

Preston Bradley Hall

Since the morning of October 11, 1897, this spectacular room has served visitors in pursuit of inspiration, information, and enlightenment. Originally designed as the place where the Chicago Public Library's extensive volumes were delivered to patrons, this extravagant space is named for distinguished clergyman, civic leader, and Chicago Public Library board member Dr. Reverend Preston Bradley (1888 – 1983).

The Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company, under the leadership of American visionary artist Louis Comfort Tiffany (1848 – 1933), produced the dome and the glass and mother-of-pearl mosaics that embellish the marble upper walls. Although the overall interior design was dictated by supervising architect Charles A. Coolidge prior to Tiffany's involvement in the project, the nuance, finish, and attention to detail is thoroughly Tiffany. An improbable combination of delicacy of design and durability of materials, this room demonstrates in detail the qualities that made Tiffany's vision so radical at the time of construction.



The Glass Dome

Probably the largest undertaking in the history of the Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company, this spectacular glass dome, 38 feet in diameter, demonstrates the full potential of Tiffany's singular vision. Here the 2,848 faceted glass jewels of rippled and streaky opalescent glass are cut in a fish-scale pattern and assembled to admit as much light as possible. Lighter shades of yellowish green glass were used at the bottom of the dome and the color becomes gradually richer and darker toward the top. At the center of the dome is a great glass rosette encircled by the signs of the

zodiac in four sets of three. Its support frame, a type of ribcage, features an extensive vocabulary of classical motifs, from bead and reel, acanthus leaf, lotus, to egg and dart.

Glasswork and mosaics were fabricated in Tiffany's New York studio by the Women's Glass Cutting Department, headed by Clara Driscoll, a gifted designer and artisan. Like most Tiffany employees, Driscoll worked anonymously and only recently has been identified as the designer of many of the studio's most prized and valuable lamps. Under her direction these remarkable craftswomen executed Tiffany's design with the skill and precision that secured the company's reputation for excellence.

The Mosaics

Details throughout the hall incorporate elements of Tiffany's innovative favrile technique – a process so unique that he had it patented in 1894. Named in recognition of the old English word for "handcrafted", this technique is characterized by the luminous iridescence achieved by mixing glass of different colors together while still molten, transforming the medium into the nuances of paint. By sequencing the favrile glass, mother-of-pearl and semi-precious stones at slight angles, these more than 10,000 square feet of mosaic intentionally shimmer as they reflect and refract ambient light.

Around the room, the supporting arches are adorned with mosaic scrolls and rosettes bearing "printers' marks", the symbols of 16th century master printers. The names of great authors and inscriptions in ten ancient and modern languages extol the love of learning.



The Inscriptions

Around the Dome

Books are the legacies that a great genius leaves to mankind which are delivered down from generation to generation as presents to the posterity of those who are yet born.

Addison

Outer Hall

A good book is the precious life blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

Milton

The real use of all knowledge is this, that we should dedicate that reason which was given to us by God for the use and advantage of man.

Bacon

A library implies an act of faith which generations still in darkness hid sign in their night in witness of the dawn.

Hugo

He that loveth a book will never want a faithful friend, a wholesome counselor, a cheerful companion, an effectual comforter.

Isaac Barrow

Foreign-Language Inscriptions

These translations were published in the September 11, 1897 Chicago Tribune.

East Wing

Egyptian:

I will make thee love literature thy mother;

I will make its beauties pass before thee.

Proverbs of Tuauu-Se-Kharthai

Hebrew:

And the book is delivered unto him that is not learned,

Saying, read this, I pray thee.

Isaiah XXIX:12

Persian:

They who by genius and by power of brain

The rank of man's enlighteners attain,

Not even they emerge from this dark night

But tell their dreams and fall asleep again.

Omar Khayyam

Chinese:

He who from day to day recognizes what he has not yet,

And from month to month does not forget what he has

attained to,

may be said indeed to love to learn.

Confucius

Greek:

The advice which their friends have not the courage to give to kings is found written in the books.

Plutarch

West Wing

French:

Men are equal; it is not birth but worth that makes the difference.

Voltaire

Italian:

Open thy mind to what I unfold and give it inward keeping
Knowledge comes of learning well retained unfruitful else.

Dante

Latin:

Whatever things were written aforetime were written for
our learning. Rom XV:4

Vulgate

German:

Oh, sweet voice! Much welcome sound

Of mother tongue in foreign land.

Goethe

Spanish:

Thus every man of real learning

Is anxious to increase his store,

And feels, in fact, a greater yearning,

The more he knows to know the more.

Yriarte