Holy Trinity Catholic Church

St. Ferdinand and Dauphine Streets

Holy Trinity Church bore witness to the settlement of German Catholic immigrants downstream from the French Quarter. At first they worshiped at St. Vincent de Paul Church, where French was the principal language. Led by Father J. M. Masquelet, the same priest who had organized the creation of St. Marys Assumption Church for Germans upstream from Canal Street, Holy Trinity Parish was founded in 1847 and built its first church on this site the next year. That church, however, was destroyed in a fire four years later. A handsome plastered brick structure, with paired towers, was erected in 1853 under the direction of architect T. E. Giraud.

Like all German churches in New Orleans, Holy Trinity saw a decline in the popularity of spoken German in the late nineteenth century. It was banned entirely during World War I, and thereafter was used only on high-feast days.

Former parishioners spoke fondly of the murals that covered the upper walls and the ceiling of the church. These were painted in 1873 by Erasmus Humbrecht (ca. 18491893), an immigrant from Alsace-Lorraine. After studying the Old Masters in Switzerland, he painted murals in numerous churches in the Mississippi Valley, including St. Louis Cathedral, the Ursuline Convent, and Ss. Peter and Paul Church (also in the Faubourg Marigny). In 1965 Hurricane Betsy damaged the roof and walls of Holy Trinity Church, and renovators painted over the murals.

A massive altar of dark wood carved in Gothic style and highlighted in gold dominated the apse. The matching side altar on the right included statues portraying the death of St. Joseph, accompanied by Mary and Jesus, and a statue of St. Roch. (Reverend P. L. Thevis was pastor at Holy Trinity Church when he founded the cemetery and chapel of St. Roch in gratitude for the rescue of his parish from a yellow fever epidemic.) The Sorrowful Mother Altar on the left was painted in more feminine colors. Carvings of the Stations of the Cross surrounded the Pietà; during Holy Week the side doors closed, hiding six of the Stations.

The pulpit was crafted around 1910 by Mr. Tellers, a master carpenter of church furniture who had been convinced to immigrate to the United States by a priest at Holy Trinity Church. He and his family then moved to Erie, Pennsylvania, where they became partners in the company that built the organ for this church, among others.

Although this congregation was German and although German-made stained glass was enormously popular throughout New Orleans, the main windows in this church were French. The large lancet windows, with Old Testament figures on the left wall and saints on the right, incorporated intense coloration and exquisite detailing, seen particularly in the faces and in the draping of clothing. Lengthy biographies of the subjects in these windows can be found in the description of Ascension of Our Lord Church in LaPlace.

These windows were signed Charles des Granges, Clermont, France. Their installation probably coincided with the 1873 addition of the murals, new altars, and a new organ. (Jean Farnsworths 1990 article, The Stained Glass of New Orleans, in the *Stained Glass Quarterly* points out that windows signed by des Granges are limited to the 1870s.)

The nonfigurative glass panels at the bottom were hinged to improve the circulation of air for churchgoers. These lower panes are of American-made opalescent glass, a technique of glass production fashionable in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the dates for these windows are unknown.

Lining the clerestory are twelve circular glass windows. Trefoils, symbols of the Trinity, alternate with panels showing a cross surrounded by stylized floral patterns. These windows fill the interior of the church with light and create an inviting atmosphere in which to worship and to study the artistic treasures of Holy Trinity Church.

The last organ, which was either the second or third in the history of the church, dated to 1912. The Tellers-Sommerhof firm of Erie, Pennsylvania, manufactured the instrument, and a 1913 notice of a grand progressive euchre and lotto party to raise funds for the organ observed that it was the delight of the parishioners. The organ was updated in 1934, but by 1972 it had aged to the point of being unplayable. After 1987, the New Orleans chapter of the Organ Historical Society dedicated many hours to restoring the organ to playing condition.

The church closed and was deconsecrated in 1997. Its furnishings have been shared with other churches or are in storage, and the stained glass portrait windows can be seen at Ascension of Our Lord Church in La Place. The clerestory windows remained in place. This beloved building, after much work to reverse the effects of age and termites, is now used as venue for the performing arts..

**Windows** **of Holy Trinity Church**

*Note: Names in italics refer to the small*

*medallions above the portrait windows.*

Altars

Zacharias St. Athanasius

*Ark of the Covenant* *Cross, shepherds crook,*

*Bible, banner*

JudasMaccabeus St. Basilius

Daniel St. Gregorius of N[yssa]

*Lilies*  *Rosary, lilies,*

*tasseled staff*

Ezekiel St. J[ohn] Chrisostomus

Jeremias St. Jeronimus [Jerome]

Transept Transept

Isaiah St. Gregorius

Elias [Elijah] St. Augustinus

*Eagle* *(St. John)*  *Monstrance*

Eliseus [Elisha] St. Ambrose

Aaron St. Benedictus

*Agnus Dei*  *Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Moses St. Thomas Aquinas

David St. Albertus

*Torah and cover*  *Dove*

Samuel [King] Wenzeslaus

Abraham St. Bernardus

*Mans head surrounded by wings*

*(St. Matthew)*

Enoch Btus [Blessed] Thomas

Narthex

Lamb Monstrance Crown

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