

# Clarion Ledger

## Jackson glass studio restores historic Memphis church at center of civil rights movement



**Joshua Williams**  
Mississippi Clarion Ledger

Century-old Clayborn Temple church in Memphis is getting a much-needed glass restoration after years of neglect. A significant spot in the 1960s civil rights movement, Clayborn Temple is now being reconstructed into a community center.

And it's being renovated with the help of a Jackson company.



Read the article online at <https://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2023/02/20/black-history-month-pearl-river-glass-restores-memphis-clayborn-temple/69869632007/>

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Owner, founder and head designer at Jackson's Pearl River Glass Studio Andrew Young said that the company was honored to be chosen to do work at the historical site.

Clayborn Temple traces its roots to its cornerstone laid in 1891 when it was known as Second Presbyterian Church. During the Memphis sanitation workers' strike of 1968, the church's older geometric-style windows were destroyed by police teargas canisters, and the church fell into disrepair.

"The process started with a recommendation to work with Clayborn Temple in Memphis in late October of 2018 and after several visits, we finally got a contract to begin work," Young said. "Before we could start work, there had to be additional work done by a separate contractor due to the building being vacant for 10 to 15 years. The process has been extensive, but we are in the last phase of work."



Memphis artists Lonnie Robinson and Sharday Michelle were selected to do a design that depicts the story of the sanitation workers' strike in the new glass elevation.

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Young said the project required three phases of work that consisted of removing the older windows, taking the stained glass windows apart and putting them back together and installing the newer versions.

"We're just about finished with the restoration of the stained-glass window," Young said. "The renovation and restorations cost north of half a million dollars."



Jackson's Pearl River Glass Studio has been creating and restoring stained glass since 1975. The Midtown studio helped with the renovation of the Capitol in 2015.

During a pivotal time in the civil rights movement, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. helped sanitation workers organize a strike and used Clayborn Temple as a place of comfort for Black protestors who were beaten while protesting.

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Robinson is in charge of redesigning the south elevation, and Michelle is redesigning the north.

Robinson said that Clayborn Temple has significant meaning to him, growing up just a mile from where history was made.



"It is an honor to be selected for the remodeling of such a great and historical place," Robinson said. "My parents and grandparents were activists during the sanitation strike and marched alongside Dr. King."

Robinson said although many supporters of King believe that his last speech was at Clayborn Temple, the last speech took place at Mason Temple, which is about a mile away.

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"I recently found out from my grandparents that I was in attendance of Dr. King's last speech as a child," Robinson said. "I feel like I've been prepared my whole life for this opportunity. I have done many projects, but this one hits home. We are currently in the end process of completing the glass work. The projected completion date is late July or early August."

Clayborn Temple later served as a symbol of strength and unity in the community.

Robinson said Clayborn Temple is one of the oldest churches in the region being restored.

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