St. Augustine Catholic Church

1210 Governor Nicholls Street

When the Greater New Orleans Archaeology Program conducted excavations here in the late 1990s, it learned that St. Augustine Catholic Church is situated on one of the oldest historical sites in Louisiana, dating to the 1720s. On this site, the Company of the Indies established a plantation, which operated until Claude Tremé sold the land to the City of New Orleans in 1810. Three decades later, Bishop Antoine Blanc established St. Augustine’s Parish in response to a petition from the city’s Free People of Color. Dedicated to St. Augustine of Hippo (A.D. 354-430), the church has served Faubourg Tremé’s multicultural community since its doors opened on Oct. 9, 1842. As religious structures, only Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel and St. Patrick’s Church are older.

Creole architect J.N.B. De Pouilly (1804-1875) designed the building eight years before undertaking his work on St. Louis Cathedral. His restrained Greek Revival-style façade gained a bell tower in 1858. Decorator Charles Gunzburg dramatically altered the interior in 1910. Under his direction, painter and parishioner Marie de Jahan completed an enormous ceiling mural (now gone) after Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo’s *Assumption of the Virgin*.

When the church was damaged by fire in the 1920s, its parishioners donated funds to restore the front altars with imported marble. The New Orleans architectural firm of Weil and Bendernagel plastered the brick façade and installed Bavarian-style stained glass that is attributed to the Emil Frei Art Glass Company, with headquarters in St. Louis, Mo. Parishioners say that the glass was of German origin, and the Frei company at that point had workshops in both St. Louis and Munich, Germany.

The side aisle windows pay homage to the parish’s French ancestry, while the clerestory windows symbolize the Old and New Testaments. The antique pearlizedglass was painted and fired in a Frei studio, but Frei never used opalescent glass as many contemporaneous American studios did as surrounds for the central figures.

The entire church was refurbished for its 1992 sesquicentennial celebration. Some of its windows were repaired at that time, and the gospel side narthex window depicting paired sacred hearts was blocked in by a secondary wall. Father Jerome LeDoux reconfigured the pews and opted for a new lectern and altar positioned nearer the congregation. Next came the completion of *The Tomb of the Unknown Slave*, a memorial honoring all enslaved peoples.

Despite numerous changes to the church’s appearance, it retains its sanctuary inscription and guiding light: *Si tu savais le don de Dieu* (If you but knew the gift of God).

*Information from an article by Keli Rylance, director of the Tulane University Southeastern Architecture Archives.*

**Stained Glass Windows of St. Augustines Church**

*Above Altar*

The All-Seeing Eye of God\*

*Nave*

*Gospel Side Epistle Side*

Monogram of Mary Monogram of Joseph

St. Hilaire St. Geneviève

St. Rémi St. Clothilde

St. Martin St. Radegonde

St. Louis King of France St. Odile

St. Michel St. Jeanne dArc

*Confessional*

Paired Sacred Hearts

*Bell Tower*

Holy Spirit

*Clerestory*

Peacock Pelican Feeding Its Young

Loaves & Fishes Wheat & Grapes

Two Doves Stag Drinking at Stream

Sacrificial Lamb Snake on Tau Staff

Star of David/Torah Chalice/Eucharist

Ark of the Covenant Noahs Ark/Flood/Dove

Dove Organ Pipes

\*This is the only non-Bavarian-style window in St. Augustines. Probably of American origin.

*Visited*

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