

Needlepoint Kneelers in the "Depot" Chapel



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For many years, the Chapel has been one of the most prominent landmarks at "Depot" and has come to embody much that is of historical, sentimental and emotional importance to the members of the RCMP. The stained glass windows, the plaques and memorials are all elegant expressions of a rich tradition and history that has been the spiritual focal point of the Force for over a century. In 1988, Mrs. Anne Bell, wife of the Commanding Officer of the RCMP Training Academy at the time (Now called "Depot" Division — Ed.) undertook a project to create hand-crafted needlepoint covers for the kneeling benches (kneelers) of the pews in the Chapel.

Needlepoint is a highly decorative and painstaking form of embroidery, often referred to as "canvas embroidery". The technique involves covering the entire canvas with yarn stitches. Each stitch serves to strengthen the canvas, and, especially when certain stitch patterns are employed, a very strong, textured fabric results. The final product, although very beautiful to look at and highly decorative, is still quite suitable for articles which will receive a lot of wear and tear. Needlepoint is a traditional covering for chairs and cushions, and is often

used in churches and cathedrals to cover kneeling benches.

Each pew in the Chapel is fronted by two kneelers — there are 64 kneelers in all — which are of a constant width but vary in length from about 42 to 58 inches. Originally constructed in the 1890s by prisoners and members of the Force, the kneelers were originally upholstered in a dull red vinyl. Mrs. Bell felt that needlepoint would be a more appropriate covering, in that it would imbue the Chapel with a feeling of warmth. It would also provide an opportunity for some creative expression as well as make a contribution to the heritage of the building.

As the windows are the focal point of the Chapel, it was decided that the pattern for the kneelers should be simple, yet elegant. The RCMP Shabrack pattern was therefore selected as the template for the design: a border of gold with a dark blue background. The initials "RCMP" and "GRC" in gold, were to be worked in at either end of each pew so that when walking down the centre aisle, "RCMP" would appear consistently on the left, and "GRC" on the right.

Mrs. Bell contacted the Woolcraft company in Regina, concerning the pattern to be