St. Stephens Church

1025 Napoleon Avenue

St. Stephens Catholic Church was established in 1849 for the Catholics of Faubourg Bouligny by Bishop Blanc, who founded many new parishes in the rapidly growing city. Fathers of the Congregation of the Mission, founded by seventeenth-century priest St. Vincent de Paul and usually known as Vincentians or Lazarists, presided here until 2007, when the New Orleans Archdiocese took over the church. The following year St. Stephens was combined with St. Henrys and Our Lady of Good Counsel churches to form the Good Shepherd Parish.

Foundations for the church were laid in 1868, and a dedicatory stone dates to 1871, but financial crises delayed building until 1877. Construction continued for ten years, with the first Mass celebrated on December 26, 1887 (St. Stephens feast day), and the formal dedication on January 1, 1888. In the early years, separate Masses were conducted in French and English. (German speakers worshiped at the nearby St. Henrys mission/church.)

St. Stephens is the second largest Catholic church in New Orleans, after St. Josephs. The Neo-Gothic structure was designed by British-born architect Thomas W. Carter (active in New Orleans from 1868 until 1894) and built by Thomas ONeil. Construction continued into the early twentieth century, when Favrot and Livaudais added the enormous six-sided spire (1905-1908). The heavy Gothic influence is visible in its verticality, buttresses, peaked gables, and tracery.

The varnished cypress ceiling is braced by wooden trusses adorned with Gothic trefoils, quatrefoils, and carved cherubim. Tradition has it that the German craftsmen here and at St. Marys Assumption immortalized their children in the carved angels.

The sanctuary bears conchpanels above the altar depicting the 24 Ancients of the Old Testament, each separated by a Neo-Gothic wooden frame. Beneath the conch is the magnificent painting of *The Stoning of St. Stephen*, the first Christian martyr and patron of this church. It was executed in 1889 by Achille Peretti (born in Alessandria, Piedmonte, Italy, in either 1857 or 1862; died in Chicago, 1923). Peretti traveled to Genoa to copy Giulio Romanos 1520 painting of the same subject in Santo Stefano (then believed to be the work of Raphael). Flanking this painting are Perettis depictions of the Annunciation, Nativity, Adoration, and Presentation. Perettis only surviving frescoes, of Abraham and Moses, are located behind the altar. Originally the other paintings at St. Stephens were frescoes but they succumbed to the New Orleans dampness, and Peretti transferred them to canvas in 1913. (Peretti also painted panels at St. John the Baptist Church.)

The glorious stained glass windows are examples of traditional European workmanship and are the products of at least three stained glass studios. High on the nave walls are ten triptych windows (five on each side) illustrating scenes from the life of Christ. These have been attributed to the Franz Mayer Company of Munich and were installed over the course of several years after the completion of the church. Correspondence with the studio dates four windows for St. Stephens to 1906. The Frei and Mayer studios both offered work of high quality (Emil Frei trained at the Mayer studio), so precise attributions may be impossible.

Below these, smaller windows in a similar Munich pictorial style from the Emil Frei Studio of St. Louis, Missouri, portray stories of St. Vincent de Paul and his followers of the Vincentian Order and the Daughters of Charity. Lovely rose windows from Frei depict St. Vincent de Paul (left) and St. Gabriel Perboyre (right), and the evangelist windows behind the altar also come from Frei.

Opalescent windows in the confessional may have been moved from an old rectory.

The narthex windows bear the only glass depictions of the churchs patron saint, created by the studio of Dr. H. Oidtmann of Linnich, Germany. From left to right, and arranged in pairs, they present St. Stephen as friend to the poor, teacher, and martyr. Stephen Frei attributes two small beautiful windows over the Napoleon Street entrance to Oidtmann. Transoms over the side entrances may be either Oidtmann or Frei. Heinrich Oidtmanns figures are more geometric, and the color of his windows is more saturated than those in the Frei and Mayer windows, where strong color is localized and there is significantly more modeling.

*Text based on work by Keli E. Rylance, Ph.D.*, *director of the Tulane Southeastern Architectural Archives.*

*Visited*

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*September 28, 2008*

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**Windows of St. Stephen Church**

Second story, front

 Sacred Heart of Jesus Immaculate Heart of Mary

Behind altar

Matthew Luke

Rose window Rose window

St. Vincent de Paul \* Blessed John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M. \*

Top windows

Agony in the Garden Jesus in the Temple

Last Supper Confession of Peter: You Are the Messiah

Jesus in the House of Simon; Wedding in Cana (First Miracle)

 Woman Who Anointed His Feet

Transfiguration The Rich Young Man Invited by the Lord

Jesus Healing the Sick Jesus with the Children

Lower windows

 (Dates refer to events)

The Lord giving the Red Scapular Marys Apparition to

 to Sister Appolline (1846) \* St. Catherine Labouré (1830) \*

Death of St. Vincent de Paul (1660) \* St. Vincent with the Galley Slaves \*

St. Vincent Brings Orphans to St. Vincent Gives Rules to First

 St. Louise de Marillac [These two Priests of the Mission (1625) \*

 founded the Daughters of Charity.] \*

St. Vincent Gives Rules to the St. Vincent with a Lady of Charity (1617) \*

 Daughters of Charity (1633) \* [signed]

 Shrine to Deacons

 St. John

Side door Side door

Eucharist Lamb Symbolizing Christ Victorious

Back of Church

Blessed John Gabriel Perboyre, C.M. Blessed Francis Regis Clet, C.M.

 (Martyr in China, 1820) (Martyr in China, 1840)

 Life of St. Stephen:

Protomartyr\*\* On Trial\*\* Teacher of the Good News\*\* Friend of the Poor\*\*

 [signed window]

Organ Loft Stairs

Christ the Good Shepherd

Organ Loft

St. Cecilia, Patroness of Music King David, Psalmist

 above: Sorrowful Mother above: Ecce Homo

\* From the Emil Frei studio \*\* From the Oidtmann studio