

Stained glass windows returned to their sanctuary

Asbury Methodist memorial to honor couple who led church Sunday School

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Call it "The Case of The Purloined Stained Glass Windows."

Asbury United Methodist Church in South Whitehall Township has installed two stained glass windows from the congregation's downtown Allentown sanctuary, destroyed in a fire more than 30 years ago.

The stained glass windows were missing for 16 years — until a mysterious telephone call to the Asbury church office.

The windows can be seen at the Aldersgate Room, a conference room off the main hallway in the church at Springhouse Drive and Walbert Avenue.

The idea for the placement originated with Asbury's Henritz Sunday School Class. The windows will honor Samuel and Eleanor Henritz, the couple who shepherded the class.

"We've been working on this project for more than a year," said Richard Black, a 56-year church member.

Black attended Asbury when it was at Jefferson and Hamilton streets, near 12th and Hamilton, the present-day location of the Allentown Public Library.

Fire shattered windows
The downtown church was destroyed in a fire on Oct. 24, 1972, about 50 years to the day, Oct. 1, 1922, when the church was dedicated.

"The gathering crowd of members gasped as the fire hoses shattered the prize imported stained glass windows," according to a report by John H. Gauger, Asbury Church historian. The windows had been imported from Germany.

The church's 50th anniversary celebration, scheduled the following Sunday, was held across the street in Christ Lutheran Church.

Asbury church's namesake is Francis Asbury, a Methodist minister who, on a visit to Allentown in 1809, "expressed a concern about 'gambling sinners.'"

The new Asbury church



Shane Christman of Baum Construction Co. carries a framed stained glass window from the Aldersgate Room.

was built in 1975.

The fire wrecked the large stained glass windows. The smaller windows that survived were along the sanctuary walkway.

Stained glass windows that were salvaged were placed in the former parsonage's yard in Allentown and possibly in the basement there.

Vandals destroyed the windows stored outside. The others were stolen.

Missing for 16 years
The stained glass windows were given up for lost — until that phone call.

Black recounted the conversation: "I have a truckload of windows from old Asbury Church. I would like to return them with no questions asked," the caller said.

"The fellow who stole them actually just stored them, thinking that he could sell them some day and make some money. But they were too 'hot,'" Black said.

"On his dying bed, he

told his friend, 'Take the windows back to Asbury Church,'" said Black.

Asbury's business administrator Thomas D. Gibson received the phone call in 1988.

"Of course, we'll accept them," Gibson recalled telling the man.

"Then, he came by in late September of that year, in a rickety old station wagon, and brought them to us," Gibson said.

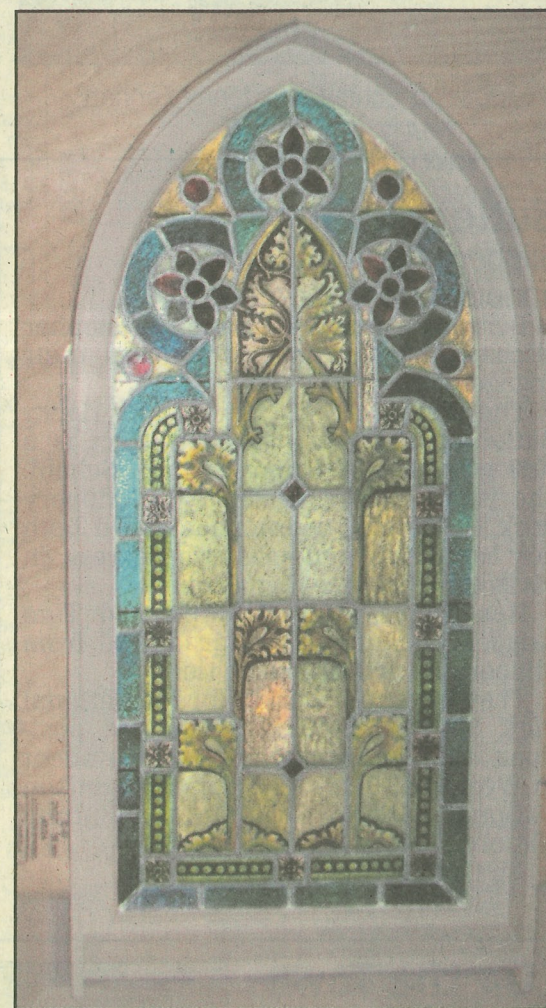
Kirk Brown, coordinator of ACTS (Asbury Chancel Theatre Society) who produces the church's religious musicals, put two of the rectangular and three of the gothic point windows in frames. They are displayed in the parlor.

A rectangular window is in Gibson's office.

The other two gothic point windows are now in the Aldersgate Room.

Windows honor couple

"We were talking about the windows in our Sunday School Class and somebody came up with the idea of installing them in the



ABOVE: Stained glass windows rescued from a fire that destroyed the old Asbury Church in Allentown more than 30 years ago have been installed at Asbury United Methodist Church in South Whitehall Township.

LEFT: Shane Christman, left, and Jeff Baum, right, place the second of two stained glass windows in an interior wall at Asbury Church.

PRESS PHOTOS BY PAUL WILLISTEIN

church as a memorial to Samuel and Eleanor Henritz, who had been Sunday School leaders for 30-plus years," Black said.

Class members and other church members donated money, a benefit breakfast was held and memorial funds were tapped for the estimated \$10,000 project.

In February, Jeff Baum, owner of Baum Construction Co., Fleetwood, Berks County, and a worker from his firm, Shane Christman, installed the windows.

They first cut through an interior wall. Then, they built new frame housings.

"This wall is the perfect place for the windows," said Black, after a visit to observe the work.

"We wanted to keep the windows as original as they were," Black noted. "To replace anything would show."

Lighting will be designed and installed by Orlando Diefenderfer Electrical Contractors.

After that, a dedication and memorial service to

honor the Henritzys is anticipated.

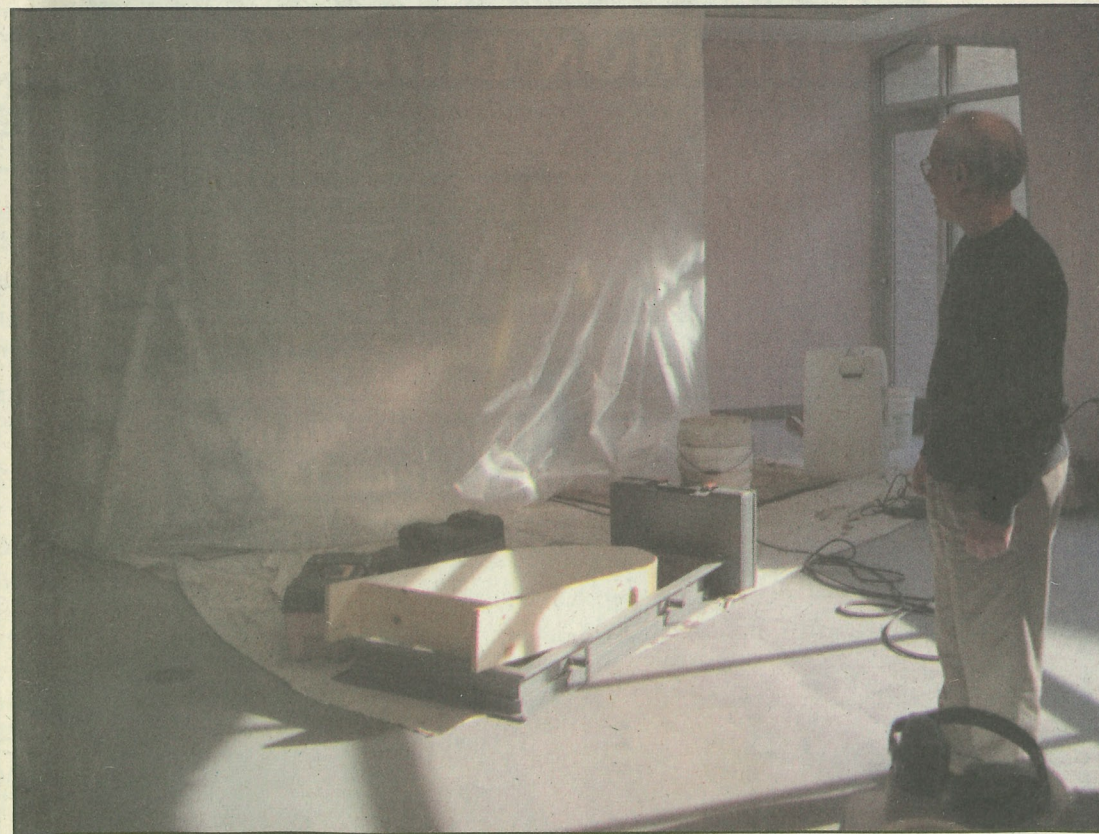
The windows aren't the only remains of the old church.

Two of the pillars of the driveway canopy and a wall in the stairwell from the main level to the lower level at Asbury's front entrance contain stone saved from the ruins.

Neither fire nor larceny could quench the spirit of Asbury United Methodist Church.



Richard Black, left, observes Jeff Baum, right, working on frames for the stained glass windows.



Thomas D. Gibson, Asbury Church business administrator, views early stage of the stained glass windows installation when protective plastic draped Aldersgate Room.