

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

St. David's Episcopal Church (1909) stands on the northwest corner of a busy intersection in the Richland Parish seat of Rayville. The church is located in a somewhat transitional area immediately south of downtown, and both institutional buildings and well-landscaped residences are its neighbors. The one-story brick structure with cast stone ornament combines elements of the Gothic Revival and Craftsman styles. Despite the construction of a large rear addition also in the Gothic Revival style (see below), the church retains its National Register eligibility.

The year 1909 seems a bit early to find Craftsman elements on a small town Louisiana building. However, the architectural evidence, in the form of matching ceiling treatments of the church's porch and nave, suggests the Craftsman features are original. They include exposed rafter tails outlining the roof on each side of the building and a gabled entry porch with several Bungalow-like elements. The porch features two Gothic arcades formed of trefoil arches rising from tall, thick brick bases. The arcades must be viewed from an angle to be seen; from the front of the building their wooden vertical members look like the Craftsman motif of slender columns rising from brick bases. The porch has overhanging eaves, and the rafters forming its roof are exposed beneath the sheathing. Perpendicular struts and carved brackets visible below the porch roof are suggestive of the Japanese influence on the Craftsman style. A wooden cross fills the porch's open gable.

The outline of the historic church forms a "T," clearly reflecting on the exterior its floor plan of nave, transept and chancel. Gothic Revival characteristics found in the building include:

1. a steeply pitched gable roof.
2. the façade's quatrefoil stained glass window, which is surrounded by an elaborately worked cast stone ornament.
3. elaborately worked single trefoil windows, each surmounted by a cast stone stepped hoodmold, flanking the entrance. Stained glass panes in a diamond pattern fill each window.
4. double trefoil windows, also filled by diamond shaped stained glass panes, piercing the building's sides. These windows are held in place by ornately carved and beveled wooden surrounds.
5. tall buttresses located at the front corners of the building. The lower portion of each buttress is unornamented, while the upper portion is paneled on each of its four sides. Each buttress culminates in a cast stone ornament with a trefoil arch on each side. The overall composition of this ornament suggests a cross gable roof. An identical paneled shaft capped by an identical arched cast stone ornament rises from the main roof's gable peak. Corbelling supports this central shaft, and a cast stone cross rises from the ornament.
6. shorter buttresses with corbelled tops attached to the sides of the building.
7. an interior beamed ceiling constructed to resemble a series of trusses. The ceiling's rafters are exposed below the sheathing in the same manner as those in the porch ceiling. Horizontal members attach to these rafters just below the peak.

Gabled parapets terminate the front and rear exterior walls, as well as the walls of the transept's two arms. The building's front double doors form a semi-circular arch.

In the interior, the north transept is open to the nave while the south transept is walled off and subdivided into small spaces. This part of the floor plan appears to be original. The interior is simply

ornamented. In addition to the above-mentioned beamed ceiling, the nave has large semi-circular arches opening it to the chancel and the north transept. The carved and beveled decorative treatment of the exterior window surrounds containing the side walls' double trefoil windows is repeated on the interior surrounds. Historic light fixtures resembling lanterns remain suspended from the ceiling.

St. David's has experienced both exterior and interior changes over the years. The most important of these is the large Gothic Revival style parish hall addition of 1957. The newer building is separated from the rear wall of the original church by about three feet. However, a pointed arch arcade adjoining one side of the addition does connect to the original building. Because of this arcade and the close proximity of the newer parish hall to the original church, the parish hall reads from the main view as an addition rather than a free-standing structure. (For these reasons, particularly the substantial brick arcade, the church and hall are being counted together as one building for the purposes of this nomination.) In 1961 a brick bell tower was attached to the side of the south transept wall. A modern handicap ramp has been installed on one side of the porch. Inside the building, the nave's floor has been carpeted and a wainscot composed of modern paneling has been added. The same paneling also covers the chancel rail.

Despite these alterations, the historic architectural character of the church is visually strong. Because of its pronounced (and numerous) stylistic elements, the original portion of the building more than holds its own with the rear addition. The bell tower's shaft is at least slender, although the appearance of the modern-looking cupola from whose roof the bell hangs is admittedly jarring. The trefoil windows and the quatrefoil window, both types very important to the church's Gothic Revival character, remain intact. All in all, the church clearly retains the architectural integrity needed to classify it as a landmark in Rayville, where high style buildings are rare.

SIGNIFICANT DATE: 1909
ARCHITECT/builder: Unknown
CRITERION: C

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

St. David's Episcopal Church is locally significant in the area of architecture within the North Louisiana town of Rayville. Its significance is based upon its status as a rare architectural landmark in a community with few examples of high style architecture.

Originally called Little Creek, Rayville is located in an area known in the eighteenth century as the Ouachita Territory. After Louisiana's annexation to the United States in 1812, politicians began carving the district into separate parishes. The future site of Rayville became part of Morehouse Parish. Until the late 1850s, steamboats on the Boeuf River (located slightly west of Rayville) provided the area's only transportation alternative to the horse and wagon. Speculators chartered an east/west railroad across North Louisiana (eventually the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Pacific Railroad) in 1836, but no construction occurred until 1854. It reached Delhi (a town east of Rayville) in 1859 and Monroe (a town west of Rayville) in January 1861. However, the Civil War temporarily put the road out of service

Although no exact date is given, sources suggest that Rayville was founded between 1861 and 1867. James Ray is credited as the founder. He established a store on the east side of the Boeuf River, and other people began to settle around it. Once the railroad resumed operation in 1867, the settlement became one of six railroad stops in the area soon to become Richland Parish. At the behest of James Ray's brother, John,

the state legislature established Richland Parish in 1868, taking land from Ouachita, Morehouse, Franklin and Carroll parishes. The first Police Jury met in Rayville in December 1869 and quickly approved the construction of a two-room courthouse. Officials replaced this building in 1872, and the new courthouse served the parish until its replacement in 1951. The town incorporated in 1889 but met with disaster the next year when a fire destroyed much of the community.

Eventually, a north/south railroad (the Missouri Pacific) came through the town, intersecting the east/west line and making the community a shipping point for central northeast Louisiana's agricultural crops. By the early twentieth century the town supported a large sawmill. Later in the century oil and gas were discovered nearby. Nevertheless, Rayville has remained a small rural community. From a population of 216 in 1880, it reached 1079 in 1910, 2076 in 1930, and a high of 4610 people in 1980. Since that time the population has fallen.

Today, no buildings from Rayville's early period survive, and a windshield survey by the National Register staff found only two landmark buildings in the otherwise typical post-1890 central business district. One is a small Italianate style store now used as the police station. The other is a lightly styled Art Deco theater. Outside the CBD, the survey found only a handful of possible landmarks, including the candidate. These include one Classical Revival and two Gothic Revival style churches, a large Classical Revival school, and the 1951 courthouse – a very late example of the Art Deco taste. Most of these buildings are restrained examples of their style that would probably not be recognized as landmarks were they located in larger communities. The same survey found Rayville's residential neighborhoods to contain some examples of the bungalow style, a few English cottages, many unstyled cottages, and a large number of mobile homes. Only one moderate size Queen Anne/Eastlake style house, two small cottages of the same style, and a large Mediterranean style house could be classified as residential landmarks, and then only within the context of Rayville. Thus, the entire town has no more than a dozen buildings that might be considered architectural landmarks. With its combination of high style Gothic Revival and Craftsman styling, and most especially its use of trefoil and quatrefoil elements not found in the other Gothic Revival style churches, St. David's ranks (along with the Classical Revival style church and the Italianate store) as one of the town's three finest landmarks.

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