

ATRIUM TOUR

(25) St. Francis of Assisi Stained-Glass Window

Buffalo Stained Glass Works



The opening of the Erie Canal transformed Buffalo into one of the great industrial centers of the United States. From grain to steel, Buffalo had it all. What few people realize today, however, is that Buffalo was also once home to the most prominent stained-glass manufacturer west of New York City. From 1845 to 1905, the Buffalo Stained Glass Works produced award-winning windows for Western New York and beyond. What began in the back room of a paint store eventually grew into a celebrated studio that created windows for more than eight hundred churches, homes, and businesses, earned international honors, and was described as the “greatest stained glass firm west of New York City.”

In 1864, Ferdinand Riester became the new junior partner, ushering in what would become the “Golden Age” of the Buffalo Stained Glass Works. Ferdinand (Fernando) Jean Baptiste Riester was born in Gouhenans, France, in March 1840. At the age of nine, he immigrated with his family to Buffalo. After receiving a public education, he became, at age fourteen, an apprentice to George L. Burns at the Glass and Enameller Studio in Buffalo. Over the next ten years, Riester studied the art of glass staining under Burns. Although he was an excellent designer, his greatest strength lay in the science of stained glass. Following the example of his engineer father, Riester studied chemistry, which enabled him to introduce innovations into this ancient art form.

Leo P. Frohe, born in the Netherlands, was the son of the classically trained artist Gottfried Frohe. Taught by his father, Leo excelled in painting and drawing, and under his father’s guidance he also began working in stained glass. In 1880, he was hired by the Buffalo Stained Glass Works as the designing artist and superintendent of the art department.



The 1889 World’s Fair in Paris brought together artists, architects, and engineers from around the world, all hoping to win top honors in their fields. The Buffalo Stained Glass Works submitted a three-window set intended for the home of Mr. Riester and designed by Leo Frohe. Frohe’s work earned the fair’s silver medal, a tremendous distinction not only for the Glass Works but also for the American stained-glass industry as a whole. A reporter at the time observed that it was “one of the first times” that American glass, created by American workmen from distinctly American designs, had competed with the “European masters in Europe” and won.

In 1905, after sixty years of innovation, awards, and acclaim, the Buffalo Stained Glass Works quietly closed its doors. Yet the stained-glass windows designed by Leo Frohe live on today at Roger Bacon High School.

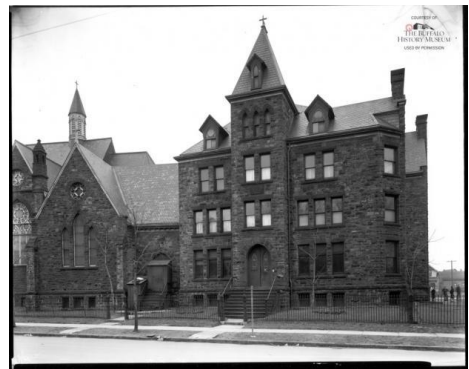
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St. Patrick Church and Friary

The Irish immigrants who took the first jobs in Buffalo's Hydraulics district were, for the most part, practicing Roman Catholics. In 1853, Bishop John Timon directed the construction of a church to serve them. Bishop Timon belonged to the Congregation of the Mission, more commonly known as the Vincentian Fathers. Because of his strong devotion to St. Vincent de Paul, the modest frame church was named St. Vincent de Paul Church, becoming the "mother church" of Irish Buffalo.

When the Franciscans assumed charge of the parish in 1858, new brick church buildings were erected, and the campus was renamed St. Patrick in honor of Ireland's patron saint.

In 1891, a large sandstone Gothic Revival church, Third Order chapel, and friary, designed by C. K. Porter and Sons, were constructed on the site. A school was also built. St. Patrick's became a large and thriving parish, and both church and school flourished through the first decades of the twentieth century. The Buffalo Stained Glass Works created the stained-glass windows for the church and chapel, and these windows were designed by Leo P. Frohe, the internationally recognized artist of the Buffalo studio.



Pat Frohe, the great-granddaughter of Leo Frohe, reflected on this legacy: *"My great-grandfather, Leo P. Frohe, made these windows and countless others. My father, Paul E. Frohe, was the last in the four-generation business. I am very proud of my heritage, and of all the talented artists in my family."*

In 1982, the church and chapel were demolished. Most of the windows were sent to a Franciscan parish in Triangle, Virginia. The St. Francis of Assisi and St. Patrick stained-glass windows, however, were placed in the friary, which remained on the property.

From that friary, the Franciscan friars of Holy Name Province continued their ministry through a food pantry, thrift shop, prison ministry, and a summer day camp for neighborhood children.

In 2018, the friary was purchased by Kathleen Regan for \$500,000 after the Provincial Council of Holy Name Province determined that the cost of maintaining the building had become prohibitive and the friar community had grown smaller. The friars moved to a rectory at Ss. Columba-Brigid, and the two windows were installed there in a chapel. In 2024, when the Franciscans withdrew from the parish, a new home was found for the windows – Roger Bacon High School.

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This window is dedicated to **John “Mike” Gilkey '69**. Mike is an American entrepreneur and the founder of Gilkey Window Company, a leading manufacturer and installer of residential and commercial windows and doors. He started the company in 1978 after gaining experience in the home improvement industry, initially operating a remodeling business out of his garage. In 1986, dissatisfied with the quality of existing products, Gilkey began manufacturing his own windows, introducing innovations such as fusion-welded construction to improve durability and performance.



Under his leadership, Gilkey Window Company grew into a respected regional brand serving multiple Midwestern markets, known for its focus on quality, energy efficiency, and customer service. The business remains family-oriented, with his son Vince Gilkey and other family members playing key leadership roles.

Outside of work, Mike Gilkey is known for emphasizing family values and often features alongside his children and grandchildren in company branding and advertising.