

Newport Life Magazine

A publication focused on the lifestyle of Newport County, Newport Life always has content that's of interest to visitors and locals alike.

I was pleased to be invited to contribute to this publication, which only grows in sophistication and appeal as the years go by.

The Newport Navigator is a sister publication to Newport Life, both are published by the Edward A. Sherman Publishing Company, which produces our award-winning local newspaper, The Newport Daily News.

The cover at left featured my story about stained glass artists Tiffany, LaFarge and Armstrong.

The article below appeared in Newport Navigator several years ago.

A Stitch in Time

Trinity Church is a Newport landmark, its bell tower a symbol of the city, visible from the harbor and downtown area.

Extraordinary features of the church include the wineglass pulpit, the Tiffany windows, a memorable architectural style, and the needlepoint kneelers. The kneelers are rectangular cushions made for the knees of the prayerful and adorned by the loving hands of the church's Needlework Guild.

The original church, built in 1701, was outgrown by 1726 and replaced by the present structure. In 1762, the growing congregation again required an expansion, and to raise the necessary monies to do so, the box pews were "sold" to parishioners. Each family had its designated space, and the various shapes and sizes which resulted reflected their individual needs and tastes. The pews were taxed annually and passed on from generation to generation.

The walls of the pews helped congregants remain warm in a drafty building which did not acquire central heating until the 1800s. The wooden pews, each with its own little door, benches and kneelers, served a very necessary function during the winter services. The congregants often brought metal footwarmers filled with coals to help provide additional heat.

The dedicated people of the Trinity Church Needlework Guild have been meeting for over thirty years, the last fifteen under the guidance of artist Eveline Roberge. Her striking designs and the expanded repertoire of stitchwork which she introduced

have raised the level of the pieces to an art form; each is a painting in thread. At one time, the guild had as many as twenty-four members who met regularly at the Carr House to stitch the beautiful, mostly Biblically-themed designs. Over the years their numbers have declined. Roberge says new members would be most welcome. No knowledge of the process is required, as she is happy to train anyone interested.

The kneelers

portray such subjects as the Nativity scene, the Lilies of the Field, Suffer the Little Children, and St. John the Evangelist. Ms. Roberge estimates it took the group around two years to refurbish all the kneelers in the main church.

Ms. Roberge recalls

the early days with fondness. "At first, the ladies wanted to do pieces with only the Basket Stitch design. I taught them to do Crosstitch, Stemstitch and Upright Gobelin as well. Afterward they would say, "Eveline, do you have any of those complicated ones I can do?"

In addition

to the Biblical themes, the kneelers reflect the personality of the various congregants' pews. The variety and creativity are amazing. A thistles motif reflects a Scottish parishioner, and a representation of a griffon that of a Welsh member. Some have the congregant's initials or family coat-of-arms. The English sloop Katie, which was captured by the Americans and christened Providence, is also represented as a scene from local history.

The most

famous kneeler may be the one featuring an intricately rendered ER II, for Elizabeth Regina, Queen of England. The Queen's kneeler has an English rose embroidered on the side, as well as a crown and laurel leaves on the top surface, framing the initials ER, with the Roman numeral two stitched between the letters.

Small

services are held in the Hughes Chapel adjacent to the church on the south side of Queen Anne Square. Examples of the guild's artistry can be found here, as well. The chapel has wooden seats, each having its own little kneeler tucked neatly beneath it on railings.

The Hughes

Chapel kneelers are smaller than those in the main church, and each of them portrays a vivid Newport scene. The colorfully rendered images of Colony House, the White Horse Tavern, Touro Synagogue, Rose Island Lighthouse, Whitehall, the Stone Mill, the Redwood Library and many more famous local buildings adorn these cushions. The prie-deux are also covered with town scenes. They portray Trinity Church and Queen Anne Square nestled amidst the downtown buildings. Canon Ballard, now deceased, suggested the Newport theme for the chapel kneelers after seeing a painting of Roberge's hanging at a mutual friend's house in New Hampshire.

Two needlepoint wall hangings, Old Colony House and Trinity Church, both depicted in their respective squares on a snowy winter's day, adorn the right wall. The group is currently working on another wall hanging, this one depicting the flowers indigenous to Aquidneck Island.

The public

is welcome to stop by for a tour. Friendly guides will be happy to share their

extensive knowledge of the building and its history. The church is open to the public, check with the church office for the best dates and times. The suggested donation is \$2 per person.