Zion Lutheran Church

1924 St. Charles Avenue

Now occupying the oldest church building on St. Charles Avenue, Zion Lutheran Church served the Uptown German immigrant community starting in 1848. The present structure, dating to 1871, is attributed to the German-born architect Albert Diettel. The modest Neo-Gothic exterior complements a simple but beautiful interior.

The earliest members of the congregation met in an Uptown home and then moved to a hall, Sankt Marien Kirche, near the corner of Gaienne and St. Peter streets. In 1848 a vestry board was established, and a lot was purchased at Euterpe near Baronne, where, two years later, the members dedicated their new church building under the name Zion. In the next six years they added a Christian day school building, instituted liturgical services, and joined the Missouri Synod.

Because of its membership growth, the congregation pledged money to construct a new church at the present site. Dedicated in 1871, the new Zion Church, including furnishings, fixtures, and lot, cost almost $31,000. Its plain glass windows could be shuttered.

In 1871, permission was given to use English at congregational meetings, and twenty years later English was introduced at evening services. By World War I, English supplanted German at all services except special ceremonies.

During a 1908 renovation, new windows and ornamental arches were added, but the overall *Hallenkirche* design remained the same. This style, found especially in Saxon Germany but elsewhere in Europe as well, is marked by the absence of both a transept and an inset clerestory with windows. Because this church is Lutheran, simplicity reigns. The ceiling is of pressed metal in a repeated geometric pattern. Simple pews are constructed entirely with pegs (no nails). The handsome Wicks organ was installed in 1968.

The windows of brightly colored opalescent glass incorporate three different designs of Art Nouveau style. Some culminate in a fleur de lys, the symbol of French kings and of purity (the lily appears frequently in depictions of the Annunciation). Legend has it that the windows came from Germany, but opalescent glass is a characteristic of American windows; European stained glass artists did not use it. The maker was probably local, possibly German. Similar glass and designs are found in numerous homes and churches in New Orleans.

Zion Lutheran Church, like many others, lost its steeple in the hurricane of 1915, and a shorter steeple replaced it. Hurricane Betsy in 1965 also inflicted damage. Despite these challenges, this church of restrained beauty will celebrate the sesquicentennial of its dedication in 2021.

*Visited*

*September 17, 1989*

*Fall, 1995*

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