

A Glass and Mosaic Family Legacy J&R Lamb Studios, 1857 to present



*Frederick Stymetz Lamb, J&R Lamb Studios,
Religion Enthroned, 1900.
Photo by Dreamwalls Glass, © 2020.*



*J&R Lamb Studios, Memory, Lakewood Memorial Chapel.
A mosaic based on a painting by Ella Condie Lamb.
Photo courtesy of Lakewood Cemetery.*

by Shawn Newton

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America's oldest, continuously run decorative arts company, J&R Lamb Studios, was famous as a stained glassmaker. It preceded the studios of both John La Farge and Louis C. Tiffany.

Establishing a Tradition

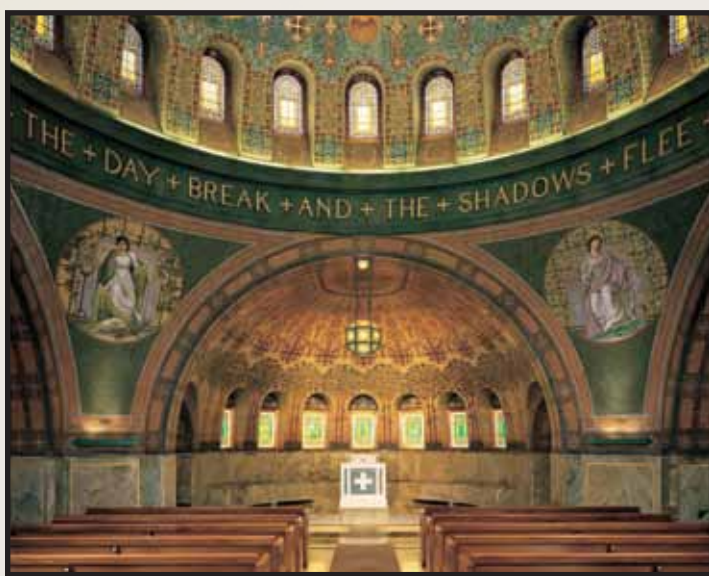
The J&R Lamb Studios was established in 1857 by brothers Joseph Lamb (1833–1898) and Richard Lamb (1836–1909) in New York City. Their parents, Joseph Lamb and Elizabeth Clark, were married in 1832 in Kent, England. Their father, a landscape architect, had been engaged to work on Niblo's Garden in New York City, an exhibition hall and open-air theater. However, prior to immigrating to the United States, Elizabeth died during childbirth and Joseph then passed away during the voyage. A sympathetic Scottish couple, Peter and Agnes Rennie, who were also making the journey to America, became the brothers' foster parents. After receiving their education, Joseph and Richard formed J&R Lamb Studios and began to create mosaic and stained glass murals, monuments, and other work for churches, temples, residences, government, and academic institutions.

The firm was chosen by the United States government as one of four studios to represent American achievements in stained glass art at the Paris International Exposition of 1900. They won two prizes for their window, *Religion Enthroned*, and continued to forge a path for their business.

Passing the Torch

Charles Rollinson Lamb and his wife, Ella Condie, who had won a medal in the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, carried the company forward. In order to help them survive the Great Depression, Lamb descendants moved the studios from New York City to Tenafly, New Jersey, and closed their metal, stone, and woodshop operations, retaining only stained glass work. Lamb studio artist, Donald Samick, bought the firm in 1970.

J&R Lamb has been responsible for creating 15,000 new stained glass windows and the restoration of 9,000 others, many of which can be considered some of the most important artistic works in our nation's history. In 2007, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., formally recognized the long-storied commitment to excellence of J&R Lamb Studios by acquiring their archives.



J&R Lamb Studios, Apse Sidewall, Lakewood Memorial Chapel. Four large mosaic figures in circular frames representing Love, Hope, Memory, and Faith adorn the side walls below the dome and are based on paintings by Ella Condie Lamb.



J&R Lamb Studios, Dome, Lakewood Memorial Chapel. The spectacular dome mosaics feature 12 angels in a circular design with fully extended wings to symbolize their protective spirit. They have no visible feet because, according to lore, they never touch the earth. Photo by Jonathan P. Ellgen.

Lakewood Memorial Chapel A Mosaic Legacy Highlight

The Lakewood Cemetery Memorial Chapel is the architectural centerpiece of the Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and by many accounts, it contains the most perfect examples of Byzantine-style mosaic art in the United States. The exterior was designed by Minneapolis architect, Harry Wild Jones, while Charles Lamb successfully complemented the Byzantine architecture with a design based on the interior of San Marco Cathedral in Venice.

After the design of the interior mosaics was completed by Ella, it was laid out on a flat surface and molds were built corresponding to the building's walls and curves. This was shipped to Rome, where Lamb procured the talents of six mosaic artists who were veterans of work at the Vatican. Ten million glass tesserae, which included marble, colored stone, and glass fused with gold and silver were assembled, after which material and artists traveled to Minneapolis for the installation.

Upon its completion in 1910, the Lakewood Memorial Chapel was the only building in the country with an authentic mosaic interior. The results of the high standards set by the trustees were rewarded by decades of glowing reviews, describing the chapel as the architectural jewel of the American Midwest. In 1931, one journalist wrote: "If this chapel were somewhere in Europe, thousands of Americans would visit it each year. Never have we seen anything to equal it in this country. Not even the famous mosaics of the Library of Congress in Washington impressed us so greatly." In 1983, the chapel was added to the National Register of Historic Places. More information can be found at www.lakewoodcemetery.org. GA

The Society of American Mosaic Artists (SAMA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating, inspiring, and promoting excellence in the mosaic arts. Visit www.americanmosaics.org for more information on SAMA's upcoming events and how to become a member.

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