St. Bernard Parish Courthouse

1101 West St. Bernard Highway, Chalmette

The St. Bernard Parish Courthouse pays tribute to both justice and the history and culture of the parish. A powerful example of classical architecture, it contrasts starkly with its modest rural surroundings. Clearly, it proclaimed that St. Bernard Parish was well acquainted with the worlds of classical and modern art and architecture.

Like many contemporaneous churches weve visited on other tours, it was designed by the New Orleans firm of Weiss, Dreyfus, and Seifferth. The Federal Emergency Public Works Administration was an important sponsor of this 1939 construction. Art Deco dominates the decorations, as seen in the metal grillwork at the main entrance, with panels depicting the symbol of justice alternating with panels of magnolias. The interior light fixtures continue the Art Deco designs, and marble abounds.

In the second-floor courtroom, low-relief wooden sculptures by local (if Mexican-born) artist Enrique Alférez portray the concept of justice, using such symbols as a strong chain, a man protecting a child, and the figure of Justice holding a book of law.

Facing the visitor are two engaging stained glass windows, created in 1992 and 1996 by the Binder Studio of Covington. These were donated by the 34th Judicial District Bar Association. On the left is the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, which occurred just a few miles from the courthouse. Note the bright red coats of the British, the bountiful rifle smoke, and the iconic plantation house that still stands at the battle site.

The brightly colored stained glass window on the right presents unique elements of the parish, past and present: a portrait of Don Bernardo de Gálvez, the Spanish governor of Louisiana from 1777 until 1785; Isleño immigrants arriving from the Canary Islands; and hard-working St. Bernard Parish citizens engaged in their traditional trades: hunting, fishing, trapping, and farming.

The courthouse was inundated by the floods that accompanied Hurricane Katrina. After many years of renovation, at a cost exceeding $13 million, the building reopened in early 2013.

*Visited November 2, 2014*

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