

TIMELINE

LA FARGE DECORATION AT NEWPORT CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

- 1695 Congregation founded at Newport, RI
- 1857 Current sanctuary dedicated, third church building to be erected by the congregation; designed in “*Lombard Romanesque*” style by architect Joseph C. Wells, noted New York church architect, founding member of the American Institute of Architects (1857) and treasurer of the AIA at the time of his death in 1860.
- 1876-77 John La Farge at work on mural and ceiling decoration at Trinity Church, Boston; the artist was disappointed when his plans for ornamental stained glass to illuminate the new murals were rejected by Trinity’s Building Committee. La Farge purchases a “Mecca carpet” prayer rug, future design source for Newport Congregational church ceiling painting, at auction in Boston and transfers it to his family home at 10 Sunnyside Place, Newport.
- 1879 Rev. Henry Van Dyke of Brooklyn becomes pastor, on January 14, at invitation of Newport congregation.
- May 17: Committee on Repairs appointed by Standing Committee.
- June 12: Committee on Repairs provides initial report on replacing stained glass;
- July 12: Committee reports that La Farge has been retained to decorate the church, with estimates at \$500. for glass and \$1,000. for murals.
- July 14: United Congregational Society launches drive to raise \$350.
- July 22: Flyer soliciting funds issued; goal given as \$3,500.
- October 21: Standing Committee notes \$2,900. pledged to repair fund.
- November 5: Treasurer reports \$3,578. pledged and \$2,702. deposited in bank.
- November 22: Standing committee meets with La Farge about decoration.
- December 3: La Farge presents Standing Committee with verbal proposals.
- December 5: La Farge presents written proposal; Committee votes \$2,300. fee.
- 1880 January 24: *Newport Mercury* reports that La Farge will provide murals and glass for church, and estimates cost with new carpeting at \$2,500.
- February 17: La Farge receives first recorded payment for work.
- February: La Farge receives patent for his “opal” glass, first issued in the country.
- May 1: *Newport Mercury* reports that church will be ready by first week in June.
- June 12: *Newport Mercury* reports that church will hopefully be ready the next day; publishes lengthy description of murals; glass is as yet only installed in part.
- July 29: La Farge receives last recorded payment; total payments equal \$2,195.
- July: La Farge receives contract for decoration of Cornelius Vanderbilt, II residence, 1 West 57th Street, New York.
- 1881 October 31- March: Two opalescent aisle windows destined for church are shown at

- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, along with other windows by La Farge. A watercolor study for the church's ceiling design is in the collections of the MFA (#11-2818, gift of Henry L. Higginson). Late in year final windows installed. Begins design work for windows of William H. Vanderbilt residence, 640 Fifth Avenue, New York.
- 1882: La Farge designs Bates and Baker Memorial windows for Channing Memorial Church, Newport.
- 1883 June: La Farge begins redecoration of Brick Presbyterian Church, New York, inspired by Newport Congregational project, at request of newly appointed pastor Rev. Henry Van Dyke, formerly of Newport Congregational.
- 1886 La Farge travels to Japan with Henry Adams.
- 1887 January: Completes set of chapel windows for the Caldwell house in Newport, windows now reinstalled at Salve Regina University chapel.
June and July: Mary Gay Humphreys publishes two articles in the *Art Amateur* based on interviews with La Farge about his design for Newport Congregational.
- 1894 July 14: Freak hailstorm "riddles" windows on north side of Congregational church.
July 22: Standing Committee meets regarding repairs.
July 23: Congregational Society weighs four repair proposals, including La Farge's, and chooses lowest bid from Metallic Setting company of Providence.
August 6: Standing Committee authorizes repair work by Metallic Setting Co.
December 1: Standing Committee approves completed work on windows. North side aisle windows shifted, in part, to south side
- 1895 August: La Farge's skylights from C. Vanderbilt residence in New York reinstalled in The Breakers, Newport by Francis Lathrop.
- 1903 July 22: Standing Committee authorizes "Mr. Williams", a decorator, to restore murals.
- 1907 Erection of guild hall and piercing of false doors behind main mural.
- 1910 November 14: John La Farge dies from heart failure.
- 1917 Standing Committee reports that windows are in need of extensive repairs.
- 1935 March-May: Board of Trustees discusses repairing windows versus putting on storm windows. After review of estimates, decision made to install storm windows.
- 1938 September 21: Great New England Hurricane topples north and south church steeples; truncated towers re-roofed.
- 1947 February 6: Survey reports that murals are water-damaged and in need of repair, some windows "breaking-up".
- 1949 February-May: Discussion on covering up ceiling murals with new plaster ceiling.
August: Decision made to patch and repair ceiling; work completed in October.
Plywood partition installed behind organ at west end of sanctuary
- 1953 January 28: Hauser Art Glass Company of Winona, Minnesota, contracted to repair windows.
- 1957 August: Minor patching and retouching of murals by Daniel U. Boone.
- 1962 June: Decision made to paint parts of the nave not containing stenciled La Farge

decoration; contract given to Daniel Boone.

July: Consultant Garabed der Hohannesian, from Rhode Island School of Design, retained on color selection with proviso that congregation desires “lightest colors to which Mr. der Hohannesian would agree”.

August: Dull olive green panels of clerestory, gallery and upper apse painted by La Farge are repainted a bright blue by Daniel Boone; stenciled decoration touched up but not repainted.

1984-89 Survey of painted decoration undertaken by Morgan Phillips of the Society for The Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA now Historic New England), with the aim of restoring the original La Farge campaign.

1996 La Farge Restoration Fund at Newport Congregational Church established and incorporated, under leadership of Prof. James Yarnall, as a non-profit, tax-exempt foundation to undertake and manage the restoration of the La Farge decorative campaign to its former 1880 glory.

Julie L. Sloan, a leading authority on glass restoration, was retained as a glass consultant and created a survey and restoration plan for the stained glass.

1997 As a result of the glass survey, the south balcony windows, deemed unstable, were removed, crated for safekeeping and replaced with to scale photo transparency enlargements.

2008-2010: Partners for Sacred Places restoration training at NCC with Preserve Rhode Island.

2010 Conditions survey of the overall structure, exterior and interior, of the church commissioned by the Fund from Mohammad Farzan of Newport Collaborative Architects.

October 16, 2012 La Farge decoration at Newport Congregational Church designated a National Historic Landmark

December 7, 2012 Title to sanctuary and parish hall transferred by Congregation to La Farge Restoration Fund at Newport Congregational Church.

2013 Roof Restoration

2014 Electrical and Fire Safety Upgrade Project