The Pittsboro community was still going through the throes of post-civil war reconstruction when Frank Marsden London was born on May 9, 1876. His father, William Lord London, was a prominent citizen of Pittsboro, a civil war veteran, a builder of the 1871 courthouse, an organizer of the Pittsboro Railroad Company in 1885, a Senior Warden of St. Bartholomew's Episcopal Church, Master of Columbus Lodge 102 of the Free Masons, and an officer and director of the Byrum Manufacturing Company. Frank, one of seven children, showed artistic inclinations and made doll clothes as a hobby and served as an altar boy at St. Bartholomew’s. His early education took place not only at home but also at the Pittsboro Scientific Academy. At the age of 17 he enrolled at UNC in Chapel Hill and moved to New York City, where he studied art at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. His education was financed by his family even through his artistic tendencies diverged from their business and industry pursuits. Frank later studied under William Chase, an internationally recognized artist.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century Frank London enjoyed considerable success, becoming a partner in Montague Castle-London Company, where he designed textiles, stained glass windows, ecclesiastical objects, and residential interiors. His impressive client list included the Vanderbilts. In addition to his design work Frank bought and renovated several New York brownstone houses which he turned into residential interiors. His impressive client list even included the Vanderbilts.

In addition to his design work Frank took up painting and design. A major work designed by London is the altar window in the St. Savior’s (Belmont) Chapel in the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York. He also designed the clock face on the southern elevation of Grand Central Station in New York, which I often consulted while dashing up Park Avenue South to catch my commuter train home.

During his association with Montague Castle-London Frank traveled to Europe a few times to research glass in cathedrals in Spain, France and Britain. On one of these trips he met another artist, Augusta Johnson, who he married in 1908. They had a daughter two years later and named her Caroline. In 1914 their son Marsden was born but their joy was cut short when Caroline died of pneumonia in December of that year. To help them cope with this tragedy, Frank, Augusta and Marsden returned to his family in Pittsboro.

There are four stained glass windows attributed to Frank London in North Carolina: two are in St. Bartholomew’s in Pittsboro (“St. Cecilia” and “Well Done Good and Faithful Servant”). The latter window is a memorial to Frank’s father, William Lord London and depicts a soldier kneeling before an altar to receive a blessing. The St. Cecilia window is a memorial to Frank’s aunt, Ann Mauger Alston, a family friend. She and her husband had lost a child and the window shows a mother offering her sick child to Jesus.

A fourth window attributed to Frank London is located in the Church of the Good Shepherd in Raleigh. There is a wealth of interesting local history and cultural tradition in our country which is often overlooked by many of its citizens.

Fred J. Vatter is a Past President of Chatham County Historical Association and a Board Member.