

# The Parish of St. John the Evangelist

On October 27, 1850, Father Dupuy happily wrote to Bishop Blanc, who had just received notification of his elevation to the rank of Archbishop: "Well, I have finally passed the contract with the Plaqueminiens. There was a good fight to put it over. I obtained, nevertheless, I believe, about all the essentials."

## THE FIRST CHURCH

An interesting view of the parish plant of St. John the Evangelist as it was in 1857 (pg. 4), shows the first parish church, erected in the 1840s, and the College of the Immaculate Conception, at right, established by Father Charles Chambost. Both church and college were destroyed during the disastrous fire of February, 1858. The picture shown here is from an old lithograph made during Father Chambost's administration.

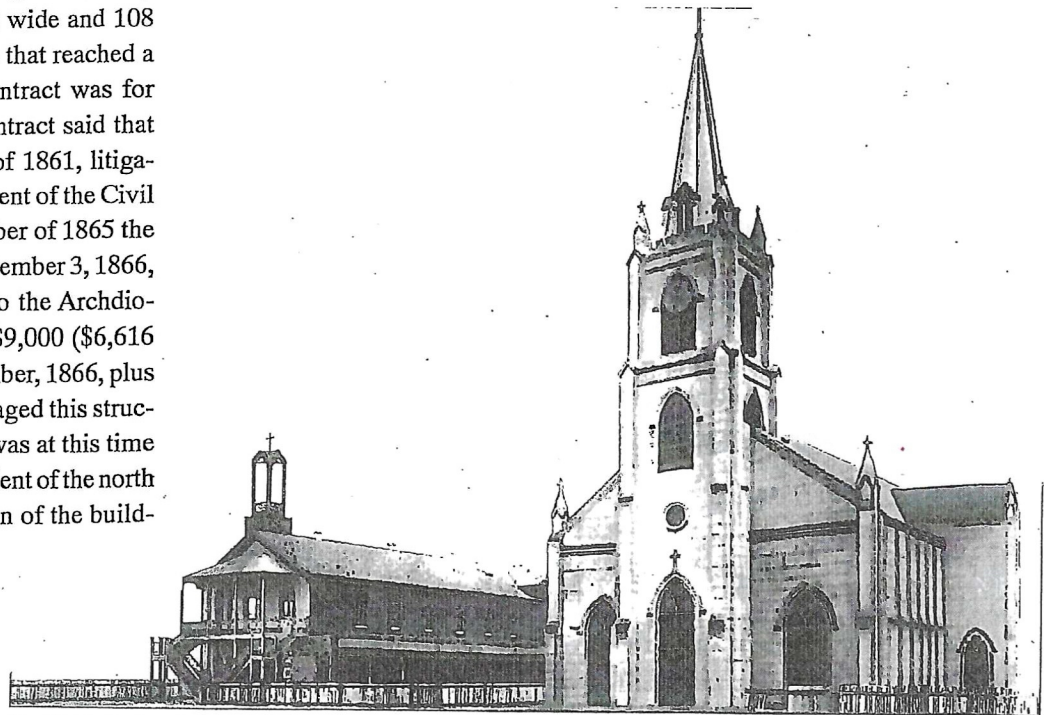
History will note that there were three churches called St. John the Evangelist in Plaquemine - and all of them stood on the same property. All of them bordered on St. John's Square, an historic piece of land in the Plaquemine community, and two of them faced the square, as the present church does.

The first church, facing the river, was constructed in Plaquemine in 1840 by William Hart. The contract was for \$5,700, and the church was to measure 45 feet wide by 70 feet long, with a 52-foot tower built on a 12 by 12 feet base.

## SECOND CHURCH

The second church of St. John the Evangelist is shown here after its remodeling and embellishment by Father Harnais. The building at left, with the odd cupola, was St. John's Free School, built by Father Harnais and destroyed by the fire of 1907. The second church was built by Father Follot in 1861, and was demolished in 1926 to make way for the present impressive edifice.

The contract for the second church was signed on May 18, 1858, and the size was listed as 56 feet wide and 108 feet long, with a 60-foot steeple, and a spire that reached a total of 110 feet from the ground. The contract was for \$16,000. It's interesting to note that the contract said that the pews would have doors. In December of 1861, litigation was filed against the church, but the advent of the Civil War stopped the court proceedings. In October of 1865 the church was seized by creditors, and sold September 3, 1866, to Belfort Marionneaux. It was sold back to the Archdiocese of New Orleans March 28, 1867, for \$9,000 (\$6,616 due on the building plus interest from December, 1866, plus court costs and other charges.) A storm damaged this structure in 1888, and it had to be reinforced. It was at this time the steeple was removed and rebuilt-independent of the north wall of the church. The cross-section portion of the building, to the rear, was also added at this time.



In 1840, Judge John Dulton donated land facing the public square for a Catholic church, the first in Plaquemine. St. John the Evangelist Church was finished in 1850 but destroyed in a fire eight years later. This print is from 1900 and shows the second building, completed in 1861. The building on the left is St. John's School for Boys, built in 1888.



The school's building was destroyed in a fire on April 12, 1907. In 1910, a brick two-story building was built to replace it, and in 1949, a third story was added. The church was torn down in 1926 to build a larger cathedral. The construction was completed in October 1927 at a cost of \$300,000. This postcard is from around 1942. (Courtesy of the Mooney family.)

### THE THIRD CHURCH

The present church of St. John the Evangelist, the most stately of all three which have stood on the property, is 70 feet wide and 250 feet long. The main structure is 234 feet long, and the height of the nave is 60 feet. The campanile measures 20 feet square and extends 114 feet, 7 inches to the top of the cross mounting the tower. A terrace, 70 feet wide by 15 feet deep, leads to the portico of the church which is 70 feet wide and 13 feet deep, and is supported by six columns.

The center aisle of the present church is 6-1/2 feet wide, and the side aisle is 11 feet wide. The aisles are separated and formed by a double colonnade of 13 massive pillars of cast stone, each 11 feet apart. The Ionic capitals of these columns support the upper walls of the large middle aisle, and lead up to the triumphal arch which opens into the transept of the apse where the main altar stands.

The floors of this church are 1-1/2 feet higher than the ground, and the floor in the sanctuary rises 2-1/2 feet above that of the church proper.

The main aisle of the church seats 1,000 persons, and temporary seating in the side aisles and in the balcony over the entrance to the church increases the seating capacity to 1500.

Architect for the church was the firm of Bendernagel & Weil of New Orleans, and the successful low bidder for the construction was Burkes & Burkes, also of New Orleans. The bid was for \$180,711.00 with spread foundation, and \$203,359.00 if pilings were used. Announcement of the awarding of the contract to begin construction included the information that when "architect's fees, altars, pews, organ, windows, light stations, and other fixture are included it will be seen that its cost will total over \$300,000."

The building is of "pressed brick", both inside and out, and is trimmed in marble and stone.

The main altar of the church, one of the most beautiful in the South, was a gift of Mrs. Frank Kearney in honor of her husband, Dr. Frank Kearney. A likeness of him appears above the left hand, front column, of the four columns which support the handsome canapé. The altar alone cost \$22,000.

The church was named to the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Plaquemine Historic District October 30, 1989. The district encompasses approximately 21 blocks of Railroad Avenue, Main, Eden, Church, Plaquemine, and Court streets and includes 92 historic buildings.