

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The church was originally of a simple rectangular plan of the Roman basilica type, the nave being separated from the side aisles by rows of sturdy Doric columns of simple square pedestals. In the 1870's the church was enlarged by the extension of the nave and the addition of the semi-circular apse and the transepts. A handsome octagonal belfry with a bell-shaped roof was placed at the apex of the apse. There are four tall, semicircular head windows on each side of the building with two more similar ones in each transept. Their double hung sashes are divided into small lights and filled with colored glass, forming a cross in each window. In the apse are two additional windows filled with stained glass from a Cincinnati manufactory. The front of the church is divided into three bays by projecting pilasters, reflecting the interior division of nave and side aisles. In each bay is a tall, semi-circular headed entrance door, recessed in an enframing of Romanesque type mouldings which were added when the facade was remodeled in the 1920's or 30's. The facade is crowned by a tall square steeple with a tapered spire. The steeple has lost its original mouldings and the central bay of the facade has been extended up through the former pediment to form an apparent square base for the steeple. These exterior alterations are largely superficial and old photographs show its original appearance to which it could be easily restored.

On the interior, the walls and columns are plastered over brick. The floor and ceilings are of wood, the ceilings of the side aisles and transepts being flat while those of the nave and apse rise to a greater height in a coved form. A deep cornice surrounds the nave and apse, with smaller cornices for the side aisles and transepts. The sacristies flank the sanctuary in the continuation of the side aisles. One of these has been utilized for the housing of mechanical equipment and a modern, two story addition has been made to the other sacristy.

The pews are largely original of the box type with doors. Additional pews have been made in the same manner. Above the main altar is a fine painting of St. Martin painted by Jean Francois Mouchet. The altar and reredos are otherwise undistinguished and are of 20th century origin. A curious grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes was added in one of the transepts in the late 19th century. A fine baroque baptismal font in white marble, a gift from Louis XVI of France to the Church, stands in the baptistry at the rear of the church. The entrance vestibule is through the massive wall of the tower base, flanked on one side by the baptistry and on the other by an interesting stairway to the choir loft.

The church is flanked by a two story rectory on the right and a two story parish hall on the left. Both buildings ante-date the Civil War, though the rectory has been extensively remodeled. It could, however, be readily restored. The parish hall on the left has a two story porch with pediment. Both buildings are of frame construction, and the structure face a large grass covered and tree shaded park, forming a dominant and impressive element in the town plan.

In a small graveyard at the side of the church is a bronze seated statue of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's heroine Evangeline, donated by the movie actress Delores del Rio who played the part in the picture "Evangeline" filmed in the area in 1929. In front of the church stands a statue of Father Jan, an early pastor and in front of the rectory is a statue of St. Martin of Tours, patron of the town and parish.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

This church was founded in 1765 by a group of Acadian exiles who arrived that year, the first of many of these unfortunate refugees, driven from Canada by the English, who came to

Louisiana over a period of some twenty years. It was these exiles who established the Acadian culture and traditions that have left an indelible imprint upon the State of Louisiana. The French military engineer, Lieutenant Louis Andry, on order of Governor Charles Philippe Aubry, accompanied the first group of exiles to the Attakapas country and probably laid out the town and designed the first church. A sketch of the early church drawn by Samuel M. Lee in the 1820's is in the collection of the Henry Francis Dupont Winterthur Museum. By an act of the State Legislature approved March 7, 1814, the church was incorporated and another act approved March 16, 1820 authorized the congregation to conduct a lottery to raise funds to build a new church. The present church was apparently erected some years after that, but the ceremony of consecration was not held until June 2, 1844. A contract for the construction of the present rectory or "Presbytere" was awarded on July 11, 1856 to Robert R. Benson, builder. Extensive alterations were made to this building, mostly in the twentieth century, but the basic fabric of the building is intact and subject to restoration. The parish hall appears to be an ante-bellum building and may be the school which a contract was awarded on January 15, 1861 to Alcee Judice and Prosper Moity according to plans by R. R. Benson.

The church has been the center of religious and cultural activities of St. Martinville and the Attakapas country since colonial days. In 1804 it was the scene of controversy when a priest appointed to the church by Pierre Clement deLaussat, French Commissioner, at the transfer of Louisiana from Spain to France and from France to the United States in 1803, was removed by Fr. Patrick Walsh, vicar general, resulting in correspondence between W. C. C. Claiborne, first American Governor of the Louisiana Territory and James Madison, then Secretary of State and the church was closed by the civil authorities.

The connection between this church and Longfellow's poem "Evangeline" gives it a significance in literature and its association with the Delores del Rio motion picture gives it a significance in motion picture history.