

# THE PEW END CARVINGS



FIRST ENGLISH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Austin, Texas



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am happy to acknowledge the assistance of some good people without whom this booklet would not have been possible. First, the handsome color photographs of the carvings are the loving work of my fellow church member, David Neuse. David made these photographs as a warm and generous man of faith.

Fellow member Cynthia Bryant researched the background and meaning of each of the symbols on the thirty-eight carvings. Fellow member David Austin, Administrative Assistant to the Pastor, offered invaluable help in locating long-forgotten church records and publications which provided priceless information about the story of the carvings. The helpful staff of the Austin History Center, as well as a number of relatives and friends of those familiar with the carvings provided additional facts to round out the story.

Two long-time friends and business associates produced this beautiful booklet. Terry Pinkston of Corporate Graphics in Arlington, Texas designed the booklet, did the typesetting and provided the digital art. Frank Sherrill of Type Case Digital Imaging, Inc. of Fort Worth, using the most advanced sophisticated digital equipment, printed the final product.

Throughout this whole process, Pastor Karli lent his support and guidance.

Forrest K. Foster  
Austin, Texas  
September 1, 2002



### FIRST ENGLISH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH Austin, Texas

Hear the words of Gregory Free, Austin architect, in his 1995 description of the First English church building, prepared for a special tour sponsored by the Heritage Society of Austin:

"Inside the main entrance, the Narthex is a low-ceilinged room, intended as a reverent, meditative space. Immediately behind, we enter the tall nave, beautifully austere with its white plastered walls, dark oak trusses, richly colored stained glass windows, and a tile floor.

"All the furnishings are in dark oak, with the pew ends hand carved by Austin's famous wood carver, Peter Mansbendel. The overall effect is a delightful synthesis of the ancient with the modern."

I have wondered about those pew end carvings for many years. What do they mean? Who was the carver? Why is it that so few of our members are even aware that those carvings exist?

I began to look for an answer to those and other questions several years ago. Research in the pertinent church records and The Austin History Center, and interviews with descendants of the founding members of First English all yielded helpful information about the people involved and the reason for the carvings.

The answer is a love story.

Peter Mansbendel was born in Switzerland and learned his wood carving skills there. He moved to New York in 1910, where he was winning increasing recognition and success. There he met Miss Clothilde Shipe of Austin, Texas, who was visiting New York. He deserted New York and followed her to Austin, where they married in 1914. They spent the rest of their lives there.

Peter was a music lover. He soon became acquainted with Prof. C. Klaerner, a highly respected Austin music teacher. Their friendship grew through

the years. Both were active members of the Saenger-runde, the famous and still-existing German singing society of Austin. Theirs was a friendship blessed by God.

C. Klaerner ("C" was for "Christian", which Klaerner never used as his given name) was a founding member of the First English Evangelical Lutheran Church in Austin. The congregation was chartered by the State of Texas on July 23, 1936. As the church grew, on August 6, 1937 they decided to build a new church building. Arthur Fehr, an Austin architect, was engaged as the architect. Ground was broken for the new building on January 22, 1939.

From the time when Prof. C. Klaerner told him of the plans for the new church building, Peter Mansbendel had a strong desire to make a contribution to the church in honor of his dear friend. The best contribution – and one that only he could make – was his talent as a wood carver. He chose to carve a distinctive, hand colored emblem on the end of each pew in the new church building.

When the new pews were delivered to the church, volunteers from the congregation took the pew ends, one at a time, to Peter's studio. There, Peter hand carved and hand colored each of the thirty-eight carvings. The carved pew ends were returned to the building and installed, as a permanent tribute to First English and the enduring friendship of the two men. The new church was completed, and dedicated on September 24, 1939. I like to think of that day as a sacred moment – a celebration of love and friendship:

*When the morning stars sang together and all  
the sons of God shouted for joy*

Job 37:8

Yes, the story of the pew end carvings is indeed a love story – the love of a man for a woman, the spiritual love of a man for a man – and for all of them, their love of God. Each of us should cherish and remember this story, as we admire with wonder these beautiful carvings.



## THE PEW END CARVINGS

### Other Mansbendel Carvings

In addition to the pew end carvings described in this booklet,  
Peter Mansbendel carved the identical emblems  
on the front of the Lectern and the Pulpit in the Sanctuary,  
as well as those on the Hymn Boards.

All were built by Professor Klaerner's son,  
who was a cabinetmaker at Calcasieu Lumber Company in Austin.  
Mr. Mansbendel also carved the bas-relief emblems  
which were affixed to the face of the Altar.

### A Note on the Meaning of Symbols

Despite the extensive research to establish the meanings of the many symbols incorporated into the pew end carvings, some defied explanation. We have identified those symbols, which in our opinion are the result of Peter Mansbendel's own creative artistry as he made the carvings, as "A Peter Mansbendel Symbol".

In addition, many of the unidentified important symbols are of roses or rosettes. F. R. Webber, in his authoritative book, *Church Symbolism: An explanation of the more important symbols of the Old and New Testament, the primitive, the medieval, and the modern*, Second Edition Rev., Cleveland, 1938, notes that the depiction of a rose symbol is a reference to Isaiah 35:1, and refers to the promise that the desert shall bloom as a rose at the coming of the kingdom of righteousness. We have identified those carvings as "Rosette: Isaiah 35:1".

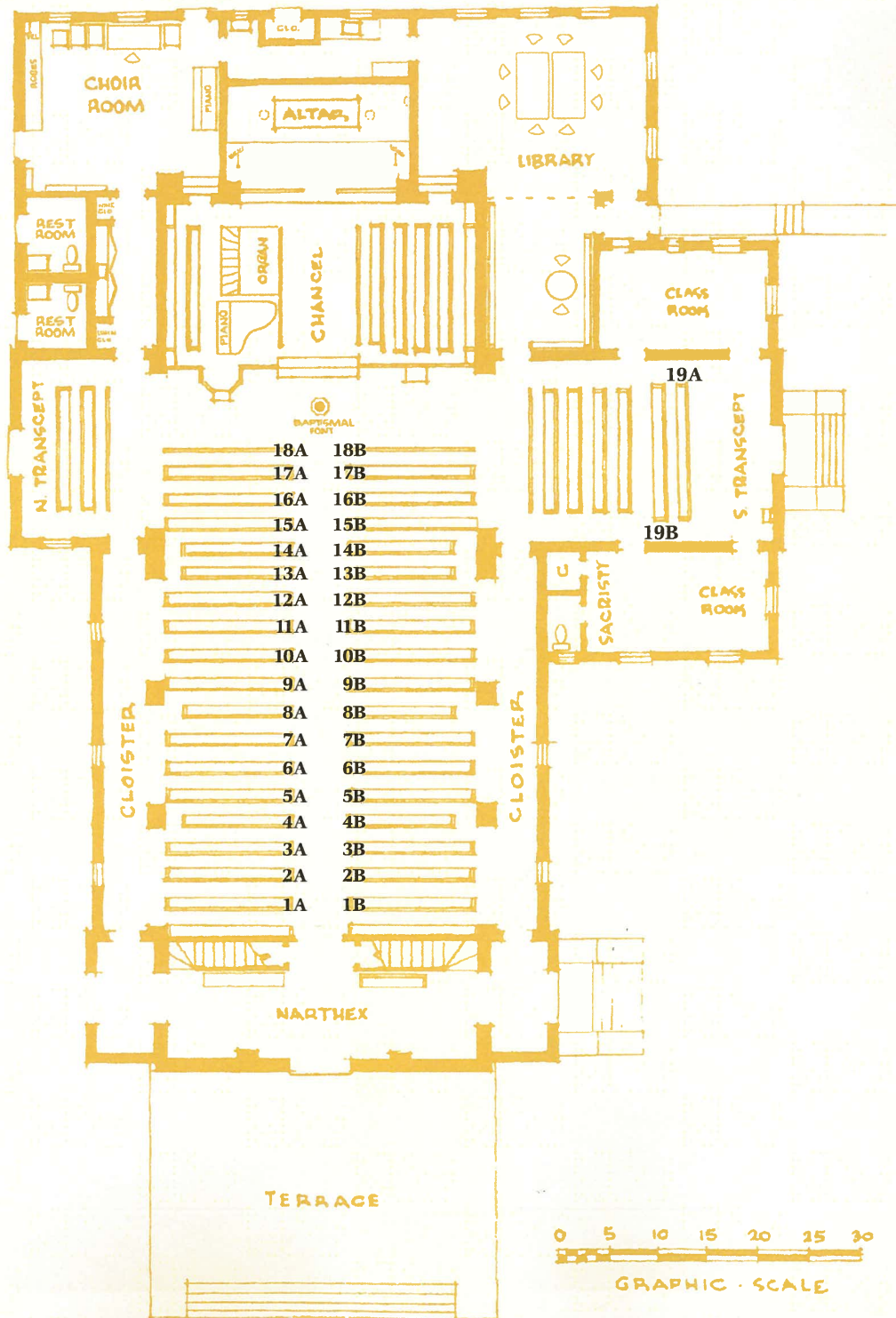
The meaning of the Standing Lamb symbol in carving No. 18A should be expanded to note that the seven tabs below the platform on which the lamb stands represent a book with seven seals, a reference to Revelations 5:1.

On carving No. 12B, the scallop shell has two meanings. The first is noted in the caption. The second meaning incorporates a reference to James, The Apostle, and the scallop shell represents a pilgrimage.

Carving No. 14B has the Latin inscription "I H S". The preferred initials, according to Webber, are "I H C", an abbreviation of the Greek word for "Jesus". In fact, all reference books look on "I H S" with disfavor, preferring "I H C" as the proper initials to use. Peter Mansbendel's choice of the Latin rather than the Greek initials shall remain a mystery.



# LEGEND





## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



A Peter Mansbendel  
symbol



A Peter Mansbendel  
symbol



The Crown of Thorns –  
the suffering of Jesus;  
the Crucifixion



The Cross



## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



A Peter Mansbendel  
symbol



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Menorah – the seven-  
branch candelabrum:  
Symbol of Old  
Testament Worship



The Torah – the first  
five books of the  
Hebrew Scripture





## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



The Daisy – symbol  
of the innocence of  
the Christ Child



A Peter Mansbendel  
symbol



Creator's Star – a symbol  
of Creation



Tribute to First English  
Evang. Lutheran Church  
and C. Klaerner

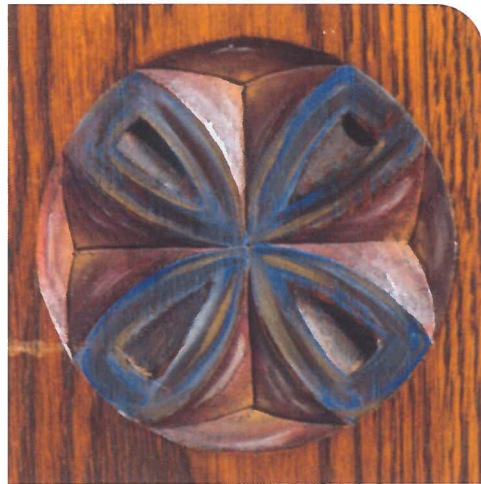




## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



The Ten Commandments



The Anchor – a symbol of Jesus, the anchor of the soul





## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Sheave of Grain –  
The body of Christ  
in Communion



Grapes – The blood of  
Christ in Communion





## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Luther's Rose



Scallop Shell – the  
Baptism of Jesus by  
John the Baptist





## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



The Daisy – symbol of the innocence of the Christ Child



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Oak Leaves – strength.  
Acorn – latent greatness



IHS – Iesus Hominum  
Salvator: Jesus, Saviour  
of Mankind





## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Five petal "Mystic"  
Rose – Mary the  
Mother of Jesus



Tribute to Arthur Fehr,  
architect of the Church  
Building



Hand – the hand of God

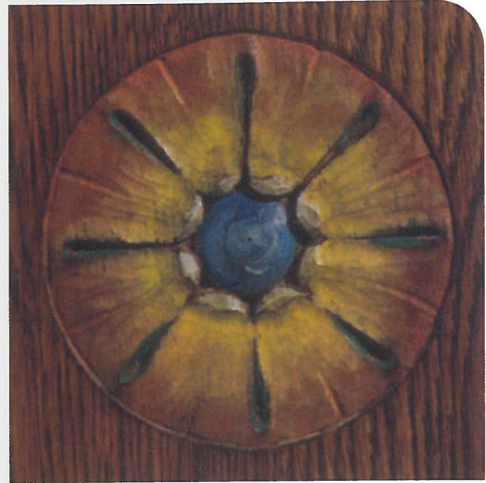




## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



Eight-point Star –  
Man's Regeneration



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Standing Lamb –  
a symbol of John  
the Baptist



XP – Chi Rho, an  
abbreviation of  
"Christ" in Greek





## MEANINGS OF THE PEW END CARVING SYMBOLS



Rosette: Isaiah 35:1



Bursting Pomegranate –  
symbol of the  
Resurrection

**Note:** The two pew end carvings pictured here, No. 19A and 19B, are on two pews that were originally located immediately in front of the Sacristy. The pews had to be moved to this temporary location in the South Transept due to a termite problem at the front part of the Nave. The final location of the two pews is still to be determined. Wherever they go, the carvings will continue to exist and be available for viewing, as a part of the treasured architectural tradition of our church.





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