

Salem United Church of Christ in New Orleans celebrates its 150th anniversary: Spirit and Spice

By Marilyn Stewart (April 2013)

Services were held in German only when Salem United Church of Christ, 4212 Camp St., formed at the height of the Civil War. Born as the First German Lutheran Church of the Sixth District, the congregation came to embrace both the Evangelical and Reformed traditions. Thousands have been baptized, confirmed, and married at the church.

At the anniversary celebration every 25 years, the cornerstone is opened. When opened last month, the artifacts removed included a 1905 edition of the German gazette, the "New Orleanser Deutsche Zeitung," rolls of handwritten lists of members' names and a twenty-five year old hymnal in pristine condition. Inside also was an August 6, 1905 edition of The Daily Picayune. The items were stored in a World War II ammo box and a copper box that had been welded shut.

A second cornerstone, at the educational building, was discovered last month with items dating to 1936, including a commemorative trowel used when the cornerstone was laid.

Church records show that the founding pastor served four months until his arrest as a Union Army deserter. During the Yellow Fever outbreak of 1878, the pastor at the time, and his wife, both lost their lives.

Early in the 20th century, services in German were held on Sunday morning, with English services kept for the evening. Members were allowed the use of the building for funerals free of charge as long as they paid the organist two dollars and the janitor, one.

The church is noted for its historic stained glass Memorial Windows that are listed in the Census of Stained Glass Windows in America, 1840-1940. The Tiffany-styled windows were featured in the documentary "Holy New Orleans," by WYES-TV, on the history and architecture of New Orleans churches.

"This little church of German heritage has survived the challenges of past and present, the effects of wars, the hardships of the Depression, and the constant changes of modern society," wrote Linda Pohlmann, secretary. "However, through it all, Salem has endured and remained a 'priceless legacy.'" For information, call 504.895.0392.