

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Church of the Good Shepherd (1896) is a limestone, Gothic Revival, basilican plan church located in the old residential area of Lake Charles. Despite a few enlargements and alterations, the church retains its National Register eligibility.

The seven bay church is constructed of coursed, rock-faced limestone and features double, lancet, two center windows and two tier buttresses. Each gable end of the church is treated with a gable parapet. North of the chancel (see map) is a sacristy set in a protruding semi-octagonal bay. The original central heating system is serviced by an ornamental stone chimney which forms a prominent feature of the building missing. The nave features a stained, pine, hammer beam ceiling with hanging pendants and a double framed roof. The wainscotting is original. There is a small rose window at each end of the church. (The one in the chancel has been covered on the interior by new paneling to the rear of the altar.) The present stained glass was installed gradually over the years as windows were donated.

Additions:

A side wing and parish hall were built in 1926 (see map). They imitated the church's Gothic styling, but were not constructed of stone. Instead, the effect of rock-faced stone was achieved through the use of stucco. The overall effect is a very good imitation.

The present stone bell tower, with its plate tracery, was added in 1953. The original plan called for a bell tower, but funds were insufficient at the time of construction. In 1953 one of the original vestrymen left money to build the intended tower. The 1953 tower deviated from the original design, but it maintained the Gothic style and the intended scale.

More recently a two-story brick addition was built to the rear of the parish hall.

Assessment of Integrity:

In the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, the covering of the rear rose window should be regarded as a minor change. The 1926 wing and parish hall are large additions to the building, but they are set to the side and their styling complements the original design. The modern rear addition has very little visual impact because of its location. Perhaps the 1953 tower addition should be regarded as an integral part of the church because it was always the intention of the original vestry to have such a tower. Moreover, when the tower was built, it was carried out in a convincing Gothic style. But whatever one thinks of the tower, it should be noted that neither the tower or the other additions have obscured the two features for which the church is considered significant -- i.e., its rock-faced limestone construction and its hammer beam ceiling.

The applicant requested that the following description of the altar be appended to the description. It is taken from a March 1, 1897 article in the New Orleans Times-Democrat.

The altar is of oak and is 10 feet, 5 inches long, divided into three panels, each containing some of the best wood carving to be seen anywhere. In the north or right panel the artist has exquisitely represented the Sacrifice of Isaac. In the south or left panel is represented the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek, as described in Genesis xiv, 18 to 20, where it is recorded that "Melchizedek, King of Salem and the priest of the Most High God, brought forth bread and wine" to Abraham, and that "Abraham gave him tithes." It is significant that our Saviour is called six times in holy Scripture "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek."

The types represented in the north and south panels are fulfilled in the Sacrifice of Christ and the Institution of the Sacrament of Bread and Wine; and hence the selection of the scene of the Last Supper for the center panel is most appropriate. The artist has faithfully reproduced in wood that most celebrated painting "The Last Supper" by Leonardo da Vinci, who for ten years was engaged in producing that masterpiece of art.

The time of the scene is immediately after our Lord has said: "Verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." The effect of those words on the Apostles is attempted to be delineated in the attitude and expression of each, and it is marvelous how perfectly the artist has transferred onto wood the expression of each Apostle as the great Vinci painted their

expressions in the picture.

The craftsman for the above panels was Silas McBee of New York.

Specific dates 1896
Builder/Architect Architect: C. W. Bulger

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criterion C

The Church of the Good Shepherd is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is a superior example of a late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century church within the context of southwestern Louisiana.

A search of the records of the Division of Historic Preservation has revealed a total of sixty-two late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century churches in the thirteen parishes which comprise southwestern Louisiana. Although the survey is not complete for this area, more or less comprehensive historic sites data is available for all major population centers as well as for the five parishes which were among the earliest to be settled and which have a large number of historic structures (St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, Iberia and Lafayette). Based upon our general knowledge of the region, we feel it is unlikely that any well-styled stone Gothic Revival churches, such as the Good Shepherd, will be found in the areas not yet surveyed.

Taken among this group, the Church of the Good Shepherd is conspicuous because of its unusual and historically correct hammer beam ceiling. This is a Gothic feature which is seldom seen in Gothic style churches in the region. In addition, as far as the State Historic Preservation Office is aware, the Church of the Good Shepherd is the only period ecclesiastical structure in the region constructed of stone, which was the preferred material for much of the Gothic Revival. Good Shepherd's distinctive rock-faced ashlar construction gives a massive but well crafted effect, which was popular in America for public buildings during much of the later nineteenth century. It appears that Good Shepherd is the only church in the region which features construction of this type. So, when it was built, it was much closer to national aesthetic preferences than any other church in the region. For these reasons, Good Shepherd should be regarded as a landmark among late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century churches in southwestern Louisiana.

Major Bibliographical References

Louisiana Comprehensive Standing Structures Survey, St. Martin, St. Mary, St. Landry and Iberia Parishes.

Historical Sites Inventory, Lafayette Parish, Sections I and II' Prepared by the Lafayette Regional Planning Commission for the Lafayette Council of Governments, June 1976 and June 1977.

1896 cornerstone on church building.

1926 cornerstone on parish hall.

New Orleans Times-Democrat, March 1, 1897. (This is an article on the dedication of the church.)

Historical sketch of the Church of the Good Shepherd prepared by applicant, Copy in National Register file, LA State Historic Preservation Office.