

Creating unique cushion brings intangible rewards

By CAROLINE HILL NIXON
(Chronicle-Herald Staff Writer)

Mrs. Forrest L. Morton of Jacksonville, Fla., who last March undertook the tremendous project of covering the communion kneeling cushion for historic St. Paul's, returned Wednesday with the completed work.

A handful of members of the church gathered with something like awe around the exquisite lengths of the cushion worked with symbols of the church.

Worked in petit point, it contains over 15 million stitches and required 12 hours work per day

for a little less than a year and a half totaling over 6,000 man hours! When the work was first undertaken it was thought 5 years would be a minimum for completion but no one reckoned on the patience, persistence and skill of Mrs. Morton.

How she came to do this remarkable feat is a story in itself and the sequence of events which brought her to Augusta, and in contact with the ladies of St. Paul's, to her, a miracle.

After the death of her husband she found the pattern of her life so changed she was unable to make adjustment to it, feeling a frustration of mind she had never known. Casting around for some rewarding project, she became interested in a Jacksonville couple with ten children. Visiting them as a friend she became well acquainted and when the husband received orders for transfer to Augusta, Mrs. Morton came with them to help find a place to live.

The Christmas after they were settled there came an invitation to have dinner with them so she made another trip here. On this visit, she decided to give the family a picture for their living room so, with the couple, visited the Old Print Shop on Macartan St.

A Chance Meeting

While browsing in the shop she was pleased to find a piece of "petit-point" which she recognized as some of the last of such work to come out of Austria before World War II. Her enthusiasm caught the attention of the attendant of the shop, Mrs. Albert H. Lehmann a member of St. Paul's, who with others at the church had long wished for someone to cover the cushion in petit-point. Here was an expert on the subject—wanting a project!

Mrs. Morton recalls Mrs. Lehmann saying, "You are the answer to our prayers." And since she herself was searching for a way out of the dark, lonely days Mrs. Lehmann was the answer to her prayers, too.

Meetings were called and the project developed. Mrs. Morton laid her plans well for the work of art. Designs for the panels were laid out on canvass by the church architect, Mr. Arthur Hazard, who is also junior warden of the congregation. Stencils had to be made and transferred by means of carbon paper to achieve a perfect reproduction.

Finding the answer to color symbolism required much research. Mrs. Morton studied authoritative books on the subject and even went to New York where she visited the beautiful cathedral of St. John the Divine. She consulted the foremost authority in America on stain glass design, Mr. George Payne of Patterson, N.J.

Exact Colors

With the aid of Mr. Michael Halebian of New York the wool, which is the same used in Persian rugs, was dyed in Stuttgart Germany.

She worked with Mr. Michael Halebian, authority of Persian rugs in New York, to achieve the exact shades of the various colors to be used in the symbols. The background of one symbol called for "lemon yellow."

"There are many shades of yellow", Mrs. Morton laughed, "so I told Mr. Halebian to just go out and get a lemon and match it." He did. The wool was dyed in Stuttgart, Germany and is in exquisitely rich shades.

An expert upholsterer, Mr. A. M. Laasch of Jacksonville, fitted the straight lengths onto the curved foam rubber cushions made in New York. It took 4 hours to block one section and was done with such skill that there are no seams and the covering is perfectly fitted.

Now that the cushion is completed Mrs. Morton will make coverings for the cushions for the bishop's and priest's chairs, an altar rug and a large rug for the chancel.

St. Paul's Church, already endowed with handsome furnishings will on October 19 dedicate the most beautiful gift of all—a work of art upon which no price can be set for it comes from the heart of a woman who has given joyfully and gratefully of her talents.

Asked how her eyes could stand the strain of long hours at such fine work she replied calmly, "My eyes?" They are not mine—they're God's eyes."