

**Native American**, mosaic, J.A. Holzer, 1895.

# J.A. Holzer and the Mosaics of the Marquette Building, Chicago

## AN INVESTIGATION

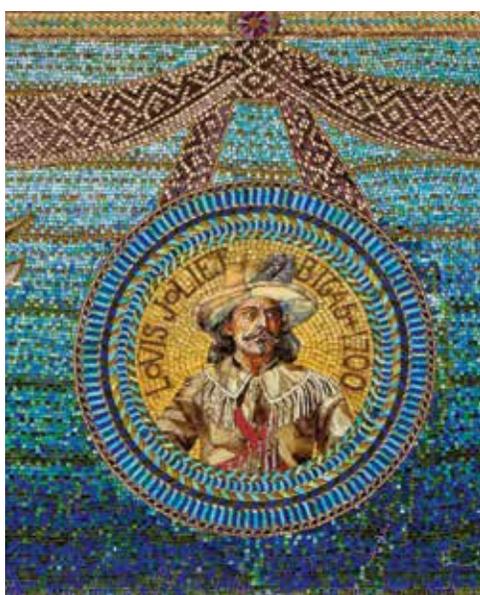
By Rolf Achilles

In 1895, the George A. Fuller Company, funded by two Boston investors, Peter C. Brooks III and Shepherd Brooks, completed construction of the Marquette Building, a steel-framed skyscraper designed by Holabird & Roche, Chicago architects. Its two-story lobby gave access to the second floor and the building's double elevators. The marble retaining wall of the hexagonal balcony suited a mosaic program perfectly.

It's for this low wall that Jacob Adolph Holzer (1858–1938) designed mosaic panels that present four scenes from the many months Jacques Marquette, a French Jesuit priest explorer and missionary, traveled with Louis Joliet's expedition into the heart of New France, an unexplored colonial empire that stretched from the Appalachians to the Rockies and from New Orleans to the Hudson Bay in Canada. Joliet's mission was to discover a route to the China Sea and the wealth of the Orient.

Marquette reached the south branch of the Chicago River on December 4, 1674. He built a cabin and ministered to and traded with the Indians near the south branch of the Chicago River, today thought to be the intersection of Damen Avenue and 26th Street. In his journal he noted that the resident Native Americans ate, as part of their meager winter diet, a long, leek-like smelly onion the locals called and Marquette spelled Chekogou. In spring of 1675 Marquette began his final journey, traveling to a Kaskaskia Indian village where he preached and celebrated the Easter Liturgy on April 14. Shortly after, his lingering typhoid like illness worsened as the expedition began its return trip. Marquette died on May 18, near the present city of Ludington, Michigan. His body was later moved to St. Ignace, Michigan, where it is now interred.

Two of the scenes Holzer depicted were from Marquette's journal as translated by Owen F. Aldis, a wealthy, scholarly



Chicago lawyer. The third scene, the death of Marquette, was added from the notes to the translation. Aldis had moved from Vermont to Chicago in 1875 to participate in the city's post-fire real-estate growth. He built a firm that took on the responsibility for planning skyscrapers efficiently, considering every aspect of it as it sprouted towards the clouds. The Marquette Building was one of them.

J.A. Holzer turned Aldis's translated words into images that the *Architecture Reviewer*, July 1897, described as "...three pictorial tablets descriptive of events in the life of Marquette ... a glowing series of pictures never before attempted in glass mosaics."

The three narrative panels are read from left to right. A descriptive text helps to identify the scene. The scene showing Marquette raising the cross carries the text: FIRMLY RESOLVED \* TO DO ALL AND TO SVFFER \* ALL FOR SO GLORIVS AN \* ENTERPRISE \*

Scene two depicts a Native American raising a peace pipe to Marquette. The text reads: THEY ANSWERED \* THAT THEY WERE ILLINOIS, AND IN \* TOKEN OF PEACE PRESENTED THE \* PIPE TO SMOKE \*

The death of Marquette panel carries the text: XVIII OF MAY A.D. MDCLXXV \* TO DIE ... AS HE HAD ALWAYS ASKED \* IN A WRETCHED CABIN MID THE FORESTS \* DESTITUTE OF ALL HUMAN AID \*

Three other panels show roundel portraits of Marquette, Joliet, and a Native American Chief of the Illinois along with suits of armor, feathered headdresses, peace pipes, trading blankets, rosaries and other items. Narrow gold vertical panels framing the figures separate the large panels. Each

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**Memorial Portrait of Louis Joliet** (detail), mosaic, J.A. Holzer, 1895.



scene is impeccably detailed in small squares or large sheets of opalescent glass, feather-textured glass, and semi-round segments of glass imitating porcupine quills stand in relief. Some tesserae project from swags. White diamond shapes marking segments of gold glass mosaics are mother-of-pearl, possibly cut from Mississippi mussels or clams. (By 1890 Muscatine, Iowa, directly on the Mississippi River was known as the Pearl Button Capital of the World.) Each of the mosaic murals features a background of graduating blue shades from dark to light, bottom to top. This was a popular Japonism employed by stained glass and mosaic artists in the United States during the second half of the 19th century.

Jacob Adolphe Holzer was born October 30, 1858 in Péry-La-Heutte in the Jura bernois of the Kanton Bern (Canton de Berne), Switzerland. After studies in Paris, Holzer immigrated to the U.S. and from 1879–1881, he studied engraving at the National Academy of Design in New York. He then worked with acclaimed sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens for about a year, before moving on to working with John LaFarge. It was in 1886, after working with John LaFarge in New York City, that Holzer began his association with Louis Comfort Tiffany. Four years on he was appointed Head of the firm’s Mosaic Department. Tiffany recognized that Holzer was a brilliant artist. From the start of his association with Tiffany, Holzer signed some of his wood, metal, and glass window designs. By the mid-1890s, Holzer was advertising that he used Tiffany products exclusively in his commissions and Tiffany was advertising, too, that Holzer used their products. This mutual admiration apparently assured customers that they were getting the best in both material and design.

Most ceiling and wall mosaics composed of glass sparkle and shimmer. The glass sheets and tesserae sparkle and shimmer, too, but in a way uncommon in other American mosaics or opalescent glass. Why? Even the sensational Tiffany Chapel created by Tiffany and Holzer for the 1893 Chicago’s World’s Columbian Exhibition (now magnificently restored and on view in the Morse Museum, Winter Park Florida), sparkles less enthusiastically than the Marquette lobby mosaics do.

Not all sand is created equal. The sparkle could be a property of the sand (silica) used to make the glass.

Sand known as St. Peters sandstone, also called “Ottawa Sand,” quarried in and around Ottawa, Illinois or in nearby eastern Missouri, consists of small well-rounded quartz grains that can be 99.44% pure quartz. Glass made of this sand is particularly clear and sparkles instinctively. The silica originated as a thick sheet of sand in a sea that once submerged much of today’s Midwest of the United States. Holzer may have specified this high-quality silica glass, the kind made of Ottawa silica for his Marquette Building mosaics.

In 1893, two years before Holzer’s Marquette mosaics, Louis Comfort Tiffany and Arthur J. Nash, an English glass chemist, had founded a furnace in Corona, in the borough of Queens, N.Y. Here Nash started blowing Tiffany’s amazing vases and other objects. Too late for the Marquette Building’s mosaics, Tiffany’s patented “Favril” glass was manufactured in these furnaces from 1901–1932.

Where could he have obtained it? Where could sheets of opalescent glass have come from in 1895? At the time there were two furnaces producing opalescent glass close to Chicago.

According to the Peltier family of Ottawa, they made the glass for the Marquette building mosaics. Here is their story:

Victor J. Peltier, a glass craftsman, was born, 1833, in Loraine, France. Immigrating to the United States in 1859, he worked as a glassmaker in New York, Pittsburgh, and in Iowa before moving to Ottawa in 1882 to work at the Ottawa Flint Glass and Bottle Company. Peltier founded Novelty Glass Company, in 1886. Conveniently Ottawa had an abundant energy supply in local brown coal—a reliable, if toxic source of energy. Novelty Glass Co. flourished producing a variety of opalescent and clear glass items, including rolled sheet glass for use in Pullman rail cars as well as domestic and sacred windows. Victor J. Peltier died in 1911, and his sons, Sellers and Joseph, continue the family business, renaming the company shortly after 1919. In 1927 the brothers produced their first marbles, but that is another Peltier story.

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**Marquette Blesses the Expedition**, mosaic, J.A. Holzer, 1895.

OPPOSITE PAGE:  
**Marquette Blesses the Expedition** (details), mosaic, J.A. Holzer, 1895.





In 1888, two years after Victor Peltier started his opalescent glass production in Ottawa, Charles Edward Henry (1846–1892), also a French glass chemist, who was also in the opalescent novelty glass business in New Rochelle, New York since about 1883, was returning from Chicago when he heard about a natural gas boom in northern Indiana. He stopped in Kokomo, Indiana, on Friday, April 27, 1888, explained what he did and what his intentions were to the city’s Board of Trade, and within hours a proposal of a free factory site and cheap gas rates was made. He accepted. The next day he selected a site.

Though I have researched KOG’s log-books and gathered other information in person, my abstracted retelling of the early history of KOG is founded on the 1998 study written Paul Crist. His research is available at <https://www.kog.com/in-depth-history.html>.

In 1888 Henry was not alone in Kokomo. Several other companies had already set up furnaces and were producing glass in Kokomo. With the natural gas directly underfoot and with minimal shipping costs, much like the coal in Ottawa was, it all was not as easy as it looked. Unexpected delays slowed Henry. In October he finally got a temporary gas line to warm up his seven-pot furnace, but he did not become an actual

player with serious glass production until November 13, 1888.

Henry’s superintendent was fellow Frenchman and glass chemist, Vital B elard. He had also been in New Rochelle and moved to Kokomo specifically to work with Henry. In 1882, six years before the move to Kokomo, B elard had run a glass design shop at 60 Rutledge, Brooklyn. In 1892, he was praised by Leo Popper & Sons “as the first manufacturer of opalescent glass in the country.” At the time there were only five major sheet glass manufacturers competing with KOG in the U.S.: John Dannenhofer, who had acquired the 60 Rutledge facility; Louis Heidt, also in Brooklyn; the Boston Antique Glass Co. in South Boston; Mississippi in St. Louis Mo; and Streator Art Glass in Streator, Illinois, focused on Cathedral glass.

Low-cost sand was available to KOG from the nearby Indiana Dunes lining the south shore of Lake Michigan. Higher quality sand was available in Ottawa, about 200 miles west. Company records do not indicate where KOG specifically sourced its silica. Henry specialized in high-quality opalescent sheet glass.

FROM TOP:

**Marquette Meeting Native Americans with Peace Pipe**, mosaic, J.A. Holzer, 1895.

**Marquette Dies**, mosaic, J.A. Holzer, 1895.



In the spring of 1889, Henry sent thirty full sheets of his opalescent glass to Paris for display at the World's Fair (The Eiffel Tower was its centerpiece). Only fourteen sheets survived the trip. They were a sensation at the Fair and garnered Kokomo the Gold Medal. Kokomo was swamped with orders. Success made Henry foolish. He overspent and on March 11, 1890, barely two years after founding the company went into receivership. A group of local businessmen acquired it.

As Kokomo's natural gas diminished, so did its glass industry. As furnaces closed, the keen business minds that had acquired Opalescent Glass Works prevailed. Soon they changed the name to Kokomo Opalescent Glass (KOG).

While Henry was manufacturing glass in New Rochelle, he relied on John B. Perraud, a New York City based agent, for distribution. In Kokomo he continued his business association with Perraud. Within months of starting production, Henry was selling opalescent glass to Chicago and other Midwest studios and starting February 1889, Perraud was selling quantities of opalescent glass sheets on the East Coast, especially to Tiffany. Perraud kept a large inventory of Kokomo opalescent glass in New York for Tiffany and others to personally choose from. At the time it was common for studios to inspect each sheet personally before it was purchased. This Tiffany did at Perraud. But KOG record books indicate that Tiffany, along with other studios, also often

bought directly from the manufacturer. KOG's new owners continue the rewarding relationship with Perraud, Tiffany and other studios, including sales to Europe.

By the early 1890s, the manufacturers of opalescent glass in the U.S. were at full production to meet local, national, and international demand. Glass companies, especially on the East Coast often report shortages. The many documented shipments of Kokomo-made opalescent glass to Tiffany via Perraud or directly and the Peltier family account of supplying specific glass to Tiffany, suggests it is highly plausible that Holzer sourced one or the other furnace for his mosaic needs. The Marquette's mosaics unique sparkle is certainly an indication of highest-quality quartz sand being converted to glass. Circumstantially combining sand and manufacturing—plus ease and cost of shipping—Holzer, Aldis and the investors most probably specified Ottawa sand and selected either Peltier in Ottawa, Illinois or KOG in Kokomo, Indiana to manufacture the glass for the story of the French Jesuit missionary Marquette who named the city of Chicago, as told in the Marquette Building, corner Adams and Dearborn, downtown Chicago.

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ABOVE:  
**Marquette Dies** (detail), mosaic, J.A. Holzer, 1895.