

The Angel of Toronto

The search of a Dutchman leads to Toronto.

Not long ago, Lazarre Ponticello died, at the age of a hundred and ten. He was France's last remaining veteran from the First World War. The passing away of this direct witness doesn't mean that this period has ended. For the time being, this book isn't going to be closed. Everywhere we come across indirect testimonies of this dreadful conflict, and not only on the extensive battlefields in Belgium and France.



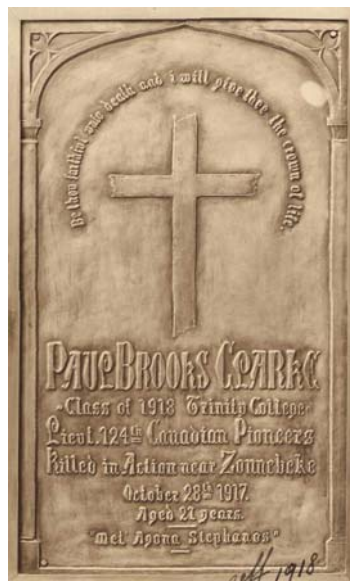
The design in plaster

Portfolio

While clearing out my grandfather's attic in Haarlem, I came across a portfolio, that is the artistic inheritance, of a certain Mr J.M. Stultiens, silversmith and metalworker. In a box I found about fifty sketches of jewelry and about the same number of photographs of various ecclesiastical objects, but also some photographs of bronze memorial tablets made for soldiers killed during the First World War, such as a memorial tablet made for Paul Brooks Clarke, "Lieut. 124th Canadian Pioneers, killed in action near Zonnebeke, October 28th 1917, aged 21 years".

Memorial tablets

Who was this J.M. Stultiens? Definitely not a relative, but who was he then? How did the box turn up in the attic of my grandfather's? How is it that a Dutchman made memorial tablets for Canadian soldiers killed during the First World War? Many questions; few answers. Besides sketches and photographs, the portfolio holds letters and bills. From this I gather he was working and living in Boston, Massachusetts, and that in about 1916 he was given some assignments by St. Thomas' Church, Toronto, Canada.



Angel

One of the assignments of the church was the making of a bronze lectern shaped as a life-size angel. Photographs show the different stages of the work of art, at first the design, then the model in clay, next the cast in plaster and finally the cast in bronze. The pictures also show his struggle with the sizes of the wings, his search for the right proportions. Nevertheless the result is magnificent. He's not just any metalworker. This is truly a work of great beauty, at least in my view. It moves me. I can't keep my eyes off it. The angel seems to ascend from this world, rising up, throwing off the lectern, liberating herself.

Oblivion

I know religious experiences can bring about this feeling, but apparently art can do it as well. That is new for me. On the internet I'm looking for the website of St. Thomas' Church. A virtual tour is leading me around. Feverishly I'm searching for the angel. In the first instance, I can't find the angel. After a while I discover her sideways. I can't catch sight of the front. The camera won't take the bend. We have to settle for her side. I consider myself fortunate for possessing at least the original photographs. I can keep them for myself and enjoy them alone, but on the other

hand I wish to snatch the maker and his collection from oblivion.



The angel lectern in bronze, 1917

Arts and Crafts

Among the sketches and pictures I discover a notice of the Society of Arts and Crafts Boston, whose Council designates him in 1926 as master craftsman. The grade of “master craftsman” implied that someone was recognized as a leader in his field of expertise. This guildlike society still exists and her archives are housed in the Fine Arts Department of the Boston Public Library. They are very interested in adding the portfolio of Joseph Martin Stultiens to their research collections. During the first decades of the 20th century many craftsmen, such as silversmiths and metalworkers, emigrated from Europe to Boston. They were the artistic vanguard whose influence has taken the interest and research of many present-day American historians. Perhaps the portfolio of Stultiens can contribute to that research.

Recognition

It would also be nice if Stultiens, 52 years after his death, would get recognition for his work.

In exchange for giving the portfolio I ask for more information about the artist. In the Ancestry Library they find a World War I Draft Registration Card. The registration card indicates that Stultiens was of “tall height, medium build, and had brown

eyes, black hair”, that he’s born on March 15, 1887 in Weert (Holland), and that his occupation is silversmith. Further we read that he is exempted from military service on the grounds of not having the American nationality and of having a wife.

Josephine or Fien

On the genealogical site maintained by the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints we read he married again on May 10, 1933. The name of the spouse isn’t mentioned. Around this period Stultiens is back in Holland. I find bills addressed to Studio Stultiens in The Hague, Holland. On several notes I come across the name Josephine. Would she be his wife? I remember, as a child, visiting my grandfather, one of the lodgers was called Fien, possible short for Josephine. That would explain the presence of the portfolio in my grandfather’s attic. With this things seem to have come full circle, although questions still remain.

Visible but unnoticed

For 80 years the angel can be seen in St. Thomas’ Church, Toronto, while the artist was forgotten and his archives collected dust in an attic in Haarlem for over 50 years. By investigating the background of Stultiens, I tracked down the angel of Toronto and had a remarkable experience.

*Bart Hetebrij
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