Academy of the Sacred Heart

4521 St. Charles Avenue

In 2018 the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Heart completed two centuries of teaching in Louisiana. Before developing the landmark campus on St. Charles Avenue, they had organized schools in the French Quarter, upriver in Convent, and in Grand Coteau. The last, founded in 1821, still functions.

In 1886 the sisters received permission to buy two squares on St. Charles Avenue, as increasing numbers of affluent families Uptown were searching for appropriate education for their daughters. The new school, designed by Diboll and Owen, was dedicated in 1900. Only six years later, two wings were added to the front of the building. One of these houses the delicately vaulted neo-Gothic chapel.

During the past century, the chapel has seen several renovations. Originally, an elaborate marble altar and railing, niches with bronzed angels, and side altars with polychrome plaster statues carried out the Gothic theme. In 1914 additional Gothic embellishments, including nuns choir stalls topped with carved tracery, were added. Changes in the 1940s and 1960s introduced an uncluttered look; statuary was sold or given away, and carpet covered the floor. Beginning in 1979, modifications hearken back to the original appearance of the chapel. The original altar rail was redesigned as the altar, and the oak floors have been restored.

The windows, also designed by Diboll and Owens, have remained unchanged throughout all the design fluctuations. At the front doors the flowing art nouveau windows greeting us were a gift of Darcantel & Diassellis, the contractor, in 1900. Above the doors is a transom window with SC,for Sacré Coeur.

Two walls of amber-colored glass line the chapel. This hand-blown antique glass, with its uneven texture, conveys a feeling of tradition and warmth. A simple rose window of delicately tinted glass in the choir loft complements the Gothic architecture.

*The school has now incorporated the former First Baptist Church into its campus. That building is described separately.*

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