

ABOUT THE STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Excerpt of Donna Standerwick's story – The Artist 1982 – The Stations were completed

“I was asked by Fr. Everitt Calhoun to do the Stations of the Cross for St. Peter's as a memorial to his wife Judy. I chose green Alaska soapstone and yellow cedar as the medium with the basic design of a simple cross of cedar about 7X11 with an oval of carved soapstone about 3X4 at the intersection. The design was liked by Fr. Cal and Fr. Bob Clapp and approved by the vestry. I completed the sketches, but then began to worry and ask myself what I had agreed to do. Green stone had been ordered but it arrived grey as it could be. I put off working on the stone, no longer sure of myself. Having delayed as long as I could I finally cut my ovals of soapstone; and one by one, I wet them to study the light and the dark patterns in them. ‘I was amazed at what I saw! Almost every stone had a pattern that conformed to one of the sketches I had done months before. I was humbled. My confidence was restored. I was an instrument. All I had to do was to bring out what was already there. What's more, when I finished the carving and polished the stone, I found that it was indeed green.’ Carving the Stations raised questions I have not yet answered. It became a pilgrimage, an emotional and spiritual experience I had not expected. I walked the “Way of the Cross”. I imagined Jesus' exhaustion as he fell to his knees on the stony ground; Simon's compassion as he lifted the cross; the agony of the nails being driven into His flesh; Mary's sorrow and grief as the dead body of her Son was handed down; the hard cold stone of the tomb”

Donna Standerwick is a widely known artist who was active at St. Peter's until moving away from Sitka.



ABOUT THE ROSE WINDOW



(Photo BY DAN FELLNER...2022)

Why does an Episcopal church in an Alaskan town have a prominent Star of David window? None of the residents of Sitka seem to have a definitive answer, but they do pass around a story that starts in 1899 and has helped lead to a local culture of coexistence ...

Excerpt from an article written by Dan Fellner (August 23, 2022)

It is a peculiar mystery that has endured for more than 120 years in the shadows of Mt. Verstovia on Baranof Island in southeast Alaska.

At 611 Lincoln St. in the heart of downtown Sitka, above the entrance to a Gothic Revival red-brick Episcopal church called St. Peter's by the Sea, sits an intricately designed stained-glass window with eight flower petals in varying shades of blue and gold.

At the center of the window is something you typically don't see in a place of prominence at a Protestant church: a star of David.

How the symbol got there is the subject of local folklore and an oft-repeated story recited by tour guides who shepherd cruise-ship passengers and other tourists around Sitka, a city of about 8,500 year-round residents that is close to 100 miles south of Juneau.

As the sign out front greeting visitors to St. Peter's by the Sea notes: *"Legends have grown up surrounding the origin of the beautiful stained-glass window at the front of the church, largely because it contains a star of David; however, the definitive story has yet to be told."*

Wanting to learn the "definitive story," I met with the church's archivist, Gail Johansen Peterson, and Judge David Avraham Voluck, the unofficial leader of Sitka's small Jewish community. Voluck, an attorney and tribal judge for the local Tlingit and Haida indigenous people, has lived in Sitka for a quarter-century.

“I’ll give you the urban myth,” Voluck said when asked about the window at a local hangout called the Backdoor Cafe. “But,” he added with a hearty laugh, “I’m talking out of my tuchus.”

Voluck, 52, who bears a resemblance to Topol in the movie “Fiddler on the Roof” and has a personality to match, told the same story I had heard the day before from a local guide during a bus tour of Sitka’s most prominent sites. When St. Peter’s was built in the late 19th century (it was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978), its leaders ordered a stained-glass window from a manufacturer somewhere in the eastern United States. The intent was to have a Rose of Sharon adorn the center of the window.

“I guess it took about a year of waiting,” said Voluck. “First, it’s got to be made, then it’s got to be packed. And then it’s got to be shipped. But some shlemiel in the shipping department must have got the windows crossed.”

On a cold November day in 1899 — much to the dismay of the local Episcopalians — the wrong window arrived. With winter soon arriving and a cold draft blowing through the gap, church leaders had to make a quick decision about what to do.

“It wasn’t exactly what had been ordered but the people who made the decisions at that time found that it was acceptable to keep that window because it harkened to the Old Testament,” said Johansen Peterson, adding that — over the decades — it proved to be the right decision.

“Everyone in the congregation is really quite enamored with it because it lends itself to our Judeo-Christian traditions,” said Johansen Peterson, who has belonged to St. Peter’s for more than 40 years.

Kathryn Snelling, the church’s current deacon, agreed.

“I have never heard a disparaging comment about it. Visitors do ask, and we share the story and the mystery,” she said.

Was there a miscommunication in the process of designing the window? Did a synagogue somewhere else receive the window that was intended for the church in Sitka? Johansen Peterson said the definitive answer will likely never be known.

As for the window at St. Peter’s, Voluck calls it a wonderful conversation starter.

“I think it’s great that there’s a star of David on display in the center of our town,” he said. “I don’t know how it ended up here, but I love it.”

ABOUT ST PETER'S CROSS

The story of St. Peter's cross

Peter is believed to have been crucified upside down at his own request, as he did not feel worthy to die the same way as Jesus Christ. Therefore many Christian sects use this cross as a symbol of humility. He was an early missionary in Asia Minor and the Roman Empire and founded the Church of Rome with Paul. Emperor Nero saw this new church as a threat, and began a campaign to eradicate these troublemakers. Peter was imprisoned, tortured and finally crucified. Such was his faith, it is believed that he remarkably succeeded in persuading his sadistic captors to change from the normal way of executing prisoners. His brother, Andrew, also was crucified, and he too requested that a cross different to Jesus Christ's Latin Cross be used. Therefore, we have another cross form, the "X" shaped St. Andrew's Cross. St. Peter is also often remembered through the Celtic Cross. Most frequently, the two crossed Keys are associated with St Peter and the keys of heaven.

