

Article from the Trenton Times

Pilot's spirit lives on in wood

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By **ANDREW MICHAEL ROMANO**

PRINCETON BOROUGH - Princeton Trinity Church's new credence table is more than a place for the bread and wine of communion, it is a memorial to Ed States, captain of ill-fated American Airlines Flight 587, and a testament to the strength and love of a community.

"He was loved by many and respected by all," said his widow, Mary Alden, at yesterday's dedication ceremony for the table. "The credence table is a perfect example of what Ed was all about," Alden said.

The table is a fitting tribute to the longtime Plainsboro resident and loyal member of Trinity.

States was a pilot by trade but a carpenter by hobby. An American Airlines pilot for 16 years and captain for a decade, States spent his time between flights designing and building furniture for his family and church.

"He loved working with wood," said Alden, "and I am so happy he took on the challenge of making some of our furniture as a learning and growing experience for himself. I know he would have been proud if he had been able to see such a beautiful piece of work."

Credit for the woodwork goes to Stan and Eric Saperstein, father-and-son craftsmen from Pennington. The hand-carved credence table, which faithfully reflects Trinity's Gothic architecture in an original design, received special attention from the two "Artisans of the Valley."

"As soon as it becomes a memorial it's something different," said Eric Saperstein. "And when we found out Captain States was a woodworker, we knew we were working in the name of a fellow craftsman. What is delivered, then, is what we call a portfolio piece - it's of the best quality we can produce. It goes beyond what we are paid to do, and it becomes a work of art."

A little bit of serendipity brought the Sapersteins and Trinity together. On the same day in early January 2002 that The Times of Trenton featured Stan and Eric in an article headlined "Carving a Niche," Trinity congregation member Grant Fraser was thinking of ways the church could memorialize his old friend, Ed States.

"I had been thinking about Ed for a while," said Fraser. "He was an amateur carpenter and he built two pieces of furniture for the church. We had actually been debating over how we were going to give him credit for the nametag boards he had built. But before we decided, the plane crashed."

That day, Fraser also happened to read a church newsletter announcing projects for the new year. High on the list: a new credence table.

"We knew we had to replace the existing credence table - it was too big and heavy and out of character," he said. "I thought: We could get Stan and Eric to do the engraving for the nametag board, and then they could build the new table. It would be a great memorial to Ed, who was a carpenter by hobby, and a perfect way to express our feelings for the States family - to memorialize him in the church on the anniversary of the crash, with a little carpentry."

In his online documentary of the building process, Eric Saperstein reminds churchgoers that the credence table was made in States' memory, and urges them to remember his life each time they see it.

"Please remember, this table is a memorial," he writes on ArtisansoftheValley.com.

"We hope each of you that knew Captain States remember him when you take communion, enabling his name and dedication to his family and church to live on in this work of art for many generations to come."

The future is also on Mary Alden's mind. It's a future her sons, Bradley, 11, and Daniel, 9, will have to live without their father - Cub Scout leader, Little League coach, and Sunday school teacher. But it's a future full of hope.

"I know that now one year has passed and it will still be a challenge," she said yesterday, her voice steady and resolute. "But I hope this year will bring us a little more peace and joy than the one before."

"I am glad this credence table will be here always for our boys to remember," she continued, "and I hope one day they will bring their children here, too."