



CATHEDRAL

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the church were destroyed because Father Sedella, also known as Père Antoine, would not let the church bells sound a fire alarm because it was Good Friday. Historian Grace King first quoted the Gazette des Deux-Ponts in which the author said that the person who sent him the details of the fire made the accusation. But even the Gazette's author doubted its factualness.

Winds fanned the flames

The fire started just a few blocks away, and, due to gale-force winds, it spread very fast. Father Sedella wrote that the fire spread so rapidly that he threw some church records into the square, and some he moved to a house "about two rifle shots away," which was quickly engulfed in flames. Spanish Governor Miro's official reports of the fire make no mention of Father Sedella's refusal to ring the church bells. In a very small town, everyone was immediately aware of the fire. The Sedella story is simply unsubstantiated.

Following the fire, Mass was celebrated in various locations, including the Government House on Decatur and Toulouse streets, at Charity Hospital on Rampart Street, in the Ursuline Chapel and in the Corps de Guard, now incorporated in the Cabildo. It was not until 1789 that the charred remains of the 1727 church were cleared.

A new church would be paid for by Spaniard Don Andrés Almonester y Roxas. The cornerstone for the replacement church was laid in early 1789 and progressed



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St. Louis Cathedral as it was rebuilt following the Good Friday Fire in 1788. Spaniard Don Andrés Almonester y Roxas paid for its construction. This was the first St. Louis Church to be known as a "cathedral." A clock tower came later.

slowly as Almonester expected a Spanish title in return, and it was not forthcoming. He even threatened to withdraw his offer.

The new church was designed by Don Gilberto Guillemant, a Frenchman in the military service of Spain. The new church was of a Renaissance design with flanking, octagonal bell towers. Some of the bricks for the church were taken from the walls of an abandoned St. Peter Street cemetery.

The church was stuccoed and painted in imitation marble. While under construction, Louisiana and Florida were separated from the Diocese of Havana, Cuba, in 1793. Consequently, the Church of St. Louis could be called St. Louis Cathedral. As the cathedral was nearing completion, a second great fire occurred on Dec. 8, 1794. While it destroyed adjacent buildings, the church was spared.

Sixteen days later, the cathedral was dedicated on

Christmas Eve, and Almonester finally received his title as a Knight of the Royal and Distinguished Order of Charles III in 1796. Almonester died two years later and was interred in a crypt in the new cathedral.

Central clock tower added

In 1819, the trustees of the cathedral (known as the Marguilliers) and the city decided to add a clock tower to the 1794 church. Noted U.S. architect Benjamin H. Latrobe was selected as the architect, and on Aug. 28, 1819, a contract was signed. It would be one of Latrobe's last projects, for he died of yellow fever in 1820 prior to the completion of the tower.

In 1842, a schism in the local church resulted in the bishop being barred from his cathedral. The fight was between the trustees and the bishop over his authority to appoint the cathedral's rector. The Ursuline chapel was designated as the parish church. The schism was

eventually settled by the Louisiana Supreme Court in 1844 in favor of the bishop.

Benjamin Norman's "New Orleans and Environs," published in 1845, provides a lengthy description of the cathedral. He wrote: "This edifice forcibly strikes the stranger by its venerable and antique appearance. The architecture of the Cathedral is by no means pure, but is not wanting in effect on this account." In "The Manhattaner in New Orleans" (1851), Abraham Hall wrote that one is "much disappointed" in the cathedral, noting you knew you had "seen the elephant."

When Almonester's daughter, Micaela Almonester Pontalba, sought to add a façade to her father's property in Jackson Square, it included an arcade over the sidewalk and a mansard roof. To harmonize with her plans, the city added the mansard roofs to the Cabildo and Presbytere.

The Square was to resem-

ble the Palais Royal in Paris. Consequently, the cathedral which her father had paid for no longer dominated the square. Something had to be done to the cathedral to bring it into scale of the square's new look.

Micaela eventually scrapped her initial plans and built the present Pontalba Buildings. The wardens had consulted architect J.N.B. de Pouilly as early as 1834 to enlarge the cathedral by lengthening and adding interior galleries, but it still could not meet the needed seating capacity.

In 1839, de Pouilly proposed relocating the cathedral to the site of St. Louis No. 1 Cemetery on Basin Street. The remains of New Orleanians in the cemetery would be put in vaults in the new church. The church would have four principal entrances in order to provide cross-ventilation. Orleans Street would then be extended to Jackson Square with the relocation of the church.

De Pouilly's third proposal was to "restore" the 1794 church by lengthening the nave and increasing the Square's façade and adding a central steeple of cypress and wrought iron. The Concordia Intelligencer in Vidalia, Louisiana, on Sept. 14, 1850, wrote: "You will be glad to learn that the old St. Louis Cathedral is being rebuilt so as to retain, as much as possible, its antique and venerable aspect, its greatest charm."

On March 12, 1849, John Kirwan was contracted "for the restoration of the Cathedral of St. Louis," but, in reality, it would turn out to be a new church. De Pouilly's original specifications called for the side walls and lower part of the front

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