



Michael Portier was born in Montbrison, France on September 7, 1795, and after volunteering as a missionary for service in Louisiana was ordained in St. Louis on September 29, 1818. He worked for many years in New Orleans and was notably successful in the field of education before he was named head of the newly erected Vicariate-Apostolic of Alabama and the Floridas in 1825. Having been consecrated at St. Louis in November, 1826, Portier arrived at Mobile in December that same year. His vicariate having been raised to the rank of a diocese in 1829, the

missionary prelate also founded Spring Hill College, established Visitation Convent and Academy, and brought greater order and growth to the works of religion over which he had been given charge. On purchasing the Portier House in 1834, Bishop Portier reported the transaction to his Roman superiors noting that the structure contained ten rooms and cost \$7,000—money well spent, he thought, to give the "Bishop and clergy an honorable residence and a handy one without losing sight of evangelical simplicity."

Upon entering the Portier House, one can not help but notice the beautiful curved staircase. The arrowhead railings are original to the house although several have had to be replaced over the years. Upon close inspection it was discovered that the support at the curve of the stairs is actually cast iron. The landing is quite unusual with two steps leading up to a window where one could see ships coming into the port on the Mobile River before the larger buildings of the city were built.



Most of the first floor boasts original heart-of-pine wood floors.

The red parlor to your left served as the business office of Bishop Portier during his residence. You may notice that upon purchasing the house, Bishop Portier had Claude Beroujon, famed architect of the Cathedral, to add a second door to the front of the house as his office entrance. The room is decorated with an antique swan chair and carved eagle sofa with fish carved legs original to the 1830-1840 time period. Portraits of Bishops Dominic Manucy and Jeremiah O'Sullivan hang in this parlor.

The yellow parlor to your right upon entering has been furnished by very generous benefactors. The 1840 Rosewood box grand piano was a gift to the Portier House from Mr. and Mrs. James D. McPoland during our most recent restoration. The piano dates back to pre-Civil War and is graced with mother-of-pearl inlay and several original ivory keys. The 1860 French Empire Parlor Set was a gift in memory of Dr. Timothy String, by his wife, Mrs. Elizabeth String. Portraits of Bishops John Quinlan and Edward Allen hang in this parlor.



The second room to your left is the beautiful dining room. The antique dining table and buffet compliment the grand window treatment. The laurel wreath and bee motif patterns were symbols used by both Napoleon and the famous Medici Family of Italy. The cast-iron chandelier is a replica from this 1830-1840 time period. A portrait of a young Bishop Edward Allen hangs in the dining room.

The green room to the right of the hallway is a multi-function room, which now serves as the Portier House Gift Shop. Its hutch cabinets with marble counters and antique bookshelves add to the historic décor.

The back of the house required a large amount of reconstruction due to deterioration, so a modern kitchen was added to provide convenience for a visiting caterers.



The family bathroom was removed to install modern men/women restrooms for public use. A dressing room and utility closet were also added. The back porch and side entrance ramp are new to the house, however Bishop Portier did have similar porches added to the back and side of the house upon its purchase to provide a buffer from the evening sun and heat.

The upstairs consists of a large open parlor area with four rooms, two to the left and two to the right. The floor of each room is original heart-of-pine flooring, however the upstairs parlor area was replaced in the 1958 restoration so that original heart-of-pine pieces could be used to replace some boards downstairs.

The first room to the left is set up for use by brides to prepare for weddings at the Cathedral. It is decorated in pinks to compliment the beautiful Dresden chandelier and wall sconces that were a gift to Archbishop Oscar H. Lipscomb from Sir Lionel Baxter of Birmingham. The lithograph of the Immaculate Conception on the mantle was donated in 2007 by Mrs. Mary C. Lousteau from the estate of her mother, Julia Emma Parker Cowley. The lithograph was a wedding gift to Mary's grandmother, Julia Emma Demouy Parker at the turn of the century. On each side of the mantle hang prints of weddings from the 1830's.

The second room to the left was once the bedroom of Father Abram Ryan, Poet-Priest of the South and Poet Laureate of the Confederacy. The room is furnished with an antique partner desk which can be used from both sides. The antique bookshelves are filled with volumes of old books, some of which include Father Ryan's poetry. A photograph of Father Ryan is on the mantle. The room also boasts a bust of Father Ryan.

The first room to the right is used as a private office for the Portier staff. It is furnished with an antique desk, which is original to the house.

The second room to the right, the blue bedroom, boasts a beautiful antique bed frame. This room is used by wedding parties for preparations and dressing.

The exterior of the house is a Greek revival style with three dormer windows on the second story. The west side ramp has been added for handicap accessibility and overlooks a working fountain and garden area, as well as caterer accessibility. The east side of the house is a beautifully landscaped courtyard, which provides extra space for outdoor receptions and seating. The yard has a large pecan tree, which supplies area squirrels throughout the winter. This historic home has seen Mobile grow for over 175 years and now in its restored form will be around for several more generations to enjoy the heart of downtown Mobile.

The Portier House **A Property of the Archdiocese of Mobile**

307 Conti Street, Mobile, Alabama



Title to this land, part of a Spanish grant and formerly a burial ground, was clarified by the American State Papers in 1828. Bishop Michael Portier, the Diocese of Mobile's first bishop, made this his home from 1834 until his death in 1859. The four subsequent bishops, Bishop John Quinlan (1859-1883), Bishop Dominic Manucy (1884-1885), Bishop Jeremiah O'Sullivan (1885-1896), and Bishop Edward Allen (1897-1926), resided here until 1906 when the Archdiocese acquired the Ketchum Home at 400 Government Street and the bishop moved there. The famed Poet-Priest of the South, Father Abram Ryan resided in the second floor northwest corner room from 1870 until 1877 and the décor is a tribute to his contributions to the Church in Mobile.

The Diocese of Mobile has continued to own the home since 1834 and it has been used for various purposes throughout the years. In the 1930's to the 1940's the house was operated by the Catholic Daughters of America during the Great Depression. In the 1940's it served as a USO hall for visiting soldiers in World War II. The house later became a meeting place for area Catholic Youth and many fondly remember Father Anthony Zoghby's play rehearsals. Several families have rented the home as a residential family dwelling over the later years and most recently the Archdiocese of Mobile has used the home for priests to vest prior to celebrations at the Cathedral. The residence was restored by the Diocese of Mobile in 1958 and in 1970 it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The most recent restoration took place in 2007. The Portier House is now open for historic tours and private party rentals. The Portier House Gift Shop has souvenirs and religious items to commemorate your visit.