St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church

631 State Street

St. Francis of Assisi Church is not affiliated with the Franciscan Order, even though it is named for the founder of the Franciscan Orders and is a neighbor of the Poor Clares, who are Second Order Franciscans.

The parish dates to 1890, when this Uptown area was growing rapidly. Mass was first celebrated in a residence renovated to house a church, rectory and school, and a succession of buildings to serve those functions quickly followed as the parish membership rose dramatically. Many of the window donors, as well as the priest supervising the construction of the new church, bore German names.

Ground was broken for the present structure in 1914, but World War I delayed progress until 1918, with the dedication in 1921. The New Orleans firm of Diboll & Owen, which designed numerous churches, was selected as the architects. Founding partner, General Allison Owen, was a parishioner at St. Francis of Assisi.

John C. Ferguson, architectural historian for the Historic District Landmarks Commission, has described the exterior design as French Gothic and the cruciform interior as decidedly English in terms of its details. He especially praises the English-style hammer-beam ceiling. The church underwent extensive renovations during the 1990 celebration of the parish centennial, and the stained glass was repaired about 25 years later.

The magnificent stained glass windows, created by the Emil Frei Company in its Munich studio, were installed about 1922, shortly after the church dedication. Most depict, fittingly, the life of St. Francis of Assisi while several others feature New Testament events. Window 3 and possibly Window 6 portray the foundress of the Poor Clares. The wealthy man and woman in Window 6 may be Francis and Clare before they renounced their high status in Assisi.

The windows are exemplary of the Munich style. Highly ornate, with the entire space occupied by artistic details, they resemble paintings. Note the rich shading in the garments. The leading is incorporated into the picture and barely visible. The fifteen windows on the main floor were designed by Emil Frei, founder of the studio, in St. Louis, and all were produced in the companys Munich studio. The artist for the choir loft window has not been identified.

Funds for the windows were solicited from church members, church groups, and the pastor, Father Brockmeier. Apparently the German artists were unacquainted with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, as they credited Window 12 to the memory of Mrs. Vincent de Paul!

 **Windows**

8

7 9

 6 10

Altar

5 11

4 12

3 13

2 14

1 1

 Choir Loft

 16

1. St. Francis as a knight giving his garment to a beggar

2. St. Francis and his father with the Bishop of Assisi

3. St. Clare taking the veil

4. St. Francis and the animals

5. *Triptych:* Adoration of the Magi

6. A noble lady (St. Clare?) and St. Francis with a beggar (leper?)

7. Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin

8. Christ celebrating the Eucharist with disciples at Emmaus

9. The Blessed Virgin receives communion from St. John the Apostle

10. St. Aloysius Gonzaga receives communion from St. Charles Borromeo

11. *Triptych:* Assumption of Mary

12. St. Francis vision of the Blessed Virgin and the second coming of Christ

13. St. Francis visiting the Sultan of Damietta

14. The first Christmas crèche (created by St Francis, Greccio, Italy, 1223)

15. St. Francis receiving the stigmata

16. Windows of blue glass

*Visited*

*April 5, 1992*

*October 14, 2012*

Detailed descriptions of the windows are found in *St. Francis of Assisi Roman Catholic Church and Emil Freis Stained-Glass Windows,* compiled by David Doll, 2017. Window photographs by Robin Satterfield.

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