Christ Episcopal Church

4805 Louisiana Highway 1, Napoleonville

It is easy to miss it, a small Louisiana brick Gothic Church nestled in a grove of majestic trees off Louisiana Highway 1. But if you spy it, you want to turn around and get a closer look. Without a guide, all you can enjoy is the exterior of the church and the charming cemetery but when you get inside you know you have stepped back in time to the days of the small plantation churches that dotted this part of Louisiana.

The earliest service for this parish was celebrated by Leonidas Polk, the first Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana, in 1843. The parish offered a rare place of worship for Protestants in a Catholic region. Ten years later he organized the parish under circumstances of great encouragement. Preparations were made to build such a church as will be in some measure appropriate for one of the wealthiest communities in the State to present as an offering to God. The plans of the church were drawn by an eminent New York architect, Frank Wills, who promised an exceedingly beautiful church of the Gothic style. His fee was $120. Within one year the parish raised the $9,500 cost, built the church with modifications of the specifications to incorporate local brick and cypress wood, and held the consecration service.

The Civil War years were difficult for this small congregation. The building was used first to house Northern troops from Ohio and Indiana, and later it became a stable. When the parishioners returned after the war, they found the windows badly damaged from rifle shot and the furnishings ruined. Post-war years held promise as well as hardship, and restoration of the interior, dedication of new windows, purchase of decorative appointments and plaques were accomplished. Nature, however, was not always kind. Churches constructed on the boundaries of sugar cane fields were frequent victims of lightning and flooding, and Christ Church was no exception.

A new belfry was built in 1896, and periodic renovations to the church continued until 1906. The adjacent parish house, formerly a lunch room for a neighboring school, was moved to the church grounds in 1957. Half of the original building was sold to pay for the move.

The date and maker of the stained glass windows are unknown.

Christ Episcopal’s pipe organ is one of the oldest in the state. A small instrument with only one manual, it was built by Geo. Jardine & Sons of New York around 1870. Its history is somewhat confused, and some accounts give it a much earlier date. Probably the Napoleonville church purchased the organ for one dollar from Trinity Episcopal Church in New Orleans in 1889, and William Pilcher of New Orleans served as installer in Napoleonville.

The last long-term rector served for 1887 to 1906. After that with the frequent turnover in clergy, there were periods when the rector of St. John, Thibodaux, served Christ Church. This pattern became more frequent and Christ Church, Napoleonville ceased to function as a congregation in 1987. The building is used for weddings and special services. At the time of the tour, four or five families lovingly maintained the building; most were descendants of the founders. Friends of Christ Church provide financial support.

*by Harriet Murrell*

**Windows**

Reredos

Large window with three lancets of Christian symbols, including the four Gospel writer, the two major sacraments, and the sacrificial Lamb

On each side of the chancel, a small diamond panel with IHS in the center diamond

Nave

St. Andrew St. Paul receiving the revelation of the Lord

King David Unidentified saint with lamb and book

Jesus in the Garden Baptism of Cornelius the centurian

Diamond panes St. Cecilia

Belfry

Jesus with the children Jesus being adored by a child

*Visited Spring 2005*

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