St. Patricks Catholic Church

724 Camp Street

St. Patricks Church was established in 1833 to accommodate English-speaking Catholics, especially the Irish, who were flocking to New Orleans in large numbers.

Its exterior is purportedly based on the York Minster Cathedral in England, and the original architects categorized its style as the Pointed Style of the Second Period of Ecclesiastical Architecture. The massive tower, 185 feet high and supported by a foundation made from flat boat gunwales, was for many years the tallest structure of the city and provided a vantage point for visitors, artists, and photographers. The soaring vaulted ceiling was inspired by the Exeter Cathedral in England.

Brothers James H. and Charles B. Dakin, from New York, prepared the designs for the building in 1837, and the cornerstone was laid the following year. Before long, however, it became clear that because of a faulty foundation the building was beginning to fail. The Irish architect James Gallier, with whom the Dakins had worked for years, became the principal architect and removed the old foundation, replacing it without pulling down the walls. The stucco coating of the brick structure dates to the mid-19th century. Serious financial shortcomings delayed the completion, so the first Mass was not said until 1840in an unpainted and undecorated sanctuary.

The three large murals above and behind the altarrepresenting the Transfiguration in the center (copied from a painting by Raphael), flanked by St. Patrick baptizing the daughters of Irish King Lóegaire on the left and by Christ raising Peter from water on the rightwere painted around 1840 by Leon Pomarede, a French artist who had come to New Orleans a decade earlier. His signature appears on the bottom of the St. Patrick painting.

Stained glass windows designed by Achille Peretti, an Italian artist who had moved to New Orleans, were installed around 1904 but survived only until the infamous hurricane of 1915.

Designed by Gallier, the beautiful stained glass dome over the sanctuary is integrated into fan vaulting and is one of the most unusual features of the church. Because the original glass of the dome and the windows was extensively damaged by the devastating Hurricane of 1915, most, if not all, of the present-day stained glass postdates that storm. The figures in the dome, representing the choirs of angels and the archangels, along with several nave windows, were made by the noted Emil Frei Art Glass Co. of St. Louis in 1916.

Father Raymond Carra presided over an energetic expansion of decorating in the early 20th century. The great mahogany doors with art glass inserts and transom and elaborate carved panels date to 1914 and were made by H. L. Moses of New Orleans in collaboration with Romeo Celli, sculptor. On the choir loft railing, the angels with St. Cecilia, patroness of music, are copies of Fra Angelicos angels and also attest to Father Carras love of religious art.

The original organ was made by Henry Erben, a famous 19th-century organ builder in New York, but its case is another example of Galliers design skills. The instrument was first played in 1843, but at that time the church was in serious financial difficulties, resulting in the sheriffs seizure and sale of the organ. The ladies of the parish who had raised the funds for the organ, however, obtained from the Louisiana Legislature An act to exempt the organ of St. Patricks Church from seizure for the debts of the corporation of said church. A 2014 brochure attributes the contemporary organ toPatrick J. Murphy and Associates, organ builders, Opus 53 (2009).

St. Patricks Church was beneficiary of an energetic fund-raising and renovation program in the 1980s, supervised by Samuel Wilson, Jr., and Robert J. Cangelosi. This included restoring the Pomarede murals, returning the side altars to their original design, and installing lighting to highlight the splendid architectural details. The Department of the Interior has designated it a National Historic Landmark.

**Windows of St. Patricks Church**

 Altar

St. Margaret Mary Alacoque \* Our Lady of Lourdes \*

Good Samaritan St Patrick \*\*

Jesus and the Little Children Virgin Mary, Patroness of the United States \*\*

Nativity Conversion of St. Paul \*\*

Angels with Crown of Thorns \* St. Anne and the Child Mary \*

\* Emil Frei Studio, St. Louis, Missouri

\*\* Zettler Studio, Munich, Germany, early 1920s

*Visited*

*September 30, 1990*

*September 19, 1993*

*November 10, 2013*

Samuel Wilson, Jr., *St. Patricks Church of New Orleans.* New Orleans, 1992.

When citing information from this document, please acknowledge the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, 2021.