

Cross of Christ Chronicles

Recent Archives Acquisitions

Both of the most recent donations to the *Cross of Christ Archives* came to us framed and under glass, one an important inspirational work done by a former member of the Stone Church Congregation, the other a valuable record of a time in our congregations when major anniversaries were not only very well-attended events, they were also thoughtfully documented by skilled photographers.

Earlier this year Violet Runnigen let it be known that she had a special piece of artwork she wished to donate to our church. A beautiful chalk drawing in color surrounded by a very unusual undulating frame now hangs in the Fellowship Hall. As you may remember during the Stone Church 150th Anniversary back in 2016 we focused on artistic depictions of the church with an emphasis on those by Ben Flatten—son of the congregation and amateur artist extraordinaire.

This particular scene (drawn in 1945) with its placid stream and somewhat exotic plant life appears to reflect the artist's own conception of the Garden of Gethsemane. To the right side Our Savior can be seen praying against a flat boulder in a pose familiar to us from many early 20th Century stained glass windows and other religious artwork—a motif borrowed extensively from a famous piece painted in 1890 by the German artist, Heinrich Hofmann.

It was very common for altar piece painters and print artists to base their work on such very well-known 19th Century images, which were readily available to the average person in those large illustrated (and partially illuminated) Bibles bound by thick beveled covers, so proudly displayed on small ornate tables in the parlors of our ancestors. (More on this next month.)

Ben titled this work “Alone” and we believe by not placing Jesus as a large central figure (as he is portrayed most often in religious artwork) it further amplified His incredible *aloneness* on that fateful night. When else in His entire life would He have felt more isolated, torn as He was between heaven and earth.

Also, at about that same time, the children of Charles Carrier informed the church of their wish to donate a framed copy of the 80th Anniversary photo taken on August 25, 1935 that had hung in his house on Sherman Street for many years. It came to us in a dark blue frame, under heavy glass.

It's quite a remarkable remembrance to say the least, a fine example of the panoramic photo art and a very good choice for the occasion. With over 400 people in attendance the only way to get them all on one picture and still allow each individual to be seen clearly and distinctly was to use the panoramic technique.

As you observe the photograph it seems as though everyone is lined up in straight rows, but in reality they are positioned in an arc, or semi-circle. The camera and tripod were set up at the center point of the radius between the two ends of the arc and actually panned the crowd slowly from one end to the other. The arc arrangement placed everyone an equal distance from the camera lens and thus kept them all in focus.

When all was ready the photographer simply wound up the camera with a key (like an old clock) and let it go. The subjects then had to remain still as the camera moved slowly on its journey into history, while inside the darkened chamber (or *camera obscura* as they were originally known) the long and pliant celluloid negative passed slowly by the lens and aperture until the exposure was complete.

Camera moving—film moving—it goes against one of the most basic rules of still photography: keep the camera perfectly still! It seems quite amazing that the results weren't a blurry mess, and is therefore a testament to the marvels that could be accomplished before the age of electronic technology.

Although this picture was taken in 1935, the process was perfected before WWI, when it was often used to record the groups of men who reported to the various draft calls, and later to photograph the troops after going through training.

An example of the former can be seen hanging in the entry of the Stone Church, along with another copy of the 80th Anniversary panoramic. (The Houston County Historical Society holds panoramic photos of many of the WWI draft calls in Houston County.)

Naturally this new method would not have been possible in the days of the glass negative, since it had to move from one spindle to another as it passed by the lens, just as in a regular camera loaded with roll film. Panoramic photos were very popular and used for the next several decades to record any number of large group functions, and also for dramatic landscape views. They also remained a favorite with the military during both World Wars and possibly the Korean Conflict.

The allure of the panoramic photo is not hard to understand. Aside from being a unique and practical way to photograph large gatherings they were also rather fun to participate in, as we discovered in 1991 when those who attended the 125th Anniversary of the Building of the Stone Church Celebration were captured with the use of an authentic period camera provided by Chris Faust of St. Paul. And believe us when we tell you that it was not easy to find someone who was not only willing, but also able to do that for us! (A print of this 1991 Panoramic Photo is also on display in the entry of the Stone Church.)

Both of the newly acquired items in this article can be viewed in the Fellowship Hall. Notice the calla lilies in the lower corner of the drawing by Ben Flatten. They may have been a favorite of his since we know of at least one other still life of calla lilies done by the artist.

Much more can, and will, be written about the 80th Anniversary photo, since by the very nature of its subject matter there are many more stories to tell.

