventually, the "Colonial" style home fit conveniently within the homebuilding industry which soared during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Developers
depended on building homes with just the basics to insure a profit; therefore extras like ornamental details and stained glass were shortly discounted.31

The stained glass artists themselves hastened the demise of stained glass by diluting the quality of their work. Also, the catalog companies who sold prefabricated "fancy glass" demeaned the stained-glass medium by treating it as a factory-made product. Across the country, companies like Baltimore Sash & Door Co. and the Pittsburgh Hardware Door Co. offered mail order catalogs selling leaded, beveled and stained-glass windows by the square foot. They featured hundreds of colored plates depicting geometric, floral, landscapes, and classical designs that were available in any size and in any color.32

The Morgan Woodwork Organization in 1921 described the making of their designs as a "craft, a science and an art."33 They asked their customers, "We leave it to your judgement whether or not the following Morgan designs bear the stamp of artistry."34 These companies helped to convince the American public that their designs indeed represented artistic quality for considerably less money than a window designed by a stained-glass artist.

The initial strains on the artists were becoming evident by 1893 when the United States Glass Workers organization was formed in an effort to band together to petition the U.S. Congress for action against foreign
competition. English and European studios received tariff advantages that caused relentless domestic competition for commissions. Then as the demand for secular windows diminished, the American stained glass business nearly fell bankrupt. As labor costs rose, studios could not look to mechanization to decrease expenses and instead diluted the quality of their work to maintain existence.

Realizing the pending disasters of the industry, a group of stained glass artists created the National Ornamental Glass Manufacturers Association of America (NOGMA) in 1903. They emphasized the need for intra-industry cooperation to prevent strikes and unreasonable demands on labor and costs. Their first priority, however, was the publication of a trade journal.35 The first issue of The Monthly Visitor the members clarified their aims:

The principal object being to bring the various corporations in closer relationship to each other and help eliminate...the many obstacles and evils in the profession. Owning to the great distance manufacturers live apart, this...is intended to call on each one regularly and find out what is going on elsewhere, so that...those who cannot attend our convention become in a degree...at least acquainted with each other.36

In order to accomplish these demands, NOGMA worked to improve protection of international tariffs, and create a nationwide catalog of stained-glass designs. In spite
of their efforts, Joseph E. Flanagan, editor of the journal from 1909 until 1929, noted that, "we have met the enemy, and it is us." Due to the overall economic situation, "demands for unionization," foreign competition, and the inconsistencies of the construction industry, many of the artists resorted to under-cutting prices and producing lower quality work.

The only facet the organization managed to sustain was its monthly magazine, The Ornamental Glass Bulletin, later renamed The Stained Glass Bulletin. The periodical was a success. It served as a source of communication between disgruntled artists and offered varying ideas and opinions of the craft. Yet, regardless of its triumph, The Bulletin could not maintain the public interest in the medium. With two world wars and a Depression, public interests naturally turned toward international affairs rather than stylistic concerns and stained glass was soon forgotten. Following World War II, American, English, and European architecture developed into the "Modern" style devoid of ornamentation least of all stained glass.


25. Burke et al., In Pursuit of Beauty, 185.


34. Morgan Woodwork Organization, 357.


CHAPTER 3
The Development of Nicola D'Ascenzo and his Studio

Nicola D'Ascenzo was born in the central, mountainous region of Italy known as Peligna on September 25, 1871 and died at the age of 83 in Philadelphia on April 13, 1954. (See fig. 1.) His childhood was spent in Jessopalena, a little hill town with his parents Giacinto and Mary Joseph. When Nicola was eleven, the D'Ascenzo family emigrated to the United States. His earliest impressions of Philadelphia were recounted by his son, Nicola Goodwin D'Ascenzo, in 1931. He wrote that his father initially apprenticed in a stone-cutter's workshop and later in a wood-carving establishment, but this was only a means of earning money. He devoted his nights to drawing and studying, and when he could afford it, D'Ascenzo attended art school. In 1889, he enrolled in the general art courses at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art. Between 1890 and 1900, D'Ascenzo sporadically attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Art and the New York School of Design where he studied art history and the fine arts. One of the earliest anecdotes of D'Ascenzo's artistic endeavors dates to 1867. At the age of 16, D'Ascenzo was asked to assist one of his earliest art teachers, Boero, in
painting murals within the chancel of St. John the Evangelist at Seventh and Catherine streets in Philadelphia. Initially, D'Ascenzo assisted by only painting the borders. But as the project progressed, a disagreement between Boero and the Reverend Percival left D'Ascenzo to finish the entire mural. 4

Nicola continued to take art courses while working as a designer at a large firm of decorators in Philadelphia. He is listed in the 1893 Philadelphia directory as a designer living at 1423 Park Avenue (which is the same year many stained-glass artists banded together to form the United States Glass Workers in an effort to fight foreign competition, see page 23.) 5 Around this time, he met an artist known for her work in watercolor, Myrtle Goodwin. Myrtle had taught design in the Textile School at the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art for nine years. According to the city directory, by 1894 at the age of 23, Nicola turned his efforts toward teaching. 6 He taught mural decoration at the Philadelphia College of Art from 1893 to 1894. 7 By 1894, Nicola and Myrtle married and left for Italy where they spent two years traveling and studying Italian architecture and fine art. Nicola made a series of sketches depicting the landscape, architecture, the local people, and museum collections. 8 Also while in Rome, he studied at the Senola Liberra and the School of St. Luca. 9
The couple returned to Philadelphia sometime in 1896. By this time D'Ascenzo had established himself as an artist, particularly a portrait painter. However as a businessman, he decided to follow interior decorating, and he established his own business at 1020 Chestnut Street in 1896. Primarily, he executed murals and designed interiors for private homes, churches and businesses. It was during one of these projects that he discovered the effects of stained glass. He was painting a mural for a client when he observed the colorful effect of a nearby stained-glass window upon his painting. His son later described his father's thoughts as, "the hideous stained glass of the time cast such an unharmonious note on the walls, that even his utmost efforts could do naught to frustrate the effects of those terrible tones on his murals." 

Out of this experience, D'Ascenzo became interested in stained glass, its history, and its production. He soon realized that there were few who actually knew how to make quality stained-glass windows or understood the traditional medieval methods and techniques. The few American artists who did know, such as Tiffany and La Farge, very few could afford. Thus, Americans often looked to inexpensive European guilds, who were allowed to import stained glass duty free. In fact, he discovered that most Americans did not even know what to look for
in a quality piece and would simply accept cheaper versions. He later described stained-glass craftmanship at the turn of the century as "an industry producing abominable works." Occasionally, D'Ascenzo reported, there would be either a clergyman or businessman who had seen European medieval stained glass and thus would expect greater quality. Sometimes, these people could influence a building committee or church organization and demand better work. Meanwhile, he continued, others simply became unaccepting of the inferior quality and turned to other decorative media such as murals and mosaics. Hence, D'Ascenzo was determined to design and manufacture his own windows in order to produce affordable, quality windows in America capable of complimenting any interior.

The early studio on Chestnut was known as a decorating firm with D'Ascenzo as the principal artist who executed murals, mosaics and portraits. Although there is no record of any work in stained glass during the late 1890's, it obvious that he was becoming interested in the craft. The first recorded stained glass commission dates to 1904, which suggests that he had accomplished the craft well enough to take on a commission.

While D'Ascenzo began designing and producing stained glass in his Chestnut Street studio, he continued to list himself as a decorator in the city directory until 1912 when he was listed as a stained glass artist with
a new studio at 1608 Ludlow Street. At this studio, D'Ascenzo created his own designs using glass manufactured elsewhere. In order to carry out the full intent of his designs, he realized that he must work from beginning to end on the entire production of a stained glass window. With this desire came a larger studio in 1926 at 1602-04 Summer Street. This studio, which was D'Ascenzo's final move, was a sophisticated, self-sufficient guild of artists and craftsmen in which D'Ascenzo and his business reached the peak of productivity and creativity.

For inspiration, D'Ascenzo often looked to antiquity, to his travels, and to the work of contemporary stained glass masters such as John La Farge and Louis Comfort Tiffany. Within the D'Ascenzo Studios Collection at The Athenaeum, there are several references to La Farge and Tiffany. Inscribed on a pencil drawing of a stained glass table-top lighting fixture are notes indicating that D'Ascenzo was preparing drawings or perhaps designing lighting fixtures for Tiffany. (See figs. 2, 3, 4, and 5.) The inscription reads: "D'Ascenzo worked with Tiffany 1909-1911." Additionally, a January 24, 1905, entry in the account book next to design #119, reads: "Smith (Tiffany)." The notation may mean that Smith was a client of Tiffany for whom D'Ascenzo was doing some work or that Smith, as a client of D'Ascenzo, merely wanted a Tiffany-like design.
As for La Farge, there is a belief that D'Ascenzo studied with the artist between 1900 and 1910 when he attended the New York School of Design and worked in New York on several jobs as a decorator. D'Ascenzo clearly showed the utmost respect for La Farge. D'Ascenzo's own library, contained articles that described La Farge's biography, influences, philosophies, and personal thoughts as an artist. Later, D'Ascenzo often wrote about the work of La Farge. In one article published in the *Ornamental Glass Bulletin* in 1924, D'Ascenzo praised La Farge's opalescent windows and described him as "one of our greatest geniuses."

With the work of Tiffany and La Farge in mind, D'Ascenzo also studied what he thought to be the ultimate in stained glass: twelfth- and thirteenth-century cathedral windows. He made numerous trips to Europe during his lifetime. On each trip, he executed a series of drawings of the landscape, architecture, and stained-glass windows (see figs. 6 and 7). A large portion of his drawings represent his most frequented sites in England, Spain, Italy, and France (see figs. 8 and 9). From his writings and drawings, it is obvious that his favorite spot was Chartres Cathedral.

The first study of the Chartres windows came in 1911. D'Ascenzo extensively studied the medallion windows, namely "Labelle Verriere" which he later used
as inspiration for the design of the Washington Memorial Chapel windows. In 1921, D'Ascenzo was given permission by the French Government to put up scaffolding in Chartres Cathedral. For several months during the summer of 1921, D'Ascenzo made a series of sketches and detailed studies of each window including the glass, the individual cames, and the techniques employed. After Chartres, D'Ascenzo continued his study of early stained glass windows at Leon, in northern Spain. There, D'Ascenzo spent two weeks in the Cathedral experiencing the effects of the windows at all times of the day and how each color reacted to the change in weather.

Its brilliant color never failed to register in a most gratifying manner. When in sunlight the color was vibrant and intoxicating. On cloudy days, when a more sober mood prevailed, there was always a feeling of warmth and great beauty.

He later wrote in *Cathedral Age* that the interior of the Cathedral, "...was like walking into a sun-lit jewel box, set unsparingly with precious gems." Throughout the 1920s, D'Ascenzo examined the Gothic glass in cathedrals such as Canterbury, York, Rouen, Le Mans, Bourges and Poitiers. He also spent much time after World War I at the Trocadéro Museum in Paris where, during the war, much of France's cathedral stained glass
had been dismantled and stored. Fortunately, this enabled D'Ascenzo to hold each piece in his hands and to come to a complete understanding of how each window was made.\(^\text{29}\)

D'Ascenzo was absorbed not only with the study of stained glass but with all periods of art, architecture and all efforts of craftsmanship. If D'Ascenzo was not executing some art form, he was surrounding himself with it. He became an avid collector of books, artwork, and antiques. As mentioned, D'Ascenzo had two libraries, one at home and one at the studio. A 1928 accession count listed 2,123 volumes including books in French, German, Italian and English, and such topics as philosophy, religion, literature, history, music, art and architecture. In 1936, the Keystone Appraisal Company prepared an estimate of the contents of D'Ascenzo's home located at 425 West Price Street in the Germantown section of Philadelphia. The appraisal reveals an extensive collection of art and furniture including a mix of eighteenth-century American furniture and early European pieces dating from the Renaissance. The scope of artwork found in the house ranged from sculpture to Japanese wood block prints to an eighth-century Italian "Madonna and Child." Most of the paintings and drawings in the house were executed by either Nicola or Myrtle. As to be expected, their work depicted religious themes, foreign landscapes, and European cathedrals.\(^\text{30}\)
D'Ascenzo not only surrounded himself with objects of beauty but went to great lengths to educate the public in hopes of creating a popular sense of aesthetics. "Art for humanity's sake" was his motto in life. His philosophy of art was based on an "industrial art" form which he believed was an effort to make useful and functional objects beautiful and available for all ordinary citizens. In fact, D'Ascenzo's thoughts were very similar to the ideology of the Aesthetic movement and its principal members John Ruskin and William Morris "who held the utopian belief that a more artful environment could be morally uplifting, (and) argued that reform in art was a means of improving society." 

As the Aesthetic movement believed that art must be a part of daily life, so did D'Ascenzo. Whether it be "palace", "temple", "mart of trade" or the average dwelling, art was seen as necessary and functional to the adornment of all spaces associated with human activities. Since only the rich could afford architects, D'Ascenzo encouraged all architects to design inexpensive homes, those under $3,000, free of charge. In an article from 1926, he stated, "I want to see the same high order of taste and skill made manifest in behalf of those who love beauty and must accept ugliness because they are poor."

These ideals pervaded D'Ascenzo's work and studio.
By 1926, the Summer Street studio which occupied two buildings became a full-scale stained-glass operation. A blueprint made in 1934 by the Keystone Appraisal Company shows 1602 and 1604 Summer Street as the main building with three floors and a basement. (See fig. 10.) To the rear of the building was a platform for deliveries and a kiln room with a connecting garage. Running from the kiln room to each floor was an elevator that allowed for easy transportation of the windows from the upper design rooms down to the kiln and out to the garage for loading.36

Inside the studio, D'Ascenzo had essentially created a guild based on traditional medieval practices. One newspaper reporter described the experience of entering the studio as "...from the heart of the New World you've stepped into the Old."37 Another writer suggested that "his studio seemed to be pervaded with the medievalism of the 12th and 13th century transported to a modern setting."38 Early photographs reveal an interior brilliantly decorated with stained glass, wood carvings, antique furniture, mosaics, murals, tapestries and paintings. In the reception room filled with reminders of the past, D'Ascenzo received visitors and presented his ideas and designs to clients (see fig. 11). Leland Case described the spirit of the studio in a 1936 article entitled, "In Search of Stained Glass":

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Don't have misgivings that you've been directed to a music studio should you hear orchestral strains as you ring the bell. Often at noon and at the end of the day, the D'Ascenzo craftsmen unlimber their mandolins and violins for impromptu concerts. The dynamic maestro, himself, is a fiddler and music lover. Medieval guilds are the inspiration of this shop, from the camaraderie and profitsharing of master and men to their art. 

Clearly, D'Ascenzo's intent was to create an operation imitative of a traditional European guild—visually, spiritually and functionally. (See fig. 12.)

As in a traditional guild, each project was a collaborative effort by the entire staff and the business was run on a profit sharing basis. D'Ascenzo established a design, glazing and art department, each of which had varying levels of craftmanship including apprentice, journeyman, and master. Throughout the D'Ascenzo Collection several key artists are continuously mentioned: David Bramnick, Edwin Sharkey, Ralph Ohmer, Frederick Mayer, and D'Ascenzo's son Nicola, Junior. Most of the artists started with D'Ascenzo as apprentices and eventually acquired the title of master craftsmen and design collaborators to D'Ascenzo. Regardless of one's title, D'Ascenzo always stressed the importance of collaboration and not one-man propositions. He wanted the studio to work together, as a unit "...like that of a fine orchestra composed of a group of artists, but
directed by an individual.  

The process of making a stained glass window included a series of steps with each level of craftsmanship assigned specific responsibilities. The first step was the creation of a design by Nicola who made a rough drawing that was then passed on to the design department. Depending on the project, D'Ascenzo would collaborate with--or even hand the design responsibilities to--one of the master artists. At the design department, the rough drawing was worked out in detail and finished as a watercolor. Next, artists and journeymen made a full-scale charcoal drawing of the design known as a cartoon. The cartoon represented the design in its actual size and also revealed the arrangement of glass, lead came, and the areas that needed additional painting.

From the cartoon, a master glazier arranged the window and indicated the placement of the lead came. This was done by tracing the cartoon onto heavy paper. Then, the master glazier made cut lines with an agate tool to determine the pattern of each came and piece of glass. This cut line tracing was given to the cutter, who cut the glass patterns with a double-edge scissors that left spaces for the lead came. Next, the cutter attached the cut out pattern with beeswax to an easel made of plain glass. Using the original watercolor design
as a guide, the cutter, with the help of the master artist who designed the window, selected the colored glass, cut it, and attached it with beeswax to the plain glass. Piece by piece, the cartoon was replaced by corresponding sections of colored glass (see fig. 15). After each piece of glass was cut, the sharp edges were carefully trimmed with a file for safe and easy handling. D'Ascenzo preferred to use antique or traditionally made glass rather than modern, opalescent glass. He deemed antique glass more expressive in color due to its irregularities. He went to great lengths to purchase quality glass. The following glass manufacturers and distributors are listed in D'Ascenzo's notebook: Larson Glass Studios in Carlstadt, New Jersey; Leo Popper and Sons in New York City; Stott-Hecht Glass Works and Industrial Supplies in Philadelphia; Artcraft Manufacturing Company in Philadelphia for carved glass; and Roy Grosvenor Thomas in New York City for ancient stained glass. D'Ascenzo was also known to buy glass from Eendheim and Company in New York City, and early in his career he traveled to Europe to buy pot glass and hand-made roundels.

When the cutter's easel was filled with the selected pieces of glass, it was carried to the painting room, where the features shown in the full size cartoon were added. (See fig. 16.) Only one color can be applied to glass permanently and that is silver stain. It is
a preparation of actual powdered silver mixed with water and applied with a brush. When heated in the kiln, it stains the glass a golden color that is just as permanent as the glass itself. However, to add details like hands, faces, shadows, and drapery, a vitreous paint known as bistre brown powder is used. This paint is prepared from metallic oxides capable of withstanding firing in the kiln without alteration. These paints fuse permanently to the glass unlike enamel colors which will flake after fifteen to twenty years. After the details had been applied to the various shapes of glass, they were removed from the plate glass, placed in the kiln, and given a first fire of about 1300 degrees Fahrenheit (see fig. 17). The glass was then shaded and given a second firing of about 1250 degrees. Silver stain was applied where necessary and given a third fire of 900 degrees.50

Traditionally, kilns were heated by wood and coke, and later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by coal, oil and gas. These heat sources were hard to regulate and often lead to distortion and cracking due to back draughts from the flue. The D'Ascenzo Studios initially used a gas furnace, but by 1926, D'Ascenzo had acquired one of the earliest electric kilns. The electric kiln was claimed to be the first truly accurate heat source equipped with a pyrometer to record temperatures and to shut off once the required heat was reached. The
efficiency of the kiln guaranteed the permanent adhesion of gold leaf and glaze to glass for mosaics and pigment to glass for stained glass. \textsuperscript{51}

The final step involved the glaziers who assembled the finished pieces of glass with lead came (see fig. 13). Each piece of glass was framed with lead with the joints soldered on both sides of the window. After soldering, a slow drying cement was forced into all the joints and edges of each piece of glass to insure a water-tight window. \textsuperscript{52} Lastly, horizontal iron stiffening bars were added to keep the window from bulging. \textsuperscript{53} Once the window was completed, it was placed on an easel again for the master artist to see. D'Ascenzo described this as "living with" the design. It would sit for a couple of days or even weeks until the artist was satisfied with every detail. A typical window took the studio approximately three months to complete, and larger, ecclesiastical medallion windows could take up to three years. \textsuperscript{54}

D'Ascenzo and the studio's responsibilities extended beyond artistic endeavors. D'Ascenzo went to great lengths to present his ideas and philosophies toward art and to show his work as an artist and a stained-glass master. In a sense, he assumed the responsibility of educating the public on aesthetic matters. He presented his ideas to all audiences. By using his reputation as a prolific
stained-glass master and artist, D'Ascenzo lectured to both private and public groups. As a member of the Pennsylvania Board of Education during the 1930's, D'Ascenzo would often give speeches to schools, graduating classes, vocational schools, and universities. The emphases of all his speeches was education, religion, and an appreciation of art. As he wrote in 1940:

Each painting, mosaic, sculpture and all forms of enrichment and embellishment including landscaping, serve to give us, everyone, a sense of pride not only for the gratification of our ability, but also as an expression of the present age for posterity, to keep burning for all time the ever shining light of something finer.

After a trip in 1939 when D'Ascenzo had visited an Italian vocational school among others in Europe, he discovered the need for individuality in the American system. He wrote:

We need to re-establish the individual craftsman in connection with our modern mass production, not only for the purpose of preserving our cherished heritage of the arts & crafts, but also to improve and beautify the product of the machine, since the work of the good craftsman has always set the standard of excellence.
D'Ascenzo preached his ideas throughout the Philadelphia educational system. He lectured annually between 1920 and 1940 to the students at the University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art about his ideals concerning art and architecture. At other institutions, he would usually lecture on stained glass accompanied by an exhibit displaying the step-by-step process on how to create a stained-glass window (see fig. 19). At Radnor High School in Wayne, Pennsylvania, he lectured on the making of stained glass and mosaics. Yet his main objective for speaking was to stress participation in the local art center and always to appreciate "the beautiful in the minds of men." D'Ascenzo was committed to educating America's youth and the general public on stained glass and the importance of quality craftsmanship and its survival in the United States. During the 1920s and 30s he lectured and exhibited over 70 times at 26 different colleges and universities.

For the general public, D'Ascenzo willingly spoke to or exhibited at every club, community group, society, gallery, and museum. Between 1925 and 1937, D'Ascenzo spoke to groups including the Rotary, the Century club, the Women's Club, and the Daughters of the American Revolution. Even his son, Nicola, Junior gave a lecture entitled, "Through Colored Windows," on a local radio
station in 1937. D'Ascenzo encouraged groups to visit the studio. Between 1928 and 1936, over 24 different groups came to the studio to observe the making of stained glass. The Art League of Philadelphia, the New Century Club, and the Women's Club of Asbury Park, New Jersey, were all visitors in 1935 and 1936. D'Ascenzo's continuous efforts proved his dedication at edifying the public regarding the art of stained glass and the eventual appreciation for all forms of craftsmanship.

D'Ascenzo exhibited with over 150 different organizations across the United States and over 450 times between 1911 and 1950. Early in his career, between 1911 and 1913, D'Ascenzo had developed nation-wide recognition by exhibiting in key metropolitan cities outside Pennsylvania. His earliest shows included Cleveland, Los Angeles, Toronto, the Chicago Architectural Exhibit, the Architectural League of New York, and the National Arts Club of New York. Later, at the peak of his career, he had several one-man shows. His first one-man show was held at the Philadelphia Memorial Hall in 1922 where he showed his stained glass designs along with a display of the steps to making stained and leaded glass. Later, in Newport, Rhode Island, D'Ascenzo exhibited a comprehensive showing of eighty-six pictures at the Cushing Memorial Gallery under the auspices of the Art Association of Newport. The pictures ranged
from oils, watercolors, etchings, crayon drawings, colored pencils to studies in several media of his work in stained glass. The subject matter was also varied from sketches of his summer home, "La Rocca," in Lanesville, Massachusetts, to portraits, studies of European architectural details, Chartres Cathedral, and genre scenes of Sicily. (See figs. 20, 21 and 22.) The show revealed the work of an extremely diverse and prolific artist. 63

The exhibits were not necessarily a means of displaying his own work but also an effort to promote the use and improve the quality of stained glass in America. In order to educate professionals and the public, D'Ascenzo exhibited everywhere from schools, to department stores, museums, galleries, clubs, libraries, religious institutions, and fair grounds. Along with his stained glass designs, mosaics, murals and personal renderings, D'Ascenzo exhibited the step-by-step processes of making stained glass and a description of the tools and techniques. By showing a variety of media in a variety of institutions, D'Ascenzo appealed to a large audience from the general public while earning the respect of artists, architects, and craftsmen.

At the peak of his career, D'Ascenzo earned a series of awards and professional honors. As a local accomplished artist, he won, in 1927, the first alumni gold prize
from the Pennsylvania Museum School of Industrial Art, in addition to the T-Square gold medal and the gold medal from the Pennsylvania Arts and Sciences Society. At the first International Exposition of Architecture and Allied Arts in 1925, he, as a stained glass master, was recognized among ten thousand exhibitors. He was awarded the gold medal from the New York Architectural League for his design and craftsmanship of the St. James Episcopal Church window in Bristol, Pennsylvania. The most critically acclaimed honor came when the American Institute of Architects made him an honorary member.

D'Ascenzo had active memberships throughout his life in the New York Architectural League, the Society of Mural Decorators, the Science and Art Club of Germantown, the Pennsylvania Arts and Sciences Society and additionally, he held such positions as president of the Philadelphia Sketch Club, Secretary of the State Art Jury, member of the Pennsylvania Board of Public Education, president of the Stained Glass Association of America for two terms (1929-1930), and president in 1933 of the DaVinci Alliance which was a group of Philadelphia artists, musicians and writers.

D'Ascenzo's efforts brought him nation-wide recognition and a varied clientele extending over 40 states and five foreign countries. Through lecturing, exhibiting, and various community leadership positions, D'Ascenzo promoted
himself and his work before the general public. To further promote his work and that of the studio, D'Ascenzo relied on extensive advertising using photographs of completed works, newspaper articles, and personal sketches and paintings in religious, college, architectural, fine art and community publications, as well as newspapers articles and telephone directories.68 (See figs. 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27.) By the 1920s, the studio was internationally known.

In addition to advertising, D'Ascenzo worked with five sales representatives—Joseph Crowley, Chester P. Dodge, George W. Smith, Carlos von Dexter and interior decorator, Lyman Cleveland. These representatives, who worked for a ten percent commission of the total cost of a work order, contacted and met with architects, religious organizations, and other potential clients in hopes of convincing them to commission D'Ascenzo Studios.69 Lyman Cleveland often shared his clients with D'Ascenzo. One client in particular, Mr. Theodore Swann of Alabama, commissioned over $12,000 worth of stained and leaded glass for his Birmingham residence from D'Ascenzo in 1929.70 Carlos von Dexter, a sales representative from New York frequently gave lectures in connection with stained glass exhibits in order to promote the studio's work.71 During the 1920s and 30s, he brought the studio twenty large scale commissions
including the Riverside Baptist Church, Temple Emanu-El, Mizpah Chapel, Central Presbyterian Church and St. James Church all in New York City, the National City Christian Church in Washington, D.C., and the Dwight Memorial Chapel of Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. 72

Initially, D'Ascenzo had relied on architects for recognition and commissions. There were 26 different architectural firms listed as clients in the account book for 1904. Some of the most prominent architects mentioned were George Hewitt and Frank Furness, Wilson Eyre, William L. Price and Martin Hawley McLanahan, and Louis Magaziner. 73 D'Ascenzo worked with all the leading Philadelphia and nationally acclaimed architects such as Paul Cret, Edmund B. Gilchrist, Grant Miles Simon, Horace Trumbauer, and the firm of C. Clark Zantzinger, C.L. Borie & Milton Medary. D'Ascenzo maintained a close alliance with the architectural profession throughout his career. From D'Ascenzo's records, it is apparent that he had a running list of architects who continually used the studio in their work. For example, the firm of Brown and Whiteside from Wilmington, Delaware commissioned D'Ascenzo 27 times between 1910 and 1930. Between 1909 and 1952, Cram and Ferguson of Boston repeatedly used D'Ascenzo for their religious commissions including, the Euclid Avenue Presbyterian Church, Cleveland, Ohio; the Church of the Intercession, New York City;
the East Liberty Presbyterian Church, Pittsburgh; the First Presbyterian Church, Greensburg, Pennsylvania; the Princeton University Chapel, Princeton, New Jersey; and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.  

D'Ascenzo had an extremely prolific career. He was an artist, educator, community leader, and businessman, as well as stained-glass master. And for his efforts, he was awarded by his peers, and by the success of his studio. Between 1904 and 1954, the studio designed over 7,800 windows and completed over 3,900 commissions. However, more importantly, D'Ascenzo had specific ideologies toward art, his work, and the stained-glass medium. He imparted his views by writing, lecturing, and exhibiting. Yet, it is his actual stained and leaded glass designs that embodied his philosophy of trying to bridge traditionalism and modernism.


16. "Current Topics of the Town, There is Epic Poetry in Memorial Stained Glass as in Monumental Stone," Scrapbook Clipping, no citation available, Betty Bramnick Collection.

17. Philadelphia City Directory 1926.

18. D'Ascenzo Drawings, D'Ascenzo Memorial Collection, Philadelphia Free Public Library.


23. "Historical Stained Glass Window," National Glass Budget (March 1920) Scrapbook Clippings, no page number available, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Also, D'Ascenzo made a watercolor drawing of the interior of Chartres Cathedral from which he made advertisement prints and had it copyrighted in 1911.


30. Betty Bramnick Collection includes a listing of books from D'Ascenzo's home and studio and a listing from the studio of the books at the Architectural League.
of New York; Keystone Appraisal Company. (February 11, 1936) lists every piece of furniture and artwork which came to a total value of $62,235.80.


40. Mary Griffin, interview (January 13, 1989).


42. David Bramnick, Polish immigrant, came to D'Ascenzo and initially apprenticed and eventually reached the level of master artist and collaborator. Betty Bramnick, interview (March 22, 1989).


44. Presiding over the designing department in 1931 was Edwin Sharkey and Ralph Ohmer, mentioned in Hark, " Beauties of D'Ascenzo Studios."


47. D'Ascenzo Address Book, Betty Bramnick Collection.

48. Mary Griffin, interview (January 18, 1939).

49. Overseeing the painting room in 1931 was master artist David Bramnick according to Hark's "Beauties of D'Ascenzo Studios."

50. D'Ascenzo, "The Principal Processes in the Making of a Stained Glass Window."


52. D'Ascenzo, "The Principal Processes in the Making of a Stained Glass Window."

53. By 1930's, D'Ascenzo was experimenting with different armature materials to avoid iron corrosion. As a substitute for iron, bronze was introduced for window frames and stiffening bars for his window designs for the chapel at Princeton University, the banking room of the Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Company, and "The Battle of Princeton" window made for the Washington Memorial Chapel at Valley Forge. Mentioned in "Bronze applied for frames and structural bars in two fine stained glass windows," Copper and Brass Bulletin 73 (October 1932):15, and "The camera reveals copper ever-present in the spotlight of daily events," Copper and Brass Bulletin 77 (December 1933):9.


57. "Nicola D'Ascenzo to Lecture Here Tonight," The Suburban and Wayne Times (January 27, 1933):1, Scrapbook
Clippings, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

58. D'Ascenzo lectured and exhibited at the following: University of Delaware, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, University of Nebraska, Girard College, Loyola, Hood, Goucher, Smith, Wellesley, Penn State, Mt. St. Joseph, Vassar, Villanova, Harcum, Rutgers University, Rosemont, Western Maryland College, Muhlenberg, Cornell, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Pratt Institute, Princeton, Trenton School of Industrial Art, and the Rhode Island School of Design. Each listed with dates in the Card Catalog File, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.


60. Address Book, Betty Bramnick Collection.


66. Although this fact is repeatedly mentioned in contemporary articles and in Who Was Who a date was never given.

67. Who Was Who, 203.

68. Address Book, Betty Bramnick Collection.

69. A list of D'Ascenzo's sales representatives along with each job they sold is found in the Card Catalog.


74. A list of architects and each of the commissions they worked on with D'Ascenzo found in the Card Catalog File, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

75. Estimation according to the D'Ascenzo Studios Collection. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
CHAPTER 4

D'Ascenzo's Efforts to Bridge Traditionalism and Modernism

For D'Ascenzo, the actual production of a window was only part of the process. Over the years, he developed a certain belief as to what a stained-glass window should be, and he tried to bridge the traditional art of stained glass with the spirit and needs of the present. Stained glass, D'Ascenzo believed, was not an entity unto itself but an art form intimately allied with architecture. At a lecture given in 1940, D'Ascenzo said: "Architecture is without question the 'Mother' of the arts and indeed art only functions at its best when in her care."\(^1\) Every design, he believed, must always be subordinate to the whole architectural treatment.\(^2\) "Unity and harmony," he stated, "should be the keynote for the craftsmen if they hope to keep intact the balance as set forth by the architect."\(^3\) Not only did D'Ascenzo collaborate with his co-workers but with the architect as well and deemed that all of the allied arts must collaborate to produce a cohesive architectural entity.\(^4\)

D'Ascenzo defined stained glass in the same manner as a twelfth-, thirteenth- or fourteenth-century window, as a "screen of pieces of colored glass, joined by lead, any portrayal being without perspective and on one plane."\(^5\)
Therefore, he felt it was only fitting to model his work after the traditional methods established by the medieval guilds of Europe. The Gothic stained glass studied during his travels in France, Spain, Italy and England became his inspiration. He applied the traditional principles of the craft to the contemporary approach to art. In his article, "Principles and Tendencies in the Making of Stained Glass Windows," he explained the need to discern what is important from medieval artistic principles.

We must turn back to the work of the 12th and 13th centuries for inspiration. However, we must seek to imitate virtues and not faults with all due respect to their naive quaintness of composition and forms; we must remember that we are living today, and must account for whatever advancement we have made in art.

D'Ascenzo strongly opposed imitation and three-dimensional realism. Although he looked to the old masters for inspiration and held their work in reverence, he believed that contemporary stained glass must "strive to bring to this noble craft something of our own era by adapting the fine principles of old art to modern conditions and needs." Furthermore, he opposed three-dimensional realism by defining stained glass as a "screen of colored glass." D'Ascenzo believed that architecturally a "screen of colored glass" was composed of one plane and must be treated as such. Perspective,
therefore, must not be part of the design.\textsuperscript{9} The window, D'Ascenzo stressed, was not a blank canvas on which a design might be painted, nor should its design be a medieval replica. D'Ascenzo believed in creating twentieth-century, American stained glass by combining traditional techniques with contemporary equipment.\textsuperscript{10}

D'Ascenzo believed it was essential to treat a stained glass window first for its functional use as fenestration, recognizing the need for armature and structural members. Light, he believed, was the sole factor to the success of a window. An artist must know the exact spot where the window is to be placed, the effects of local light, varying weather conditions daily or seasonally, the intensity of direct and indirect lighting, the color of interior walls, and the type and proximity of other windows. By knowing the full effect of light, D'Ascenzo was able to determine the color composition and the arrangement of cames in order to design a window capable of penetrating color at any hour of the day and under all weather conditions.\textsuperscript{11} He explained the effects of color in a 1924 article, "Principles and Tendencies in the Making of Stained Glass Windows."

It is a known fact that certain colors play peculiar tricks when they transmit light. For instance, blue glass eats away the leads more than yellow or red glass, as well as it affects adjoining colors, giving yellow a green edge, and red next to blue a purple
appearance. This peculiar phenomenon will give a straight lead line much variation as it passes through the various colors.\(^{12}\)

While the problems of light determined the success of a window, the lead lines and constructional iron bars D'Ascenzo expressed, "are the very life of a well designed glass window."\(^{13}\)

The more you submerge the black lines of lead and iron, the worse the window. Lead is not only necessary to separate the glass pieces and define its color and design, it adds brilliancy and sparkle to the window, and is as necessary as its brightest color. The black iron bars are not only a means of support, but a necessary accent, and should be studied in connection with the design of the window. Its spacing should add rather than destroy its design, as is obvious in many of opalescent windows.\(^{14}\)

D'Ascenzo believed that most stained-glass artists tried to conceal the lead line in order to increase the sense of realism, which contradicted the function of the window as an architectural element. Traditionally, he insisted, the lead line had always been an integral part of a design and together with the glass created an illuminated opening in the wall.\(^{15}\)

From D'Ascenzo's first conception of a stained glass design, he always believed in the traditional use of cames and incorporated them within his designs. The article "A Modern Master of an Ancient Art," describes
D'Ascenzo's early problems of obtaining cames. Around 1905, when D'Ascenzo ordered one inch wide lead cames, the distributor thought there was a mistake because at the time nobody in America was making inch-wide cames nor did anyone have the molds (dies) to make them. D'Ascenzo insisted that he needed this size came in order to execute his design. Soon, he managed to convince the purveyor to furnish his request for cames of varying widths. Eventually, craftsmen recognized D'Ascenzo's technique and the use of assorted lead cames and iron armature was revived within the designs for stained-glass windows.16

Another obstacle D'Ascenzo encountered with lead lines was the effect of interior artificial lighting at night upon a window. At night or during cloudy weather, a stained-glass window becomes a black hole in the wall. This dilemma was most prominent in churches. D'Ascenzo noticed that artificial lighting illuminated only certain areas such as the altar and some painted surfaces; therefore, the unity of design was lost. To solve this problem, he decided to experiment on his medallion windows for St. Paul's Church in Chestnut Hill, a suburb of Philadelphia. For these windows, extra wide leads were used to define the medallions and the figures within the design. D'Ascenzo first experimented by superposing repoussé lead which in the daylight is invisible. Then,
he flanked the lead with applied opaque color to give a surface color only at night. Lastly, the armature and leads were gilded with gold leaf. D'Ascenzo's work created a whole new effect. During the day, the rich colors filtered through the glass and dominated the visual experience of the church. By night, artificial light reflected off the gilded leads and created a golden pattern within the blackened window. D'Ascenzo in fact was the first to create a double function for a stained glass window. Not only did it function as part of the interior decoration during the day but at night as well. Thus, a harmonious balance was created between the entire interior design as a unified whole. Doroth Grafly described the effect in 1929:

There is magic in the transition, to sit in the exquisite church at twilight watching the play of blues and reds through the brilliant medallions that tell of the life of St. Paul...Then, as the light fades and the colors die gradually, there emerges a pattern of gold utterly different in its design emphasis from that of the daylight impression and wholly unexpected.

As a true craftsman, D'Ascenzo continuously tried to improve his technique and the craft of stained glass. He studied every aspect of the craft and its history. He analyzed the lighting, color, and immediate architectural
environment. To improve his technique, he modernized the craft by relying on twentieth-century science and technology. Through research and analytical chemistry, he stressed the need to analyze the craft in order to preserve the traditional techniques and to improve a window's durability, strength, and quality of colored glass.

All of the so-called secrets of the early craftsmen have long since been laid bare on the laboratory table and we have been fortunate in thus learning of many pitfalls to avoid. The glassmaker of today has the advantage of recourse to science; tests can be applied for all given conditions and we are able to learn in a few hours that which has taken centuries for actual demonstration.

D'Ascenzo's beliefs in the traditional craft of stained glass were manifested in his work. He applied his ideologies to every design, be his clients religious organizations, public institutions, wealthy to middle-income homeowners, businessmen, companies, banks, hotels, department stores, restaurants, or private clubs. The range of commissions included full interior designs, lighting fixtures, murals, mosaics, and stained glass. Some of the major installations were Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California; Washington Memorial Chapel,
Valley Forge, Pennsylvania; The National Cathedral, Washington, D.C.; the Riverside Baptist Church, New York City; Rodeph-Shalom Synagogue, Philadelphia; and the Horn and Hardart automat restaurants along the east coast.

As for the many collegiate windows D'Ascenzo designed, they include Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut; Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey; the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Mulhenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania; Georgetown Prepatory School, Garrett Park, Maryland; Canterbury School, New Milford, Connecticut. 20

D'Ascenzo not only revived the traditional art form but explored its aesthetic potential. Instead of imitating the medieval style, he exploited the combination of modern and secular themes with traditional Christian iconography. In fact, this approach was the same as the twelfth- and thirteenth-century stained-glass designers. The medieval designers modernized historic images, such as The Virgin Mary, by clothing them in Gothic dress. The thirteen windows in the Washington Memorial Chapel at Valley Forge, a ten year project starting in 1914, depict the life of George Washington and the history of America's independence and the founding of the republic. The thirteen windows are the Christ window (also known as the "Martha Washington Memorial Window"), "Carrying the Gospel to the Ends of the Earth," "The New Birth and the New Freedom,"
"Freedom through the Word," "Discovery," "Settlement," "Expansion," "Development," "Revolution," "Patriotism," "Democracy," "The Union," and "The George Washington Memorial Window." The windows were designed in the manner of the twelfth century, French medallion style window, yet replete with modern themes. For example, the "Freedom through the Word" window represents themes of freedom through the work of the Gospels. The window depicts William Tyndale, translator of the New Testament, John Wycliffe sending forth his preachers, the Reverend Hunt reading from the Book at Jamestown, and George Washington presenting a red morocco volume of the Testaments to his two adopted children.21

A similar example is at the Kenyon College Chapel, in Gambier, Ohio, where the college commissioned a chapel window for the transept in 1930. Because Kenyon was one of the earliest schools in the "West," founded in 1824, D'Ascenzo chose to depict the great western expansion. The windows—a pair of lancets surmounted by a medallion—depict settlers arriving in Conestoga wagons, cattle herders, and the development of the oil fields. The windows illustrate early life on the plains and symbolize America's sense of progress and development.22

For the Cathedral of the Air at the Naval Air Base in Lakehurst, New Jersey, D'Ascenzo illustrated the story of aviation. In the memorial chapel dedicated to war
veterans and to those who have given their lives or made outstanding contributions to aviation, D'Ascenzo created fifteen windows illustrating the progression of aviation from fable to modern-day science. The designs include legendary images such as Elijah's chariot of fire and the flying carpet followed by historic events such as Leonardo da Vinci's drawings of flying apparatus and the balloon flight by the Montgolfier Brothers. Specifically American aviation events include President Washington with members of his Cabinet and of Congress witnessing the first balloon flight in Philadelphia by Pierre Blanchard in 1793, Lincoln's Civil War balloon, Lilienthal's glider, the Curtis hydroaeroplane, the Wright Brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk, Byrd's flight over the North Pole, and Lindbergh's trans-Atlantic flight. D'Ascenzo's designs not only tell the complete story of aviation but present contemporary civilization as well.

D'Ascenzo also used modern secular images to compliment religious themes. In the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, D'Ascenzo explored the use of secular motifs such as, sports and radio broadcasting, in six aisle windows which formed the "Press Bay," "Labor Bay, and "Sports Bay." The "Press Bay" depicts Christ preaching the word of God adjacent to modern themes of broadcasting. In one lancet window D'Ascenzo depicted a minister "broadcasting"
from his pulpit, a linotype operator, Morse telegraphing the first message, and the invention of television. The "Sports Bay" window depicts challenge and triumph with biblical references like Esau the Hunter, Jacob wrestling the Angel, Samson slaying the lion, and symbolic images like The Spiritual Athlete and The Armour of Salvation. A compliment to this window is a medallion type window depicting contemporary matches: bowling, boxing, ice hockey, football, baseball, basketball, tennis, fencing, automobile racing, swimming, ice skating, target practice, billiards, sculling, archery, hunting, soccer, skiing, polo, trout fishing, golf, tobogganing, sailing, bicycle racing, cricket, and curling. By mixing Christian iconography with modern, secular themes, D'Ascenzo created twentieth-century religious windows. Rather than imitate medieval subject matter, he created windows understandable to contemporary society, which was exactly what the medieval glass master had done by portraying religious themes understandable to medieval society.

In secular designs, D'Ascenzo continued this approach. He designed a 25 foot high window for the main banking room of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company. The window tells the story of the history of Philadelphia. Two scenes from the life of William Penn are represented: his landing near New Castle, Delaware, and his treaty with the Indians. At the top of the window, Independence
Hall is represented with the signing of the Declaration of Independence and George Washington addressing the Congress. The decorative borders contain medallions portraits of Philadelphia's historical citizens such as Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, David Rittenhouse, John Bartram, James Wilson, Robert Morris, and George Clymer.25

D'Ascenzo designed for the Camden Free Public Library an exterior mosaic frieze above the main entry. The mosaic, which measured 72 feet long by 9 feet high, represented "America Receiving the Gifts of the Nations." It comprised "thirty-eight lifesize figures representing the races and nationalities that have contributed their science, art and literature to the upbuilding of the great American Commonwealth."26 Some of the figures represented were Longfellow, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Raphael, "Byzantium," and "Persia."27

For the Folger-Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., D'Ascenzo designed windows indicative of the function of the building. The library was designed by architect, Paul Cret, to house Henry Clay Folger's endowment of Shakespearean literature. Under the direction of Cret, sculptors, painters, and artisans came together to decorate an institution dedicated to Shakespearean literature. In the reading room, D'Ascenzo designed windows with motifs that were popular in Shakespeare's day. He used heraldry, the badges of Elizabeth and James I, and the
armorial bearings of Shakespeare's patrons, Sir Thomas Lucy and the Earl of Pembroke. On the west wall, D'Ascenzo designed a seven panel window entitled, "The Seven Ages of Man." The seven figures ascend and then fall to form a pyramid symbolic of the rise and fall of man. The design started with a depiction of infancy followed by boyhood and "Lover sighing like furnace." At the apex is the "Soldier seeking bubble reputation e'en at the cannon's mouth." The descending group included "Justice full of wise saws and modern instances," followed by two figures representing the later stages of aging. In Folger's private study, D'Ascenzo represented Shakespearean characters such as the jester, Portia, Touchstone, Cardinal Wolsey, and Romeo. 28

Just as the medieval stained glass artists looked to their environment for subject matter so did D'Ascenzo. He looked to his world, a modern twentieth-century environment for design schemes and, in turn, up-dated the medieval stained glass craft to a creative art having modern significance. D'Ascenzo's efforts to bridge traditionalism and modernism were manifested in his studio, as a recreation of a medieval guild and in his explorations into modern technology, materials and subject matter.
ENDNOTES


17. Dorothy Grafly, "New Ideas at Work Reviving Old Art of Stained Glass," *Philadelphia Public Ledger*
(June 9, 1929) Scrapbook Clippings, no page number available, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.


28. D'Ascenzo Studios Advertisement reprinted from "Shakespeare Library Shows Stained Glass by D'Ascenzo," The Philadelphia Record (March 12, 1934) and advertisement
CHAPTER 5

An Analysis of D'Ascenzo's Residential Designs

According to the D'Ascenzo Studios Collection at The Athenaeum, D'Ascenzo completed over 600 residential designs for approximately 450 to 500 clients, which accounted for about twenty percent of the studio's work. Ninety-five percent of the residential designs were created between 1905 and 1930. The peak years for the studio's residential commissions were between 1913 and 1917 and 1924 through 1930. With the advent of the Depression and later with World War II, D'Ascenzo designed only eighteen residential windows between 1930 and 1945.¹

The cost for a D'Ascenzo window ranged considerably and reflected the originality and complexity of a design. For example, in 1911, Mr. M. W. Young paid $9.00 for two plain, leaded casment windows for his Overbrook, Pennsylvania home, while, Mr. J.C. Boyd paid $715.00 for a stair hall stained-glass design for his Washington, D.C. home. D'Ascenzo's initial approach to every client was to establish a budget. He would always accommodate his clients by preparing two version of a design; one would always be more simple and cheaper than the other. On the average, most of D'Ascenzo's residential clients commissioned stained glass for one window or one room.
During the studio's first peak during the 1910s, the average commission was under $200. However, by the late 1920s, commissions were larger. Instead of just one window, clients were looking for stained and leaded glass for multiple rooms and the costs averaged between $700 and $1,000.²

Many of D'Ascenzo's residential commissions came from the same clients. Wealthy entrepreneurs and members of Philadelphia society continuously commissioned D'Ascenzo throughout his career for their homes, businesses, and local parishes. For the DuPont family of Wilmington, Delaware, D'Ascenzo did a series of window designs. In 1916, he was commissioned to design windows for the DuPont Building in Wilmington. In 1923, he was commissioned to work with architects Brown & Whiteside to design windows for the DuPont Hotel, and in 1926 a skylight for DuPont's "La Mont" residence. Finally in 1933, he designed a stairhall window for Alfred I. DuPont's home in Wilmington.³

Another example is the Curtis family. In 1910, Alfred A. Curtis of Wilmington commissioned D'Ascenzo for a window that cost $80.00, and in 1911, Fred W. Curtis of Reading, Pennsylvania, spent $490.00. Mrs. Cyrus H.K. Curtis of Wyncote, Pennsylvania, commissioned one bay window in 1923 for $4,200, a memorial window in 1928 for her daughter, Eleanor Pillsbury Pennell, for the Unitarian Church in Germantown, and a mosaic for the
same church in 1930.\textsuperscript{4}

In an article entitled "The Use of Leaded Glass In Suburban Residences," D'Ascenzo imparted his thoughts on residential stained glass. He stressed the use of leaded and stained glass in any room, and in any style house. He wrote, "to see a Colonial or a Queen Anne or a half timber house with large panes of plate glass, unbroken by leads or muntins, is in the same class as to see a cement house without mortar joints."\textsuperscript{5} He believed that every room demanded certain themes and that a window should be "not merely pretty but useful and decorative."\textsuperscript{6}

For the library, he suggested bookmarks or printers' marks for windows and bookcase doors. This, he believed, illustrated the "link between the contents of the bookcases and the printers of the books," which was "not only interesting but instructive."\textsuperscript{7} (See figs. 28, 29 and 30.) He also liked to use medallions depicting the evolution of book illustration and manuscript illumination (see fig. 31). He wrote: "such a treatment lends 'tone' to the library (and) emphasizes its use and makes it distinctive."\textsuperscript{8} In the dining room, he suggested a window or china closet door illustrating china marks because, he explained, it would encourage "the youth of the family to grow up with an understanding and appreciation of the great workers who have labored hard to perfect china utensils."\textsuperscript{9} The intrinsic value of the design would
breed "a sense of respect for a mere dish." For a music room design for Mrs. Herman Buchborn in 1910, D'Ascenzo employed the three musical muses from Greek mythology (Melpomene, Polyhymnia and Terpsichore) to form a comprehensive illustration of the study of musicology. (See fig. 32.) Most of D'Asccnzo's designs were for the public spaces in a home; however, on occasion, a client asked for a window for a bathroom. In this case, D'Ascenzo used a decorative, aquatic plant, the water lily for Mrs. Hutton's bathroom in 1911 (see fig. 33). He also recommended using a mermaid in water, a design he featured in "The Use of Leaded Glass in Suburban Residences."

Certain situations, however, warranted a different approach. Designs for stair hall windows proved to be the most popular residential commissions for the studio. The designs either shielded an unpleasant view or helped to enhance a good one. In 1911, D'Ascenzo designed a stair hall window for Mrs. Kate Willard Boyd's Washington, D.C. home. He wrote, "there was a red brick wall ten feet across the passasge-way," and it was a "...distressing outlook from an important hall window." He described these views as "unsightly outlooks" and "eye-sores." To solve the problem, he designed a window with a view taken from the colonnade of a monastery garden in Amalfi, Italy, that he had visited and later described.
as, "after you once see the original, your dreams are haunted by its recollection." Upon installation, Mrs. Boyd gave a tea party to introduce the window to Washington, D.C. society. (See fig. 34.) In 1910, for the Everett residence in Cleveland, Ohio, D'Ascenzo again used a scene from his travels in Italy. He designed a six part window for $2,293, depicting a dramatic landscape of cliffs overlooking the ocean (see fig. 35). Although the exact location is unknown, it does recall one of D'Ascenzo's sketches of an Italian cliffside monastery, The Belvedere (see fig. 9).

Another prevalent motif for stair hall windows was climbing wisteria supported by columns or a garden trellis; a theme which was made popular by Tiffany in his 1905 design, "Oyster Bay Window." Tiffany's design used a heavy trellis covered with wisteria, which frames the window. The background was a distant depiction of the Oyster Bay landscape. D'Ascenzo produced a similar stair hall window in 1910 for the Howe residence in Nashville, Tennessee, for $275.40. The design also used a heavy trellis with wisteria which framed the window. However, in the background, the garden motif was continued with a central fountain and flanking cypress trees. D'Ascenzo used modified versions of this design several times between 1909 and 1915 for such clients as J. Bertram Lippincott of Bethayres, Pennsylvania, the Eaton residence
in Norwich, New York, the Merrill residence in Pittsburgh, a client of architect, W. Ward of Liverpool, New York, and the Lockwood residence (location unknown). Instead of including an entire landscape scene for these windows, D'Ascenzo used clear leaded glass for the background. These designs enhanced the view, rather than improving upon it, by simply framing the window with the wisteria motif (see fig. 36 and 37).

For a more traditional window, D'Ascenzo chose Renaissance motifs. In 1917, Dr. Ziegler of Haverford, Pennsylvania, commissioned D'Ascenzo to design a window in the classical style (see fig. 38). The source for the design was Dintorni, a book of reprinted illustrations of the windows for the Certosa corridors in Florence by Giovanni Da Udine. D'Ascenzo's design recalls Giovanni Da Udine's "Life of St. Bruno," a popular motif used for secular windows during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. (See fig. 39.) Another example described as "Renaissance style" was the stair hall window designed in 1931 for H. V. Foster of Bartlesville, Oklahoma (see fig. 40). The central medallion featured a ship in full sail with seashells and marine life including sea horses, dolphins, compass points, knotted rope and the globe encircled by the signs of the zodiac.

Another design source for stair landing windows was the opera. In 1930, D'Ascenzo designed eight windows
containing stained glass medallions featuring historic operatic scenes for the E.J. Kulas residence in Cleveland, Ohio. The design, which cost $1350, represented scenes from "Faust," "La Boheme," "Martha," "The Flying Dutchman," "Lohengrin," and "Pagliacci" (see fig. 41). A detailed photograph of the "Pagliacci" medallion reveals D'Ascenzo's intricate handpainting of the facial features and drapery folds (see fig. 42).  

For those who preferred less elaborate windows, D'Ascenzo offered a variety of popular medieval motifs and themes such as zodiac signs, the four seasons, the months of the year, and heraldry on clear leaded glass. This idea parallels N.H.J. Westlake a writer in the 1890's on the subject of stained glass in the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. D'Ascenzo owned a copy of Westlake's *A History of Design in Painted Glass* in the studio's library. In it, Westlake described the windows of Billing Castle, England as having decorative windows without obstructing light. The windows featured coats of arms and picture roundels "placed in the center and ornamentally leaded or slightly painted with delicate work."  

D'Ascenzo imitated the windows from Billing Castle and the popular roundel designs from fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for many of his residential commissions. In 1913, Dr. Dudley P. Allen commissioned
a five paneled window representing traditional heraldic signs for his Cleveland residence (see fig. 43). The design used colored heraldic roundels on diaper patterned, leaded glass. For designs using the four seasons, D'Ascenzo represented each season by its labor in a colored roundel with random depictions of the zodiac signs. (See fig. 44 and 45.) For Mr. T. L. Hausmann of Miami, Florida, D'Ascenzo designed, in 1920, a set of four windows depicting traditional artistic crafts, pottery making, painting, print making, and weaving (see fig. 46 and 47). Again, each motif is depicted in a roundel on patterned, clear leaded glass.

Another popular motif created by D'Ascenzo was a combination of seasons, heraldry, zodiac signs, and the earth's elements. The windows made for the Seiberling residence of Akron, Ohio, in 1914 show "Air," "Autumn," "Fire," "Water," "Spring," and "Land." (See fig. 48 and 49.) A detail of "Water" reveals a coat of arms of aquatic motifs, a ship, whales, and a mermaid which is topped by a conch shell and Neptune, god of the sea, with his trident (see fig. 50).

Surviving renderings and photographs of D'Ascenzo's residential work reveal that his leaded glass designs with just a touch of color and hand painting seemed more popular than full stained-glass windows. For most of his designs, D'Ascenzo relied on fluid lead lines rather
than stained glass for artistic effects. The main hall windows made for the Wheeler residence in Indianapolis in 1913 used clear glass, a variety of lead lines, and just a bit of stained glass to color the petals of the flowers (see fig. 51). By 1921, D'Ascenzo relied solely on the lead line to create a decorative window. The stair hall windows for Mr. W. H. Luden of Reading, Pennsylvania, costing $750, included flowing lead lines to create multiple positive and negative shapes (see fig. 52).\footnote{For Mrs. Edward Bok of Merion, Pennsylvania, D'Ascenzo designed the "Caravel" windows for her dining room in 1931 at a cost of $935. (See fig. 53 and 54.) The caravel, a small fifteenth-century sailing ship used by the Spanish and Portuguese, was used as the principle decorative motif. Silhouettes of the ship were cut out from a sheet of lead and then hand-tooled for a repousse finish.\footnote{D'Ascenzo often relied on his clients for ideas and tried to incorporate themes relative to them. For example, when Mrs. Waite Phillips contacted the studio in 1926 for some windows, D'Ascenzo immediately designed something indicative of the Phillips' environment. The Phillips' home, "Villa Phillimonte," was located in Cimarron, New Mexico. Therefore, D'Ascenzo took the opportunity to design windows with a historic western theme. In six arched windows, D'Ascenzo depicted the}
early settlers with their Conestoga wagons, cattle herders, and local Indians. In the distance, the terrain of New Mexico is represented, and at the top of the central windows are heraldic signs of the American Indian. (See fig. 55 and 56.)

In order to incorporate personal characteristics and interests of the client, D'Ascenzo would initiate a correspondence. A surviving correspondence between the D'Ascenzo Studios and architect James P. Piper, reveals a typical approach to a residential commission. First, H. Miller, a sales representative for the studio, secured the commission for the George R. Hann Residence in Sewickly Heights, Pittsburgh. In a letter dated August 10, 1929, Miller wrote the studio about the architect's design intent for the house, personal characteristics of Hann, and the specifications for windows. The letter indicated that the architect had designed a rustic house to be built in the woods with rough interior finishes. George Hann was described as a graduate of Yale University, a pilot, and a member of the Fairchild Air-craft Corporation. The specifications included casements and stained glass for the living room, dining room, library, and tap room, while the rest were to be plain leaded glass.

With this data, an "Information for the Designing Room" form was filled out. The form suggested the
Following:

designs wanted for the following rooms - Dining Room - aeronautics; Tap room - roundels and rough glass; Library - sport scenes, book marks; Living Room - general subjects music, etc. Entire group to suggest play rather than study. This man is a bachelor and likes to entertain. 34

From the form, the master artists developed the designs and kept a regular correspondence with the architect and his client for their ultimate approval.

The final letter from the studio to Piper described each design scheme and the costs: the dining room included 14 windows depicting aeronautic themes for $1,100; the living room included 26 windows with "selected motifs" and the emblem of Yale University for $1,900; the library included 9 windows showing sport scenes and printers' marks for $575; and the tap room included 11 windows with roundels, rough glass, and irregular lead lines for $475. The total cost for this work along with additional plain leaded glass was $6,400. 35 Although none of the renderings survive for the Hann residence, the written description reveals D'Ascenzo's exploration into the client's interests in order to personalize each design.

A similar example was the Curtis commission. Cyrus
H. K. Curtis, founder of Curtis Publishing Company and owner of the two local Philadelphia newspapers, commissioned a bay window design for his Wyncote, Pennsylvania, residence in 1923. D'Ascenzo created a scheme suggesting the gathering and disseminating news in the ancient, medieval and modern worlds. The central panel depicting Paul Revere's midnight ride and the Battle of Lexington, revealed Curtis's New England roots (see fig. 57). The left panel represented Phidippides bringing the news of the victory of the Battle of Marathon to Athens in 490 B.C. (see fig. 58). The right panel was a depiction of a medieval town crier giving out the information as required of him by law (see fig. 59). Along the borders of the windows were well-known printers' marks: William Caxton's first printing press in England, 1477; William Morris' Kelmscott Press, 1890 to 1898; and Aldus Manutius' 15th-century Aldine Press in Italy. Also, the seal of the state of Pennsylvania was represented as the mark of the original Ledger which was continued by Mr. Curtis as the printers' mark for the Sunday Inquirer and the Evening Ledger. D'Ascenzo not only personalized the Curtis windows by using symbolic motifs but also fully explored the stained-glass window's ability to tell a story.

One of D'Ascenzo's most comprehensive and expensive commissions was the Swann residence in Birmingham, Alabama. Theodore Swann, owner of Federal Phosphorous Company
and later the Swann Chemical Company, commissioned the studio in 1929 to provide all the glass work for his new country estate. The house was built in the English Tudor style and comprised four stories and thirty rooms. The house was sited on a multi-acre knoll which commanded a view of the city of Birmingham. Today, the house is the private residence of a retired real estate entrepreneur. 38

D'Ascenzo designed windows for the living room, sun room, dining room, study, stair hall, hallways, kitchen, breakfast room, attic, elevator, bathroom, basement, and garage. 39 Based on extant renderings and photographs, D'Ascenzo used the following design motifs throughout the house: heraldry, the four seasons, evolution of the book, secular functions in a medieval court, and the Canterbury tales. This being a country house, D'Ascenzo used informal window designs. Instead of relying on color, which would have obscured vistas, he exploited lead lines and hand painting for a desired effect. In the trophy room, hunting scenes were painted at the bottom of the leaded casement windows; the subtle representation of figures makes the scene appear as if it was occurring on the horizon (see figs. 60). In the sun room, a figure representing medieval book illumination appears to the left with three surrounding, delicate flower motifs. (See fig. 61.)
To give greater distinction to the main rooms of the house, D'Ascenzo used more elaborate designs and color. Heraldry, depicting the history of the Swann family, was used for the stair hall window (see fig. 62). The window design relied on the use of lead lines and hand painting with only a small portion of red, blue and yellow stained glass. (See fig. 63.) The living room windows depicted the four seasons (see fig. 64). Each leaded casement window was surmounted by a colored medallion representing one of the seasons, including the name and labor of the season. D'Ascenzo used varying medieval motifs in the dining room incorporating heraldry and the common secular activities of a medieval court (see fig. 65). The medallions depict a hunter, a woman in medieval dress, a jester, and a musician. (See fig. 66.) Finally in the study, D'Ascenzo used the procession of Canterbury Pilgrims, a theme he had used before but never fully developed (see fig. 67). In the Swann residence, the theme spread over nine casement windows. The design is a highly detailed panorama of the pilgrim procession traveling to Canterbury Cathedral which is visible in the last window to the right. (See fig. 68 and 69.)

The Swann commission was not only the most expensive residential job but indicative of the studio's residential work at its peak. During the 1920s, residential commissions
steadily increased in quantity as well as in cost. The Curtis commission in 1923 cost $4,200 for just one bay window, and the Hann residence called for $6,400 worth of stained and leaded glass for an entire house in 1929. No longer was the stair hall landing considered as the only appropriate place for a decorative window. Instead, clients and their architects and decorators were conceiving of new homes with multiple rooms using decorative windows. With this trend peaking in 1929, it appears that, had it not been for the Depression and World War II, the demand for residential stained and leaded glass would have continued.
1. The peak years are based on only those commission which included a date, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

2. Average cost is not comprehensive of all residential commissions. For some of the commissions a cost was never recorded, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.


7. D'Ascenzo, "The Use of Leaded Glass in Suburban Residences."


10.D'Ascenzo, "The Use of Leaded Glass in Suburban Residences."


12. Account book, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection, lists this rendering as design #2601. D'Ascenzo also designed a skylight, design #2608, for Mr. Hutton's bathroom, any renderings or photographs no longer exist.

13. In D'Ascenzo's "The Use of Leaded Glass in Suburban Residences" is an illustration of a sinuous mermaid figure in water surrounded by aquatic plants and waterlilies.

15. D'Ascenzo, "The Use of Leaded Glass in Suburban Residences."


21. Illustration of painted stained glass windows by Giovanni Da Udine in Dintorni Certosa, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection.


23. The Morning Examiner Bartlesville, Oklahoma (May 15, 1932) Scrapbook Clipping, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection.

24. Kulas file, Card Catalog file, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection.


26. Dr. D.P. Allen file, Card Catalog file, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection. The cost of the window was $415.00.

27. The four seasons motif was repeated in the Catharine Comley commission, design # 6039 and 6040, in 1929 for her New York apartment (no price), and in the Mr. Abram C. Mott commission, design #3010-A, in 1926 for his Lansdale, Pennsylvania residence by architect
Mr. Edgar Seeler for $1575.


29. This design was exactly repeated for Isaac C. Eberly of Reading, Pennsylvania in 1926 and for Quincy Bent of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1919.

30. D'Ascenzo used this exact same design before in 1913 for F.D. Yuengling of Pottsville, Pennsylvania, however, the Luden commission is the first use of this design without colored glass.


32. Waite Phillips file, Card Catalog file, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection. There is no mention of the location or cost of these windows.

33. Letter to Frederick Mayer from H.R. Miller, (August 10, 1929) Hann Correspondence File, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection.


35. Letter to James P. Piper from The D'Ascenzo Studios, (September 17, 1929) Hann Correspondence File.

36. Windows were removed from the Curtis residence in 1936 after the death of Mr. H.K. Curtis and moved to the Curtis Publishing Co., Independence Square, Philadelphia. Today, the windows still stand in the lobby of the Curtis Publishing Building.

37. Curtis file, Card Catalog file, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection.

38. Don Vesey, phone conversation (July 5, 1990) Archives Department, The Birmingham Public Library.


40. D'Ascenzo used the Canterbury Pilgrims theme before in 1916 for Samuel Samter of Scranton, Pennsylvania and in 1921 for George W. Elkins of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, Card Catalog file, D'Ascenzo Studios Collection. These designs are smaller and not as fully
developed as the Swann design.
D'Ascenzo Studios always had a steady demand for residential commissions. However there were two periods in which the demand increased. Between 1913 and 1917, the number of commissions increased and between 1924 and 1930, the magnitude of each individual commission increased. By comparing D'Ascenzo's success during these periods with the general stained glass environment discussed in Chapter 2, one realizes a contradiction.

The Tiffany Studios peaked around 1905, and Tiffany himself retired in 1919 leaving his studio to carry out only church commissions.\textsuperscript{1} Tiffany's rival, John La Farge, died by 1910. As for the rest of the stained-glass community, the journal of the Stained Glass Association revealed they were plagued by problems. Because of foreign competition, demands for unionization, and the cycles in the American construction industry, many studios suffered and resorted to under-cutting prices and quality.\textsuperscript{2}

It is within this environment in which D'Ascenzo Studios not only survived but developed into a thriving modern-day medieval guild.

D'Ascenzo's attitudes toward business, art, and stained glass are testaments to his success, namely his
efforts to bridge traditionalism and modernism. By up-dating the craft, he introduced a new approach to the medium. For his residential designs, he established specific window themes for each room and ultimately believed that the window design should not just be decorative but instructive as well. He explored the window's design potential to tell a story. D'Ascenzo's designs spoke to contemporary society by using modern subject matter and personal characteristics of the client.

Because of D'Ascenzo's close alliance with the architectural community, he was well aware of the changing trends in residential designs. House styles moved from the eclecticism of the Victorian period to more traditional Colonial and Tudor Revival during the first quarter of the twentieth century. D'Ascenzo adjusted his designs accordingly. Instead of designing full, stained-glass windows popular at the turn of the century, he lightened his designs with clear glass and relied on the lead line for artistic expression. He modernized the stained glass window by adapting it to the changes in architecture. Through D'Ascenzo's efforts, the stained glass medium was not debased as an art form appropriate only for Victorian homes but considered an art form appropriate for any style home.

Although D'Ascenzo bridged traditionalism and modernism, he was ultimately trying to adhere to the
principles of a true medieval stained-glass guild. He maintained the traditional techniques of the craft, the stained-glass window's association with architecture, and the medieval notion of relying on contemporary civilization for subject matter. A medieval stained-glass window was always instructive as well as decorative; thus, D'Ascenzo maintained this theme. Just as the medieval craftsmen looked to their world for subject matter, so did D'Ascenzo. He designed windows that told modern American stories and timeless themes (like truth, triumph and communication) with twentieth-century figures and motifs.

D'Ascenzo's work can be compared with the most famous stained glass artists. D'Ascenzo's training was similar to Tiffany and La Farge in that all three began as artists. Like Tiffany, La Farge, and the Pre-Raphaelites, D'Ascenzo applied the medieval techniques to his craft. However in subject matter, D'Ascenzo was far more creative. While Tiffany and the Pre-Raphaelites imitated classical and romantic subjects and imagery, D'Ascenzo turned to the modern. He relied on modern subjects and imagery, and in turn, Nicola D'Ascenzo left his own unique mark on the history of stained glass.
ENDNOTES


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Figure 1. Nicola D'Ascenzo painting at his Summer Street studio.
Figure 2. Pencil drawing of a stained glass lighting fixture.
Figure 3. Pencil drawing of a stained glass lighting fixture.
Figure 4. Pencil drawing of a hanging stained-glass lighting fixture.
Figure 5. Pencil drawing of a hanging stained-glass lighting fixture.
Figure 6. Pen and Ink Sketch Made at the Musee Nationale in Florence, Italy.
Figure 7. Colored Pencil Sketch of the Interior of the Liverpool Cathedral in England, 1926.
Figure 8. Pencil Drawing of the Interior of St. Mark's, 1932.
Figure 9. Pencil Sketch of The Belvedere in Taormina, Italy.
Figure 10. Facade of 1602-1604 Summer Street.
Figure 11. D'Ascenzo Studios reception room displayed stained glass windows, glass mosaics, color studies, and finished paintings.
Figure 12. D'Ascenzo's private studio at 1602-1604 Summer Street.
Figure 13. Group photograph of the artists and craftsmen at D'Ascenzo Studios.
Figure 14. Edwin Sharkey, in the Design Department, making a watercolor rendering of a stained glass design c. 1931.
Figure 15. Master glazier cutting glass.
Figure 16. Artists painting in details with bistre brown powder.
Figure 17. Firing glass in the electric kiln.
Figure 18. Glaziers fitting together finished pieces of glass with lead cames.
Figure 19. Exhibit of The Process of Stained Glass by D'Ascenzo Studios, displayed at Memorial Hall in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia.
Figure 20. Portrait by D'Ascenzo, August, 1936.
Figure 21. Portrait by D'Ascenzo, 1935.
Figure 22. Portrait of Tom A. Daly, Esq. by D'Ascenzo, August, 1939.
Figure 23. Front cover of an advertising brochure.
Figure 24. Advertisement featuring the "Heroes Window" from The Temple Synagogue in Cleveland, Ohio, 1947.
Figure 25. D'Ascenzo's pastel drawing "Madonna and Child" featured in an advertisement.
The D'Ascenzo Studios
1604 Summer Street, Philadelphia, Pa.
are pleased to refer you to their artistry in
the following Episcopal Church buildings

✦ STAINED GLASS ✦
St. Mark's P. E. Church, Frankford, Pa.
St. John's Cathedral, Denver, Colorado.
Trinity P. E. Church, Pottsville, Pa.
The National Cathedral, Washington, D. C.
Immanuel Episcopal Church, Wilmington, Delmar.
St. James P. E. Church, Bristo, Pa.
St. Paul's P. E. Church, Chestnut Hill, Pa.
The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City.
Mercersburg Academy Chapel, Mercersburg, Pa.
The Washington Memorial Chapel, Valley Forge, Pa.
St. Andrew's P. E. Church, Wellesley, Mass.
Trinity Memorial Church, Kalamazoo, Michigan.
Christ Church, Concord, Michigan.
St. John's Church, Cynwyd, Pa.
St. Paul's Church, Overbrook, Pa.
St. John's P. E. Church, Lansdowne, Pa.

✦ MURALS AND STAINED GLASS ✦
St. Stephen's P. E. Church, Westhampton, N. Y.
St. John's Church, Wilmington, Del.
Trinity P. E. Church, Easton, Pa.

✦ MOSAIC AND STAINED GLASS ✦
St. Paul's P. E. Church, Chester, Pa.

Furnaces are welcome in the studios at all times.

Figure 26. Advertisement featuring designs and a list of completed works, 1936.
Figure 27. Advertisement featuring an article, "Riverside Church is Mother Tribute, Part of Stained Glass in Famous N.Y. Edifice Done by D'Ascenzo."
Figure 28. Illustration from D'Ascenzo's files of European printers' marks from the 15th and 16th centuries.
Figure 29. Watercolor renderings featuring printers' marks for a bookcase, c. 1906.
Figure 30. Historic printers' names and dates used in bookcase lights for Judge John M. Patterson, 1916.
Figure 31. Manuscript illumination design for the Ludwig Residence, 1924.
Figure 32. A bay window depicting three muses in the Buckborn's music room, 1910.
Figure 33. Water lily design for Mrs. Hutton's bathroom, 1911.
Figure 34. Stair hall window for the Boyd Residence, 1911.
Figure 35. Stair hall window for the Everett Residence, 1910.
Figure 36. Wisteria design with flanking columns made for the Merrill Residence, c. 1909.
Figure 37. Wisteria design with flanking columns made for the Lockwood residence, stair hall lights.
Figure 38. Renaissance style design for Dr. Ziegler, 1917.
Figure 39. Window design by Giovanni Da Udine.
Figure 40. Stair hall window for the Foster Residence, 1931.
Figure 41. Stair landing window for the Kulas Residence, 1930.
Figure 42. Detail of the "Pagliacci" panel.
Figure 43. Traditional heraldic signs were featured in Dr. Dudley P. Allen's window, c. 1913.
Figure 44. Autumn and winter depicted in a set of windows made for Catharine Comley's apartment in New York City, 1929.
Figure 45. The four seasons and zodiac signs featured in the main stair window for the Mott residence, 1926.
Figure 46. A potter and an artist.
Figure 47. A printer and a weaver.
Figure 48. "Air," "Autumn" and "Fire."
Figure 49. "Water," "Spring" and "Land."
Figure 50. Detail of "Water."
Figure 51. Main hall windows for the Wheeler residence, 1913.
Figure 52. Stair hall windows featuring a silhouette of a ship and a windmill made of lead.
Figure 53. Two panels from the "Caravel" window, 1931.
Figure 54. Two panels from the "Caravel" window, 1931.
Figure 55. Windows for "Villa Phillimonte," 1926.
Figure 56. Windows for "Villa Phillimonte," 1926.
Figure 57. Central panel depicting Paul Revere's midnight ride.
Figure 58. Left panel depicting Phidippides bringing the news.
Figure 59. Right panel depicting a medieval town crier.
Figure 60. Hunting scenes are represented by a central figure with a bow and arrow and an elk to the left.

Figure 61. Medieval book illumination design.
Figure 62. Stair hall window featuring heraldic designs.
Figure 63. Preliminary watercolor rendering showing the stained glass portions.
Figure 64. "Spring," "Summer," "Autumn," and "Winter."
Figure 65. Watercolor rendering depicting a dining room wall filled with window designs.
Figure 65. A window featuring a hunter, a woman of the medieval court, a jester, and a musician.
Figure 67. Five panels depicting the procession of the Canterbury pilgrims.
Figure 63. A detail of the procession reveals the delicate hand painting.
Figure 69. The detail above shows the procession arriving at the Canterbury Cathedral.