

Rambusch celebrates 125 Years of Passion for Its Work

Submitted by Charles Linn



(L to R) Martin, Viggo and Edwin Rambusch

The Rambusch Decorating Company (RDC), a CCFM Corporate Member for more than 20 years, is celebrating its 125 anniversary, as the last two generations of Rambuschs continue to run the firm with their forefathers' passion for excellence in design.

Frode Rambusch (1854-1924), an artistically talented Danish immigrant, founded RDC in New York City in 1898. He was born in a small Denmark village, showed promise as an artist as a young boy and was indentured to a master painter at an early age. After an education at the Royal Danish Academy of Art, an apprenticeship with a second master painter, and work as a journeyman all over Europe, he decided that his opportunities in Denmark were few.

The flip of a coin determined he would leave for New York City rather than St. Petersburg, Russia, and he arrived in 1889. Immediately employed by some of New York City's finest decorators he knew he was temperamentally not suited to remain an employee for long. He made a few attempts at starting his own business and with a well-capitalized partner finally succeeded.

Their 1898 Charter was ambitious, promising that the company would pursue "...the manufacture and sale of stained glass, the execution, manufacture, and sale of ecclesiastical and domestic decoration for churches, houses, and other buildings and of sculpture and relief work." These are areas in which the firm still excels, with one exception: The charter did not anticipate that Rambusch would become a leading manufacturer and innovator of church lighting and specification-grade architectural lighting products.

Viggo B. Rambusch, Frode's grandson, grew up working at the company. After college and military service, he started as a salesman in 1957. A little more than a decade later, he became president and remained so for 30 years. Viggo recently recalled that most of his grandfather's earliest projects were in Catholic churches. Through Frode's talent, charm, and proven project management skills he engaged the local

Catholic clergy, and soon there were Rambusch church projects in all of New York City's boroughs. By the mid-1920s the company had done church and commercial work all along the Eastern Seaboard, New England, and the Midwest.

Today Rambusch is guided by Viggo's twin sons, Edwin and Martin. Both began working in the firm as teenagers, and after receiving their undergraduate and graduate degrees, became employed there full time in the early 1990s. Edwin has been president and Martin chairman of the board for more than 25 years. They, along with their father, are familiar faces to those who attend CCFM conferences, where they are frequent presenters.

Martin, who operates Rambusch's Artwork and Liturgical Environments Studio and its Stained Glass and Mosaics Studio explained the rest of the firm's genealogy saying, "Frode's son, Harold, assumed responsibility for running the company at the the beginning of the Roaring Twenties."

Edwin, who runs the Custom Lighting and Engineered Lighting Studios, added, "Our grandfather, Viggo F.E., joined Harold a few years later. Together they brought the firm through the Great Depression, the War, and the 1950s and '60s." During this time the company continued with its church work, including chapels, three giant rose windows, and many other projects at National Basilica of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., which was the focus of the Sunday tour at the 2023 CCFM Conference in Baltimore, "We also decorated the interiors of the Waldorf Astoria, the Roxy Theater, and the Empire State Building," Edwin continued.

Under Martin and Edwin, the firm continues to do projects that are quite significant. The Custom Lighting Studio was in charge of the conservation and relighting of the original Statue of Liberty flame when it was relocated to a new museum. And, the Artwork and Liturgical Environments Studio returned to the National Basilica for the mosaics in three of the massive domes including the Trinity Dome, which is nearly 90 feet in diameter.

"When I think about some of the work that the firm is known for," said Martin, "such as the Trinity Dome, I become concerned that people might think we're only interested in high profile projects. That is not the case.



(L to R) Martin and Edwin Rambusch

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“Every church environment is valuable, and when we are hired each deserves our full attention and best effort,” he says. “We work in small churches everywhere from Maine to Hawaii, and from every era.” The twins agree that projects are best done with the active participation and input of the church community.” This active engagement of congregants and clergy is a process they call “the Thread of Design.”

“Some of our projects, while small in scale, involve collaborating with architectural firms and contractors,” said Edwin. “For a 1930s Gothic Revival Immaculate Conception Church of the Corpus Christi Parish in Portsmouth, N.H., we worked with the architecture firm MPSB Studios (another CCFM Corporate Member) as they planned the renovation and designed a new color scheme. Our objective was to make sure that the lanterns we restored and modernized, and the new fixtures we added, were discrete and completely compatible with their restoration.”



Corpus Christi Parish in Portsmouth, NH

As the history of Rambusch continues, both Edwin and Martin express a similar sentiment about their clients and their firm. “It is really impossible to express the appreciation we have for the opportunities we’ve received,” said Martin. Edwin adds, “Possibly nothing matters more to us than contributing to the preservation of our churches. We would like for them to be a blessing for worshippers long after our work is done.”

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