On March 12, 2025, Stained Glass Association of America (SGAA) Executive Director Megan McElfresh warned members about potential impacts on the glass industry due to increased tariffs on goods from Canada and Mexico. For old timers like me the reaction is—Again?

In the Winter 1996 *Stained Glass Quarterly* I had written a synopsis of the wonky tariff tug-of-war between the U.S. political parties affecting the SGAA and the entire stained glass profession up to the 1930s and beyond.[[1]](#endnote-2) Besides tariffs, U.S. government actions have affected stained glass producers in the past regarding apprenticeship standards (1940s)[[2]](#endnote-3), consumer product safety (1970s)[[3]](#endnote-4), workplace safety (1980s)[[4]](#endnote-5), and lead safety (1990s)[[5]](#endnote-6) among others. In each case the SGAA or partners in related trades managed to minimize or ameliorate the potential damage to the industry from potential collateral economic fallout resulting from government’s policies.

WHY TARIFFS? AND WHY TRADE ASSOCIATIONS?

The 1996 article goes on to explain the federal policy process of creating, implementing, raising, or lowering tariffs. By tariff we mean a tax on goods produced elsewhere coming into a country. One crucial question is why do we have tariffs? The historic purposes of tariff policy are fourfold: 1) raise revenue, 2) protect developing domestic commerce sectors from unfair competition, 3) reward favorable reciprocal trade policies by other countries, and 4) punish or sanction nations for adverse actions or policies. An example of this last tariff policy purpose 4 occurred in 1982 when then President Ronald Reagan withdrew “most favored nation” status from Poland, thereby raising tariff rates from a friendly moderate rate to a trade-stopping high percentage.[[6]](#endnote-7) Later Poland sought to return to ”most favored” standing, thus achieving purpose 3 for the U.S.

Monitoring custom rates, trade volume, and prices constitute one of the paramount watchdog functions of trade associations along with member accreditation, conferences, and continuing education among other services. Tariff issues connote the need for a trade association like the Stained Glass Association of America because of the vital functions it provides during transitional financial times. In looking at the past performance of the SGAA during its various tariff tussles, five key roles loom large that can help current members. These are:

* *Information gathering and dissemination*. In other words, get the facts and make sure everyone is aware of developing situations.
* *Public outreach and building alliances*. Alert public officials, news agencies, social media, allied industries, former clients, religious, and community leaders if conditions become especially severe.
* *Conduct**a comprehensive discussion on strategies and action plans*. Throughout its early lobbing history, stained glass studio owners and their trade associations were never able to reach total unanimity for an effective tariff strategy. At the same time, truly creative problem-solving requires toleration of different views as a prerequisite for frank and open brain-storming sessions, and encouragement of new strategic initiatives with membership support.
* *Provide a forum for members to vent*. Business downturns impact both owners and employees. Public discussions can be therapeutic by revealing shared concerns, challenges or worries about friends, family, and colleagues. In a profession that prides itself in the long-standing family focus of studios and the multi-generational companies that have faithfully and skillfully produced a truly inspirational product, having the ability to express one’s feelings and gain assurance from others can contribute to a more positive work environment. Trade associations assist members best in these tenuous economic circumstances by steering discussions toward opportunities rather than fixating on obstacles.
* *Stay focused and vigilant*. Tariff issues require considerable attention and time, which could otherwise be allocated to business matters. Over time members will need reminders of the status of tariffs and whether additional organizational attention is necessary. If the SGAA remains alert to tariff problems, there is every indication to believe that this organization will be poised to meet tariff issues in the year 2125.

In the following section there will be examples of the past utilization of these roles by the SGAA.

THE SGAA AND TARIFFS—PAST PERFORMANCE

As of this writing, the 2025 tariffs are set to address each of the four purposes depending on the Executive Branch’s assessment of a trade partner’s tariff rate history. This covers U.S. goods duties and the impact on American commercial sectors. Early indications show that in 2025 new tariff rates were contingent upon tax revenue potential, protecting industrial sectors losing market share to international competitors, favoring countries with reasonable reciprocal rates, and punishing countries with excessive rates or restrictive trade policies. However, historically the first two objectives of revenue generation and protection of domestic industries were the primary uses of tariffs by the U.S. throughout the nineteenth and into the early twentieth century.

The United States’ tariff legislation went through four basic historic time periods. The initial years of this country, from 1789 to 1922, are known as the "congressional control era." The first tariff, created in 1789, listed all glass at a duty of “10 per centum ad valorem.”[[7]](#endnote-8) A year later the glass tariff increased to 12 ½% including glass for windows. When the first tariff went into effect there were only nine glasshouses in the U.S., mostly of German ownership. From 1842 onwards, stained glass was subject to a tax assessed at 30% of its appraised value. Professionals managed tariff issues either individually or through local groups. By the 1880s and 1890s, in large cities there were petitions for tariff relief issued by “Glass Stainers” of Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Boston, or New York.[[8]](#endnote-9) In smaller cities, individual studios would provide evidence supporting tariff reduction to the U.S. Congress. For instance, in 1894 in a petition to Congress, Buffalo Stained Glass Works submitted a tariff request. In it the company documented a decline in business of $6,000 from three years earlier, a reduction of employees as a result of reduced business, and the problem of competing with European stained glass firms due to low wage scales abroad and free labor from apprenticeships versus the American wage standard of between $12-15 per week for employees.[[9]](#endnote-10)

In a nutshell, the first tariff era saw a conflict between American stained glass studios and established European workshops in England, Germany, France, Italy, and Belgium. The earliest days of the mid-nineteenth century finds the European importers skillfully outmaneuvering the American glaziers. The European firms managed to locate highly effective U.S. law firms and to hire skillful import agents to guide their windows through the labyrinth of American custom houses. Their initial strategy, the first of three prongs, was to cast the American product as grossly inferior to the hallowed studios of Europe that trace back to the ancient medieval system and whose delicate painting, rich colors, and mosaic style harkens to the glory days of the Middle Ages.

If the importers were to be believed, the American glazier was a journeyman Earl Scheib, the gravel voiced owner of an automobile painting company who claimed he would “paint any car for $49.99” on radio and television during the late twentieth century. According to the Europeans, American glass “professionals” were itinerant workers in wagons or jalopies with ladders sticking out with glass and tools visible along with everything extraneous (except for a sign painted on the side of the vehicle reading “I’ll glaze any church for $49.99.”) The importers would then claim that the work produced by American firms was cheap and shoddy in comparison to the European product and if people did not believe this then ask their clergyman, an allusion to the second prong. That such vagabond stained glass workers existed traveling from town to town scheduling repair work was true, but the overseas glaziers tried to convince Americans this was the rule and not the exception. The task for the Americans was to dispel this image with the American clergy and public.

Eventually, domestic studio owners began to publicize with ample ballyhoo that the American stained glass profession received training and experience with the top European glass shops and that often the quality of the American product exceeded that from abroad with more original designs while using the same glass as the European for which the Americans paid a tariff. These messages were sporadic and reactive to measures taken by the importers. By the turn of the century, the benefit of a national organization became apparent in order to fulfill the information gathering, alliance building, and public outreach roles. In sum, U.S. stained glass studios needed a national trade association.

As noted, the second prong of the importer’s strategy was the successful rallying of church officials to testify on behalf of the European product. Congress, from 1883 to 1900, trying to be responsive, chose the political gambit of saying yes to everyone. They did this through the third prong of the importer’s strategy which was to convince the U.S. Congress to accede to high tariff rates to appease American studios and politicians, but to create a duty-free list for windows destined for religious or liturgical purposes. As a result of the inclusion of a free list, importers could provide American churches with the traditional style of stained glass that most immigrants viewed before coming to America and now without the added tariff expense. At the same time, the presence of a 45% tariff rate, a separate rate for pictorial art, and a duty-free list placed customs officials with the arduous task of reviewing every shipped window for destination and purpose. Consequently, the U.S. National Archives are replete with records of litigation, detailed testimony on stained glass window manufacturing, “Treasury Decisions” challenging the actions of customs officers, and appeals courts sorting out conflicting decisions challenged by European importer or an American studios.

From 1850-1900 the tariff rate yo-yoed from 25-45% depending on whether the “free trade” Democrats or “protectionist” Republicans were in control of Congress or the Presidency. The actual beginning of the domestic manufacturers versus importers conflict began with the Tariff Act of 1883, nicknamed the “Mongrel Tariff,” adding to the peculiar nature of tariff policymaking. This major overhaul of the tariff schedules lists exemptions from tariffs for the first time. Its inclusion of a provision for stained glass “established for religious purposes, and not intended for sale” becomes the first appearance of the duty free list for the glass industry This inclusion catches the Americans unaware and eventually the importers from abroad have a foothold into the American market.

If the situation was not bad enough, also working against American stained glass studio interests was a “free art” movement of artists urging free trade to encourage the importation of the latest styles of European art into the United States. Among the listed artists were renowned stained glass figures, including Louis C. Tiffany, John LaFarge, and D. Maitland Armstrong as well as such well-regarded painters and sculptors of the time including Albert Bierstadt, William Merrit Chase, Richard M. Hunt and Augustus St. Gaudens.[[10]](#endnote-11) A major reason that the stained glass artists were not threatened by European importers was that they ushered in the innovative technique of opalescent glass. This product line and design style was not in direct competition with the mosaic and painterly stained glass style of the European product. This emphasis on technical innovation through opalescent glass and contemporary designs and painting styles is a sign that during tariff struggles focusing on the opportunities and revamping marketing strategies turns obstacles into opportunities. Nonetheless, the presence of popular stained glass artists signing petitions for free art weakened the American studios argument. What was lacking was a national organization to bring all sides together to hammer out a consistent message.

The Supreme Court case of  *U.S. v. Perry & Ryer (146 U.S. 71, 1892).* was another highlight of the early congressional control era of tariffs. This case typifies the perplexity of the tariff puzzle. In this imbroglio a customs official encounters unassembled stained glass destined for Philadelphia’s Sacred Heart Convent on November 24, 1890. According to court documents, the appraiser declared that these windows were “executed by artists of superior merit” representing biblical figures and designed “for religious instruction and edification.” The collector ruled that the windows were subject to a 45% duty based on the current tariff rate. The official noticed these paintings were on glass and not paintings qualifying for a 15% duty reserved for those works of art on canvas or surfaces other than glass.

The importers appealed this decision to the internal review process, the Board of General Appraisers, who upheld the port assessor. The importers then appealed the case to the Circuit Court, which found that the duty-free provision of the Tariff Act was more appropriate and overturned the Board of Appraisers judgment. It is then that the case went to the Supreme Court which brought temporary closure by reversing the appellate court ruling and ordering the 45% tariff to stand. This decision unleashed a firestorm within the religious community and reinvigorated the importers to seek duty-free entry on all its shipments. For the American side it was a clear, but short-lived victory. The U.S. side benefited from the case originating in New York, where the large stained glass studios resided. In looking at the testimony before the court, New York stained glass studio owners John Morgan, Edward Colgate, and Charles and Richard Lamb were the principal witnesses. Each individual patiently explained under cross-examination the finer points of stained glass fabrication while tailoring their responses to bolster the American standpoint. While the 1892 case helped the American side, overlooked is the amount of time and expense with data collection, testimony preparation, time off from the studio and travel expenditures, and other outlays that these government actions, initially designed to help business, require. Moreover, American studio owners in less populated or less wealthy areas would be unlikely to monitor this type of case so that tariff decisions nationwide were highly inconsistent.

Two years later the importers struck back winning a tariff reduction to 35% under the Democratic administration of Grover Cleveland, himself a clergyman. By 1897, the tariff rate returned to 45% under Republican William McKinley. From this point, it became apparent to domestic stained glass studio owners that a broad-based organization and a new strategy to counter the importer/clergy alliance was a requirement.

After reviewing the lobbying efforts of the stained glass studios prior to 1900, as well as looking at the roles of a formal trade association, there are two positive and two negative features that stand out as reasons for only mixed success. On the plus side, the American studios deserve praise for the significant public outreach and alliance building with organized labor. Studios and glass-oriented union officers sat together in the halls of the Capitol Building awaiting their opportunity to plea their cause and recommend action. Second, the American side mustered considerable financial data, mindful of the limited recordkeeping at the time, and they clearly showed that labor costs in the U.S. were more than Europe by a significant amount. Specifically, in Germany the wages were so much lower than Great Britain, France, or Belgium except for the most skilled flesh painters. Thus, the Americans deserve kudos for information gathering and dissemination.

On the downside we find that there are two areas that need improvement. Even though American stained glass studio owners and unions provided testimony, it was not a coordinated effort. Labor looked at workers abroad and managers looked at the prices, labor costs and market overall. Both management and labor would have been more effective by reinforcing more of the others’ concerns so that labor looked to be supportive of management and vice versa. The goal in legislative testimony for trade groups is to present the fullest picture of the situation thus giving a more united storyline. Even more problematic was the data collection efforts. The studios would present lists of salaries paid by specific firms in Europe. However, in the list, Franz Zettler becomes “Zittler” and Heaton, Butler and Bayne reads “Eaton, Butler and Bain.” Nor do the Americans cite the sources of their data so that misspelled names raise doubts about the overall accuracy of their figures. Making sure of one’s facts is always the first effort for a convincing argument, at least in those days.

In 1903, the efforts of Ludwig von Gerichten and Joseph Flanagan of Chicago brought together stained glass studios nationwide through the creation of the National Ornamental Glass Manufacturers Associations (NOGMA). In 1906, as tariff problems escalated, updates on tariff actions reached members regularly by means of a new publication, *The Monthly Visito*r, which eventually morphed into the *Stained Glass Quarterly* of today.[[11]](#endnote-12)

Von Gerichten and Flanagan were big on information gathering and dissemination. Their efforts to found an organization and communicate with members through a monthly magazine were significant in kick-starting this new organization. Once they understood the magnitude of the problem they continued to try to educate American officials to their point of view. Likewise, they reached out to allies among the trade unions of glass workers, both within and outside of stained glass. These included labor groups as the Glass Stainers and Lead Glaziers Protective Union, the Amalgamated Glassworkers International Association of America, and the Decorative Glass Workers’ Protective Association. Eventually NOGMA meetings devoted considerable time to the tariff question even when other issues pertinent to business management were pending.

The final battles of the “congressional control tariff era” between the American stained glassmakers and the importers occurred over the 1913 and 1922 tariff revisions. The 1913 Tariff Act lowered stained glass to the 1842 rate of 30% and declared stained glass over 20 years old was duty free. It is here that members of NOGMA became the recognized leaders of the American craft. NOGMA leaders built alliances with union officials to corroborate its financial data. Top church prelates as well became aware of the business implications of the free list. However, even the most divinely inspired citizen reverts to voting his or her pocketbook in political matters. What stands out, however, is the testimony given by the likes of Ludwig Von Gerichten and Otto W, Heinigke whose passion, articulation and preparation with business data were stellar, even in a losing cause. Although the importers won the skirmish in 1913, the Americans were gaining the organizational skills and learning the roles of trade associations to make a formidable comeback.

The advent of World War I disrupted trade and the world economy shifted to wartime production. From 1914 to 1920, conditions stifled European stained glass producers due to lack of materials and shipping risks. A considerable number of American churches had placed orders with the European stained glass houses and were awaiting order fulfillment. Once peacetime returned, ships with orders began to dock again at Customs Houses and instantly the tariff issues resurrected. Once again agitation began for tariff revision with the advent of Republican Warren G. Harding’s administration.

In the 1922 Tariff Act, pro-business and protection-oriented Republicans were back in control and NOGMA officials took full advantage. Tariffs and business conditions dominated annual NOGMA meetings. Members sprung to political action by responding to congressional queries about how the 1913 Tariff was affecting each industry. Studio owners explained in detail their business volume trends over the previous five years and they concluded emphatically that business was declining and struggling.

Also significant was the eventual swaying of the clergy away from the automatic assumption that the European stained glass product was superior to the domestic one. American studios began to repackage their message by alerting prominent clergymen that the Europeans were the ones pushing a shoddy product. The Europeans cut corners, according to the U.S. testimony, by recycling window designs and cartoons from previous commissions and passing them off as original works to justify high design costs. Other issues arose over the quality of construction, paint firing, and the overuse of labor-cheap apprentices to churn out the large volume of work destined for the U.S. The importers put up strong resistance, but in the end the tariff rate on stained glass windows rose to 45%, but once again the duty-free list for churches remained despite NOGMA objections.

One different outcome of revamping the 1922 tariff was the creation of a U.S. Tariff Commission. This affected the stained glass industry because the Commission received authorization to investigate flexible-tariffs, unfair practices and discrimination. As the first historic period of “congressional control” tariff making ends, a weary Congress turned to the executive branch and this new commission for a more coordinated and consistent tariff policy. To NOGMA members, struggling over the tariff question became business as usual serving to energize the association but also to exhaust studio members with the additional burden.

The second tariff era, known as the “presidential flexibility” period. lasted from 1923-1934 and it preoccupied the stained glass industry throughout its tenure. During this period, Congress empowers the president to adjust tariff rates for parity with other nations, thus introducing what is now the modern view that tariff making is a presidential rather than congressional dominion. The hallmarks of this era was the involvement of such eminent members of the U.S. stained glass legacy such as Charles J. Connick. Otto Heinigke, and George Payne. Studio members devoted considerable time and money pushing the domestic stained glass producer’s agenda to block obstacles to expansion in the lucrative church window market. Despite the business-friendly administrations of Harding, Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover, the business conditions of the 1920s which were supposed to be roaring, instead were only murmuring as the decade neared 1930.

With tariffs still a concern because of the free list exemptions, and the general business climate becoming more worrisome, the stained glass studio owners fully assumed the roles of the trade association by 1) rebranding, 2) conducting a coordinated and focused tariff battled to Congress, and 3) earning the attention of the clergy to their plight. The rebranding occurred with a name change of the organization from National Ornamental Glass Manufacturers Association to the Stained Glass Association of America with which we are now familiar. The inclusion of the word “America” adds specificity to the scope of the organization while “stained glass” had become increasingly identifiable with the public than the amorphous term ornamental glass. Furthermore, the word “Manufacturers” connotes a technical or industrial product while stained glass conveys the full artistic element. What stands out is that the organization was not standing pat, but rather it sought renewal and revitalization.

Invigorated with a new identity, the American studio owners girded their loins and adjusted their scabbards ready to engage the importers one more time for the 1929 tariff bill.[[12]](#endnote-13) Tragically, the October 1929 stock market crash ushered in what proved to be the worst economic climate in American history. Economic historians argue that the raising of the tariff rate to 60% brought commodity trade and building construction to a virtual halt. Even though the American side made a good impression on members of Congress, the 1929 bill, known popularly as the “Smoot-Hawley Tariff” due to the bill’s co-sponsors, is a lesson to organizations to be careful what you wish for.

The time following the passage of the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act in 1930 until the Reciprocal Trade adoption in 1934 was a bleak period in American stained glass history. Here, and even into the World War II years of the 1940s, Charles Connick of Boston and his able assistant Orin Skinner, a former editor of the SGAA’s *Stained Glass* quarterly magazine, together kept the organization afloat despite a growing number of studios leaving due to financial failure. Skinner tells the story of Mr. Connick paying from his own pocket his talented designers and painters to hand color stained glass patterns that employees pasted to the covers of the quarterly magazine. Connick reasoned that this was a way to deter his talented staff from seeking work elsewhere and keeping them in practice if business gets better. Connick was not alone and other large studio owners followed suit. What is most striking about the history of the SGAA is how individuals like Von Gerichten, Flanagan and Connick stepped forward to defend the craft and enhance the industry, usually at considerable time and expense.

By 1934, Congress decided to wash its hands of the time-consuming tariff question and under the direction of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the third era began known as the "reciprocal trade era." This was a “golden rule” policy of crafting tariffs against countries through the executive branch and its emissaries. The Office of the President would set tariffs in accordance with the manner in which that nation treats the United States regarding comparable tariff rates and access to markets. In other words, we treat you as you treat us—reciprocally. While the 2025 tariff issue appears to align with the principle of reciprocity and aims at revenue enhancement, it is premature to determine the direction of the overall policy and whether any unforeseen consequences will arise.

The current tariff era is known as the “General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) era.” It runs from 1947 to the present. This process involves scheduled negotiations between countries and until recently seemed to hold a steady trade policy globally. There was one brief time period when Congress reinserted itself into the tariff equation. The predicament came about over the introduction of faceted glass. This was an innovative technology using chipped Norman slabs and cement (later epoxy resins) replacing lead to adhere the glass and form the window. This modern style of stained glass was developing in the 1950s and presented the biggest technological innovation since the creation and development of opalescent glass.

The beginning of the situation occurred when multiple major stained glass studios engaged in a race to develop and capture the market in faceted glass with a bidding war on the prestigious commission for America’s first major faceted glass installation in the First Presbyterian Church at Stamford, Connecticut. With the bids on the project secured, it appeared as if the contract would go to Philadelphia’s Willet Stained Glass Studio over the French firm of Gabriel Loire Studio. In a surprise move, SGAA members expressed shock to find that a Connecticut senator introduced a rider, or minor amendment, to a legislative bill to waive tariffs on “guar gum” and “for duty-free entry of stained glass for the First Presbyterian Church of Stamford, Ct.” The removal of tariff duties became the difference in the bid and the Loire firm came away with the contract. Later, additional congressional riders appeared for faceted glass from France for churches in Arizona.

Within a brief time, the SGAA responded through its executive director John G. Lloyd, a former editor of the *Stained Glass Quarterly*, and an understandably irritated Henry Lee Willet. Both men went before Congress and presented the case that this was a step backward from reciprocal trade to congressional control again. What is apparent for this discussion is that the SGAA was vigilant on tariffs after years of it being a moot issue, not unlike what we are facing today. Also, the SGAA built an alliance with the International Brotherhood of Painters, Paperhangers and Decorators union so that the two corroborated the narrative and statistics presented before the Senate Finance Committee that was looking into the matter. This indicates a maturation of the SGAA as a trade organization and portends readiness to meet the current tariff challenge..

From this previous section we learn that the SGAA has been a work in progress. From no truly national organization before 1903 to nascent tariff skirmishes up to 1913, and later regrouping, re-messaging and rebranding, the organization has put itself in a position to draw upon its past record to guide future responses to hardships. In essence, past experience guides future practice in dealing with any extreme changes .

GOING “WAY BACK” TO 1925

Another means to analyze the current tariff situation is to seek past similarities that could play out today. If we pretend to borrow the “Way-Back” machine from my two favorite childhood cartoon characters Peabody and Sherman segmented on the “Rocky and Bullwinkle” cartoon series of the 1950s and 1960s, we can travel back to Washington, D.C. one hundred years ago in 1925. As we pass the White House, we will notice that a conservative Republican, Calvin Coolidge, occupies the Oval Office. Across the Mall at the Capitol Building, we look in on Congress and we see that Republicans control the aisles of both the Senate and House of Representatives. Walking past the Supreme Court Building, we notice most justices gained appointment from Republican presidents, who have held the presidency for seventeen of the last 25 years since 1900. So far the partisan composition of the federal government is well-nigh identical between 1925 and 2025.

Moreover, in 1925 the conservative Republican Party was the overwhelming choice of SGAA owners while their employees gravitated to the liberal Democratic Party. Republican strongholds then were in the industrial Northeast and agricultural Midwest while the Democrats controlled the former Confederate states of the South and were friendly with organized labor and immigrants. Like today, the Republicans campaigned as the party of business, low taxes, and low tariffs except to protect struggling domestic industries. Meanwhile the Democrats favored the farmer and small businesses and low tariffs at all costs.

If we keep walking around Washington, D.C., we find additional issues corresponding to the present. From a park bench we find a copy of the *Washington Post* with President Coolidge’s 1925 State of the Union address reprinted. While Coolidge was optimistic about the general condition of prosperity and progress in the U.S., he expresses concern about of number of pressing issues that are familiar to us today. He addressed the growing national debt and the need to make government more efficient. Civil service reform and making government workers more productive and responsive to policy mandates are other problems Coolidge aims to address. He calls for the reduction of income taxes and adds that this is not for the rich but for the general public. By mentioning the rich, the president indicated that taxation was a means to reward wealthy political allies even a century ago. Next, Coolidge discusses the “Alien Problem,” the escalation of immigration tension that had grown in the U.S. in the 1920’s following the end of World War I. Political and economic tumult abroad was forcing people to emigrate to the United States from Asia, particularly China and Japan, as well as Eastern Europe, and Mexico. Coolidge vowed to “protect wage earners of this country” with restrictive immigration legislation. Growing national debt, the need for more effective and responsive government, and immigration were key themes in Coolidge’s message to Congress in 1925. This should give pause to twenty-first century politicians who claim there are easy solutions to these recurring political problems.

Finally, Coolidge raises the specter of tariffs and the need to promote fair competition in international trade. In 1925 the tariff issue was still salient but on the back burner. We have seen that the 1922 Tariff Act had given the President a more active role in tariff policy and people were closely watching the result of this action.

Getting back on our Way Back Machine we set the dial for 1925 and quickly visit Chicago’s Columbia Ave. where we see Joseph E. Flanagan, editor of the NOGMA’s *Bulletin.* since 1909.We see himin his office preparing stationery and logos with the new trade name the Stained Glass Association of American (SGAA) because this is the year the organization changed its name from NOGMA to the SGAA. This monthly publication became the cornerstone of the stained glass organization covering issues from art, design and aesthetics to politics, including tariffs, as well as conference and family news. In the pages of the SGAA’s *Bulletin* during 1925 Flanagan was quick to praise President Coolidge’s “wise business-like policies” so it was clear that the studio owners had their preference in the White House. If ever there was a dedicated SGAA member, consider that Mr. Flanagan, the first president of the organization and its editor for 19 years died the day he completed the layout for his last. Issue in 1928.[[13]](#endnote-14)

As we return to the present on our borrowed Way-Back Machine, we can reflect on 1925 and see that this was a good year for the organization, full of optimism, confident in the future. However, even under the Tariff Act of 1922 importers were bringing in 1925 over 111,000 square feet of glass valued at $202,352. For the U.S. Treasury this meant taxes collected amounting to 101,176 at a 50% ad valorem rate. What cemented the up-beat mood in 1925 was stability returning from the turmoil of the 1914-1918 World War as well as a flu pandemic during that period.[[14]](#endnote-15) One lesson from this is that membership derives confidence in the trade organization owing to a steady stream of information and articulate leaders to offer members reassurances that they can meet any challenge.

We can take solace in the fact that whatever spillover the current tariff confrontation creates, the SGAA is well poised to take the lead in safeguarding the craft. In her message to the membership on tariff on March 12, Executive Director Megan McElfresh crafted a message identifying a serious and imminent danger possible to the profession. This message explains the nature of the problem and follows with a clear call to action by members that embody the style, clarity, and sense of purpose that characterizes SGAA calls to action in the past. In this context, the current SGAA is well-positioned to address the challenges arising from this substantial shift from previous practices.

FINDING A WAY

This examination of tariffs highlights factors from the past that should inspire SGAA members in the organization’s ability to steer through these political and economic challenges. The key advice is to search for new opportunities rather than dwell on obstacles and reflect on adjusting business operations to emerge more prosperously. A motto to inspire future success during uncertain times comes from a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian who found a muse in a stained glass window in Atlanta’s First Congregational Church. The motto: ”To Find a Way or Make One.”[[15]](#endnote-16)

1. William Serban, “The Tariff Question Revisited: The Impetus for the Formation of the SGAA,” *Stained Glass Quarterly*, V. 91, No. 4, Winter 1996, pp. 293-305. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. John Gilbert Lloyd, *Stained Glass in America*, Jenkintown, Pa., Foundation Press, 1963, pp. 96-106 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. William Serban, “The Tariff Question Revisited: The Impetus for the Formation of the SGAA,” *Stained Glass Quarterly*, V. 91, No. 4, Winter 1996, p. 304 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. William Serban, “The Tariff Question Revisited: The Impetus for the Formation of the SGAA,” *Stained Glass Quarterly*, V. 91, No. 4, Winter 1996, p. 304 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. William Serban, “Stained Glass and Government Regulation: The Lead Issue*,” Stained Glass Quarterly*, Fa.1990, pp. 182-184. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. “Reagan Calls Polish Leaders ‘Lousy Bums,’” *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, Oct. 10, 1982, sec. 1, p. 6. Although this shows President Reagan using a tariff tool to coerce a policy change in another country, overall, he was opposed to high tariffs, and he sought to keep product prices low through low tariff rates. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. John Gilbert Lloyd, *Stained Glass in America*, Jenkintown, Pa.: Foundation Press, 1963, pp. 98-99. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. U.S. House of Representatives. 54th Cong., 2nd Session. Tariff Hearing Before the Committee on Ways and Means, Washington, D,C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894, p. p273-274. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. U.S. Senate. 53rd Cong., 2d Session. *Senate Report 413: Replies to Tariff Inquiries, Bulletin # 7*, Washington, D.C., 1894, pp. 132-133. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. “In the Cause of Free Art,” *New York Times*, May 18, 1892, p. 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. See also, Darlene Brady, William Serban, Orin E. Skinner and Norman Temme, “Mostly About the Magazine.” In *Stained Glass Index, 1903-1978*. Bronxville, N.Y.: The Stained Glass Association of America, 1978, pp. 8-18. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. The Smoot-Hawley Tariff Bill was introduced in 1929 and hearings were held on a proposed increase on the duty from 45% to 60%. The Stock Market crash of October 1929 delayed the proceedings and the bill finally became law in 1930. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. Orin E. Skinner, “Mostly About the .” In *Stained Glass Index, 1903-1978*. Bronxville, N.Y.: The Stained Glass Association of America, 1978, p. 11. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. U.S. Tariff Commission*. Summary of Tariff Information, 1929, on Tariff Act of 1922*. Schedule 2—Earths, Earthenware, Glassware, etc. Washington, D.D.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1929. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. David Levering Lewis, *The Stained Glass Window*, New York: Penguin Press, 2025, p. 4. This is a family history by Pulitzer Prize winning historian Lewis who was inspired by a 1909 “Motherhood Triptych” stained glass window with his maternal grandmother portrayed as the Madonna placed in Atlanta’s renowned First Congregational Church.

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