

New Orleans Historic District Landmarks Commission
Designation Report
The Norwegian Seamen's Church



Meeting Date: April 10, 2019

Property Address: 1758 - 1772 Prytania Street

Owner: 1772 Prytania St LLC
1470 URANIA ST
NEW ORLEANS, LA 70130

Architect: Nils Erling Hansen

Construction Date: 1968

Significance: Architectural, Cultural

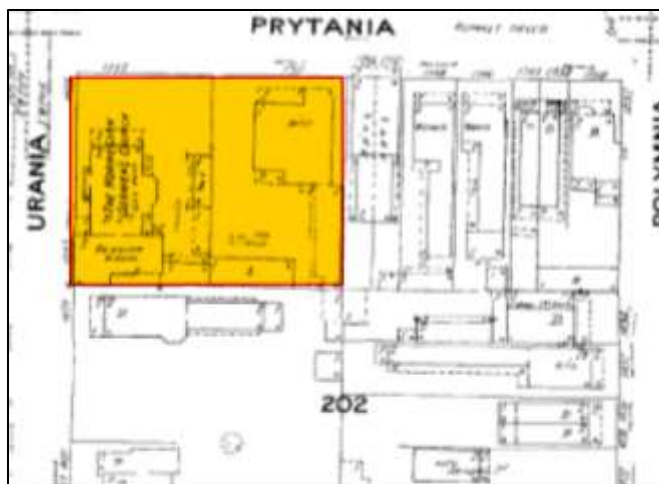


Figure 1. Sanborn Map, New Orleans, 1937 vol. 4, Sheet 378

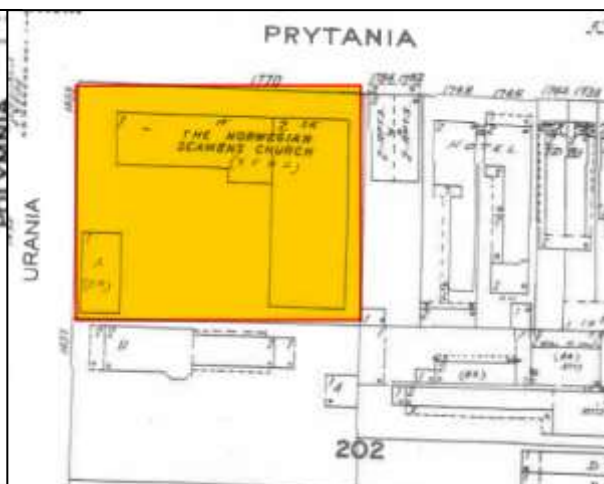


Figure 2. Sanborn Map, New Orleans, 1994 vol. 4, Sheet 378

General History

In 1825, the first recorded ship of Norwegian immigrants to the United States, the “Restaurationen,” left from Stavanger for New York, with 52 passengers on board.¹ The New York Statemen reported “It is the captain’s intention to remain in this country, to sell his vessel and prepare himself to navigate our waters.”² In 1838, Ole Rynning published *Sandfaerig Beretning om Amerika*, a “True Account of America for the Information and Help of Peasant and Commoner,” a guidebook for Norwegians who wished to emigrate to America.³ He wrote, “Norwegians are found to be scattered about in many places in the United States. One may meet a few Norwegians in New York, Rochester, Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New Orleans.”⁴ He noted that wages in New Orleans were “very high” compared to Missouri or Wisconsin.⁵ While the “quickest and cheapest route” to the Midwest was through New Orleans, he warned that “one can seldom go to New Orleans except in ships which are sheathed with copper, and that New Orleans is very unhealthy and insalubrious, except from the beginning of December until April.”⁶

The vast majority of Norwegians coming to New Orleans, however, were sailors, arriving on both Norwegian ships, and foreign ones. The first Norwegian cargo ship arrived in New Orleans in 1839, transporting coffee from Brazil.⁷ The Civil War decimated the American shipping industry, and foreign carriers, including the Norwegians, picked up

¹ (Tangeras 1982)

² Ibid.

³ (Blegen 1917)

⁴ (Blegen 1917, 247)

⁵ (Blegen 1917, 254)

⁶ (Blegen 1917, 267-268)

⁷ (Pedersen 1981, 19)

the slack, a situation which remained unchanged until 1915, when almost ninety percent of American goods were being carried by foreign vessels overseas.⁸ While the Norwegians initially shied away from American trade during the war years, the immediate 15 years following the end of the Civil War, saw the shipping trade grow; in 1865, the fleet was 5,400 ships, by 1880, it was 8,000.⁹ During these years, because of changes in the shipping industry, work for Norwegian sailors shifted from New York, to the Gulf Coast, before eventually expanding to the West Coast in the 20th Century.¹⁰

The Norwegian Seamen's Mission, or *Sjømannskirken*, was founded in Bergen, Norway, on August 31, 1864, by the Rev. J.H.C. Storjohann, to "spread the gospel and to assist Scandanavian seamen in foreign ports."¹¹ Between 1876 and 1929, Norwegian Seamen's churches were established in New York (1878), Philadelphia (1929), Baltimore (1919), Pensacola (1876), Mobile (1896), and New Orleans (1906).¹² The church in Pensacola opened in 1876, with Lars Johnsen Wormdahl, as its pastor.¹³ At that time, there was reported to be as many as fifty Norwegian vessels in the port of Pensacola at any given time.

The church in New Orleans was founded in 1906, by Andreas Gjertsen, as an offshoot of the Pensacola church, and was located in a house at 1067 Magazine Street.¹⁴ The original chapel was twenty five feet by fourteen feet; there was a small reading room and a vestibule for the pastor.¹⁵ In 1907, the church bought a lot in Cypress Grove Cemetery for their parishioners, or for any Norwegian sailors who died in the city.¹⁶ By 1908, the church had outgrown its original location and moved to 1057 Magazine Street, where they had a larger chapel, a larger reading area, and "living quarters for 'the pastor' and his wife."¹⁷ The church continued to minister to the estimated 25,000 Norwegian sailors that sailed into port every year, as well as the roughly 200 Norwegian families who had settled in New Orleans by that time.¹⁸ There were six ships which sailed regularly into the City during that era: *Austvangen*, *Vestvangen*, *Sorvangen*, *Nordvangen*, *Dalvangen*, and *Lindvangen*.¹⁹

⁸ (Tangeraas 1982)

⁹ (Tangeraas 1982, 140)

¹⁰ (Tangeraas 1982, 145-147)

¹¹ (Seamen's Church Does Great Work 1932), (*Sjømannskirken* n.d.), (Kverndal 1986, 600)

¹² (Tangeraas 1982), (Kverndal 1986), (Federal Writer's Project 1939), (Timeline 2008), (Seamen's Church Institute records 2008)

¹³ (Tangeraas 1982), (Pedersen 1981)

¹⁴ (Lonely Lasses Send Gifts to Sailors 1917), (Pontchartrain 2015), (Woolley 1930), (Seamen's Church Does Great Work 1932)

¹⁵ (Woolley 1930)

¹⁶ (Seamen's Church Does Great Work 1932)

¹⁷ (Woolley 1930)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ (Pedersen 1981, 19)

In 1928, the church moved to its present location at 1772 Prytania Street, into a two-story Greek Revival building that was the former residence of Dr. George Pratt.²⁰ Here, there was “room for a chapel seating 200, for large reading and writing rooms, (rooms) for (pastor) Dr. Lohne and his wife and for the two assistants that had become necessary.”²¹ There was originally some protest to the church by the neighborhood; the Tenth Ward Civic League worried that an institute catering to sailors would depreciate their property values, but the church eventually won approval at a public hearing.²² In 1932, it was reported that the church was ministering to “thousands of Scandinavian seamen, Danes, Swedes and Norwegians” and was, by that time, the “headquarters of the gulf.”²³



Figure 3. Norwegian Seamen's Church, 1964

During World War II, as part of the Axis attack on the US shipping industry, German U-boats attacked multiple ships in the Gulf of Mexico; 25 of these attacks were within 150 miles of New Orleans, and 8 of those were Norwegian ships.²⁴ On May 25, 1942, the tanker, *Haakon Hauan* was en route to Galveston, when it was hit by a torpedo; crewmembers were taken to New Orleans, while the ship was brought to Mobile for repairs.²⁵ Norwegian tanker, *Nortind*, was torpedoed 90 miles south of New Orleans on June 20, 1942; one crewman was killed in the attack.²⁶ The ship and crew arrived in the City two days later.²⁷ On July 6, 1942, the cargo ship, *Bayard*, was en route from New Orleans to Cristobal, when it was sunk 45 miles south of the coast; survivors were brought by aircraft to New Orleans for medical care by the US Coast Guard.²⁸ The church “became marked by these happenings”

²⁰ (Business Section Sales Take Lead In Realty Mart 1928)

²¹ (Woolley 1930)

²² (Seamen's Church Does Great Work 1932), (Women Contest Right of Sailors to Move Mission 1927)

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ (Pedersen 1981), (Chen 2004), (War Lurked in the Gulf; Nazi Subs Attacked 44 Vessels 1945)

²⁵ (Helgason, Haakon Hauan 1995)

²⁶ Ibid., (Chen 2004)

²⁷ (Chen 2004)

²⁸ (Helgason, Bayard 1995)

and the mood during these years was described, at the time, as “tragic.”²⁹ During the War, the Norwegian Crown Prince and Princess, the Ambassador, the Parliament President, Consul General, Cabinet Minister, and the Norwegian shipping director all visited the church.³⁰ At the end of World War II, the Seamen’s Church was “the scene of many presentations of war medals to seamen.”³¹

As early as 1945, the church was looking to expand.³² In 1956, the church announced plans for a “completely modern building” and in 1964, the church acquired the property adjacent to the church at 1758 Prytania Street for \$38,000.³³ A fundraising drive was started in 1964, and plans were drawn up for a new church and recreation center, designed by Nils Erling Hansen, a New Orleans native of Norwegian ancestry, who was a graduate of Tulane University.³⁴ Hansen traveled, at his own expense, to Norway to present the plans to Pastor Aardal, Secretary General of the Norwegian Seamen’s Mission.³⁵ Ground breaking ceremonies took place on June 5, 1966, with Pastor Aardal present.³⁶ The new facility would include “a reading room, kitchen, game room offices, and living quarters for the pastor, his assistant, and secretary,” in addition to a larger chapel.³⁷

After a brief delay in construction, due to both a contractor’s bankruptcy and a miscalculation about the amount of bricks they would need to finish the project, the new church building was dedicated on November 24, 1968, by His Majesty King Olav V of Norway.³⁸ Nils Erling Hansen was decorated by the King, receiving the St. Olav’s medal, at the dedication ceremony.³⁹

Throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s, the church continued with its mission of providing a “home away from home” for Norwegian sailors; in addition to spiritual services, it also provided a pool, horseback riding, canoe trips, barbecues, and jazz concerts.⁴⁰ Throughout the years, hundreds of musicians performed at the church, and it became known



Figure 4. Dedication postponed due to brick shortage, 1968

²⁹ (Chen 2004)

³⁰ (Pedersen 1981, 21)

³¹ (Pedersen 1981, 21)

³² (Norwegian Seamen to Expand Mission 1947), (Pedersen 1981, 20-21)

³³ (A Home For Norse Seamen 1971)

³⁴ (Plans For New Church Okayed 1966), (Tulane University 1953)

³⁵ (Pedersen 1981, 24)

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ (Plans For New Church Okayed 1966)

³⁸ (Kent 1981), (Wogan 1968), (Seamen’s Church Rites Tomorrow 1968), (Pedersen 1981, 21)

³⁹ (Pedersen 1981, 29)

⁴⁰ (Mongelluzzo 1978), (Kent 1981)

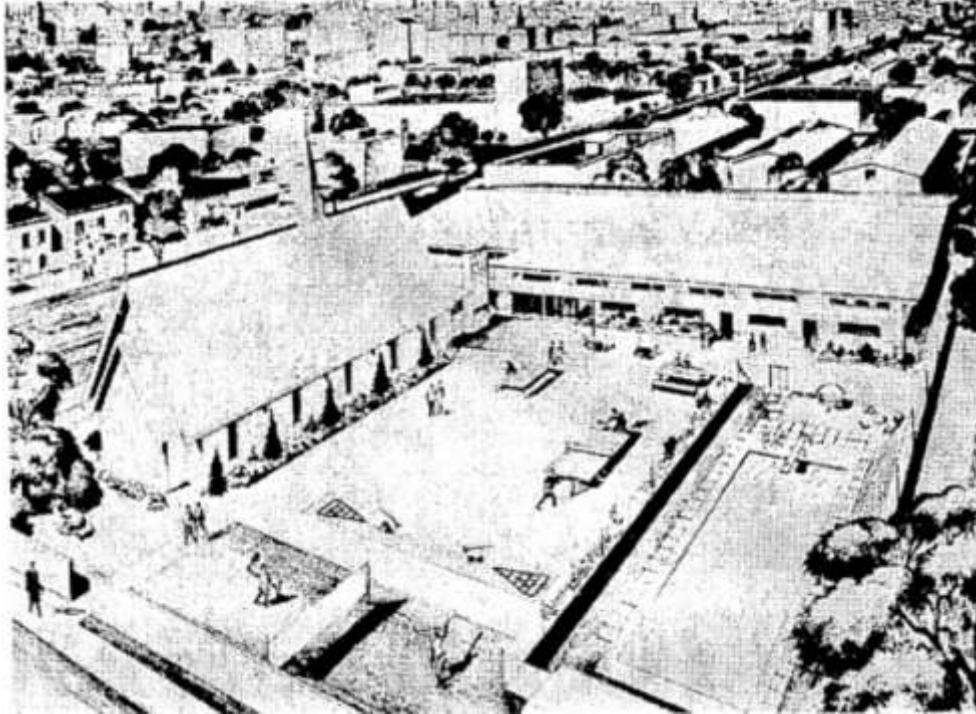


Figure 5. Drawing of the proposed church and recreation center, 1966

as *Jazzkirken*, or “Jazz Church” in Norwegian.⁴¹ During the 1970’s, a relationship between the church and Preservation Hall developed, partially because the church’s mail man was musician, Narvin Kimball.⁴² Kimball played numerous concerts at the church, as did

Wallace Davenport, Morten Gunnar Larsen, Aline White, Lillian Boutte, Greg Stafford, Michael White, Freddie Lonzo, Lionel Batiste, Big Al Carson, Tom Fischer, and the Preservation Hall Jazz band, among many others.⁴³

A constitutional amendment in Norway in 2012, formally separated the Church of Norway from the state, removing the King as head of the church.⁴⁴ In 2016, the Norwegian government stopped supporting the church financially, and ownership of the Seamen’s Church transferred from the Church Of Norway to a local board of directors.⁴⁵ The building sold in 2018 to 1772 Prytania St, LLC, listed as being owned by Deborah Davis, W. Patrick Schindler, The DWF Winingder 2013 Trust, and the KWS Winingder 2014 Trust.⁴⁶

⁴¹ (Jacobsen 2014), (Reckdahl 2017)

⁴² (Jacobsen 2014)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ (Cranmer 2017)

⁴⁵ (The Associated Press 2018), (Reckdahl 2017)

⁴⁶ (Louisiana Secretary of State 2018), (Orleans Parish Assessor’s Office 2019)



Figure 6. 1758 Prytania St., 2019



Figure 7. Anchor, which lay in front of the church from 1965 - 2018



Figure 8. 1772 Prytania St., 2019



Figure 9. Photo of dormitory, from Urania St., undated



Figure 10. View of the Chapel from Prytania St., undated



Figure 11. Entry vestibule at chapel, undated



Figure 12 & 13. Views of recreation center, from Prytania St., undated



Figure 14 & 15. Interior Courtyard views, undated



Figure 16 & 17. Interior Courtyard Views, undated

Building Description



Figure 18. Norwegian Seamen's Church, partial elevation facing Prytania Street, 2018



Figure 19. Norwegian Seamen's Church, 1758 Prytania St., 2018

There are two buildings spanning two lots at 1758 – 1772 Prytania Street. The legal description of the properties are: 1. SQ 202 Lot 3 or One Half Lot 2. S 21 22 Prytania 79 11X127 and 1. SQ 202 LOTS 19 20 PRYTANIA & URANIA 80' X 128'. The building facing Prytania Street is a recreation center and church with a rather unusual footprint; it's a large L-shaped structure, with two different facades, connected by a circulation corridor facing Prytania Street. There is another building, a long rectangular dormitory structure, which lies behind the chapel portion of the L-shaped structure. All buildings have concrete slab foundations and are made of a tan/grey brick.

As the recreation center and church have two facades, it's easiest to discuss them as separate structures. The recreation center is a balloon frame, five bay, two-story building, with an overhanging gable roof facing Prytania Street. There is an addition at the right façade, set back from the street, with a long horizontal band of slider windows. The building has 4-pane French casement windows on the front elevation.

The chapel portion of the structure is a five bay, one-story building with a steep, A-frame roof. The entryway has



Figure 20. Norwegian Seamen's Church, partial elevation facing Prytania Street, 2018

a deep narrow gabled overhang, with exposed framing, topped with a slender spire. The spire is clad in shake shingles. The corridor connecting the two buildings has a horizontal band of aluminum windows.

The dormitory structure is contemporary, a 2004 renovation of an older garage; it is a long rectangular building, with a crenellated brick wall surrounding a band of windows that runs along the Urania facing



Figure 21. Norwegian Seamen's Church, Urania Street, 2018

elevation. There is a paneled metal garage door at said elevation. There is also an in-ground swimming pool on the grounds, enclosed by the buildings of the compound.



Figure 22. Aerial Image of compound, Google Maps, 2019.

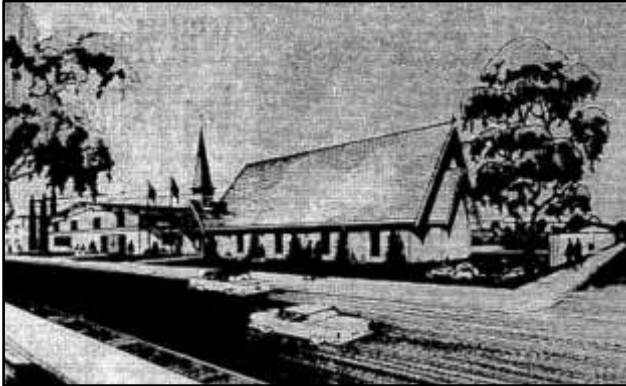


Figure 23. Drawing of proposed church, 1966



Figure 24. The Norwegian Seamen's Church, 2011

Criteria for Landmark Status

The Historic District Landmarks Commission evaluates the significance of a structure based on four criteria, as established by Section 84.22 of the City Code, any one of which can make a building eligible for nomination. The first criteria is outlined as any structure which exemplifies or reflects “the broad, cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community.” The third criteria addresses building which “embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.”

Landmark or landmark site means an unimproved parcel of ground (landmark site) or such parcel with improvements or such improvements without grounds (landmark), wheresoever located in the city, subject to the jurisdiction of the historic district landmarks commission, of particular historic, architectural, or cultural significance, which parcel plus its improvements, if any:

- (1) Exemplify or reflect the broad cultural, political, economic, or social history of the nation, state, or community;
- (2) Are identified with historic personages or with important events in national, state, or local history;
- (3) Embody distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style, method of construction, or of indigenous materials or craftsmanship; or
- (4) Are representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual ability has been recognized.

Cultural and Architectural Significance

Cultural

The history of the City of New Orleans is inextricably linked to its port, which has historically been one of the largest and busiest in the country, and which still generates roughly \$100 million in revenue every year.⁴⁷ Because of the City's proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, New Orleans has been both a domestic and international shipping hub since its inception. Throughout the 19th century, foreign commerce was “more important to the economy of the New Orleans region than domestic commerce;” there was more trade flowing between New Orleans and the rest of the world (principally the Caribbean, England, France, Mexico, Brazil, and Holland) than to other parts of the United States.⁴⁸ Until 1915, foreign vessels “carried almost 90% of American overseas

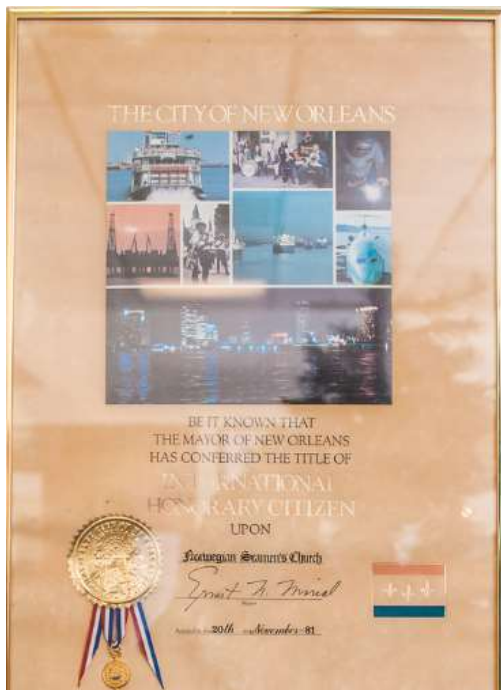


Figure 25. International Honorary Citizen, bestowed upon the church by Mayor Morial, 1981

⁴⁷ (PORT NOLA n.d.)

⁴⁸ (Redard 1985)

trade."⁴⁹ In the early 1900's, there were almost 30,000 Norwegian sailors sailing into New Orleans every year, a number which held relatively steady through the 1980's, when New Orleans was the largest grain port in the United States.⁵⁰ The Norwegian Seaman's Church stands as a reminder of New Orleans 300 year long history as a truly international city.

Architectural

The Norwegian Seamen's Church is stylistically dissimilar from other buildings in the Lower Garden District; its closest relatives are found in Scandinavian architecture. The overall massing of the Norwegian Seamen's Mission: two buildings connected by a corridor, has precedent in a Norwegian architectural form,



Figure 26. A Varangerhus in Hamningberg, Båtsfjord, Norway, 2016



Figure 27. Svalbard Church, built in the Varangerhus style, 1958, designed by Hans Magnus, in Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway, 2006



Figure 28. A Varangerhus, in Skallelv, Vadsø, Norway, undated

⁴⁹ (Tangeraas 1982, 140)

⁵⁰ (Norwegian Church Hosts Open House in New Plant 1970), (Mongelluzzo 1978)



Figure 29. Hole Church at Royse, Buskerud County, Norway, restored by Finn Bryn, a long church from the 1200's renovated after a fire in 1954, undated

the *Varangerhus*, which is a combination or cluster house, wherein multiple buildings with different uses, all occupy one compound.⁵¹

The church is built in the *lang kirke* or long church style, featuring a *våpenhus*, which translates as weapon house - the place where weapons are laid down before entering a church - the traditional name for an entry vestibule.⁵² The chapel portion of the structure resembles other mid-century Norwegian church architecture; Hans Magnus's Longyearbyen Church in Svalbard, Norway, built 1958, has a very similar massing and overall appearance, as does Finn Bryn's 1954 restoration of the Hole Church at Royse, Buskerud County.⁵³



Figure 30. Entry vestibule, 1772 Prytania St., 2019

⁵¹ (Harrison 2018)

⁵² (Fjord Norway n.d.), (Bakkevig 2013)

⁵³ (Svalbard Church 2018), (About Svalbard Church 2014), (Sigrid Marie Christie n.d.)



Figure 31. Traditional Norwegian farmhouse, built in the *Trønderlâne* style, in the Hook of the Stor-Eivdal area in Osterdalen, Norway, undated



Figure 32. Hauge Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, from 1852, Daleyville, WI, 1933

The recreation center resembles a *Trønderlâne*, or traditional long Norwegian farmhouse, a building typology interestingly seen in other Norwegian churches in America, such as the Hauge Log Church, a Nationally Registered Landmark, in Daleyville, Wisconsin, built circa 1852.⁵⁴

Statement of Significance and Staff Recommendation

While the Norwegian Seamen's Church was founded to serve a very specific subset of sailors, it is emblematic of the city's rich cultural history, and current status, as a major international port. Stylistically, the buildings that make up the campus at the Norwegian Seamen's Mission are rather unique, and more closely resemble Scandinavian architecture, than that of the surrounding neighborhood. The building serves as a valuable reminder of the diversity of experiences and cultures that make up our city's social and economic history. As such, the staff recommends the designation of 1758-1772 Prytania Street as a landmark.

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⁵⁴ (Historic American Building Survey 1933)

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Figure Attribution

Cover Image. Author's Own, November 2, 2018.

Figure 1. Sanborn Map, New Orleans, 1937 vol. 4, Sheet 378.

Figure 2. Sanborn Map, New Orleans, 1994 vol. 4, Sheet 378.

Figure 3. Norwegian Seamen's Church, 1964. *The Times-Picayune*, August 29, 1964.

Figure 4. Dedication postponed due to brick shortage, 1968. *New Orleans States Item*, October 5, 1968.

Figure 5. Drawing of the proposed church, 1966. *The Times-Picayune*, March 24, 1966, 13.

Figure 6. 1758 Prytania St., Photo courtesy of Anna Pernas, HDLC Staff, March 22, 2019.

Figure 7. Author's Own, November 2, 2018.

Figure 8. 1772 Prytania St., Photo courtesy of Anna Pernas, HDLC Staff, March 22, 2019.

Figure 9. Photo of dormitory, from Urania St., photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 10. View of the Chapel from Prytania St., photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 11. Entry vestibule at chapel, photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 12. Views of recreation center, from Prytania St., photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 13. Views of recreation center, from Prytania St., photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 14. Interior Courtyard Views, Photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 15. Interior Courtyard Views, Photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 16. Interior Courtyard Views, Photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 17. Interior Courtyard Views, Photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 18. Author's Own, November 2, 2018.

Figure 19. Author's Own, November 2, 2018.

Figure 20. Author's Own, October 19, 2018.

Figure 21. Author's Own, November 2, 2018.

Figure 22. Google Maps, overview, 2019.

Figure 23. Drawing of proposed church, 1966. New Orleans States-Item, March 23, 1966, 14.

Figure 24. Google Maps Streetview, 1772 Prytania St., 2011.
<https://www.google.com/maps/place/1772+Prytania+St,+New+Orleans,+LA+70130/@29.9354354,-90.0763161,3a,75y,76.38h,99.95t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1skdJXzJHUbhTGywXSrAo4oQ!2e0!5s20110301T000000!7i13312!8i6656!4m5!3m4!1s0x8620a5d646c10653:0xad67bc5bdc7e148!8m2!3d29.9355893!4d-90.0758812>, accessed April 4, 2019.

Figure 25. International Honorary Citizen, bestowed upon the church by Mayor Morial, 1981. Photo by Dani Benton, courtesy of Evan Benton, undated

Figure 26. A Varangerhus in Hamningberg, Båtsfjord, Norway, 2016.
<https://www.booking.com/hotel/no/hamningberg-holiday-house.en-gb.html>, accessed November 25, 2018.

Figure 27. Svalbard Church, built in the Varangerhus style, 1958, designed by Hans Magnus, in Longyearbyen, Svalbard, Norway, 2006 taken by Bjørn Christian Tørrissen-
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Longyearbyen-Church-2006.jpg>, accessed November 25, 2018.

Figure 28. A Varangerhus, in Skallelv, Vadsø, Norway. <https://www.ruijan-kaiku.no/viser-fram-unik-kvensk-byggeskikk/>., accessed November 11, 2018.

Figure 29. Hole Church at Royse, Buskerud County, Norway, restored by Finn Bryn, a long church from the 1200's renovated after a fire in 1954. <http://fruella-leminia.blogspot.com/2012/10/norges-kirker-var-urnorske-arv-del-6.html>

Figure 30. Entry Vestibule, 2019. Photo courtesy of Anna Pernas, HDLC Staff. March 22, 2019.

Figure 31. Hauge Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, State Route 78, Daleyville, Dane County, WI, built 1852 in the Trønderlâne style. PHOTOS FROM SURVEY HABS WI-240 (Historic American Building Survey 1933).

Figure 32. Traditional Norwegian farmhouse, built in the Trønderlâne style, in the Hook of the Stor-Elvdal area in Osterdalen, Norway
[https://lokalhistoriewiki.no/wiki/Fil:14062_Kroken_\(Stor-Elvdal_kommune\).jpg](https://lokalhistoriewiki.no/wiki/Fil:14062_Kroken_(Stor-Elvdal_kommune).jpg)., accessed April 1, 2019.

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