St. Johns Episcopal Church

718 Jackson Street, Thibodaux

St. Johns is recognized as the oldest Episcopal church west of the Mississippi River. Along with its cemetery, the church is included in the National Register of Historic Places.

The parish was founded in 1843 by the famed Fighting Bishop, Leonidas Polk, who was the first Episcopal bishop in Louisiana. Polk lived on Leighton Plantation in Thibodaux, eventually moving on to serve at Trinity Church in New Orleans before serving in the Confederate Army.

This Classical Revivalstyle building, consecrated on Palm Sunday 1845, was originally designed to resemble a Greek temple, with open porticos on all sides. The interior with box pews is reminiscent of early New England Protestant churches. The building has seen several significant design changes in its 150-year history.

The two stained glass windows are in the chancel, a later addition, and the side windows have clear glass. The reredos window (above the altar) features St. John the Apostle and Evangelist. He is surrounded by intricate designs and several symbols of the disciple whom Jesus loved. Over the credence table is a smaller window, portraying grapes and wheat, representing wine and bread. Its border incorporates symbols of John.

Both windows were installed in 1933, and a signature identifies the Boston company of Charles Connick as maker. Connick remains a giant figure in American neo-Gothic window design. These two windows are excellent examples of his mastery of the style of early cathedral stained glass.

Like most historic churches, St. Johns has enjoyed a series of organs. It is surmised that the first was a reed organ installed in 1894, but that failed and was replaced by an electronic Allen organ. At the time of a major renovation of the church in 1999, the organist found a seven-rank, tubular pneumatic organ dating to 1893 that had been salvaged from an Episcopal mission in North Carolina and was undergoing restoration by James Hammann in New Orleans. The mechanism proved demanding to maintain and was replaced with solid-state electronics that allowed for the installation of a separate console downstairs for better communication among the organist, priest, and congregation. Mr. Hammann added a 1920s-era natural wood case for the downstairs organ in 2006. Beginning in 2010, Roy Redmond of Fort Worth took over the challenge of maintaining the organ, expanding it to nine ranks and replacing the console with an antique painted console that better first the church architecture.

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