

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The records of the Church of the Epiphany indicate that the original building, "a neat and commodious structure," was built in the winter of 1857-1858 of cypress timbers and bricks made by slaves of native clay taken from the banks of the Bayou Teche. It was a one story, rectangular building, 34' wide and 74' deep. The architect and builder are unknown.

The records also indicate that in 1884 the exterior side walls were reinforced with buttresses and that a belfry was added. The building itself was otherwise untouched until renovations were undertaken in 1959. At that time the building appeared as shown in Figure 1.

In 1959 the building was enlarged by replacing the last 11' of the existing structure, which had deteriorated, and by adding to the rear a wing 15'6" by 52'. (See Figures 2 and 2a.) This addition allowed the Sacristies and altar area to be relocated, thus enlarging the seating area and providing space for a mechanical equipment room. Original brick was saved from the replaced section and used on the exterior of the addition. Details were constructed to match those of the existing structure.

The weakening original structure was stabilized by removing the truss and ceiling and roof load from the exterior walls and placing the load on boxed in pipe columns at each truss. These columns rest on a poured concrete beam supported by two spread footings. A concrete slab floor was then poured to replace the wood frame flooring. (See Figure 3.) Interior finish work was done under the general direction of Perry Segura & Associates of New Iberia, Louisiana.

The Church of the Epiphany bears a strong resemblance to the small village churches of the English medieval period, not surprising in American Episcopal churches. The style incorporates simple masonry parapet facades and a steeply pitched roof. In Sir Banister Fletcher's A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method (17th Edition, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, Page 387), a drawing of Boarhunt Church, Hants, England, is one example of this style. The wooden belfry, which was added to the Church of the Epiphany in 1884, bears a remarkable similarity to that of the Boarhunt church. (See Figure 4.)

At the Church of the Epiphany the architectural style is adapted to local materials in the modeling of the brickwork and in the wood details. Gothic details are seen in the pointed arches, the spires, and the traceried windows. The vestibule is a tall Gothic arch with parapet framing the recessed entrance of high wooden doors. The main facade wall contains a circular rose window and, above it, brick dentils which outline the peak. Finials designed as spires rest on protruding buttresses at each corner. The side walls contain fenestration set in pointed arches.

Inside, the decor is so plain it must be called spartan. The walls and ceiling are white plaster with pale gray trim. The balcony, originally for slaves who attended church with their masters, is wood, painted gray, and supported by two square wood columns. An interesting little turning stair leads to the loft, and several old "slave pews" of two different sizes are still there. They bear markings which tradition says are the teeth marks of horses which ate hay piled in the pews when the church yard was used for the horses of Union soldiers during the Civil War. Holes in the seats were supposed to have been drilled to drain rain water.

The focal point of the interior is a stained glass window extending from floor to ceiling behind the altar. It is said that this beautiful window is a Tiffany piece. The colors are lovely muted tones dominated by an exquisite rose and accented with bright medium-blue lines. This window is the only color on the interior except for the side stained glass windows, including one at the rear which is quite brightly colored and different from the others. These windows were all added in the 1959 renovation. All are memorials.

The renovation undertaken in 1959, as stated before, strengthened the weakening structure and enlarged it to the west. The original slate roofing was removed and replaced by asphalt shingles to lighten the roof load. During the renovation it was necessary to strip the structure of its dense covering of vines, which was apparently responsible for keeping the deteriorated rear wall erect, but today much of the wall surface is again green with regrown vines.

SPECIFIC DATES	1857-1858
BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Episcopal Church of the Epiphany is significant locally because it is the oldest church building in Iberia Parish. Except for its brief period of Union occupation during the Civil War, the building has been in continuous use as a house of worship of the Episcopal Church since its consecration in 1858. Similar in style to Grace Episcopal Church in St. Francisville and Christ Episcopal Church in Napoleonville, it, like them, is a good example of the rural, brick Gothic Revival Church - modeled largely after medieval English village churches, - built in America during the mid-nineteenth century. Along with other Episcopal churches built during this period in Louisiana, the Church of the Epiphany is a product of the missionary movement of Bishop Leonidas K. Polk. The Church of the Epiphany also played a military role during the Civil War, in that contemporary records indicate that it was used by Union soldiers occupying New Iberia in 1863 as a barracks, a prison, a stable and a hospital.

The Church of the Epiphany was built during the winter of 1857-1858. Church records indicate that the cost was \$6,000, but there is no information concerning the architect or the builder. The Gothic Revival style is here adapted to local materials, in the modeling of the brickwork and in the wood details. The result is a relatively simple, although sophisticated, church created to merge current style with local building materials, skills and techniques. The land on which the Church was built was donated by Harvey Hopkins and was located on the Main Street at the west end of town.

The Church of the Epiphany was consecrated in the spring of 1858 by the Rt. Rev. Leonidas K. Polk, first Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana. In an address delivered in 1834 at a convention held at Grace Church in St. Francisville, Bishop Polk had declared a four-fold challenge: (1) to make divine services available in English to a part of the country which had known only those in Latin, (2) to establish parishes among those settlers who had been Episcopalians before migrating to Louisiana, (3) to bring into the Church those as yet unchurched, and (4) to provide a ministry to the Negro population.¹ In the score of years during which Bishop Polk labored as a diocesan in Louisiana, the number of church buildings increased from three to thirty-three; the congregations from six to forty-seven for Caucasians and more than thirty for Negroes; the clergy from six to thirty-two; and the communicants from 222 to 1,859. The congregations of Negroes included 3,600 persons. The Church of the Epiphany demonstrates a response to this four-fold challenge of Bishop Polk.

In April 1863, after union forces captured New Orleans, the 19th Army Corps under command of General Nathaniel Banks came through the area to further protect New Orleans. The town of New Iberia was occupied on April 16. A young Union officer of the 52nd Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, wrote home to his family that one of his duties was the guarding of prisoners in the western part of the town. "The prison pen was a church, which perhaps never before saw so large a congregation."² When General Banks moved north, he left an occupation force behind. A medical detachment of the 130th Illinois converted a church into a hospital for the wounded. It is generally accepted that the church building referred to by the soldiers from

Massachusetts and Illinois was the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany. A traditional tale of the Church is that the marks on some of the older pews, now kept in the balcony, were made by the teeth of horses of the Union soldiers, who placed the pews on the lawn with hay for their mounts and drilled holes in the seats to drain the rainwater. The history of the Diocese says that seats were removed and burned, the windows mutilated, and walls written on with charcoal, and there are church records of the cleanup work done after the departure of the Union Army. The walls were washed, the pews repaired and services again held.

Since that time the Church of the Epiphany has continued to play an important role in the spiritual life of the community.

¹Hodding, Carter and Betty W. Carter, So Great A Good: A History of the Episcopal Church in Louisiana and of Christ Church Cathedral 1805-1955, (Sewanee: 1955), p. 58.

²J. F. Moors, History of the 52nd Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteers, (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1893), p. 153.

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