

## **Across Oceans, Across Time® ...**

### **Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...**



One of the traditional features of Danish churches is the presence of ships' models hanging from the ceiling along the center aisle in the nave, the ship-like main part of the church building. Often donated or presented to the church on special occasions, these models have been interpreted in different ways throughout the centuries. A seafaring nation, some ships commemorate loved ones lost to the waves; others celebrate a safe return from a voyage or a lifetime at sea. The ships also signify the role of the church as a refuge from life's storms. As Danish immigrants spread throughout North America and founded Lutheran congregations in their new homes, they often carried this tradition with them, and ships may still be found in many of these churches. Most are modeled on 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century sailing ships. The above ship, carved by St. Louis artist Bonnie Rasmussen, is modeled on a ship from an earlier era - the early days of Christianity when small Viking cargo ships traveled between the coastal communities of the Danish islands. The meter-long ship was dedicated at Bethany Lutheran Church in Webster Grove, Missouri, on the occasion of the congregation's 105<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2002. The congregation and artist mutually decided that the benign history and graceful shape of this type of vessel made it ideal as a representation of peace and communication between peoples, ideals actively espoused by the Webster Grove congregation during its history. The materials used to create the ship, the artist's first attempt at making a model, are identical or close to those originally used over 1000 years ago.

Do you have a photograph of the ship hanging in your church? If so, the Family History & Genealogy Center would like to have a copy and description of its history for an upcoming display. They can be sent to Michele McNabb at the FHGC.