

St. Joseph's Hospital - Paris, Texas

CHAPEL FADES INTO HISTORY

*Jim
pls file this*

Our Lady of the Visitation Chapel, the lovely little structure located on 8th Street S.E. between Clarksville and Austin Streets in the shadow of all the activity at St. Joseph's Hospital, was a place of quiet beauty and serenity. Over the years it served as a special setting for numerous baptisms and weddings. It was a refuge for prayer and meditation by the public and the Sisters at St. Joseph's.

While many Parisians and former Parisians scattered over Texas will miss seeing the historic little chapel, its razing marks the beginning of Phase II of St. Joseph's Hospital Development Program - a moment in the history of Paris and its growth. Reading through the history of the chapel one notes the close ties it has had to the community. The following excerpts tell a poignant story:

1914 The lovely ivy-clad Oklahoma fieldstone chapel, designed by an Irishman, was originally constructed along with the St. Joseph's Hospital built at that time to replace the former St. Joseph's Infirmary. The chapel stood beyond the life of the hospital building constructed in 1914 when it, in turn, was replaced by the present St. Joseph's Hospital constructed in 1968. In blessing the chapel during the dedication ceremony on July 2, 1914, Bishop Joseph P. Lynch said: "From now on this chapel will be called 'Our Lady of the Visitation'". A beautiful statue was set in a niche of the entrance tower overlooking 8th Street to grace the little chapel's namesake.

1916 The little chapel has an interesting note in the history of the great fire of Paris in 1916. The Sisters were warned about 6:30 p.m. on March 21st to vacate the premises as the fire was only 10 blocks away and moving rapidly toward them. In spite of the sounds of exploding oil and gas tanks nearby, the crash of falling walls, cries of distress, heat so intense that

that window panes melted and the Sisters' skin felt parched, they stayed and kept pouring water from buckets and pans on the dry lawn and roofs. At 1:30 a.m. on March 22nd the Sisters received Holy Communion in the chapel. Suddenly the winds changed miraculously and the entire St. Joseph's property remained unharmed. All available space in the property was opened to the city and school offices destroyed by the fire so that city and school administration could carry on uninterrupted. For their unselfish love and warm hospitality to a city in tragedy, the Sisters were later presented a loving cup from the City of Paris.

- 1959 Air conditioning was installed in the chapel in 1959 as the beginning of a renovation program.
- 1961 The chapel was re-decorated in February of 1961 with altar, statues, pedestals and pews being refinished through the professional services of Edmund N. Fatjo, ecclesiastical artist of the international renown.
- 1967 Father Francis Brady was appointed Chaplain of St. Joseph's Hospital effective July 6, 1967, by Thomas K. Gorman, Bishop of the Dallas-Fort Worth Diocese.
- 1971 A special historical event occurred on August 15, 1971, at 3:00 p.m. when, for the first and only time, a Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word made her profession of Religious Vows outside of the Motherhouse. On that date Sister Patricia Ann Leonard made her profession in Paris. However, because of the number of people in attendance the event could not be celebrated in the little chapel as hoped, but was held in Our Lady of Victory Church next door with the Rev. Francis Brady as the Celebrant.
- 1975 As a result of leakage due to the need of a new tile roof, the interior ceiling collapsed on Holy Thursday, 1975. Restoration of the building was financially unfeasible. A new chapel was opened on the second floor of

St. Joseph's Hospital just beyond the lobby and gift shop to replace the former building which is more easily accessible to the public and families of patients in the hospital.

In commenting on the razing of the chapel Sister Mary Eustace, Administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital, stated that the reflective mood that one experiences in the passing of such a lovely work of art is replaced by the challenge of the need for a larger hospital with greater services to meet the needs of our growing community.... It is symbolic of the life of the man of God who fades into greater glory through death.