

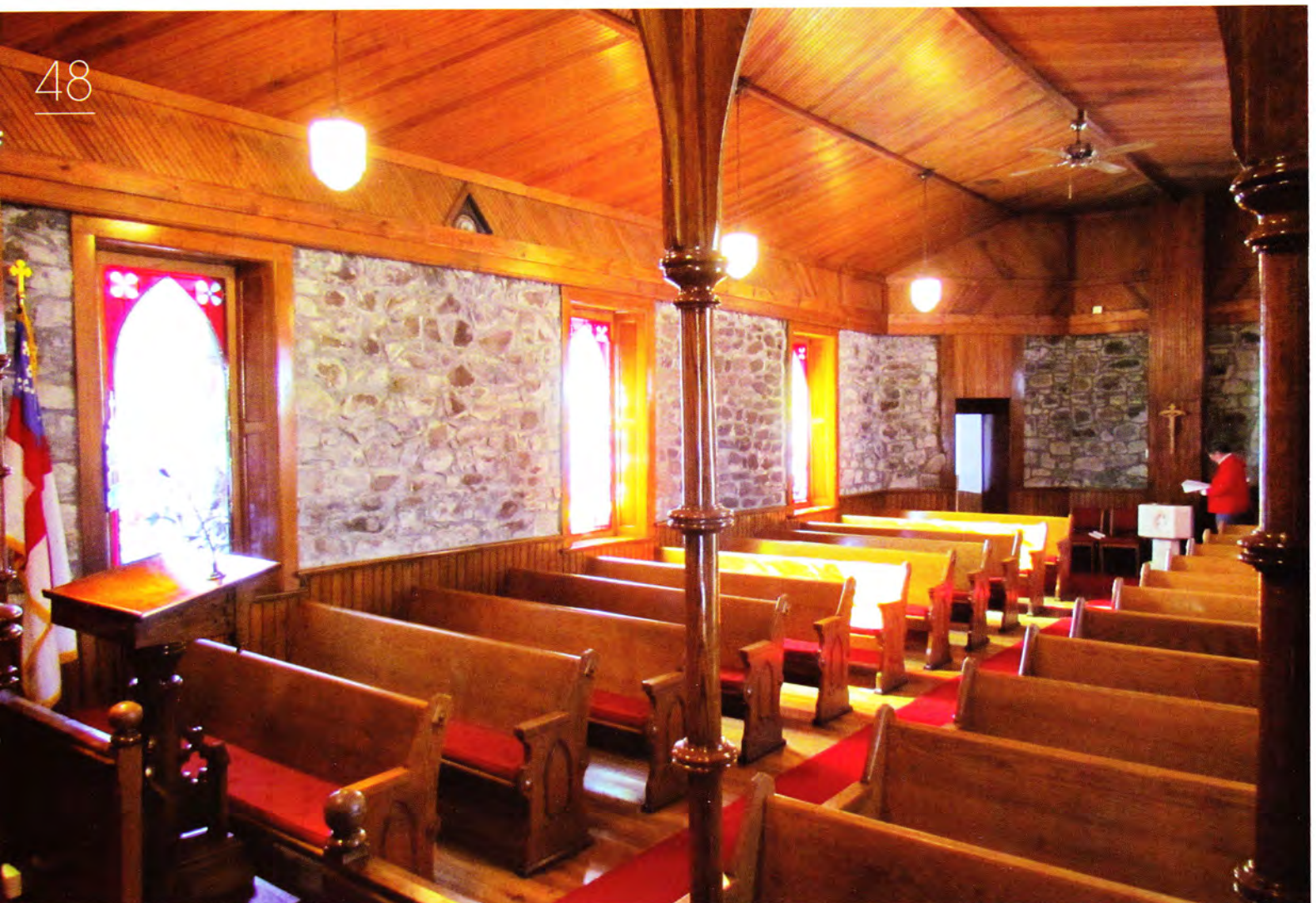
# THE Windows OF ST. JOHN'S

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAY CRANE

**T**HE TOWN OF OURAY IS considered the “gem of the Rockies.” If that’s so, then St. John’s Episcopal Church is a jewel unto itself. The abundance of precious metals found in the San Juan Mountains (called the shining mountains by the Utes) brought hundreds of prospectors to the area in the 1870s. Many of the settlers of the Ouray Valley were of English, Welsh, and Cornish descent, and — unlike the majority of mining camps in the area — Ouray became a family town. The miners and their families missed the churches of their native lands and set about building a place of worship that would resemble those they had left behind.

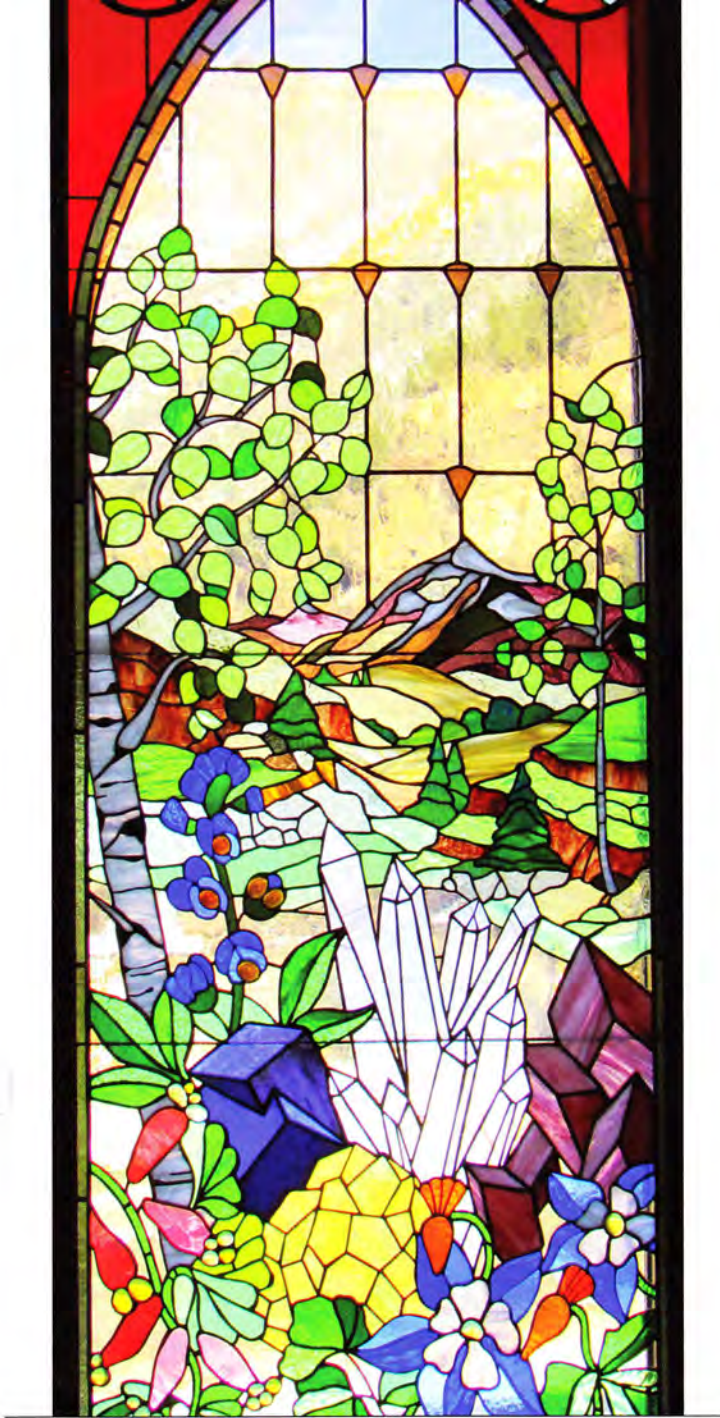
Reverend Jo Ann Ford gave me a tour. She has led this congregation since coming here from Kansas over four years ago. She reports that construction of St. John’s began in 1879, employing the skills of the Cornishmen and displaying the beautiful stonework for which they were known. Inside and out, the attention to detail is amazing. Not surprisingly, the church itself is very reminiscent of a Victorian English country church. Jo Ann often thinks about the effort it must have taken these hardworking immigrants, after spending a grueling day in the mines, to put further energy into the building of this church. It must have meant a lot to them. In 1975, a parish hall was added. So closely does it resemble the original stonework that it takes awhile to realize that it’s newer by a century.

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*The music window, like the others, allows a view of the nearby mountains and the big sky.*



The crowning glory of both the church and the parish hall are the stunningly beautiful stained glass windows, completed between 1989 and 1999. For those we can thank the remarkable Virginia Laycock, who was 70 when she began the project. She and her husband and their five children arrived from Winslow, Arizona, in 1979. He was a banker and had found work in Ouray.

Virginia, who will be 90 by the time these words see print, is one of the most amazing, funny, congenial, and independent people I've ever met. Her talents are many: painting, quilting, and fine woodworking — and the creation of stained glass. She is self-taught in all her endeavors.

She recounts the story of how she came to take on the windows project. She remembers that the Bishop's Committee was a bit skeptical about her part in it, perhaps, she thinks, because she was 70 at the time. She says, "I assured them that if I met my demise before work was completed, I wouldn't have to be paid." And then she laughs. "I fooled them all. I finished all 18 windows."

The theme is "God's Gifts to Ouray." Each window was sponsored by a patron, who then described to Virginia what was special to them about the area. She converted each idea (or blessing, if you like) into a visual motif. As if by magic, she has combined these disparate concepts into the loveliest of visions. Looking at them, it's easy to imagine other details that may have prompted their design. All the windows have an underlying theme of nature; there are trees and flowers, birds and animals, mountains and waterfalls, all in vibrant colors. One window centers around music and depicts the antique pump organ that is still used during every Sunday service. Another features the minerals native to the area. Virginia and her husband lost a daughter a few years before the project was completed, and she is memorialized in the Laycock window with flowers, hummingbirds, and butterflies, honoring her short life.

Judiciously, Virginia kept most of the design and color in the lower two-thirds of each window, so that we can look out upon the majesty of the mountains just outside. What a shame it would be to lose that view!

While she no longer works on such a large scale, Virginia creates beautiful kaleidoscopes from stained glass and inlaid wood.

St. John's is indeed a treasure. It's the oldest church in continuous use in Ouray. Though its congregation is small (as is Ouray), it's active in the community and beyond. All denominations are welcomed in the open and inclusive congregation, a part of the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado.

Don't be satisfied with these photographs. If you call ahead and leave a message, you may well have the privilege of going inside to see them for yourself. Or attend a Sunday morning service — it's sure to lift your spirits. ❖

## More

- St. John's Episcopal Church  
329 5th Ave., Ouray  
970.325.4655  
Sunday morning services at 10:30  
[www.stjohnsouray.com](http://www.stjohnsouray.com)
- Virginia Laycock's kaleidoscopes are shown by Ago Gallery on the corner of 5th Avenue and Main Street in Ouray.
- Articles by Patrick Davarn and Barbara Muntyan were of great assistance in assembling information for this story. GV thanks these writers.



*The window shown on the facing page features the minerals of the area. Here, we see flora, fauna, and mountains.*