



# ARCHITECTURE

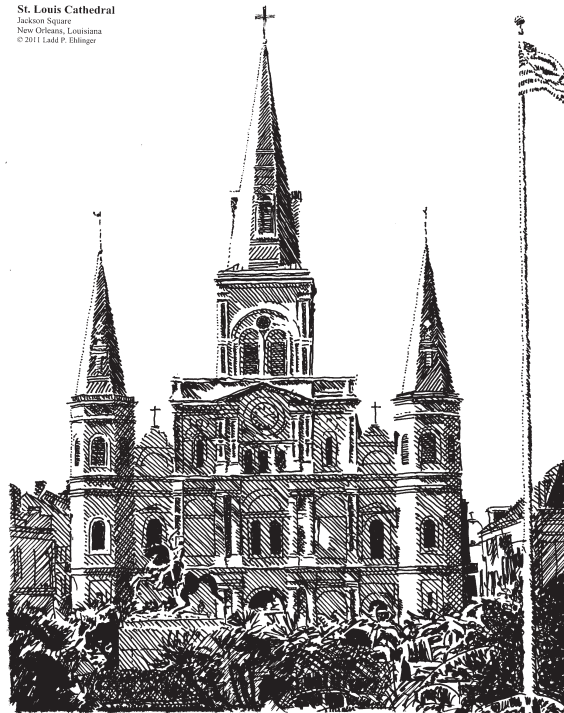
EHLINGER & ASSOCIATES

FOURTH QUARTER 2011

St. Louis Cathedral  
Jackson Square  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
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Ehlinger & Associates extends Seasons Greetings to all of our friends who receive the newsletter. Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and Happy New Year.



St. Louis Cathedral Basilica

## \* The Other Oldest U.S. Cathedrals

St. Louis Cathedral Basilica claims to be the oldest cathedral in the U.S.A. As is typical with any such claim, so do at least two other churches...

San Fernando Cathedral, in San Antonio claims to be the oldest, but it wasn't built until 1733, nor was it elevated to a cathedral until 1873. However, San Fernando retains the original walls, as opposed to St. Louis' several complete rebuilds.

Another claim, by Baltimore's Basilica, is equally true. Constructed in 1806, it is the youngest of the three with claims, but it was dedicated as a cathedral in its own diocese before Louisiana or Florida (and their associated, older diocese) became part of the U.S.A. Louisiana was the 18th state in 1812, Florida the 27th in 1845, and Texas the 28th, also in 1845.

This quarter's newsletter sketch by Ladd Ehlinger is of the famous St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans.

Shortly after the official founding of New Orleans as a city in 1718, the site of the present day St. Louis Cathedral Basilica was selected by French engineer, Adrien De Pauger, who also designed the primary layout of the city into a 66 square parallelogram. A quick, crude wooden structure was built on the site to house religious activities in the young city, but no plans or sketches of it exist.

In 1722, just after being declared the new capital of French Louisiana (formerly in Biloxi), New Orleans was hit by a severe hurricane that leveled the church and most of the infant city. De Pauger designed the second church, which wasn't completed until 1727, a year after its architect, De Pauger, passed, who is buried in the church.

The second church was a "brick between post" construction, a method of construction developed by the French colonists and maintained through the Spanish occupation, where the supporting

structure is a wood post and beam frame, with the spaces between posts filled in with brick and then covered either with wood siding or stucco, to protect the brick and the wood frame from the harsh humidity and rains.

The second church stood for sixty years, until the Great New Orleans Fire of 1788. The fire occurred on Good Friday, a day on which it was forbidden to ring the church bells - the usual alarm and call to action during a fire. 865 buildings were destroyed, along with the church.

Construction of the third church didn't begin until a year after the fire. The architect is unknown, but it was funded by Don Andres Almonaster y Roxas, a wealthy emigrant from Andalusia (Spain). It is rumored that bricks from the original city cemetery were used in the construction.

During its five year construction, the diocese of Louisiana & Florida was created by the Pope in 1793. As such, the church was dedicated as a Cathedral on Christmas Eve, 1794, making St. Louis Cathedral the

oldest operating cathedral in the U.S.\*

As a Cathedral, St. Louis became the Bishop's See - his seat in the diocese, and New Orleans gained standing in the Catholic Church, allowing for continued improvements to the cathedral.

In 1819, Benjamin Henry Latrobe was hired to design a new central tower for the cathedral. Latrobe is best known for designing the U.S. Capital building, and is often referred to as "the father of U.S. Architecture". In New Orleans, he designed the Customhouse in 1807, and the first waterworks system was designed and initiated by him and his son in 1811.

For the cathedral, Latrobe designed a large central tower, to house a bell and clock, procured by a New Orleans clockmaker, Jean Delachaux, on a trip to Paris. The bell was officially named "Victoire", for victory at the Battle of New Orleans. (Translated French inscription:)

*Brave Louisiana, this bell whose name is Victory has been melted in memory of the glorious day of January 8, 1815.*



St. Louis Cathedral, 1838,  
with Latrobe's central tower design.

Latrobe succumbed to yellow fever in 1820, shortly before his final project, the tower, was completed.

Improvements to the Cathedral continued. In 1825, Italian artist Francisco Zapari was hired to decorate the interior of the church. In 1829 an organ was procured.

In 1840, Andrew Jackson returned to New Orleans for the dedication of a monument in the Place d'Arms, renamed as Jackson Square, which resides directly in front of the cathedral.

The church was in need of an expansion as the city grew, but it wasn't until 1845 that further work on the cathedral was initiated. In 1844, work by the Baroness Pontalba on the two buildings to each side of the square resulted in a visual dwarfing of the cathedral, and the church board wanted to bring the cathedral back to scale.

French architect J. N. B. de Pouilly was hired to design the expansion of St. Louis Cathedral. De Pouilly was a well known and prolific architect in New Orleans, and had just recently completed St. Augustine Church (1842), the first African-American Catholic church.

His design for St. Louis Cathedral retained the three spire design of Latrobe, but enlarged them with towering spire steeples and the French Romantic flavor with which we are familiar with today.

The expansion was of such a nature that very little of the third church remained intact. It was intended for the side walls to remain, but the nature of the expansion required their replacement, so it is arguable whether De Pouilly's's expansion constitutes a "fourth" church on the site.

During construction of the new design and expansion, the central tower collapsed, resulting in extensive damage to the walls and roof. De Pouilly was fired from the project, but it was still completed according to his designs.

Fortunately, the bell, "Victoire", survived the incident and was reinstalled in the new tower. It is not known if the clock is the original or not.

In 1909, a dynamite explosion occurred in the cathedral, under suspicious circumstances.

*The police express the belief that dissention among a party of Italian workmen, engaged in making certain repairs to the south tower of the church, was responsible for the explosion. It is claimed that a charge of dynamite or some other high explosive was placed where it was thought it would send into eternity certain workmen against whom the enmity of the perpetrators existed and that a miscalculation as to the time of the explosion was made.* (The State, Columbia, SC, 26 Apr 1909)

The Hurricane of 1915 damaged the foundation of the cathedral, portions of which collapsed the following year, requiring closure for renovations.

In 1964, Pope Paul VI designated the Cathedral a Minor Basilica, and it was visited by Pope John Paul II in 1987.

The Cathedral was spared major damage during Hurricane Katrina (though there was some roof damage and water intrusion, requiring repair of the organ among other items).

Inside the church, one is greeted by the rows of wooden ionic columns, separating the side aisles from the nave, and supporting an unused second floor gallery.

The altar is framed by a rococo style backdrop with gilded, fluted Corinthian columns. One may note the small size of the windows, easy to protect during the frequent hurricanes, but the size also highlights the tale of St. Louis' life, as pictured in the intricate stained glass.

The barrel vaulted ceiling captures the bays of the wall in a rolling Gothic arch, transitioning to the intricate renaissance style artwork that decorates the ceiling. De Pouilly's Beaux Arts design influence can be felt without overwhelming the experience.

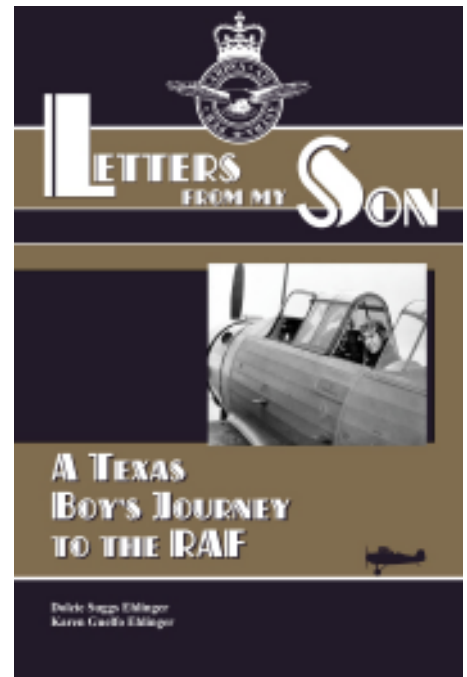
- Perrin Ehlinger

## Welcome Aboard!

E&A welcomes Dustin Hartman as our newest intern architect.

Graduating from LSU in 2010 with a degree in architecture, Dustin has been involved in the construction industry since 2003 during his junior year in high school at Brother Martin. During college, he continued work with several contractors, then took an internship where he excelled in drafting, modelling and rendering, as well as performing site visits for various projects.

At E&A, Dustin continues his internship, working with plans, elevations, detail drawings, cost estimating, specifications, site visits, and other project duties.



The coming-of-age story of Early Willson Jr., a simple boy from Texas whose adventures led him to become a pilot in Britain's Royal Air Force. From Harlem to London, from the depths of the Depression to the dawn of World War II, journey with Early through his long-lost letters and memoirs as he struggles to find his place amidst the turbulent times.

by: Dolcie Suggs Ehlinger  
and Karen Guelfo Ehlinger  
Available December 2011 at most bookstores. For an autographed copy, mail a check for \$22.95 to:

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