

The St. Maurice Methodist Church (1874) is an unstyled frame country church located in the tiny rural hamlet of St. Maurice. The community consists of a handful of buildings scattered along U. S. Highway 71 and Louisiana Highway 477. The well-preserved church is located at the juncture of these two two-lane roads and is a hundred or so feet from both. Integral to the setting is an historically related cemetery located immediately to the rear of the church.

The simple, pitched roof, gable fronted building's dominant exterior feature is a central one-stage entrance tower with a pyramidal roof crowned by a cross. The tower combined with the relatively steep pitch of the main block produces a very vertical building, especially when viewed head on. The tower and main block are sheathed in medium gauge weatherboards held in place by square nails. The building's caretaker, J. E. Jones, the grandson of the builder, indicates that the frame is of pegged construction. The present tin roof replaced what was originally a wood shake roof. The main block and tower feature corner boards, and the side elevations of the main block have an entablature-like band which wraps around the front and rear to form crude gable end returns. Four evenly spaced square head, nine over nine windows pierce the side elevations, while identical windows, one on each side, pierce the rear elevation. The tower, at the first story, has a narrow six over six window on each side (two panes wide). Narrow vented openings accent the front and sides at the second story level. The tower entrance retains its original double doors with a multi-pane transom above. Exterior alterations have been minimal, being confined to the following: the c.1940 replacement of the building's original wood piers with concrete blocks, the c.1940 replacement of wooden steps with concrete steps, the partial closing of two windows for air conditioner units, and the recent installation of a handicap access ramp on the rear elevation. One also suspects that the rear door opening is not original; the door itself is clearly modern.

St. Maurice's simple, stark interior is typical of churches of this type in Louisiana. The interior is very well preserved, including the original pews, altar rail, and lecterns. The walls and vaulted ceiling are sheathed in flush boards. There is no attempt at adornment or decoration. Window surrounds are formed of plain boards. On some windows the frame is two boards wide, and on some one board wide. The handmade rigid-looking pews are held together with square nails. The simple altar rail is formed of vertical boards with a few inches between each (in the manner of a balustrade). The three paneled lecterns are located on a three-stage platform. The only noteworthy interior alteration is the loss of the original doorway from the tower vestibule to the sanctuary. Originally identical to the main entrance, its multi-pane transom has been removed and replaced with boards, and the doors are modern. According to long-time members of the church, the building historically was heated with a pot-bellied stove located in the center aisle. A modern ceiling vent marks where its stovepipe was removed. St. Maurice was lit by kerosene lamps until the 1950s when electricity was introduced. One or two of the kerosene lamp hooks remain on the walls.

Immediately to the rear of the church is its small historically associated cemetery surrounded by a chain-link fence. The earliest grave dates to 1879. While a headstone-by-headstone survey was not done, it is clear that the cemetery has a mixed historic/modern character. Per a consultation with the Register staff in Washington, the cemetery is being included as part of the setting but is not being included in the count of resources.

Significant dates	1874
Architect/Builder	Builder: John E. Jones
Criterion C	

The St. Maurice Methodist Church is locally significant in the area of architecture because it is a rare surviving example of an important North Louisiana building type.

The building is a well preserved example of a simple frame country church. As such, it represents a local North Louisiana unpretentious building tradition associated with the settlement patterns of the region. Distinctively different from the older French Catholic southern part of the state, the parishes in northern Louisiana were settled in the 1840s and '50s by Anglo-Saxon Baptists and Methodists migrating westward from the Upland South. The man who built St. Maurice Methodist Church, John E. Jones, was from Georgia. According to family tradition, he was on his way west when he was asked to stay a while at St. Maurice and build a church. The church he built was for the first few years known as the Independence Church because it was interdenominational. In 1887 the church joined the Methodist Conference. As an aside, Jones decided to stay; he is buried in the church's cemetery.

The region he chose to call home was characterized by small farms and disbursed settlement patterns. Churches typically were located in remote rural settings or small hamlets. In 1874, when St. Maurice was built, the nearest town of any size was Natchitoches, located about 10 miles to the west. From an architectural standpoint, North Louisiana's rural churches are known for their simple, unadorned, often quite stark character, whether they be from the 1870s (the date of the earliest surviving examples) or the very early years of this century. The typical surviving example is a rectangular, pitched roof, gable end building of frame construction with little in the way of decorative detailing (i.e., St. Maurice Methodist but without the tower).

While they were scattered across North Louisiana historically, churches of the type described above are now rare survivors. Although the region has not been surveyed in its entirety, several parishes have been surveyed under contract to the State Historic Preservation Office. These surveys combined with staff knowledge reveal that there are most likely only 15 to 20 examples remaining in the several parish region.

For the most part, churches of this type have been the victim of population shifts. In rural, often remote locations, they no longer had congregations large enough to support them by the 1950s and '60s. And, of course, once vacant, a building's future is very insecure. Those that have managed to survive are generally not in full-time use, but have an active and dedicated support group and are used occasionally, with the most popular event being an annual homecoming with dinner on the grounds.

St. Maurice Methodist is fortunate because services are still held there every Sunday, although the congregation is small. Many of the seventeen members of this well-preserved church, the only one the congregation has ever known, are descendants of the builder.

POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE

St. Maurice Methodist Church served as a public school early in its history (according to oral tradition from 1874 to 1923). Such public-private partnerships in education were common in Louisiana. While it is known that a school existed at the church, there is insufficient information at the present time to claim significance in the area of education.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Interview with J. E. Jones, grandson of the builder. Mr. Jones, age 70, has been a member of St. Maurice Church since he was 13.

Deed recorded August 27, 1887 wherein Mrs. N. M. Strong donated to St. Maurice Church the land upon which the building was located. Refers to "that portion of property now occupied by the church building and graveyard." Copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

Survey data on various North Louisiana parishes on file in Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.