DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Christ Episcopal Church is situated on the west bank of Bayou Lafourche on a long, narrow lot located in the sugar cane producing community of Napoleonville, Louisiana. The land donated by Dr. E. E. Kittredge for the church is on the corner of what used to be Elm Hall Plantation. The beautifully proportioned building is in almost perfect scale with the narrow lot, its tall neighboring trees and the small town of Napoleonville.

Designed by Architect Frank Wills of New York City in the Gothic Revival style similar to English village churches from the medieval period, the church was built in 1853 by local carpenters at a cost of $9,500, which was raised locally.

The floor plan is of asymmetrical design with the nave measuring 58' 0" long by 25' S" wide; the sanctuary 22' 0" deep by 18' 10" wide, (off center with the nave); small transept 13' 10" wide by 6' 6" deep only east side; the sacristy 11' 4" wide by 9' 2" deep just forward of the transept (appears to be a later addition) and an entrance portico on the west rear corner (this was completely changed in 1896).

A study of the plan reveals how Frank Wills was influenced by early English village churches. Similar layouts can be found in sketches by Sir Banister Fletcher in his book A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method.

When he planned the church, Wills had to carefully consider the materials which were indigenous to Louisiana. Brick walls, 22" thick, laid in common bond with headers every sixth course, were used in lieu of stone found in most English churches. These bricks, along with virgin cypress wood for roof and floor structure were manufactured locally. The only materials which had to be imported from the East were slate for the roof and stained glass for the windows .

Externally, the one story church has a long and slender appearance with emphasis on the vertical, typical of the Gothic style. The brick walls are 18' 9" high with a very steep slate covered roof on a slope of 20" in 12". Directly above the front transept wall and centered on the nave is a brick spire which is terminated by a graceful cross.

The exterior detailing shows a sensitivity on the part of the architect to achieve elegance in a very simple, straightforward method. The reddish brick walls, once covered with plaster, are reinforced with brick buttresses 18" deep by 19□" wide located directly behind each interior roof truss. The wall base is supported by a water table which flares outward, giving the church a visual sense of stability. Between each buttress is a Gothic-arched stained glass window that is emphasized by masonry work which tapers outward from the glass similar to Gothic portals in Europe. Behind the altar is the north wall which consists of corner buttresses, a heavy brick base which supports a three-paneled, pointed-arch, tracery stained glass window and a larger recessed brick section within the gable which frames the window.

The nave is entered on the west rear corner through a portico which once had a steep slate-covered roof supported by an unusual collar-braced wood truss whose legs extended all the way down to the floor line. This structure was completely replaced in 1896 by a new and well-detailed brick portico. Abutting the portico on the west side of the church now stands an Education Building which was built in later years.

The interior of the church has rather austere, although graceful, detailing. The walls of the church are white plastered, which contrasts with the dark brown stained woodwork. The wood floor is elevated 24" off the ground on 3" x 8" joists and is made of 1" x 6" cypress boards painted brown. The apse contains a stained oak altar, a Gothic-style wood reredos and a large pointed-arch stained glass window behind. Along the walls are slender stained glass windows depicting scenes from the Bible. Within the cast transept are a wood organ, probably added in later years, and a small wood Baptismal font that is flanked by stained glass windows depicting Christ and the Children and the Baptism of Man. The rear wall behind the font has two smaller stained glass windows and a circular window high in the gable. On the west side across from the organ in the east transept, is a wood pulpit in the Renaissance Revival style. It is a memorial to one of the church founders, George W. Jones, who died in 1889. In the nave are eighteen black painted wood pews, and at the left (west) rear of the nave is the entrance, with cypress, paneled doors shaped in a pointed arch.

The roof is constructed of cypress consisting of nine finely detailed collar-braced roof trusses which seem to the roof load down into the walls, 6" x 6" purlins spanning the trusses and 4" x 4" beaded rafters at about 16" apart on center which support the 1" x 10" wood deck. The roof was probably restained in later years since there is no contrast in color between the various framing members or deck. Along the top of the plaster walls is a dark stained wood cornice resembling crenelation on a Medieval castle. This, along with the collar braces, visually joins the walls with the roof structure.

Behind Christ Church, and taking up almost one-half of the property, is Christ Church Cemetery. The first row of tombs is situated about twelve feet from the back of the church and extends across the entire width of the property. The first few rows contain marble and granite vaults, many bearing the names of the early members of Christ Church - Kittredge, Barton, Pugh, Lanier, Dodge, Sundberry, Folly. The family vault of Dr. Ebeneezer Eaton Kittredge is a handsome marble structure enclosed by a wrought iron fence. There are some graves which bear dates prior to the building of the church, and it must be assumed that the bodies wore moved to this cemetery after 1853. Not all of the graves are as impressive as that of the Kittredge family. Mingled with the larger tombs arc more modest, but well kept brick tombs, and there are also some crumbling, unmarked graves.

SPECIFIC DATES	1853
BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Architect - Frank Wills Builder - George Ament

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Christ Episcopal Church in Napoleonville, Louisiana is significant local for several reasons. It exemplifies the typical mid-nineteenth century Episcopal church established in Louisiana by Bishop Leonidas K. Polk and is unusual for the important role it played in a predominantly Catholic section of the state. The church is a good example of the Gothic Revival style, in this case reminiscent of English village churches. It was designed by an important New York Gothic Revivalist, Frank Wills. During the Civil War, Christ Church was used as a barracks for Union troops and then as a stable for their horses. The stained glass was used for target practice, and then fire left the Church a ruin. Many prominent church and community leaders are buried in Christ Church Cemetery.

In his Episcopal address delivered in 1834 at a convention held at Grace Church in St. Francisville, Bishop Polk, who had had a year to study the problems of the Diocese of Louisiana, identified a four-fold challenge: (1) to make divine services available in English to a part of the country which had known only those in Latin, (2) to establish parishes among those settlers who had been Episcopalians before migrating to Louisiana, (3) to bring into the Church those as yet unchurched, and (4) to provide a ministry to the Negro population. In the score of years during which Bishop Polk labored as a diocesan in Louisiana, the number of church buildings increased from three to thirty- three; the congregations from six to forty-seven for Caucasians and more than thirty for Negroes; the clergy from six to thirty-two; and the communicants from 222 to 1,859. The congregations of Negroes included 3 ,600 persons. Christ Church, which was the nineteenth or twentieth edifice to be built during his episcopacy, illustrates well the success of Bishop Polk's efforts in the decade before the Civil War began. The history of Christ Church also constitutes a good response to Bishop Polk's four-fold challenge.

Soon after Bishop Polk resigned as Missionary Bishop of Arkansas with supervision of the Dioceses of Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama and Episcopal oversight of the Republic of Texas to become the first Episcopal Bishop of Louisiana in 1841, he settled upon Bayou Lafourche at Leighton Plantation. He encouraged his plantation neighbors and friends formerly members of the Episcopal Church in such places as Virginia and North Carolina, to meet together for Episcopal services with the intention of forming a permanent congregation. The Reverend Mr. J. F. Young, later Bishop of Florida, had already begun his work as an Episcopal Minister in the Bayou Lafourche area on July 18, 1842 with two communicants. Then Bishop Polk himself conducted the first Episcopal services in Napoleonville on Sunday, June 25, 1843 at the Assumption Court House. The steadily increasing group of communicants continued to meet intermittently ;n the Court House until 1853. During this period survivors were held for the Negroes on the plantations of the Parish.

With a direct and continuing concern for the creation of an Episcopal parish in Assumption, Bishop Polk presided at the organizational meeting of Christ Church, held ten years after its first services. On January 10, 1853 a Constitution was adopted and the first vestry elected. Bishop Polk later spoke of the formal organization of the Parish "under circumstances of great encouragement. Preparations were made to build such a church as will be in some measure appropriate for one of the wealthiest communities in the State to present as an offering to God."[2]

Soon after the organizational meeting of Christ Church, Mr. Frank Wills, an Englishman then residing in New York City, was engaged to draw plans for Christ Church.[3] He was the architect for the New York Ecclesiological Society which promoted the building of churches in the manner of the English parish church of medieval times. He is known to have designed one other church in Louisiana - Trinity Church in Natchitoches. A Mr. George Ament was engaged to build the church, and was later buried in the cemetery behind the church. Dr. Ebeneezer Eaton Kittredge, originally from New Hampshire, donated a corner of his Elm Hall Plantation for the church and cemetery. Col. (of the Assumption Militia) William Whitmell Pugh of Woodlawn Plantation donated the cypress and handmade bricks of which the church was built, as well as the labor. Evidently Bishop Polk was very pleased with the progress of this particular parish, for he wrote:

> "Within little more than a year. . .and that year one of great depression from a widely spread epidemic, the friends of the church in the Parish of Assumption have organized themselves into a parish; and raised, exclusively among themselves, for the support of their minister and the building of their church, above $9,500. That church is completed and it is the most beautiful edifice of its kind I have ever seen in the Southern or Western country. Its style is Gothic, and very pure for its period. And its entire arrangement, within and without, exceedingly appropriate, beautiful, and in the best of taste."[4]

In addition to Dr. Kittredge and Col. Pugh, the first vestry consisted of George Washington Jones, a prominent planter of Glenwood Plantation, who served as Junior Warden for many years; Alexander Franklin Pugh, manager of the extensive Augustin-Bellevue-Whitmell plantation holdings in the northern part of Assumption Parish; Edward F. Pugh of Pothier Plantation, son of the Thomas and Eliza Foley Pugh of Madewood Plantation, R. Sparks, of the family of the outstanding State Senator Colonel W. H. Sparks, and William Reed Mills, the secretary, who was an attorney formerly from Vermont. Col. Pugh was elected Senior Warden and continued to serve in this capacity until a few years before his death in 1906, at the age of 95.

The original subscription contained the names of twenty-one persons, some of whom were not Episcopalians, but residents of the community - some even Roman Catholic - who wished to participate in an undertaking which promised "so great a good" for the whole community. In this predominantly French-speaking community of Napoleonville, little more than a village at the time, Christ Church served not only to provide a means of worship for those of the Protestant persuasion, but also served as a focal point and gathering place for the English-speaking people of the Parish, or "Americans", as they were called.

The formal organization of Christ Church, ten years in the making, came quickly to fruition in the building of the church and the consecration of its sanctuary on May 10, 1854, presided over by Bishop Polk. After this auspicious beginning. Christ Church continued to serve its community through the efforts of prominent leaders and lay people.

The Rev. Mr. J. F. Young resigned in 1855 and then several other rectors served for the few years before the Civil War. In 1860 there were twenty white communicants and twenty Negro communicants. When the Civil War came Bishop Polk left to become a Major-General in the Confederate Army, during which service he lost his life.

During the War, Christ Church was used as a barracks for Federal troops from Ohio and Indiana and then as a stable for their horses. The stained glass windows were used for marksmanship practice and in the end, fire left the church a ruin.[5] Bishop Wilmer, visiting the church in 1867 and holding services in the Assumption Court House, described Christ Church as a "naked ruin" and said "...The inscriptions left upon the charred walls of this holy and beautiful house remain to attest the worth of popular education when not restrained by reverence for God and religion." Bishop Wilmer was encouraged upon this visit, however, "with the many proofs of their sound instruction in the faith, and their intense desire to welcome the advent of a minister of Christ, and the

restoration of their church from its ruins."[6]

Although greatly impoverished by the Civil War, the congregation of Christ Church began the work of restoration immediately, and soon made the building available for public worship. By 1869 they welcomed Bishop Wilmer within their own walls, and he declared that, "They were persecuted, but not foresaken; cast down, but not destroyed."[7] Scarcely was the edifice made habitable, however, than it was struck by lightening during a thunderstorm. Again it was abandoned. As early as 1870, under the leadership of the rector, the Rev. Mr. Charles A. Cameron, restoration of the church edifice was taken anew.

In 1886 Christ Church purchased a rectory for $1,500. Between the years of 1887 and 1906, during the ministry of the Rev. Mr. Upton Bowden, another period of church renovation began, with the Edward Pugh Munson family playing a prominent role therein. Mr. Munson added a belfry to Christ Church in 1896. The magnificent stained glass window above the altar, said to be a "Tiffany", was sent to New York City for restoration during this period. Again in 1909 this ill-fated window was sent to New York City for restoration after being shattered by another "act of nature."

An outstanding clergyman of the twentieth century was the Rev. Mr. Quincy Ewing, a grandson of the Dr. Kittredge who gave the land for Christ Church. This brilliant, always controversial man served as rector of Christ Church from 1906 until 1929, challenging the thought and mores of the comparatively conservative community by espousing such "liberal" views as women's suffrage and such "heretical" ideas on the equality of black people. During one particularly stern sermon on women's suffrage, one of his parishioners, U. S. Senator Walter Guion, a member of the vestry, walked out and withdrew from future membership in the church.[8]

The Rev. Mr. Ewing had earned the enmity of Mississippi's Negro-baiting Senator James K. Vardaman by challenging the racial status quo in his preaching there. Being forced to leave, he continued his iconoclastic battles in Alabama, denouncing the crime of lynching through the columns of The Outlook (October 1904). Far from changing his philosophical and theological views to accord more closely with those of the community, the Rev. Mr. Ewing continued to espouse his more radical views after coming to the Bayou. In 1909 he published in the Atlantic Monthly (March, 1909, Vol., CIII,
p. 393) an article entitled "The Heart of the Race Problem," which was a model of Southern dissent from prevailing views on race. The Rev. Mr. Ewing's long tenure at Christ Church may have been due to the fact that he was among family on Bayou Lafourche. The influence, nevertheless, of such a man preaching such provocative ideas of social justice so foreign to those of his day, could not help but be felt in the small community of Napoleonville.

From its early days with Bishop Polk up until the present time, Christ Episcopal Church has continued to influence the lives of both Episcopalians and others in the Bayou Lafourche community in and around Napoleonville. A number of church leaders through the years have been buried in Christ Church Cemetery, a constant reminder of those who contributed so much through the years to establish Christ Church and then to keep it an active force.

Footnotes

1 Hodding Carter and Betty W. Carter, So Great A Good: A History of the Episcopal Church in Louisiana and of Christ Church Cathedral 1805-1955, (Sewanee: 1955), p. 58.

2 Herman C. Duncan, The Diocese of Louisiana - Some of Its History 1838-1888, (New Orleans: A. W. Hyatt, 1888), p. 178.

3 Phoebe Stanton, The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture, (Johns Hopkins, 1968), pp. 293-296.

4 Carter, p. 67.

5 Ibid, p. 144; Duncan, p. 179.

6 Ibid.

7 Duncan, p. 179.

8 C. W. Wynes, "The Reverend Quincy Ewing: Southern Radical Heretic in the Cajun Country," Louisiana History, VII (Summer, 1966), pp. 2202-2228.

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