Mount Olivet Episcopal Church

630 Pelican Avenue, Algiers

Mt. Olivet Church holds the record as the oldest church building in continuous service on the West Bank. Worship began in 1846 at the Hughes Hotel, though the congregation did not formally organize until two years later.

Dedicated in 1854, this building is crafted completely of cypress and has withstood two fires and numerous hurricanes. The sturdy Country Gothic style reflects the architectural preferences of the mid-nineteenth century. Originally the entrance faced Olivier Street, and box pews were arranged so that congregation members sat facing each other, much as in many New England churches.

At the time of construction, Leonidas Polk was bishop of Louisiana, before his career as a Confederate major-general, and during the war soldiers from both sides took communion at Mt. Olivet Church.

Early on, a racetrack stood across the street from Mt. Olivet Church, to the dismay of lady parishioners. In 1861 the track was closed, as the horses were needed for General Lees army. The following year the Union General Spoons Butler captured Algiers and closed the church because its rector was a Confederate officer who insisted on praying for Jefferson Davis.

The church reopened after the war, services resumed, the congregation flourished, and it became evident that larger quarters were needed. In 1894 a splendid brick church, large enough to accommodate three hundred people, was dedicated on adjacent land, while this building was desanctified to become the parish hall.

Because of structural problems, the brick building had to be demolished in 1961 and, once again--after considerable strengthening of the foundations--this simple wooden structure became the parish church. Whenever possible, furnishings and decorations from the brick church were incorporated into the smaller oneamong them the altar and reredos behind it, the pulpit and lectern, and the paintings on the walls.

The three stained glass windows with figurative designs, near the entrance, also come from the brick church. Representing scenes from the life of Christ--the Nativity, the Crucifixion, and the Ascension--they were designed by the Jacoby Art Glass Company of St. Louis (restoration work in 2021 by the Attenhofer Studio revealed the signature). As it did for many imported windows, the A. Henry Lips Company of New Orleans installed them. These are exceptionally handsome windows, and the design focuses on the central figure of Christ as a source of light for the entire panel.

A fourth window (a memorial to a former pastor) was recently installed above the front door. Like the other three windows, it dates to the construction of the brick church and was designed by the Chicago-based firm of Messrs. George E. Androvette and Company but were crafted by a skilled atelier in Munich, Germany. This round window depicts St. John the Divine recording the Book of Revelations while his symbol, the eagle, flies above. A church bulletin in 1894 describes it as remarkable for its simplicity, yet richness and churchliness.

*Visited*

*April 14, 1991*

*May 21, 2006*

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Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, 2021.