

Judson stained glass studios still use old world methods

by Roger Swanson
(Seventh in a Series)

Forty-one years ago Horace Judson said there was no rush to the craftsmanship at the Judson Studios.

"We work slowly and for perfection as they did six centuries ago, he said.

That insistence on the old methods that have yet to be improved holds true in 1981 as it did in 1897 when the stained glass studios, held in esteem throughout the world, was founded by Walter Judson in Los Angeles and moved to its present location at 200 South Avenue 66 in 1920.

An important principal in the firm during its early years was William Lees Judson, father of the firm's

founder. William Judson was the founder and dean of the College of Fine Arts and Architecture of the University of Southern California, located in the same building which now houses the Judson Studios.

PORTRAIT PAINTER

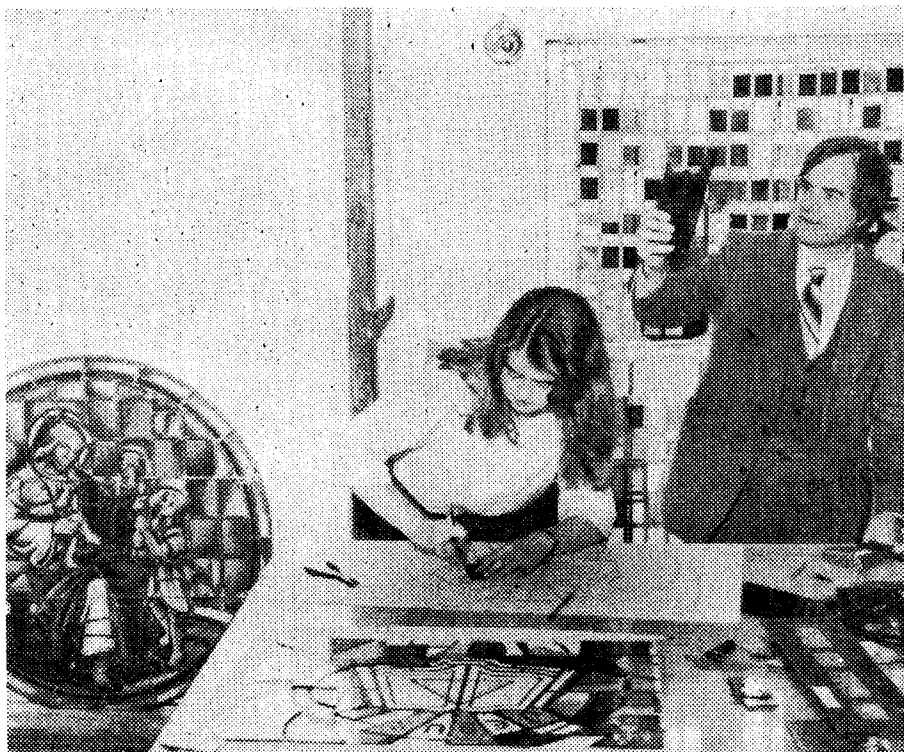
William Lees Judson was also a portrait painter, emigrating from England in the latter part of the 19th Century. His talents as an artist were utilized by the fledgling firm in its early years, giving faces and features to the figures in the stained glass windows.

William Lees Judson died in 1928 and six years later his son, Walter Judson died. Taking over the firm was Walter's son, Horace, an attorney who gave up his practice to

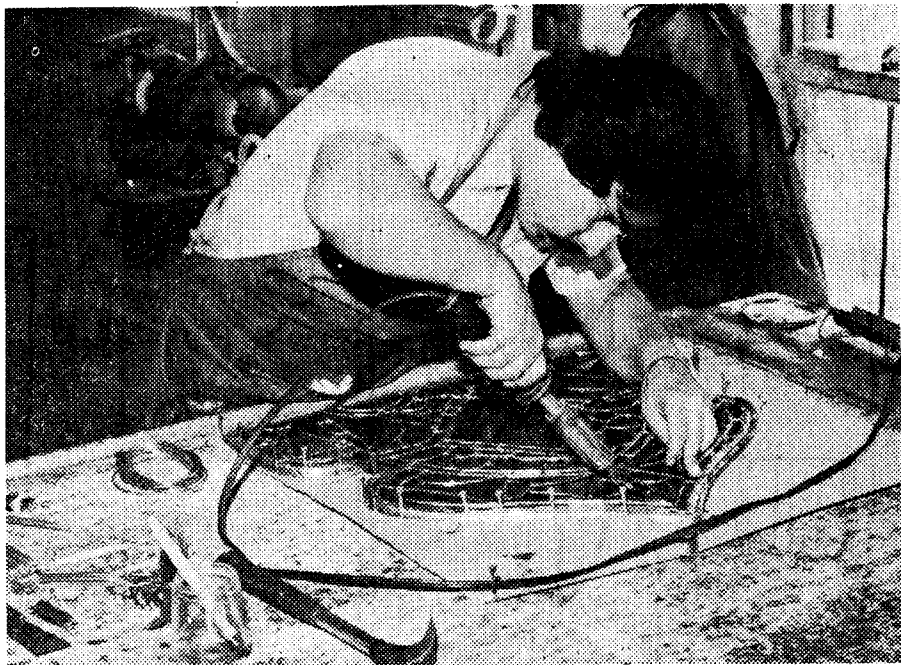
assume leadership of the family firm. Horace retired to San Diego in 1975 and today his son, Walter Judson, fourth generation of the family, is president of the firm which is in its 85th year.

Making of stained glass windows reached its zenith as an art in the 12th and 13th centuries in France. Trained artists blueprinted, sketched, enlarged to scale and prepared patterns in triplicate, a process that often took several months. Then the irregularly-shaped glass was fitted into many-sided niches on an easel placed in a strong light. There the craftsman and his apprentice of the

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EXPERT WORK — Craftsman Ann Pope expertly cuts glass on a full-scale pattern for a stained glass window while Walter Judson, fourth generation member of that family to own Judson Studios, admires a piece of glass to be used for the project. The famous studio has been in the same building since 1920.



SOLDERING — Edward Rey melts solder to seal the leading in a stained glass window panel being made at Judson Studio. It can take several months to complete a window from the time the order is taken until it is installed.

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renaissance would carefully pry loose the "H" shaped leads, then threaded the borders of the glass and fired the work in a red-hot kiln, under which reinforcing substance would have been blown to give tenacity and protection to the beauty created.

16TH CENTURY

In the 16th century the craft was taken over by artists who painted designs on clear glass. The results were disappointing and that process fell into disfavor among the real craftsmen who worked their designs in many hued and shaped pieces of glass.

The fourth generation Judson, Walter, 39, continues the tradition begun by his great grandfather and grandfather. The methods and tools have changed little.

"We do use a lot more electricity and glass costs a

lot more but that's about the only thing that's changed," he said. It has been proven that the ingredients used by Judson Studios in making glass are the same as those used at the time of the Roman invasion of England.

Glass from all over the world is delivered to the studio. More than 600 colors are available to the craftsmen, including the rare gold pink that is said to dominate any panel. Churches remain the largest customers and so reds of the cardinals, purples of kings, greens of an oriental jewel and all their shadings are at hand to be cut and snipped and shaped.

Better grades of glass are mixed with gold and less expensive glass is mixed with copper. The rare gold-pink now costs \$13 per square foot.

EMPLOYS 10

Today, Judson Studios

employs 10 full-time craftsmen, down from a high of 22 in 1956 and 1957, a boom-time for church construction in Southern California and the world.

Windows made by the firm can be seen at such local churches as Highland Park Presbyterian Church, St. James Episcopal in South Pasadena, All Saints in Pasadena and the First Congregational Church in Los Angeles. Judson Studio work also includes "The Life of Christ" window series which sanctifies the facade of Eagle Rock's St. Barnabas Church, "The Rose Window" in La Jolla, the "Children of All Nations" window in Redlands and "The Baptistry Window" in Westwood.

The studio has also made a massive interior dome which measures 107 by 35 feet for the Tropicana Hotel in Las Vegas. Cost of the window was \$200,000.