Historic St. James A. M. E. Church

222 North Roman Street

The oldest African Methodist Episcopal church in the Deep South, St. James Church has a long, proud history. In recognition of its importance, the National Register of Historic Places added the church to its prestigious list in 1982.

The parish was organized by blacks in 1844, in response to the decision in their integrated church that they must sit in the balcony. The Masons were active in the creation of the church, and the Prince Hall Masons of Louisiana were organized here.

Reflecting the growing racial tensions in Louisiana and the nation, the state licensed the church four years later for free blacks only. Furthermore, the license stipulated, St. James Church could be open only during daylight hours. Police closed the church in 18581862 because of its abolitionist policies.

During the Civil War, members of the Louisiana Native Guards (black Union soldiers) used St. James Church as their headquarters. Political involvement continued during Reconstruction, and Lt. Governor Oscar J. Dunn and Governor P. B. S. Pinchback were members of the parish.

Construction for the building began in 1848, with much of the labor donated by members. Post-Katrina renovations revealed that fireplaces had been set into one wall. The building was dedicated in 1851, the same year as St. Louis Cathedral.

Like all historic churches, it has seen periodic renovations. Because modernizations around 1891, including the addition of the pastel windows, were financed in part by the Masonic organization, the window dedications identify many donors as members of fraternal organizations. These windows feature cheerful flowers in pastel opalescent glass with faceted jewels in the upper sections.

In 1903 the congregation hired the Orleans architects Diboll and Owens to carry out further renovations. The pressed tin ceiling, arch in front, steeple and four spires, pews, and some of the windows date to this renovation.

Following Hurricane Katrina, the church received funds from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express to rebuild from the storm and a century of aging. Additional repairs are ongoing, and repairs by Attenhofer Stained Glass were completed just before the tour.

In addition, St. James Church has been helping revive its historic neighborhood by renovating homes. Do notice the well-maintained residential buildings in this area, which adjoins the new medical district.

*Reverend Otto Duncan, pastor of the church, contributed a wealth of information.*

**Windows**

African Methodist Episcopal crosses

Altar

Class No 3, Magnolia Lodge No. 1990

Ed Thompson, Leader G. U. O. of O. F.

P. G. M., Queen Esther No. 4, C. P. of H.

G. U. O. of O. F. (Order of the Eastern Star)

G. A. R. Eureka Grand Lodge

E. A. Williams, M. W. G. M., F. A. M.

James & Charles Vance Miss I. M. I.

Knights of Pythias Old Daughters of St. James

Pride of Louisiana Friends of St. James A.M.E. Church

Lodge, 2 K of T, Order of 12

[Odd Fellows]

Abbreviations

*C. P. of H.:* ??

*F. A. M.:* Free and Accepted Masonry

*G.A.R.:* Grand Army of the Republic

*G. U. O. of O. F.:* Grand United Order of Odd Fellows

*M. W.. G. M.:* Most Worshipful Grand Master

*P. G. M.:* Past Grand Masters

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