Poor Clare Monastery

720 Henry Clay Avenue

The monastery of the Order of Saint Clare, better known as the Poor Clares, is home to a contemplative order of nuns founded by St. Clare and St. Francis of Assisi. Once a part of the Boré Plantation, this property was purchased in 1891. The chapel dates to December 26, 1912. To design and oversee the construction of this beautiful monastery, the sisters relied on Brother Leonard Darshied, a Capuchin (Franciscan) brother. An extensive correspondence from Brother Leonard documents his instructions and the decisions about the building

The altars and wooden furnishings of the extern (public) chapel were made in Cleveland, while the statues, Stations of the Cross, and crucifix came from the Daprato Studio of Chicago, which has created religious art since 1860.

Brother Leonards correspondence made no mention of stained glass windows, but Stephen Frei, of the St. Louis studio of Emil Frei, forwarded a copy of the 1913 receipt for the glass: 38 windows for $1,368. While glass from the Frei studio is found in many New Orleansarea churches, these are among the earliest examples of Frei work here.

The windows feature lovely portraits of five Second Order Franciscans (nuns who have taken vows), five First Order Franciscans (friars who have taken vows), and two Third Order Franciscans (lay members; here, St. Margaret of Cortona and St. Paschal Baylon). Very few of these saints are shown in stained glass elsewhere in New Orleans. Each saint is depicted with a symbol of his or her attributes.

The portraits occupy only the central part of the windows, while graceful floral and geometric patterns surrounding the saints allow gentle light to brighten the small chapel.

A highly unusual window, moved from the house that stood on the property in 1891, is found in a door to the nuns chapel. It was made by the studio of Henry Belcher, who invented a method to build mosaic windows using tiny pieces of glass without compromising the strength of the window and without blocking much light (as traditional metal cames would have). A molten lead alloy poured between the glass fragments bonded the tiles, somewhat presaging the creation of *dalle de verre* windows, which use a concrete or Epoxy matrix. Production began around 1884 and continued less than ten years. Because the matrix included lead, those who made these windows were in a high-risk occupation.

**Windows**

(Within parentheses: Symbol or attribute of the saint)

Left side, facing altar

St. Clare of Assisi (Ciborium with Eucharist)

St. Agnes of Assisi (Child Jesus with orb)

St. Colette of Corbie (cross)

St Catherine of Bologna (Infant Christ)

St. Veronica Giuliani (her stigmata & a crown of thorns)

Margaret of Cortona (cross, spear, lance with vinegar-soaked sponge)

Right side, facing altar

St. Francis of Assisi (stigmata on his hands)

St. Bonaventure (manuscript and quill)

St. Bernardino of Siena (abbreviation IHS)

St. Paschal Baylon (adoration of the Sacred Host)

St. Peter of Alcantara (cross and skull)

St. Leonard of Port Maurice (dove and Scripture)

Rose window: St. Michael the Archangel

Transoms: (L) Monstrance & Host (R) Lamp & Book

*Visited*

*April 1992*

*October 2012*

See also: *Chapel, Saint Clare Monastery.* 1992. New Orleans: [St. Clare] Monastery Print Shop

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