

A Concise History of Holy Name of Jesus Church



1886 -Fr. John O'Shanahan, SJ, Superior of the Southern Jesuits, envisioned a parish and college by Audubon Park, since the Cotton Centennial of 1884 had caused sights to turn toward the area. Before applying to Archbishop Francis Janssens, Fr. O'Shanahan promised our Blessed Lord that he would give the title of "His Holy Name" to the Church if the Archbishop would approve of the project.

He must have been persuasive, for Archbishop Janssen did give the Jesuits one of the two new parishes "on condition they build a college and a House of Retreat." With this permission,

Fr. O'Shanahan purchased a section of the Foucher Tract from Joseph Hernandez for \$22,500. The section measured four hundred- forty-seven feet fronting St. Charles Avenue and ran back all the way past Claiborne Avenue, fl depth greater than a mile.

The "Little Jesuits" Church, as distinguished from the great Jesuit Church on Baronne Street, was a Gothic structure made entirely of native wood. Six Jesuit brothers skilled in carpentry constructed the building.

It represented an outlay of 540,000. The "Little Jesuits" was a real Louisiana product: the wood used was from this state; the stained glass windows were made locally, and so was the massive 20,000 pound organ, which had come from the Cotton Centennial of 1884. Jesuit Brothers did the hand-carving and carpenter work, using plans drawn by N. N. Clayton of Galveston, Texas. Its size was 130'x60'.

1892 -On Sunday May 29, 1892; Holy Name was solemnly blessed and dedicated to the honor and glory of God. The Mass was celebrated by Fr. Downey, SJ, recently appointed pastor, and his assistants were Fr. Joseph Gerlach, SJ, and Fr. P. J. Kennedy, SJ. Seventy practicing Catholics comprised the population, and income for the first year was \$163.00.

Fr. John Downey said, "You can see that the temporal and spiritual condition is very poor. The income from the parish does not suffice for our support-It being too small and too poor." The 1st report to the Archdiocese listed three baptisms, one mixed marriage, and one funeral. Only 100 Communion had been distributed according to that first report.

1904 -Plans began taking place for a college. Fr. William Power, SJ, Provincial Superior, appointed Fr. Albert Biever, SJ, and others to staff the new educational Institution. In addition, Fr. Biever was assigned as Pastor of Holy Name.

1910 - To accommodate the building of Marquette Hall and the Thomas Moore Memorial Administrative Building, the original wooden church of Most Holy Name of Jesus was moved thirty feet down St. Charles

Avenue. It is perhaps the first large Catholic church in the city to have been put on rollers and moved intact. The congregation heard Mass Sunday, July 17, 1910, with the building on jackscrews, and immediately afterwards 30 workmen put the structure on rollers and in half a day had moved it to the new location.

1913 - In March Fr. Biever was advised that Miss Kate McDermott was donating \$100,000.00 to the Most Holy Name of Jesus for the erection of a church in memory of her brother, Thomas McDermott, a sugar broker. Subsequently, she increased her gift by \$50,000.00 and made Loyola University heir of her estate. It was the largest gift ever received by the Jesuit Fathers in this city.

Such a timely gift was enormously appreciated, since the "Little Jesuits" had grown substantially and had been unable to handle its congregation, which far exceeded the 400 seating capacity of the wooden church. The new church would have seating room for about 1,600 people.

Pile driving started July 30, 1913. Regrettably, Miss Kate McDermott did not live to see the completion of this project. She died the year the work began.

During this year it was also decided that the Pastor of Holy Name of Jesus and the President of Loyola University would be two separate positions.



1918 - The dedication of the McDermott Memorial Church on December 9, 1918, had Archbishop John Bonzano, Apostolic delegate to the Holy See, officiating. This was the day after Archbishop John W. Shaw received the pallium from him as the new Archbishop of New Orleans.

The only permanent altar installed in the church for the dedication was that of St. Joseph. Grandly carved of Carrara marble and costing \$12,000.00, Lawrence Fabacher had donated the Main Altar in memory of his entire family. Four of the statues on the top represent Saints after whom his sons were named.

1919 - This was a momentous year for Holy Name of Jesus, for the Sunday Mass broadcasts were begun over Loyola's radio station WWL. For years, Mr. Leo Zinser served as Mass Commentator, and Mr. Guy Bernard was organist.

1941 - The upper windows of the church were adorned with stained glass with various memorials.

1974 - This is the year that began a campaign for the renovation of the church. Fr. J. Emile Pfister, SJ, began this campaign when he became pastor this same year.

1977 - On May 29, 1977, commemorating the renovation under the direction of Mr. Piet Kessels, Archbishop Philip M. Hannan presided at the Eucharistic celebration marking 85 years from the church's foundation. The renovation had cost \$450,000.00 three times more than the original construction about 50 years earlier.

1985 - The former convent of the Sisters of Mercy became the parish center, and the residence for the parish priest.