

SGAA Conference Updates

Looking Forward and Forging New Connections



by Megan McElfresh

Coming together to share and learn is one of the core pillars of the mission for the Stained Glass Association of America (SGAA). There is no virtual experience that can rival the cumulative knowledge we experience in person at our annual conference. Still, we cannot ever refuse to put the safety of our members at risk. We are determined not only to build on what we started in 2020 but also find new ways to serve our community as it grows. While maintaining the strong bonds of friendship and camaraderie that exist now, we can also share that passion with a broader audience and use the challenges of the times to welcome new faces to our historical association.

A Change of Plans

Like most of the country, in Spring 2020 we thought we would merely be postponing our Summer 2020 Conference a few months, possibly a year. As the entire nation began rescheduling events for 2021, we found ourselves in one scheduling difficulty after another, not just in moving our 2020 conference but then moving the following years' conferences that had already been scheduled.

One way the SGAA works to secure better rates for our conferences is to work three to five years out. By early fall in 2020, after seeking counsel from both our legal and insurance advisors, it became increasingly clear that we needed to scuttle both our 2020 and 2021 conference plans, pivoting our focus on other ways we could connect until 2022.

It took most of 2020 to successfully navigate the process of canceling those conferences and recovering deposits plus whatever other early investments we possibly could in order to get those monies back to our members and sponsors. It has been tough to give up on our Philadelphia and Salt Lake City conferences for now, but we look forward to rescheduling with the hosts in those cities as soon as we can do so.



Photo of Justice & Mercy (c. 1928) by George W. Haskins Studio, Rochester New York. Taken by Megan McElfresh while touring South Park United Presbyterian Church, now a commercial conversion project in Buffalo, New York.



Interior of Trinity Episcopal Church in Buffalo, New York, taken in October 2020 while still empty on Sundays due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The SGAA moved its main offices to Trinity Center at Trinity Episcopal in January 2021.

Virtual Programs for 2021

With so much of the rescheduling process finally wrapping up, we are looking forward to connecting virtually with members in several ways. It was difficult to continue our zoom meetings in the fall, but we have those up again starting right now!

Looking into a more structured “virtual conference,” we felt strongly that a multiday virtual event was a format that simply could not be successful for us. We are an enthusiastic, passionate crowd, and there is undoubtedly business that we will need to attend to. More importantly, there are educational opportunities that we should make an effort to explore. With those things in mind, we have decided to spread out our time together across the year versus packing it into two or three long days.

We are very excited to be putting together bimonthly programming for 2021, which began in March 2021 with Ted Ellison. Members will be getting significant discounts on their 2021 registrations thanks to generous support from our sponsors. After discussion and feedback from the other virtual educational programs we offered in the fall, we felt it was important to share our presentations with the passionate public as well.

Upcoming Bimonthly Programs

On March 18, thanks to support from Monarch Glass Studio, the SGAA presented *From Hand to Hearth: The Untold Story of American Glass Mosaic Fireplaces* by Ted Ellison. Fascinating programming to follow Ted’s presentation in 2021 will include:

- a talk on the science of iridescence in glass by Greg Merkel, Ph.D.,
- a virtual restoration panel and roundtable, and
- a visit and lecture from Jasmine Allen, Curator at The Stained Glass Museum.

Looking Ahead to 2022 and 2023

We still look forward to having informal member gatherings on zoom, and we will likely have a separate business meeting in this way as well. Stay tuned and see you online!

In the meantime, we are looking forward to our 2022 and 2023 Summer Conferences. We have not been alone in canceling, renegotiating, and rebuilding during the years that will have passed by the time we meet together in 2022. These conferences will not only be significant because we will finally be able to gather together again, but they are also significant milestones for our industry and our organization. We anticipate releasing more information about those conferences by May 2021.

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Visit www.stainedglass.org for more information on the Stained Glass Association of America, SGAA’s move to Trinity Center in Buffalo, New York, and how to become a member.