

Describe THE PRESENT AND Original (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

St. Gabriel Church - Constructed 1772, altered or perhaps rebuilt in the early 19th Century.

St. Gabriel Church is typical of the simple type of frame construction that was well known to the Craftsmen of that time, using materials found at the site, notably cypress wood.

The structure is a blend of two types of Architectural styles. The exterior is a simple type of Gothic Architecture that could be executed in frame construction. The Gothic Arch is used for the windows and in the paneling in the entrance doors and transom.

On the interior the influence in Classic as seen in the turned Tuscan columns of solid cypress, the turned spindles in the Altar Rail and the railing around the Choir Loft. The side Altars, made of cypress found on the site, were classical in design.

The construction is simple frame type, typical of that day where cypress was in abundance. Floor joists 8" x 10" on 10" x 12" sills, (rough hewn) a of solid cypress set off the ground on brick piers. The floors are cypress board. Walls are wood frame construction with beveled cypress clapboard siding on the exterior and 1" x 12" cypress planks in the interior covered with burlap which is painted and decorated.

Two rows of solid cypress Classic turned columns support a vaulted ceiling down the center. This ceiling, like the side walls, is covered with burlap. The roof is supported by wooden timbers forming a scissors truss. The roof is metal shingles on wood stripping. The original roof was probably hand-split cypress shingles.

The four corners of the belfry and steeple are supported by 8" x 8" heart pine posts. Pine was probably used in these because of their great length which was not obtainable in cypress.

There is a cypress beaded ceiling wainscot around the interior walls. Doors, windows, frames, pews, altars, cabinets and other interior trip are all of cypress.

The electrical wiring which was added at a later date, is simple knob and tube system using drop cords for lighting.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Church of St. Gabriel is situated on land obtained by a land grant (Spanish) in the year 1774. Tradition has it that the parish was established in 1761 but the earliest records are records of baptisms, deaths and marriages in 1773 recorded by Father Angel (Angelus) de Revillagodas. The originals are in the Archives of the Diocese of Baton Rouge in the Catholic Life Center Building. A guide to vital statistics of Church Archives in Louisiana Vol. II by the WPA lists these records. The silver bell given by the Queen of Spain bears the inscription Santa Maria de la Merced ora pro nobis Se Hilso Comendados MRPI - Ypnacio de Jesus Maria ano de 1768. This bell is now in the new St. Gabriel Church. The Congregation of the Roman Catholic Church of St. Gabriel was mainly composed of the Acadians who were driven out of their homes in Nova Scotia and settled along the Mississippi River.

Many famous people were parishioners in this historic church. Governor Paul Hebert 1853-1856 was of the parish of St. Raphael which was a chapel of St. Gabriel until 1888.

Pierre Joseph Landry's headstone in St. Gabriel cemetery bears the inscription "Born at St. Malo Jan. 9, 1770 died at St. Gabriel March 1843 - A good Republican who is missed by his friends, wife and nine children. Whose good morals were necessary." Mr. Landry began to carve or sculpt in wood after an accident kept him from his active duties on his plantation. One of his famous carvings "The Wheel of Life" is displayed in the Presbytere, Louisiana State Museum in New Orleans. A bust of Andrew Jackson is at the Hermitage in Nashville, Tennessee and a carving of the Holy Family is owned by one of the descendants, Mrs. Josie Landry Stirling of Wakefield, La. Many others are believed to exist.

Another famous person who was buried in St. Gabriel was Charles B. Dakin a famous architect from New York. He and his brother James Harrison Dakin are mentioned in "Greek Revival in America" by Talbot Hamlin. James Harrison Dakin was the designer of the old State Capitol in Baton Rouge. Charles Dakin came to New Orleans with James Gallier as his partner in 1834. They were joined by Charles' brother James H. Dakin in 1835 and many famous buildings in New Orleans were designed by this firm. Charles left the firm and went to Mobile where he designed many famous buildings. He died at the age of twenty-eight and was buried in St. Gabriel's cemetery in June, 1839. His tombstone reads

"Husband,
I needs must mourn for thee
Tis ever thus, with all that's best below
The dearest, noblest, loveliest are always first to go.
He went amid these glorious things of earth, transient as glorious."

This inscription is in English which contrasted with the French inscriptions on most of the other tombstones of that time.

A college for boys was built in 1828. It was hoped that the Jesuits would take over the college but after surveying the vicinity, etc., decided to settle at Grand Coteau where they established St. Charles College. The building which housed the college was used as the rectory from 1848 to about 1894 when Father Remond, the pastor, purchased a house with his own funds. This rectory was used until the new rectory were build in 1958.

The Church has been moved from its original site downriver to the present location, and has survived four moves for new levees.

This building is thought to be the oldest existing church building in the Louisiana Purchase Territory.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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- (3) Roger Boudier, "St. Gabriel in Iberville 1773-1953" pamphlet written for dedication of new St. Gabriel Church, 1953.
- (4) Guide to Vital Statistics of Church Archives in La. Vol. 2 WPA project 1940.
- (5) Albert Grace "Heart of the Sugar Bowl" 1928
- (6) "Greek Revival Architecture" by Talbot Hamlin 1944
- (7) A Thesis by V. M. Scramuzza, 1924 Louisiana State University