St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

1139 Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard

Like many New Orleans parishes, St. John the Baptist was established by Archbishop Antoine Blanc. The year was 1851, and the parish was largely Irish immigrants who had settled in the bustling market area near the southern terminus of the New Basin Canal (back of town). Again like many New Orleans parishioners, members first worshiped in a small wooden building that soon could not contain its growing congregation.

The magnificent brick structure we visit today was begun in 1868 and dedicated in 1872, and it bears witness to the skill of New Orleans masons. Because of the unstable ground, the foundations of the church extend ten feet beyond the walls in all directions. The architectural style blends Baroque decorative features with a massive Romanesque or modified Byzantine structure. The church suffered a disastrous fire in 1907; although the roof collapsed, the tower and walls remained standing. The landmark tower houses a four-faced Seth Thomas clock. The gold leaf coating applied on the dome in 1963 was financed by the forced sale of church properties, including its 97-year-old school, for the construction of the Pontchartrain Expressway.

The interior of the church, with mahogany pews and marble altar steps, is a reminder of the former prosperity of this parish. Its stained glass windows follow a thematic plan, even though they were installed over the course of almost a century as funds became available (1874 through 1962). The window above the altar portrays St. John baptizing Christ, and the others depict fourteen Mysteries of the Rosary. The majority were manufactured by the Franz Mayer Studio of Munich; others, by the Zettler studio, which worked closely with Mayer.

Three windows behind the altar have been removed, and this glass is now located in the upper panel of the Nativity window and in the upper and lower panels of the Ascension window. It is speculated that the principal parts of these two windows were relocated from another church, as their proportions are incorrect for their settings.

The organ is at least the fourth in the history of the church. The first, from Henry Erben of New York, was installed in 1853 in the smaller church. In 1873, after the present church was erected, Mr. Erben supplied a far larger 3-manual instrument. Erben was this countrys first world classorgan builder, and he was also a successful and innovative businessman, initiating a progressive trade-in policy. Almost certainly he took the original organ back on very liberal terms to ensure a sale. The second organ served until it was lost in the devastating fire, which began in the loft. The late Gus Laine, a local organ technician, remembered that the next organ came from Carl Barkhoff of Salem, Ohio. Sometime between 1955 and 1962, the Wicks Company of Highland, Illinois, sold its Opus 3572 to St. John the Baptist Church. This product of Americas largest organ builder has 16 ranks available on two manual and pedal divisions and works by direct electric action.

*Keli Rylance, PhD., director of the Southeastern Architecture Archives at Tulane University, said that paintings by Achil Peretti (Italian, 1857-21923) are in this church.*

**Windows of St. John the Baptist Church**

St. John Baptizing Jesus (M 1903)

Altar

Annunciation (M 1903) St. Margaret Mary Alacoque (M 1903)

Visitation (M 1903) Crowning of Mary by Jesus (M 1903)

Nativity\* Assumption of Mary (M 1903)

Presentation of Jesus (M 1903) Descent of the Holy Spirit (M 1903)

Finding Jesus in the Temple Ascension of Jesus\*

Mary, Joseph, Child Jesus, God the Father and Holy Spirit Resurrection of Jesus

(Zettler, signed)

Agony in the Garden (M 1962, signed) Crucifixion

Scourging of Jesus (M 1962) The Way of the Cross

Upstairs

St. Elizabeth with Child John (M 1962) Zachariah (M 1962)

St. Thomas Aquinas (?) St. Patrick

St. Peter St. Paul

Rose window with 12 petals (M 1962)

Center: Ecce Agnus Dei

Three transom windows to complement the rose window

(two for side entrances and one over main entrance) (M 1962)

M: Mayer Studio of Munich

\* Includes flowery panels originally behind the altar.

Zettler windows were installed in 1915, 1923, and 1925. No other information.

*Visited*

*Spring 1989*

*September 30, 1990*

*March 19, 2000*

*May 17, 2003*

*April 22, 2007*

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