

14. CHURCH OF THE VISITATION  
222 North Jefferson Street

Church of the Visitation  
Reverend Alban J. O'Hara  
222 North Jefferson Street  
Huntsville, Alabama 35801

Lot 6, Block 302, Old Town; 100' (Jefferson) x 146'  
16 537780 3843290

Begun 1861 - dedicated 1877: Architect/Builder unknown

DESCRIPTION

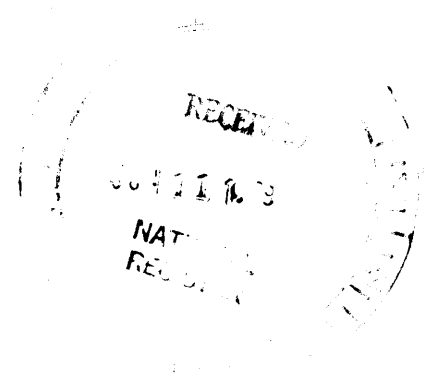
This is a one-story, limestone structure of Romanesque Revival design with a steep gabled roof, two hexagonal stone towers set at the front corners and a semi-hexagonal apse. The trim-stone is smooth limestone, the front wall surfaces are slightly rougher in texture, and the foundation and side-walls surfaces are rough-faced regular ashlar. The apse, which appears to have been added between 1871 and 1884, is randomly coursed ashlar of medium texture. The front towers originally had tall hexagonal wooden spires which were replaced in the early 20th century with short, stubby ones above 8 and 12 feet high. The north spire base is raised approximately 6' above that of the south in order to house the bell.

The large main central entrance consists of double paneled doors topped by a round arch with wood paneled infill. Originally these doors were much taller and had four panels. The entry is flanked by pilasters which extend above the steep gabled roof about 5 feet with a low-sloped gabled-topped wall connecting between the pilasters. All windows are round-arched in the romanesque manner; side windows are paired within a larger stone arch. Arches are set out from the wall face with imposts and keystones set out still more. A projecting stone, belt-course occurs about mid-way up the front wall. The walls, except for the apse are topped by simple, bold stone cornices.

The interior is noted for the barrel vault over the center aisle of the three-aisle nave and the unusual capitals of the columns. The apse is a half-dome over a half cylinder and is separated from the nave by an arch and flanking pilasters. In the past quarter century several moderate alterations have occurred and consist of: replacement of tall entry doors with present ones, replacement of narrow entry steps by present wide ones, rough plaster finish and gypsum board installed on interior walls, installation of plywood wainscot, installation of plate glass openings in east narthex wall, installation of modern pews, and covering of wooden floor with tile and carpet.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Church of the Visitation is the oldest Catholic Church in Northeast Alabama and is one of the state's earliest examples of the Romanesque Revival style. The building was modern for its period in that it was not archaeological in design and used the medieval Romanesque examples only as a point of departure. Locally it is noted as the only 19th century church in the area with a barrel-vaulted nave ceiling or load-bearing limestone walls and one of only two mid-19th century churches with internal columns in the nave.



Significance (continued)

The church was established in 1860 by Father Jeremiah Treacy and work on the building began the following year. Construction was halted by the Civil War and the building was not completed until 1872 and not dedicated until 1877. Although the architect is not known, research is currently being conducted to determine if Patrick C. Keely of Brooklyn provided plans for the building.

