MOUNT OLIVET CHAPEL Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, this Episcopal Chapel was built in the 1850's and dedicated by "The Fighting Bishop of the Confederacy," Leonidas Polk. It was used by Union troops during the Civil War. The Chapel's cemetery contains the graves of several noted Louisianians including Governor Thomas Overton Moore. Mount Olivet is located on Main Street in Pineville.
Construction and Consecration

Historic Mount Olivet Chapel and Cemetery have had a varied history during 124 years of existence. The Chapel was built in 1857 under the diocesan leadership of the illustrious Leonidas Polk: First Bishop of Louisiana; founder of the University of the South (Sewanee, Tennessee); and a General in the army of the Confederate States of America. Bishop Polk was known as the "Fighting Bishop of the Confederacy," losing his life in the war in 1864. It was he who consecrated the Chapel on June 29th, 1859. [Note the Bishop Polk window, the first on your right as you enter the building.]

Mrs. McCoy, wife of the Reverend Amos D. McCoy, Rector of Saint James Church of Alexandria, was an active and zealous missionary, raising most of the funds for Mt. Olivet construction by teaching in a private school. All the lumber used in building the Chapel was donated by Major Huie from his plantation. The Chapel was erected by Mr. Charles Schrader, grandfather of the late Henry E. Hardtner. Richard Upjohn, a famous church architect of the time, drafted plans for the Chapel, which is an example of Steamboat Gothic design.

Civil War Period

During the War between the States the Chapel was used as a headquarters for the Union Army. [There is a charming legend to the effect that Union soldiers, taking their ease on the back porch of Mt. Olivet Chapel, would vary their boredom by taking rifle shots at the heels of a young man named Rosenthal, whose duty it was to be a runner between the Confederate forces at Fort Buhlow and a camp south of Pineville, and whose courier route, unfortunately, took him through the cemetery. The shots are reputed greatly to have increased his running speed.]
During the Period of Reconstruction in the South

During the late 1860's Dr. Anthony Vallas, a licensed Layreader and formerly a professor at the State Seminary before its closure in 1861, held occasional services both at St. James Church and Mt. Olivet Chapel. (The State Seminary, located across from the Veterans Administration Medical Center on U. S. Highway 71, had a well-known professor, General William T. Sherman.) Written records for 1860-1873 period in Mt. Olivet Chapel's history have been lost. We do know that during this time Mt. Olivet was a Chapel of St. James Church.

Chapel as St. Peter's Parish, 1873-1880

On September 1, 1873, a congregation was organized at the Chapel, becoming St. Peter's Church. This Parish remained independent until 1880, when it became, once more, a burial Chapel of St. James Church whose Rector held regular services. [We would note here that anyone traveling from Alexandria to Pineville had to cross the Red River by ferry.]

The Middle Years-1880's through 1940's

From 1880 until the 1940's, Mt. Olivet was primarily a Mission Station, without resident priest or active congregation on a day-to-day basis. St. James, Alexandria used the building as a burial Chapel and as a station for monthly celebration of Holy Communion. The building from time to time doubled as a community center for the area. The Reverend Abner Nash Odgen and his wife taught elementary classes for a time before his death in 1881.

A flurry of activity from 1908-1920 was sparked by the leadership of two lay Episcopalians, dedicated to the spiritual and material upkeep of the Chapel. William J. Warrington opened a mission for destitute men and boys on Donahue Ferry Road,
using Mt. Olivet as a resource for their spiritual needs. Emma Gray, widow of the Reverend John Gray, Vicar of Christ Church Mission, Alexandria, spearheaded Episcopal activity in painting the Chapel, putting on a new roof, acquiring the first of the stained glass windows, and providing organ and choir music for services.

The Chapel Windows

The Bishop Polk window and the tall, narrow window seen on your right as you enter the Chapel are of fairly recent vintage—the early 1950's. These two windows flank one of the several Tiffany windows in the Chapel—the angel at the door of the tomb. [Tiffany originated a process of working with stained glass art in a semi-molten state, enabling him to work the glass into raised folds and enhancing the drapery effect of the subject's clothing. You will note the individualistic face on the angel. This effect was obtained by copying from a photograph of the person being memorialized.]

Directly across from these windows, to your left, the two narrow windows are of 1950 vintage. In fact, the Naomi and Ruth window was being finished in its installation the afternoon of June 26, 1956—ninety-nine years after the laying of the sills for the Chapel. Note the replica of Mt. Olivet at the bottom of the window directly across from the Bishop Polk window. These two windows flank yet another Tiffany window. It is believed that the Emma Gray window is also a Tiffany.

The Twenty Years after World War II

After World War II Mt. Olivet was again organized as a Mission, and in 1946 became a Parish. Dr. Fayette C. Ewing gave the funds for the adjoining parish hall in 1946, in memory of his sister, Mrs. Lelia Ewing Werlein.

In 1961 property for a new Church building was
bought on Edgewood Drive, Pineville [only two miles across the fields from where Mr. Warrington had so nobly served poor men and boys], and the congregation of Mt. Olivet Church built there a larger Church building, rectory, and parish house. The former Mt. Olivet congregation became that of St. Michael's Episcopal Church, dedicated on the evening of September 29, 1966 by Bishop Girault M. Jones, 7th Bishop of Louisiana. Ownership of Mt. Olivet Chapel and Hall reverted to St. James, Alexandria.

A New Ministry for Mt. Olivet

In 1967 Bishop Jones "rented" Mt. Olivet Chapel and Hall for the use of the Department of Christian Social Relations of the Diocese for the princely sum of $1.00.

The Episcopal Hospitals Chaplaincy took residence at Mt. Olivet in 1967. The Chaplain is using it as the focal point for a general institutional ministry (in thirty-four institutions in the Central Louisiana area). In 1972 Bishop Iveson B. Noland, 8th Bishop of Louisiana, accepted Mt. Olivet Chapel and Hall as a gift from the congregation of St. James Church. Since the division of the Diocese of Louisiana, the Western Diocese of Louisiana is now owner of these buildings. [Bishop Willis R. Henton, 1st Bishop of the Western Diocese of Louisiana, is interested in using Mt. Olivet Chapel and Hall as fully as possible]. In 1973 outpatient counselling services were added to the institutional services to the extent of six days a week in the Hall. The present staff of the Chaplaincy consists of a Mental Health Chaplain, a Board Certified Social Worker, a Layreader-Catechist, and a Peer Chaplain.

How You Can be a Part of the Continuing Ministry at Mt. Olivet

To be a benefactor: Send your check to The Western Diocese of Louisiana, P. O. Box 4046, Alexandria, Louisiana 71301, and mark it "For
Mt. Olivet Chapel." Or: Put coins and/or bills in the alms box at the side door for the Episcopal Hospitals Chaplaincy Fund. Gifts to this alms box will enhance the ministries of its staff in the area. And: Before you leave this historical place offer thanksgiving to Almighty God for the ministries done here since 1857, and pray for the souls of those whose bodies lie here in this cemetery.

May God richly bless and keep you---today, and all the days of your life.

---April, 1981.

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