



IN MEMORY OF THE
HENSLEY CHILDREN

Measurements and art language description

Artist: Owen Doremus (1819-1878) New Jersey United States installed 1863

Photographed by Cathedral Warden Daniel Hall with a Canon EOS 5D5-R, 50.6 megapixels camera and
Canon 28-300 mm telephoto prime, wide lens on July 27, 2017

Essay "The Hensley Family Windows: California Pioneers" by Jean Libby for the Dean and Rector,
Officers, Wardens, and Members of the Vestry at Trinity Cathedral in San Jose

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The Hensley Family Windows: California Pioneers

Flanking the doorway at the east corner wall of the sanctuary, the Arms of Christ—lance and the Holy Sponge—march upward on the ladder to His Crucifixion in painted glass by artist Owen Doremus of New Jersey, a prominent stained glass maker before the invention of opalescent stained glass in the 1880s. The Trinity Episcopal Church building was constructed of wood from the Santa Cruz Mountains by ship's captain James Hammond in 1863 in San Jose, California, the oldest church in continuous use in the city.

This is the second in a series written and photographed for *The Carillon* by Trinity member Jean Libby (retired community college history instructor) based on the 1977 publication *The Trinity Windows* which was primarily written from notes by Joan C. deLisle with great contribution from her mother, Ailsa de Lisle. The Vestry created the book as participation in the Bicentennial Celebration in San Jose, California in 1976. Jerry Estruth of the Trinity Vestry and a Commissioner was editor and photographer. We have the intention of seeking recognition by the Census of Stained Glass Windows in America and the Corning Glass Museum in New York state. Trinity's extant fifteen windows from the original eighteen are one of the largest collections by Owen Doremus.

The project is joined by historian Thomas L. Libby of San Francisco (author Jean Libby's son) to further develop the symbolism and artistry of the Doremus windows:

The window has three principal interior design element regions. The lowest of the three design areas in the Hensley window contains symbols placed above a blue background. Cobalt blue evokes the Virgin Mary and is the color associated with her—lighter blue is associated with Heaven. There is no place in this window where Christ's divine nature is represented.

The symbols are three of the group referred to as Arma Christi. There are approximately twenty symbols within this group. They are essentially the tools of Christ's crucifixion. They are also referred to as Christ's weapons as the process of His Passion is understood to be an affirmative defeat of evil; consequently in the Latin language, the devices used in His killing on the cross are the "Arms of Christ," with the word arm implying weaponry and not bodily limbs.

In the case of the lowest of the three design regions, the symbols are a ladder, a lance, and a sponge on a reed. The Holy Sponge was used during the course of the crucifixion to hold vinegar and was given by the Roman soldiers to Jesus to taunt him when he asked to drink water during His Passion. The lance, of course, is the article used by the Roman centurion to pierce Jesus' side and inflict the fifth bodily wound made during the Passion. The ladder, in the Arma Christi, was used to remove Jesus' body from the cross after His death.

The uppermost design region in the Hensley window has only two design elements—the crown of thorns wrapped around three nails of the crucifixion. Looking closely at the nails, one can see the nail heads on the exterior leading to the nail tips joined in the center of the circle formed by the crown of thorns. Both are symbols in the Arma Christi.



The People of the Windows charted by Trinity historians are legendary in local, state, and national history. Samuel J. Hensley was an overland pioneer to California, arriving after much difficulty with the Walker-Chiles Party in winter 1843-1844.¹ He was the tenth child of Samuel Hensley and Frances Ware Livingston who moved west from Virginia in the early 1800s, born in Kentucky in 1816.

In his teens Samuel J. became a trapper and pathfinder in Missouri among the group known as “mountain men.” At the Sutter Fort in Sacramento young Hensley was soon involved with the complex Mexican War, then joined John C. Fremont’s Bear Flag Revolt (1846) as Captain of the mounted riflemen. Hensley went to Washington with Commodore Stockton to defend Fremont, losing there but finding a new shortcut to California on the overland route return. Once back in Sacramento, now-Major Samuel J. Hensley figured prominently in the discovery of gold at Sutter’s Fort (1848). He founded the California Steam Navigation Company at the deep-water port of Alviso, becoming very wealthy.

Statehood for California (1850) was burgeoning in San Jose and among the residents who would become the founders of Trinity Episcopal Parish in 1861. Elisha O. Crosby, from Tomkins County in central New York, was an elected senator at the Constitutional Convention. Feeling confident that California was safe for settlement, he brought his widowed sister-in-law, nephew (first names unknown, initials “M”) and niece (Mary Helen Crosby) in 1849. Crosby asked John Bidwell, an overland pioneer to California (1841) who was in Washington D. C. lobbying for California statehood to meet and assist them on the ocean journey around the Horn of South America, trekking across Central America, then to San Francisco.

California’s admission as a Free State was achieved due to a strong plea by Senator Seward of Auburn, New York. In it, Seward noted all of California’s advantages to the Union—its rapidly growing population, recent discovery of gold, abandonment of its military government and its new constitution. He strongly encouraged its admission as a state. An original printing of the passionate argument made against the Compromise to include a strengthened Fugitive Slave Law is in the collections of the California Historical Society: “Often called the ‘Higher Law’ speech, it was Seward’s first speech to the U.S. Senate. Senator Robert Byrd has described it as one of the most “significant ‘maiden’ speeches in the history of the Senate,” and it established Seward as a leading opponent of slavery.”² Local tradition includes a visit to Senator Seward from his childhood friend Mrs. Crosby, the widowed mother of Mary Helen Crosby to bolster this conviction with direct details of California.

Mary Helen Crosby Hensley is frequently noted as the “daughter of Elisha O. Crosby” a member of the First California legislature. This is unlikely, as Crosby was born in 1818 and Mary Helen in 1830. It is more likely that she was his niece, as it is historically known that E. O. Crosby took responsibility for care of the children of a deceased older brother. The will of Samuel J. Hensley, who died at age 49 in 1866, states that his wife was the sister of Elisha O. Crosby. This is contradicted in the brief autobiographical memoir of Elisha Crosby

¹ One year ahead of Moses Schallenberger, who spent the winter of 1844 alone in the Sierra guarding the wagons of the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy Party, the first overland wagon train to California and Oregon. Moses and Fanny Schallenberger were also founding members of the Trinity Episcopal Church congregation in 1861.

² The compromise with slaveholding legislators in control of the national government enacted a Fugitive Slave Law (1850) that strengthened an earlier one. The entire issue was corrupted by the *Dred Scott v. Sanford* Decision of the U. S. Supreme Court (1854) which nullified the Missouri Compromise of 1820 restricting slavery in the western territories. *Dred Scott* (written by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney of Maryland) declared that only white persons were U. S. citizens, and that “the black man had no rights the white man was bound to respect.”

written in 1887, stating that his sister Mary Helen Crosby emigrated from Groton, New York to Lawrence, Kansas with his parents Samuel and Mahitabel Crosby and married a railroad official, Otis B. Gunn. This is confirmed with their burials in Lawrence. A younger brother, Samuel Crosby, emigrated to San Jose during the 1850s. He was killed in a gunfight outside the court house in 1859 over property issues in Mayfield, now Palo Alto, in Santa Clara County.

Representative Bidwell carried the California admission papers onto the steamship *Oregon*. He asked Mrs. Crosby to guard them from pro-slavery adherents opposed to the free state, and she gave them to Mary Helen, age nineteen, for additional subterfuge. Mary Helen wrapped them in her blue silk parasol, never opening it even during torrential rains while crossing the isthmus of Nicaragua. Major Samuel J. Hensley was on the *Oregon* as well. When it docked it was he rather than Bidwell who won Mary Helen Crosby's heart. They married in 1851, creating a large estate in the area of San Jose now bounded by North First and Fourth Streets, Julian and Empire Streets. After a change of plans for the building site of Trinity Church—first envisioned for the corner of Fifth and San Fernando streets—it was four lots from the property of Samuel Hensley, including the horse corral, that became Trinity's location on North Second Street, then facing St. John Street. The Hensley family is frequently noted in the confirmations, baptisms, and burials of the early church, traced in *The Trinity Windows* (1977) and *Trinity Church, San Jose, California, Advent 1860 to 1903* Trinity Parish Guild (1903).

The founding minister of Trinity Episcopal Church (now Cathedral) was a native of Frankfort, Herkimer County, New York. Rev. Sylvester S. Etheridge had recently completed his Divinity degree at Nashotah Seminary in Wisconsin, begun in the 1840s on the western frontier. The first Bishop of California, William Kip, found Etheridge in San Jose in 1860. The first meetings of the congregation, at City Hall on Market Street, included an astonishing number of six African American families among the first communicants, baptisms and confirmations.³

Reverend William Ingraham Kip was rector at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Albany, New York, for fifteen years before assignment as missionary bishop of California in 1854, a post created for him when he refused transfer to Baltimore's slaveholding Episcopal diocese. He was prominent in San Francisco politics and society, and hosting military officials at Alcatraz (then a fort) with Samuel Hensley on steamship cruises. The "Helen Hensley" was a favorite vessel.

Samuel Hensley died at age 49 in Alameda in 1866; their home on First Street, which was a prefabricated structure brought to California by Commodore Stockton known as the Crosby/Hensley house, burned in 1870. The grand home that replaced it (seen in *Thompson's Atlas*, 1876) became a bed and breakfast on the corner of Hensley and North Third Street according to the Hensley Historic District Neighborhood Association.

³ This significance is recognized by Jan Batiste Adkins in *African Americans of San Jose and Santa Clara County* (Arcadia Publishing, 2019) As well as the number of African Americans in the first congregation, the author Jan Adkins suggested further correlation with the people in the congregation from central New York, known for abolitionist views and actions. See "The Smith Families Window: Abolition Congregation" by Jean Libby http://www.alliesforfreedom.org/files/The_Smith_Families_Window--Collect.pdf

Mary Helen Crosby Hensley's 1871 portrait (Arbuckle Collection, California History Room, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Public Library) shows a care-weary widow wearing a gold Greek Cross on her black attire.



In 1880 the estate was subdivided by the two Hensley children while Mary Helen remained active in Trinity Church. She sponsored the acquisition of the first five bronze bells of Trinity's carillon in 1880 (now twenty-four bells) in the name of the Sunday School. The chancel Sunday School window by Owen Doremus, one of the original eighteen commissioned by Trinity Parish in 1863, was probably contributed by Major Samuel J. and Mary Helen Crosby Hensley as well as the Hensley Children memorial window that signifies the Passion of Jesus Christ.

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