

The Sunday Chieftain

117th Year No. 116 © 1988



Pueblo, Colorado, Sunday, August 21, 1988

50 Cents

Fourth-generation artisan restoring Rosemount window

By MARGIE WOOD
The Pueblo Chieftain

Phil Watkins was born to the life of a stained-glass artisan. He is the fourth generation of his family in Colorado to work with stained glass, and his family's history in the craft stretches back 200 years before his great-grandfather arrived in Colorado in 1868.

There's so much demand for his original work in stained glass that he doesn't have much time for restoration work, but he's making time this month to restore a large window at Rosemount Victorian House Museum.

"I just do restoration work when I see something I like," he said. "Some windows just aren't worth restoring — they're in a crummy building and they're just going to get broken again."

He views Rosemount, on the other hand, as a particular prize among historic buildings.

"I was really impressed by this building," he said. "I visit historic houses wherever I go, and I just don't think there's a house like it, still with the original furnishings and the things people used. Pueblo really has something here."

The window, entitled "The

'I visit historic houses wherever I go, and I just don't think there's a house like it, still with the original furnishings and the things people used. Pueblo really has something here.'

— Phil Watkins

Kingdoms of Nature," looms over the staircase in the entry hall at Rosemount. Its glass was painted and fired in a kiln (as opposed to a design made of colored glass pieces). All the designs are applied before the glass is fired, and different metals or minerals give the paints their colors.

Individual pieces are held by lead channels. Joints are soldered and then stained glass cement is applied between the glass and the lead to make it watertight and lend rigidity to



the panel. Over nearly a century, the 9-by-13-foot window has bowed out in several areas — some enough to let light in through the cracks.

Watkins said about three-quarters of the window will have to be removed, restored and replaced, working piece by piece. He has set up a bench and shop downstairs at the museum, but said some pieces may have to go to his home shop in Englewood.

"If the pieces come out fairly easily, I should be done in about

a month," he said. "Otherwise, it will take a lot longer."

At 41, Watkins counts 31 years in the stained-glass business, starting with sweeping floors for his father. "Then he let me start cutting some glass and I worked my way up through the business."

His father worked on windows at Sacred Heart Cathedral here about 30 years ago and hoped to help on the Rosemount project, too, but he became ill.

Among restoration projects in Denver, Watkins has worked at the Brown Palace Hotel, St. John Cathedral and Montview Presbyterian Church — and whatever historic houses survived the wrecker's ball in the last 20 years.

That's a subject that pains him:

"I work on most of the historic houses in Denver and they've always put in a new kitchen, or taken out the hardwood floors and put in tile; or taken out the wainscoting and put in silver-coated wallpaper," he said.

"Denver tore their history down," he said, ticking off the names of mansions decorated with stained glass that shines no more. "If this house was in Denver, it would have been torn down in the mid-60s."

