

Stained glass has been a Watkins family tradition since the 1760's we have been told It all began in Liverpool, England where the Watkins stained glass legacy took hold The middle 1800's was the time when several family members came to the US by boat Preparing for departure, they packed their belongings, with tools of the trade in tote They were all trained in the building trades, and heard that US opportunities were vast Clarence was drawn to the tradition of stained glass "joiners" as relatives from the past



He worked in studios in Boston, NY and St. Louis but decided on a less crowded state We're told he loaded his glass & tools in a covered wagon & arrived in Denver in 1868 Denver was not the big town he expected to see, thus he used his tools for carpentry In 1881 his studio, Denver Stained Glass Works was listed in the Denver directory Clarence became a respected businessman and honored for the windows he had made He was also very cantankerous and would bring his pistol to make sure he'd get paid

Frank was the next Watkins to enter the trade; he began his formal apprenticeship in 1902 Working separately they did many churches, all the priests and archbishops they knew During the 1920's, he & coworkers would make hundreds of windows stacked in rows The builders picked them up each Saturday and installed them even in the bungalows The depression was a time when Frank would work on many churches windows at no cost These years were hard times for everyone; with no work, his and others fortunes were lost

Phillip Sr. was born in 1922 and also apprenticed as a master craftsman of stained glass He learned the skill and "family secrets" from his father, just as in generations past The onset of World War II put Denver's stained glass production once again on hold Due to the demand for metal and the need to make bullets, lead could no longer be sold Phillip Sr. became an AF pilot, spending time in London & Liverpool before he next flew He researched centuries old Watkins records & documents and confirmed the stories true

Doing stained glass in the 1950's, he was later joined by son Phil who was born in 1947 Phil served his full 6000 hour apprenticeship and began his first church alone at age 11 The father-son duo worked in Englewood for 30 yrs creating stained glass side by side They made windows for about 380 churches & 4000 homes, each one made with pride They were constantly busy as Denver was growing so fast with much new construction Colorado's oldest and most respected stained glass studio had the finest reputation

Since 1985 Phil Jr. has been sole owner, personally doing each job from start to finish There is no plan to hire more help or expand, tho his backlog never seems to diminish Making over 1500 windows since '85, he does each aspect of the craft like a specialist As a fine master painter, he became a member of the British Glass Painters Society list He painstakingly cuts the glass and fabricates each piece to form a beautiful work of art He will not compromise or take short cuts, each window becomes a work from his heart

During the past century, there have been differences in personalities and artistic vision Each man responds to the trends of time, creating his own style with an artistic mission Work is still done with the same old tools, but now using electricity to solder the lead came The method and skills of fabrication of the Watkins masters used in the 1700's will remain The family secrets from England, as well as handed down knowledge & techniques will stay Phil's three girls are learning the art, helping out & making creations that are for sale today Utilizing the skills that are being taught to them by Dad and the knowledge they have gained Perhaps they will continue to pursue the stained glass art in which they are being trained