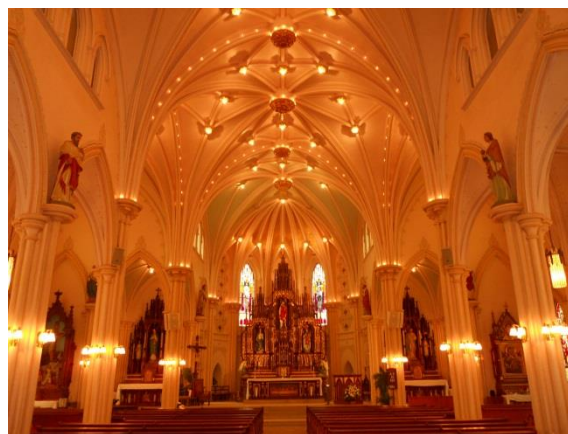


Sandwiching in History
St. Edward Catholic Church
823 Sherman Street, Little Rock
June 5, 2015
By Rachel Silva



Intro

Good afternoon, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the “Sandwiching in History” tour of the St. Edward Catholic Church. I’d like to thank the folks at St. Edward’s for allowing us to tour their beautiful church today. Specifically, I’d like to recognize Al Schneider, Scott Sparks, Teresa Mendez, and Father Jason Tyler for their help with the tour.

This tour is worth one hour of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me after the tour if you’re interested.

The cornerstone for St. Edward Catholic Church was laid in 1901, and the building was completed in 1905. The interior was finished and dedicated in 1911. The church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 for its Gothic Revival design by Little Rock architect Charles L. Thompson.

Organization of St. Edward Parish & First Church

A significant number of German immigrants came to Arkansas in the 1870s and 1880s. Many of these people were German Catholics who had fled their native land to escape Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. The German word *Kulturkampf* ("culture struggle") refers to the legally sanctioned discrimination and harassment of Catholics in the German Empire carried out by Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck from 1871 to 1878. Bismarck's anti-Catholic policies were enacted in response to a perceived political threat from the Pope and a growing number of Catholics. Fleeing persecution, these German immigrants were drawn to Arkansas by railroad companies and the Catholic Church.

For example, the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railway worked closely with Bishop Edward Fitzgerald to advertise the land in the Arkansas River Valley between Little Rock and Fort Smith to German Catholics. The railroad company wanted people to settle along the route, thereby establishing a market for its services. St. Benedict's Colony, located near Paris in Logan County, was founded in 1877 on land donated by the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railway. The colony was created after Bishop Fitzgerald encouraged Benedictines from St. Meinrad's Abbey in southern Indiana to establish a mission on the western frontier. In 1891 St. Benedict's Colony became an independent monastery and was renamed Subiaco Abbey. Subiaco provided Benedictine priests for St. Edward's until 1992.

In 1880 the Cathedral of Saint Andrew was the only Catholic church in Little Rock. Because of the influx of new German-speaking Catholics, Father Felix Rumpf, O.S.B. (Order of St. Benedict), was appointed assistant pastor at St. Andrew's Cathedral in 1883 to minister to the German members of the congregation. In 1884 Bishop Edward Fitzgerald (the second bishop of the Diocese of Little Rock, which includes all Catholics in Arkansas and at that time, Indian Territory) sanctioned the creation of a German-speaking parish at Little Rock and donated three city lots—each worth \$400—on East Ninth Street for the construction of a new church.

Construction of the first church began in September 1884. The first church faced south on Ninth Street and was located near the middle of the block between

Sherman and Ferry streets. It was a two-story, wood-frame building with overall dimensions of 40 by 90 feet. The building had a front-facing gabled roof and a central bell tower. The first floor had a 14-foot ceiling and housed a school and the priest's living quarters. The second floor, which had a 22-foot ceiling, served as the worship space. The total construction cost was \$6,510.48, which included pews and other furnishings for the church as well as desks for the school.

The church was dedicated on August 26, 1885, to St. Edward, King and Confessor, in honor of Bishop Edward Fitzgerald's patron saint. Rev. Felix Rumpf was the first pastor of the church. The church bell was manufactured in 1886 by the Buckeye Bell Foundry in Cincinnati, Ohio, and weighed 1,203 pounds. It was purchased by St. Edward's parishioner and Little Rock saloon keeper Nick Kupferle in memory of his wife, Rosa, who died on July 9, 1885. Text on the bell read, "Dedicated to Saint Rosa," which was not in reference to a true saint but rather, a term of endearment.

Second (Current) Church

The present church was constructed because the congregation had outgrown its 1885 building. The cornerstone for the second (and current) church was laid on November 10, 1901, at the corner of E. Ninth and Sherman streets, west of the first church building. An article published in the *Arkansas Gazette* on November 10, 1901, provided information about the new church.

"Every Sunday, early in the morning, service begins, and the church is always filled three and four times a day. The old church, which is not at all a small building, has become insufficient for their numbers. The necessity has become imperative to erect a larger and handsomer church; larger, for the increasing number of its members; handsomer to be in keeping with the growth of a prosperous city. The site on Ninth and Sherman streets is the most beautiful place in the city for a church, being situated opposite the beautiful City Park. This fact demands a more costly, creditable edifice. To accomplish this, our German Catholics have received many

encouragements, and it is their aim to meet all expectations and to keep up the record that the German congregations enjoy everywhere else.”

“...The new church is being built in the form of a cross...When completed, the church will be 140 feet long. At present, only 112 feet are being built. The sanctuary proper (area around main altar), which will be added later, will be 28 feet long. The width of the church in front, at the towers, is 62 feet...The interior arrangements will have much similarity to that of St. Andrew’s Cathedral. The roof will be supported by pillars. The height from the floor to the ceiling will be less in the new church than in the cathedral. This will be done with a view to secure good acoustics. Mr. Charles L. Thompson is the architect of the building. The contractor for the foundation of the church, Mr. William Mara, will have completed his work within a few days. The beautiful, massive appearance of the granite ashlar facings attract the attention and admiration of all.”

The second and present church was completed in spring 1905 and was dedicated on July 4, 1905. There was a five-day celebration of the dedication, beginning on July 2. The church was blessed by the Rt. Rev. Edward P. Allen, Bishop of Mobile, Alabama, because Bishop Fitzgerald was ill at that time. Sermons were given in German and English following the blessing. This brings up an interesting point. Sermons at St. Edward’s were given in German until World War I, when Bishop Morris issued a directive that sermons should no longer be given in German as a demonstration of patriotism on the part of Catholics in Arkansas.

The interior of St. Edward’s was not completed until 1911, and a second dedication took place on July 4, 1911. The service was conducted by Bishop John Baptist Morris, the third Catholic bishop of the Diocese of Little Rock. Father Maurus Rohner was pastor of St. Edward’s at that time. The total cost for the second church was \$113,787.02 (exterior was \$54,139.74 and interior was \$59,647.28). They spent more on the interior than the exterior!

Architecture & Interior Details

In the late 19th century, the English Gothic Revival style was very popular, especially for churches, because it embraced medieval forms and details which drew the line of sight upward toward God and heaven. St. Edward's was laid out in the shape of a cross with a nave (pews), transept (North-South cross-section), and sanctuary/apse (area around the main altar/curved section behind the main altar). The congregation faces east toward the rising sun, which serves as a reminder that Jesus is the son of God and the light of the world.

St. Edward's is one of the few Gothic Revival-style buildings designed by the Thompson firm. Interestingly, Thompson's original design for the church included two spires, one on top of each front tower. These spires were never built, possibly because they were cost prohibitive. Nevertheless, the church is an excellent example of Gothic Revival design. Characteristics include multiple towers, lancet (or pointed arch) window and door openings, buttresses, stained glass windows with elaborate tracery, and crockets (or finials) on the transepts. The building's foundation is made of locally quarried granite, and the exterior walls are grey-brown brick. Lintels, sills, and exterior trim are made from Carthage, Missouri, marble, identified by running veins which resemble cracks. The roof is patterned slate, which was replicated and repaired in 1993. The 1886 church bell was reinstalled in the north tower of the new church.

The church interior features ornate plaster work. The plaster at St. Edward's, done at a time when the usual daily wage of a plasterer was \$1.50, cost over \$32,000. This price tag was the result of delicate arches and molded rosettes, which were trimmed in pale pink and 23-carat gold leaf.

When the present church was completed in 1905, before the interior decoration was finished, the high altar and altars of the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph from the 1885 building were brought here. A more elaborate high altar and side altars, five in all, were dedicated on October 13, 1912. These altars were made in Germany and shipped to Little Rock. They were hand-carved linden wood with onyx pillars. The high altar featured statues of Edward the Confessor (center, top), the English king who built St. Peter's Abbey (now Westminster), as well as St.

Catherine (left) and St. Henry (right), patron saints of Henry and Catherine Schmedes (“Schmeads”), who donated real estate to St. Edward’s Church. The Last Supper was depicted in the center of the altar table. The high altar from 1912 was destroyed by fire in 1964 and rebuilt. To get an idea of the high altar’s original design, look at the altars of Mary and Joseph. More on that in a minute...

The stained glass windows were imported from Germany and most were donated by parishioners. The 14 Stations of the Cross, which depict the suffering and passion of Jesus, were also imported from Germany. The plaster scenes are about three feet tall with separate wooden crosses above each station. They originally had German inscriptions but were later changed to English. The statues of the saints were installed in 1910-1911 during the original interior decoration. Twelve columns are capped by these statues. [At least two of the statues (Peter and Paul) were here by 1905, but the rest were added a bit later.]

The south side of the church is the Epistle side, and the north side of the church is the Gospel side. Most of the stained glass windows on the Epistle side (south) feature male saints, while windows on the Gospel side (north) have female saints. At the turn of the 20th century, it was common practice for men to sit on the Epistle side (south) and women to sit on the Gospel side (north).

When this church was first completed in 1905, the lighting consisted of sconces on the interior columns, and that’s it. The overhead lights—with the exception of the bronze lamps—were installed in 1911 by the Arkansas Electric Company as indemnity (or compensation) for an accident suffered by Father Maurus Rohner, the pastor at St. Edward’s. According to an article in *The Guardian*, in early August 1911, Father Maurus Rohner was hospitalized after his horse-drawn carriage was struck by a streetcar. He was seriously injured but recovered. The Arkansas Electric Company, which then owned the streetcar, compensated the priest with lighting for the new church.

The church features wrought-iron sacristy panels and gates as well as door hinges and exterior lamps manufactured by Binz Brothers Iron & Wire Works, then-

located at 1018 Center Street in Little Rock. Binz Ironworks is still in business today. What are sacristy panels and gates? The sacristy is the area where vestments and sacred vessels are kept. St. Edward's has a double sacristy, separated from the sanctuary/apse by iron panels—the room on the north is used by clergy, and the room on the south is used by altar servers (both boys and girls).

The organ was purchased in 1909 for \$5,000. It was refurbished in 1986 for \$60,000. During the 1986 project, the pipes were reconfigured to make the western rose window visible from inside the church.

1952 Re-decoration

In 1952 twelve bronze lamps were installed in the church to replace “simple commercial units which were inconsistent with the Gothic architecture.” The bronze lamps were purchased from Worthen Bank & Trust Company, then-located at 401 S. Main (now the KATV Building), which was disposing of the lamps for \$37.50 each. Fourteen lamps were purchased with the help of donations from parishioners. Two lamps were later given to Marylake Monastery, and twelve remained at St. Edward's. [Only nine lamps can be accounted for at St. Edward's today.]

The church's interior walls originally featured simple painted decoration (or stenciling) over the arches and along the plaster molding. The interior was restenciled in 1952 by the Cole Brothers for \$12,100. Three sons of Steve L. Cole, Sr., an accomplished painter who died in 1945, formed Cole Brothers, painters. The Cole brothers were Steve, Jr., Larry, and John Cole. They were members of Our Lady of Good Counsel Church in Little Rock. The Cole Brothers simplified the pattern around the arches and molding and added panels of stenciling with Christian symbols. The Cole Brothers also covered ten panels above the high altar with gold leaf.

1964 Fire

On the evening of Sunday, January 12, 1964, some Catholic High students were leaving a basketball game at the St. Edward's gymnasium and noticed that the church was on fire. They immediately reported the fire, but smoke had already filled the church. Three hours later, the smoke-blackened tabernacle and Blessed Sacrament were recovered from the church. The sacred vessels were tarnished but not otherwise damaged. The fire started in the south transept where votive candles were burning at the shrine of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. That shrine and the high altar were the most heavily damaged. The St. Benedict and St. Scholastica windows over the high altar were destroyed. The St. John the Evangelist window melted. The stained glass windows not destroyed by the fire were severely damaged. There was extensive damage to the sacristy, the sanctuary floor, and the church basement.

Bishop Albert Fletcher wanted the altars and windows restored as closely as possible to their original appearance. The restoration of the church was underway by July 1964. Leo J. Hiegel of the Little Rock architectural firm of Weaver and Hiegel was in charge of the entire project. Nabholz Construction Company of Conway was tasked with structural repairs and repainting. Ludwig Schermer of Schermer Art Studios in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was in charge of restoring and rebuilding the damaged altars, windows, and statues.

The high altar was actually restored by a descendant of the original builder. Ludwig Schermer helped locate Ferdinand Staflesser, who succeeded his father as proprietor of the woodcarving studio which made the original altar. He had moved his shop from Germany to a village in northern Italy. Staflesser had his father's plans for the original altar and was able to reconstruct it. The replacement had three differences from the original—it did not have onyx pillars, gold leaf was added, and the altar table was separate from the altar screen (to allow priests to celebrate Mass facing the people; this became common practice after the Second Vatican Council).

The windows of St. Benedict, St. Scholastica, and St. John the Evangelist were rebuilt in Germany. Ludwig Schermer repaired and restored every other window

at his studio in Tulsa. Each piece of glass had to be removed, cleaned, repainted, refired, resealed, and then reinstalled in the frame. After the fire, the church's wooden floor was replaced with concrete overlaid with terrazzo.

During the repair work, the parish hall was used for Mass. In April 1965 services were again held in the church. The restoration work was finished in August 1965 but was not paid for until the 1970s.

2001-2002 Restoration

The last restoration at St. Edward's began in 2001 and was completed in May 2002. At that time, the stenciling was repainted by Becky Witsell based on historical photographs of the church interior. The total cost of the project was \$650,000.

St. Edward's Catholic School/Sisters' Home/Rectory

When St. Edward's parish was created in 1884, there was a provision for a school. The school opened in September 1885 with 64 students and was located on the first floor of the 1885 church. Lay teachers managed the school until 1892, followed briefly by the Benedictine Sisters from Jonesboro. Beginning in 1895, the Benedictine Sisters from St. Scholastica's Convent at Shoal Creek, Arkansas, were engaged to teach the children. [The St. Scholastica Monastery later moved to Fort Smith, where it remains today.]

After the current church was completed in 1905, the school remained in the 1885 building, which sat directly behind the new church and faced Ninth Street. The parish hall also occupied part of the old building. In the 1920s, the old church/school building was moved over to the corner of Ninth and Ferry, still facing south on Ninth, and a brick veneer was added. By the 1950s, the old school/parish hall was deemed unrepairable and unsafe. A new school, located at 816 Ferry Street, was built to replace it. Construction began on the new school in October 1954, and it was completed in April 1955. The old building was then

demolished. In 1963 a classroom wing and gymnasium were added to the school (this is the part of the school at the corner of 9th and Ferry). In 2007 a new school building was constructed on the site of the old rectory (north of the current church) and was connected to the 1955 school by a breezeway.

In 1897 the Sisters, who had originally lived in the 1885 church/school building, moved into an old, wood-frame school at the southeast corner of 8th and Sherman that had been purchased from the Little Rock School District. This old school served as the Sisters' Home until a two-story, brick convent was built in 1927 on the same site. The Sisters helped to staff the school and lived in the 1927 Sisters' Home until 1997. The building was then used as church offices and a clinic. It is currently the church office building.

The rectory (or priest's living quarters) was originally located in part of the first floor of the 1885 church building. After the construction of the current church, the rectory was located in a one-story, wood-frame house at 815 Sherman Street (just north of the church). The old rectory was demolished in 1953 and a new brick rectory and parish hall was erected on the same site. It was completed in December 1953. The 1953 rectory was demolished to make way for the 2007 school building. The parish then purchased a house at 620 Ferry Street to serve as the rectory.

Recent past & current stats

The Benedictine priests based at Subiaco Abbey, who had served St. Edward for more than a century, left the parish in 1992 due to a shortage of priests. Since that time, the parish has been served by priests from the Diocese of Little Rock. In 1994 Bishop Andrew McDonald designated St. Edward's as the parish for Spanish-speaking sermons. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, there was a Polish presence at St. Edward's. In 1994 St. Edward's had an associate pastor from Poland, and for a brief time, masses were offered in three languages each Sunday—English at 9:30 a.m., Polish at 11 a.m., and Spanish at 2 p.m. Due to a shortage of Sisters, St.

Edward's School is now staffed by laypersons. The school offers instruction in Pre-K through 8th grade and finished the 2014-2015 school year with 154 students.

Interior Symbolism (windows, altars, stenciling, statues, etc.)

High Altar—rebuilt in 1964 by a descendant of the original craftsman based on the original drawings. It features three statues—Edward the Confessor (center), St. Catherine (left), and St. Henry (right). St. Catherine and St. Henry were included in remembrance of Henry and Catherine Schmedes (“Schmeads”), who donated money and real estate to the church.

Edward the Confessor holds a church, symbolic of building churches. He built Westminster Abbey.

St. Catherine refused to renounce Christianity for a royal marriage and was sentenced to die on a spiked wheel. The wheel broke, and she was beheaded instead. She holds the wheel.

St. Henry was King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor. He built several religious buildings and protected them from attacks, so he holds a church and sword.

Crucifix—from the 1885 church.

Blessed Virgin Mary Altar—carved wood with onyx pillars. This resembles the original high altar but on a smaller scale. The angels hold banners reading, “We adore you.” “We glorify you.”

North transept—

Altar of Suffering Souls—Small altar representing the abyss of Purgatory surmounted by a Crucifix. Shows angels pouring the Precious Blood of Christ upon the needy souls who look up to the Cross for assistance and relief. Notice the man with a crown in Purgatory—this is included to show you that people of all classes may go to Purgatory.

The altar rail was removed from the church after the 1964 fire and Vatican II. It was stored upstairs for years and was discarded in the early 1990s. The old, ornate confessionals were also stored upstairs after Vatican II. In 1994 parts of the old confessionals were used to build the altars to Our Lady of Guadalupe (north transept) and Our Lady of Czestochowa (“Chest-a-hova”; south transept).

South side—

St. Joseph Altar—carved wood with onyx pillars. The angels hold banners reading, “We bless you.” “We praise you.” The stenciling on the wall by Joseph’s altar relates to Joseph as the patron of a happy death. The dancing deer are symbolic of Psalm 42: The Christian yearns for God as the deer for water. The second image depicts the last rites—oil, stole, and candle. A candle is extinguished when a dying person takes his last breath. Bottom image features the letters “S” and “J” for St. Joseph.

Shrine to Our Lady of Perpetual Help—

Mary comforts the Christ child. Archangel Michael appears on the left, and Archangel Gabriel appears on the right.

Point to Our Lady of Czestochowa (“Chest-a-hova”; south transept) again.

Rose windows—

North transept—Joseph; large stained glass window below the rose window depicts the death of St. Joseph.

South transept—Maria; large stained glass window below the rose window depicts the holy family.

Choir loft—“IHS”: the first three letters of Jesus in Greek, “Ihsus”

Stained glass windows in the nave—

Female saints on the north side and male saints on the south side. The names of each saint are written in the halo above their head.

12 statues of saints cap the columns

***Next tour is Friday, July 10 at NLR City Hall.