Rayne Memorial Methodist Church

3900 St. Charles Avenue

Dating to 1875, the brick exterior of Rayne Memorial Church, with its neo-Gothic arches and tall spire, has never been altered. The interior retains much of its original appearance despite extensions and renovations over the years. Charles Lewis Hillger was the architect and James Cox the builder. The original altar was not recessed, and light came from a circular chandelier with tiny gas jets. A mirror above it reflected the light downward. The windows of blue glass did little to lighten the interior.

The church, first called the St. Charles Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was conceived and partially financed by the Reverend Robert Walker Rayne, a lay minister and a successful merchant who also donated the land. Upon completion, the church had no congregation, as Methodists were rather scarce in New Orleans. In 1876, groups from three small churches (Cadiz Street Church, Felicity Church, and Carondelet Church) joined as charter members, and descendants of these members attend Rayne today. The name of the church changed probably in 1879, with Raynes death, when title to the property passed from the Rayne family to the trustees of the church.

The current stained glass memorial windows were installed after the infamous Hurricane of 1915, which seriously damaged the roof and interior. At that time the pulpit and organ loft were set back, modern indirect lighting replaced the old gas fixtures, and central heat was added.

The central portions of the windows were imported from Germany and were made by the Emil Frei Company, which then maintained studios in both St. Louis, Missouri, and Munich, Germany. The figures, depicting scenes from the life and teachings of Christ, are of antique glass and are framed by opalescent glass added in New Orleans by members of the A. Henry Lips family. Notes from the Frei studio say that they restored and replaced original stained glass windows in 19551961, but which windows were included is not known. Emil Hofmann of the Frei Munich studio served as the artist both for the original windows and the later repairs.

The focal point of the sanctuary is the dramatic interpretation of the Ascension of Christ. In a striking red robe, he gracefully floats upward in a diagonal path, rather than straight up as at most churches.

The Hannah Chapel next door was built in 1968. Brick was found to match the sanctuary exterior, and the windows, again by the Frei Company assisted by Henry Lips of New Orleans, use the modern slab glass technique of construction.

Hurricane Katrina blew off the iconic steeple, which fell through the roof of the church!

This church has a fine three-manual organ built by Aeolian Skinner in 1962. It contains 51 ranks of pipes and operates through an electro-pneumatic action. This was one of the last instruments from this noteworthy builder, which developed the American Classic concept of tonal design. The Skinner organ replaced an organ by the Möller company of Hagerstown, Maryland, and the opus number of that organ allows to date it to about 1918. Certainly the Möller instrument replaced an earlier one, but the maker of that one is unknown.

**Windows**

Choir Loft

Ascension of Christ

Nave

Not my will but thine be done He rose again on the third day

Come and follow me Behold, I stand at the door and knock

But one thing is needful I must be about my fathers business

The Lord is my shepherd Peace be unto you

*Toured September 23, 2001*

*Notes revised March 2020*, but the *Covid-19 epidemic precluded a visit to the church to confirm identifications.*

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