

St. Anne Catholic Church is a one-story basilica plan church whose gabled facade (or main block) is flanked by multi-story towers. It stands within a two-block, rectangular shaped parcel situated approximately in the center of the Assumption Parish town of Napoleonville. More specifically, it is located in a residential area four blocks inland from Bayou Lafourche's west bank. Stylistically, the 1909 masonry church reflects the Romanesque influence, although its frame northern tower top dates to c.1920 and reflects the Colonial Revival taste (see below). Despite a few alterations over the years, St. Anne easily retains the bulk of its original architectural character and hence its Register eligibility.

St. Anne's Romanesque appearance is derived from the placement of the previously mentioned towers (one larger and more prominent than the other) at the two front corners of a gabled nave. More importantly, it also is derived from the extensive use of round arch motifs. For example, the building features a number of large round arch windows on its towers and on both sides of the nave and chancel. The latter are surmounted by brick archivolt laid in corbelled concentric semi-circles to suggest texture. Similar large subdivided openings pierce the south tower and the lower level of the north tower. However, the second level of the north tower is pierced by a set of three-part arcaded windows on three of its four sides. On the church's gabled main block, a large three-part arcade of compound arches leads to the building's first floor entrance porch, while tympanums serve as transoms above the three arched doors to which this porch leads. Above the entrance arcade and behind a parapet wall (see below) a large blind arch is flanked by two smaller arched windows. All of the arches on the facade and all sides of the towers are surmounted by contrasting concrete moldings in semi-circular bands.

Other exterior features original to the church include a concrete watertable, a roundel placed within a circular band with keystones located above the blind arch on the facade, triangular shaped motifs within the spandrels of the entrance arcade, and a parapet wall above the latter. The parapet is capped by concrete coping which appears to extend around the mid-sections of the two towers to form belt courses dividing the first and second stories of each. Originally the thick entablature above the arcade was ornamented with a modillion cornice, as was the entablature of the front gable. Crowning the entrance arcade is a statue, and a cross rises from the peak of the front gable.

St. Anne's northern tower, the taller and more highly articulated of the two, features a handsome frame two-stage top. An entablature with a denticulated cornice surmounts the brick portion of the tower. Above the entablature is a frame stage featuring paneled pilasters and subdivided oculus windows, each highlighted by four keystones. The stage supports a balustrade with paneled posts and an octagonal belfry which has arched openings and a domed roof surmounted by a cross. The southern and less prominent tower features a broad entablature highlighted by a modillion cornice (like those missing from elsewhere on the façade) and a balustrade identical to that on the north tower. Because the northern tower top is stylistically quite different from the brick Romanesque church, the staff of the Division of Historic Preservation suspected that it been added, which was borne out in Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. The Napoleonville map for 1912 shows a masonry tower at the north side with the notation "80 foot spire" and no reference to frame construction. The next available map, that for 1927, records a brick base with a wooden belfry in this location. Because the south tower has an identical balustrade, one would assume that this feature was added at the same time. For the purposes of this nomination, a date of c.1920 is being used.

A recently discovered early photo shows that originally the north tower was even higher than it is now. Atop the present domed cupola was another domed cupola quite small in scale but otherwise identical. Crowning it was a cross (presumably the same cross now atop the large cupola). The date of this alteration is not known.

The St. Anne basilica consists of a large nave with a chancel at its far end. Rows of columns mark the side aisles. Behind the chancel is a sacristy added in the 1930s or 1940s. The tower at the nave's southern front corner contains a staircase leading to a choir loft located above the main entrance. The northern tower's lower room is used as a vestibule.

St. Anne's interior is extremely ornate. Perhaps its most notable decorative feature is its ceiling, which incorporates a coffered barrel vault down the center of the nave. The vault rises from an entablature which outlines its base. This entablature includes a simple architrave; a stenciled frieze containing patera featuring a cross design; bands of reeding and egg and dart molding; and a modillion cornice. The entablature is supported by a series of colossal fluted Corinthian columns which stand upon octagonal paneled bases. A second modillion cornice outlines the lower ceiling above the church's side aisles. Corinthian pilasters with paneled bases separate the large windows on the nave's side walls and continue into the chancel. All of the column and pilaster capitals, as well as much of the molding, are gilded. Carvings depicting the stations of the cross flank each pilaster in the nave. Interestingly, the choir loft has a Gothic Revival style balustrade.

In addition to the loss of the small cupola, the modillion cornices, and the addition of the sacristy, all previously mentioned, St. Anne has received other alterations over the years. Exterior changes include the construction of a storage room behind the sacristy, replacement of the original asbestos roof, and an extension of the church's front plaza (including construction of a handicap ramp). The church's arched stained glass windows (subdivided by molding to create additional arched motifs) are not original but were installed during the historic period. The most notable interior alteration was the 1959 replacement of the original main and side altars with Italian marble altars. The main altar now features a mosaic of the Last Supper and a life-sized statue of Christ on the cross. A marble pulpit and marble floor in part of the church were installed at the same time. Later, tile floors resembling the marble were installed in the rest of the church. Other changes include replacement of the original pews and light fixtures, the installation of unobtrusive spotlights within the coffered ceiling and on some of the columns, and the installation of an organ in the choir loft.

The only alterations of any notable impact on the church's architectural character are the loss of the modillion cornices and the loss of the diminutive cupola which once crowned the large cupola on the north tower. But even these losses are relatively small when one considers the strong architectural statement made by St. Anne. In short, the church is so intensively styled that it can sustain the loss of the features outlined above. As one of a limited number of landmarks within Assumption Parish, the church is an outstanding candidate for National Register listing.

Contributing Elements

Two contributing elements exist within St. Anne's two-block parcel. Both pre-date the current church and, thus, have always been associated with it. The first is a frame rectory with an accompanying ell wing built in 1895. Although it has received alterations (including installation of aluminum siding), the building's important stylistic features are clearly evident and justify the rectory's classification as a contributing element. These features include triangular pedimented door and window surrounds, paired Italianate brackets which decorate the front dormer and the rear room of the ell, and an elaborate Colonial Revival style center hall.

The second contributing element is the church cemetery, located behind the basilica. Although new burials do take place and a modern mausoleum stands at the rear, the majority of the burials are historic. The first occurred in 1874, with a large number occurring in 1898 and 1899.

Non-Contributing Elements

Three non-contributing elements also stand on church property. These include a brick and concrete block church hall (1952), a brick education building (1984), and a large storage building (1998) covered in aluminum siding.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1909, c. 1920
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Builder: C. C. Stewart (1909)
CRITERION: C

St. Anne's Catholic Church is locally significant because it is a landmark within the architectural patrimony of Assumption Parish.

Assumption is one of Louisiana's older parishes, having been legally established in 1807. Its early population consisted of persons of French, Spanish, Acadian, and German descent. This mixture was expanded by the addition of Anglo-Americans after Louisiana became, first a territory (1803), and finally a state within the United States (1812). Agriculture has always been the parish's economic mainstay, with sugar cane the dominant crop. Perhaps because of its rural focus, Assumption has never developed large communities. The small town of Napoleonville is the only place of any size, and its population is only 802.

Despite its long history, Assumption Parish has few real architectural landmarks. The Division of Historic Preservation's Standing Structures Survey for the parish records approximately 2,000 buildings defined as historic (50 years old or more). According to survey records, the vast majority of Assumption's residences are small Creole cottages, shotguns, bungalows, and simple versions of Queen Anne Revival and Eastlake cottages. A handful of the latter display well-developed gallery decoration, and a few houses have projecting Queen Anne bays. Nevertheless, most of the parish's domestic architecture can only be described as undistinguished. Additionally, the survey shows that, for the most part, the region's commercial buildings also fall into the undistinguished category. Against this background the parish's few landmark buildings assume added importance. These include one otherwise simple cottage whose major feature is a large octagonal turret reflecting the influence of the Queen Anne Revival style, two historic school buildings (one a restrained version of the Beaux Arts style, the other displaying a restrained Neo-Classical design), a small Neo-Classical style bank, two Romanesque commercial buildings, an Italian villa style parish courthouse with its accompanying Italianate jail, two major antebellum Greek Revival plantation houses found along Bayou Lafourche, and four architecturally important churches.

St. Anne is also architecturally significant because its ornate basilica is one of very few grand interiors in the parish. The others of note are the Greek Revival style Madewood Plantation House, the 1889 dining room at Belle Alliance Plantation House (both National Register), and four National Register-listed churches. The only other possibility for an elaborate interior would be the 1896 parish courthouse, but here the public spaces were never richly styled.

Historical Note

St. Anne is the second church to stand within the two-block parcel. The first, known as St. Napoleon (but not named for the town), was built in 1874. It was replaced because its congregation had outgrown the facility. Work began in 1908 and ended the following year. The building was constructed by C. C. Stewart of Baton Rouge for a cost of \$30,000. Parishioners chose to name the new church after St. Anne, to whom they had prayed for assistance during a previous yellow fever epidemic.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Division of Historic Preservation, Historic Standing Structures Survey of Assumption Parish.

Folse, Marlene L., History and Description - St. Anne Catholic Church, typescript; copy in National Register file.

Historic photos of St. Anne Catholic Church; copies in National Register file.

Letter, Marlene L. Folse to Pat Duncan, December 28, 2000; copy in National Register file.

Site visit by National Register staff.