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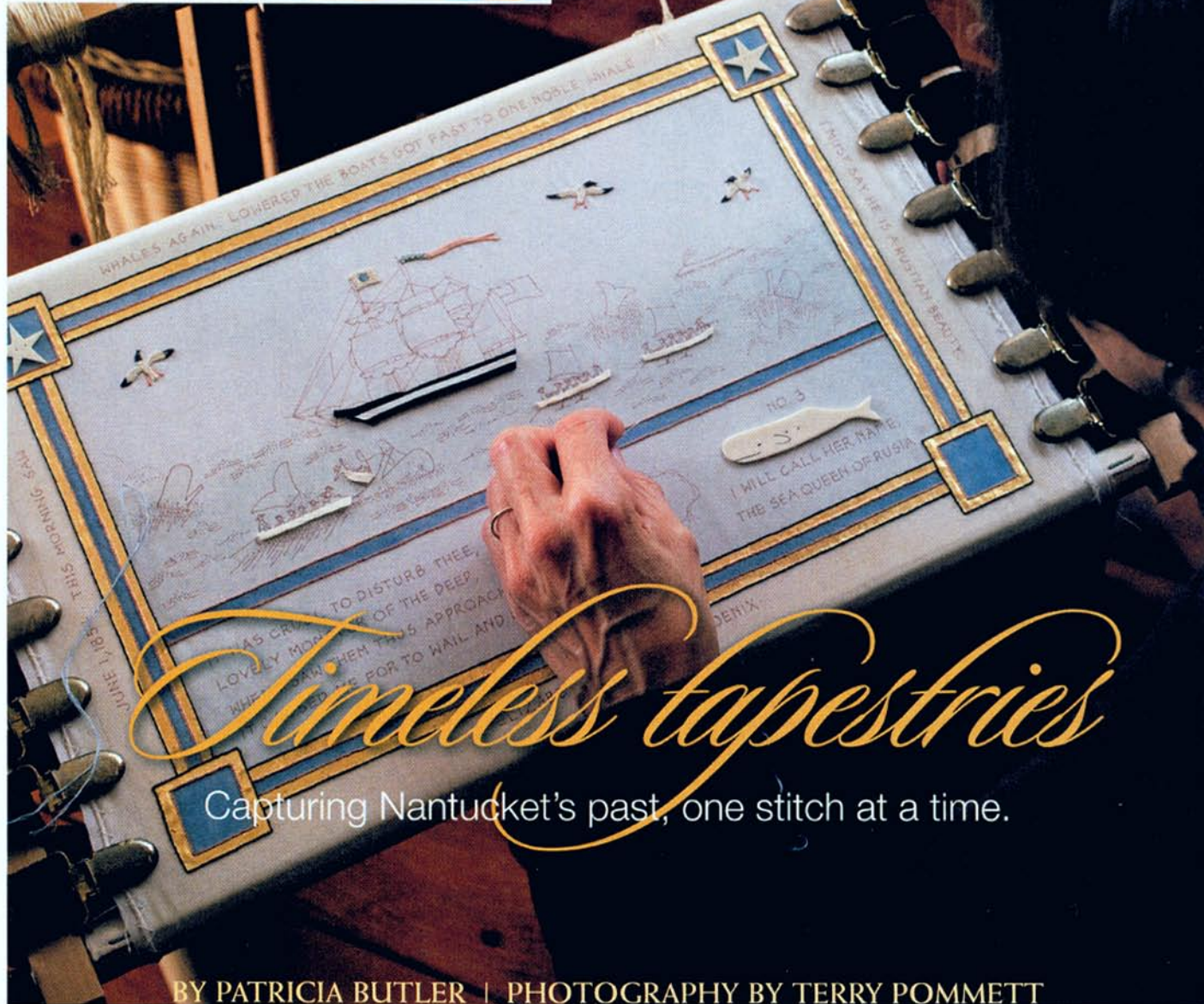
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Timeless Tapestries

Capturing Nantucket's past, one stitch at a time.

BY PATRICIA BUTLER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY POMMETT

A SMALL WOOD-FRAMED PIECE HANGING IN THE FRONT HALL OF A HISTORIC HOUSE ON NANTUCKET'S QUINCE

Street is a captivating introduction to Susan Boardman's artistry. The embroidered narrative is dedicated to Nantucket's celebrated astronomer Maria Mitchell, and its design evokes medieval tapestries and illuminated manuscripts. But the intricate piece also captures the true colors of Nantucket's sky and sea as well as the island's architecture.

Conceptually rich themes and exceptional technique come together in Susan Boardman's unique embroidered creations. The highly sought-after and admired works reflect the artist's interest in noteworthy Nantucket women, past and present, and their contributions to the island. In addition to her business creating embroidered narratives for private patrons, Boardman is a deeply committed board member of the Nantucket Preservation Trust and the Nantucket Atheneum. She has donated her work to fund-raising efforts, resulting in significant resources for those organizations and for the Nantucket Historical Association.

Ten years ago Boardman was inspired to create her first Nantucket narrative after studying and transcribing the detailed logbook kept by Susan Veeder, wife of Nantucket whale ship captain Charles A. Veeder. Susan accompanied her husband on his ship *Nauticon* between 1848 and 1853. Her written observations were illustrated with primitive, vibrant watercolors that captured the journey in depth—its common and uncommon sights, sounds, joys, and sorrows, including the death of her 15-month-old daughter.

Boardman begins each embroidered story after contemplating the particular subject matter and sketching a design, sometimes several times, in her journal. When the final arrangement is determined, she paints a background color on white cotton muslin. The artist, whose great-grandfather was a Swiss embroiderer, uses



In her home studio on the island, Susan Boardman, opposite, embroiders historic Nantucket themes into one-of-a-kind works of art like those above.

three basic stitches—the split-stitch, buttonhole lace stitch, and the French knot—all worked in French cotton floss that can be separated for textural effect and color variation. The embroidery is embellished with glittering beads, gold leaf, appliqué, and scrimshaw carvings, and then it is quilted to create texture and linear interest. Each individual piece can take four to six weeks from start to finish.

Boardman, who began learning needlework skills when she was five, works in a serene home studio that reflects her quiet nature. In 1989, she and husband Bill, a lawyer, collector of marine art, and enthusiastic host for the Nantucket Wine Festival, bought the Benjamin Barney house, which was built in 1765. Out of necessity, the Boardmans undertook a two-year restoration, capitalizing on a previous Federal-style renovation that had made the house more open and spacious. Antiques, art, and furnishings appoint the elegant, deep-hued front parlors, and a Kevin Paulsen mural graces the lovely central hallway. Boardman's studio is on the second floor in the back of the house, in a less formal, two-story ell.

Natural light from south and west-facing windows floods the studio. A kind of Nantucket-Quaker-style aesthetic prevails, with polished wood floors gleaming beneath a simple sewing table. An arm's-length away is a practical, handsome cupboard crafted by the late Steven Swift, Nantucket carpenter and furniture maker, its drawers filled with sewing paraphernalia. On top of the cupboard, works-in-progress and completed work share carefully arranged space with inspirational objects—shells, photographs, paintings, and drawings. A comfortable armchair between the two win-

dows provides an alternative place to work with a portable sewing stand. A Nantucket basket woven by the artist holds essential implements on the worktable.

After graduating from the University of Massachusetts, Boardman took an extension course at Nantucket's School of Needlework, and then went on to complete a master's degree in Education at Simmons College. She received an Advanced Professional Study Certificate from Pine Manor College's American Institute of Textile Arts, where she was a member of the faculty. In the 1970s, when Susan was teaching a graduate course at Simmons, she enrolled in famed needlework artist Erica Wilson's week-long summer embroidery seminar on Nantucket.

Boardman's portfolio celebrating Nantucket's history grows each year. The Nantucket Historical Association (NHA) has presented two exhibits of her work at the Fair Street Whitney Gallery, in 2002 and 2006, each featuring nine historic and/or contemporary "Notable Women." A major exhibit of her work, "An Island of Women," with 27 embroidered narratives is planned for June through December, 2010. The exhibit will be held in conjunction with the much-anticipated opening of "Greater Light" on Howard Street, an NHA property under restoration.

Visit the Nantucket Historical Association's Web site, www.nha.org, to view a digital version of the "Notable Women" exhibits and for more information about Susan Veeder, including the complete text from her logbook on the Nauticon. 🗨

Patricia Butler is a coauthor of *Sea Captains' Houses and Rose-Covered Cottages: the Architectural Heritage of Nantucket Island*.