

Michael Hugo-Brunt

## The Church and Former Monastery of St. Augustine, Macao

The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, vol. XIX, no. 2, pp. 69/75

# The Church and Former Monastery of St. Augustine, Macao\*

MICHAEL HUGO-BRUNT University of Toronto

ONE of the most celebrated churches in Macao was once part of the Monastery of St. Augustine, which was established by the Augustinian Order. The founders were Spaniards from the Philippines, and this undoubtedly had an important effect on the church's development, for it took many years before the Augustinian community was accepted with equanimity by the Portuguese of Macao. It was inevitable that this active group of ecclesiastics should have become involved in many of the numerous political and social controversies which occurred so frequently in Macao's turbulent history.

During the period of the dual monarchy from 1581 to 1640, the Spaniards made persistent attempts to gain control of Portuguese interests in the Orient, nor did they limit their interference to commerce and administration, but also attempted to infiltrate the ecclesiastical establishment. Spanish Augustinians tried to enter China after the defeat of Ly Ma Hon, a celebrated Chinese pirate, who had attacked Luzon in 1574. The Spanish military commanders were eventually granted permission to send a mission to Fukien after negotiations with the admiral of the Chinese Imperial Force which took part in this joint expedition. The Portuguese regarded this as an unjustifiable penetration into their sphere of interest.

On 5 July 1575 this mission landed at Kienhai and proceeded via Cheungchau to Fuchau. They presented a petition to the viceroy soliciting permission to establish a permanent mission. He refused to grant their request and they were forced to return to Manila in 1575.<sup>1</sup> The Spaniards later sent a second mission, but this was also forced

\* The author takes the opportunity of acknowledging the kind assistance of the celebrated historian J. M. Braga of Hong Kong, who allowed him the unrestricted use of his private library and gave him much valuable advice; also of the ecclesiastical and government authorities of Macao, who assisted him during his investigation.

1. The mission members were Martinho de Harrada (also spelt de Herrera or de Herrado) and Geromino Marin. Marin later transcribed Harrada's reports to Spain in his own manuscript.

to return empty handed to Manila.<sup>2</sup> It was this failure which directed the attention of the Spanish Augustinians to Macao.

The historian Pe. Cristóvão de Nazareth<sup>3</sup> believed that the friar Miguel dos Santos (a nominated governor of the Bishopric of Macao) was the founder of the monastery and that he transferred both church and monastery to their present position.

On 3 April 1587 the Augustinian friars, António de Arcediano, Ildefonse Delgado, and Bartholomeu Lopez sailed from Acapulco in the Philippines but were, unfortunately, shipwrecked on the Chinese coast. They arrived at Macao in July and were received into the Augustinian monastery, where they were befriended.<sup>4</sup> This confirms that the institution was established in Macao sometime before 1587.

The actual establishment of a Spanish mission in Macao is vaguely referred to by Marques Pereira in his *Efemérides*,<sup>5</sup> and he quoted the following passage as his authority:

The 22nd August, 1589. The religious personnel of St. Augustine took possession of the Convent of Our Lady of Grace at Macao on this date. It had been founded previously by Spanish Fathers of the same Order, and at the suggestion of the Governor of India, Manuel de Sousa Continho, to Philip, was ceded to them.<sup>6</sup>

2. The celebrated account of Fr. João Goncalvez de Mendoza (or Mendosa or Mendoca), afterwards the Bishop of Lipari, viz. *Historia cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres, Del gran Reyno dela China* etc. (Rome, 1585). He added Herrada's observations (see *Alphabetum Augustinianum*, Madrid, 1644) to his own. He was a member of the Augustinian Order.

3. Pe. Cristóvão de Nazareth, *Mitras Lusitanas no Oriente* (New Goa, 1924), p. 369.

4. Fr. Fonseca, *Historia de la Provincia de Sino, Rosario* (Macao, 1896).

5. A. Marques Pereira, *Efemérides Commemorativas da História de Macau e das Relações (da China) com os povos Christãos* (Macao, 1868), p. 75.

6. Artur Levy Gomes, *Esboço da História de Macau 1511-1849* (Macao, 1957), p. 79. St. Augustine's (or Sto. Augustino or Convento de Santo Agostinho, as it is known locally) is referred to as a

Nothing more is known until 1591, when the monastery may have been moved to the present site. Some authorities are of the opinion, however, that the establishment always occupied the same site and that this changeover was merely a reference in the journals to an alteration in the positions of the doors of the building.<sup>7</sup>

It may be assumed, however, that the Augustinians, like the other orders, were granted the dominating site on the summit of a hill, so that the church was a focal point in the city.

Throughout the period of the Spanish domination the Portuguese distrusted the Spaniards, and the appointed officials of the King of Spain were usually Spanish or Portuguese with Spanish sympathies. The Macao authorities were particularly resentful of the presence of Spanish ecclesiastics in the city, and they complained bitterly about them to the viceroy at Goa. The situation eventually improved when the convents and monasteries of Spanish origin in Macao were handed over to Portuguese members of the same order. According to Sir Andrew Ljungstedt this occurred in 1589.<sup>8</sup>

Little is known of the early history of the Portuguese Augustinians, although some friars worked in the Japanese missions and suffered persecution there. Their relationship with the Macanese seems to have been uneventful and by 1620 the sanctuary chapel was finished, although the remainder of the church was not complete. It is possible that both the convent and the church buildings were finished between 1600 and 1620, for this was a period of great prosperity in Macao. As no original sources of information exist, this is an assumption based upon the tremendous amount of building activity which occurred during these years on other churches.

St. Augustine's had no known architect, but it may be assumed that it was designed by a priest who had some knowledge of building. The plan is obviously influenced by Iberian traditions. The priests probably arrived at their final design through a strict analysis of the ritualistic function. The services involved both congregation and friars, and it may be assumed that the plan reflected the special requirements of churches in Macao. For example, the choir gallery accommodated the catechumens, who entered it from an outside entrance which was a standard procedure at this time.

---

convent in the records, but this does not mean that it accommodated nuns. Throughout this paper it is referred to, therefore, as a monastery. The term convent appears to have been used as a designation for any religious house regardless of the sex of the occupants. The church itself was dedicated to Our Lady of Grace.

7. J. M. Braga, *A Igreja de Sto. Augustinho e as Augustinhos em Macau* (Macao, 1946), pp. 824-825. The author states that he has been unable to find or substantiate these statements.

8. Sir Andrew Ljungstedt, *A History of the Portuguese Settlements in China* (Boston, Mass., 1836), p. 19.

The ornamentation reflects the amateur architect, for it is a robust mixture of classical motifs, which are often extremely original in arrangement, for example, the reverse volutes on the elevation. Local craftsmanship accentuated their originality.

In 1620 the prior of the order, Friar Simão da Sto. Antonio and Friar Aurelio Coreito, the procurator of the monastery, were presented with part of the cargo of a Portuguese ship at a thanksgiving ceremony. This gift commemorated the deliverance of Portuguese merchants and sailors who had been attacked by the Dutch on the annual Japan voyage,<sup>9</sup> and it was intended that it should be used to build a chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Penha of France. This may have been intended for the church, but it was probably used on the chapel of Penha, which still exists at the present time.<sup>10</sup>

In 1623 Don Francisco Mascarenhas was appointed the Captain-General of Macao. He was a most unpopular administrator, and after a period of violence and discord he took sanctuary in the monastery and was actually shelled from the Monte Fortress which made three holes in the walls.<sup>11</sup>

During the seventeenth century the Augustinians prospered exceedingly and were granted or willed much property in Macao and on the adjoining islands, so that the order enjoyed a substantial local income, part of which was used in the upkeep of their premises.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, the Augustinians were actively involved in the unfortunate Rites controversy when they championed the authority of Charles Thomas Maillard de Tournon,<sup>13</sup> the Patriarch of Antioch and Apostolic Legate, against that of Dom João do Casal, the Bishop of Macao. They also offered him the sanctuary of the monastery, and this was viewed as a reasonable affront both to the authority of the bishop and the Macao community, so much so that on 12 July 1692 Casal excommunicated any person who entered St. Augustine's for Mass or any other religious purpose, and had a notice posted on the monastery door, in which de Tournon was publicly challenged to substantiate his authority and to revoke his censures of excommunication and other decrees. The resultant tension which developed in Macao

9. C. R. Boxer, *Boletim Eclesiástico da Diocese de Macau* xxxiv, no. 397 (April 1937).

10. The chapel or hermitage of Nossa Senhora da Penha was later incorporated into a fortification. In the middle of the nineteenth century a new building was erected, and this is today the private chapel of the Bishop of Macao.

11. He eventually had the three cannonballs gold-plated, sending one to the king, the other to the viceroy and keeping one for himself. See C. R. Boxer, *Macao Three Hundred Years Ago* (Macao, 1942), pp. 84-85.

12. de Nazareth, *Mistras Lusitanas*, p. 389. Paschal M. D'Elia, *Catholic Missions in China* (Shanghai, 1934), p. 103.

13. Pereira, *Efemérides*, p. 31.

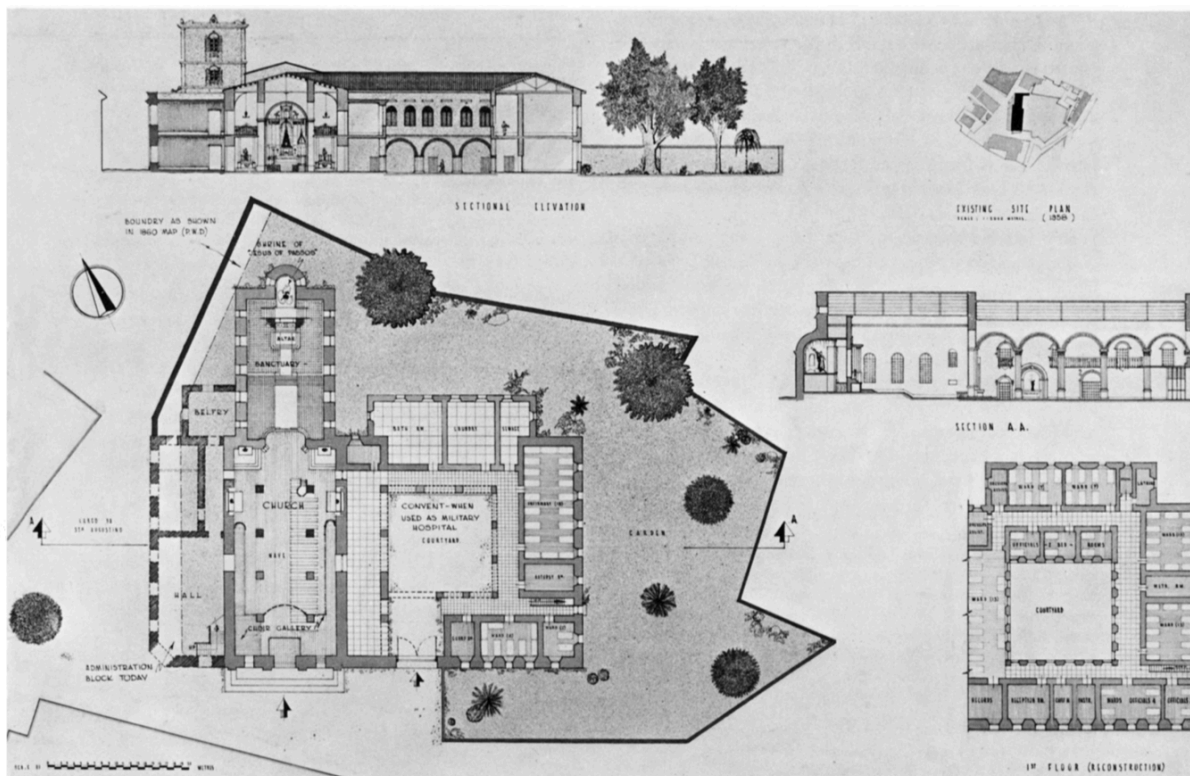


Fig. 1. Plans, sections, and site plan, Monastery of St. Augustine, Macao, at the present time.

was so bitter that de Tournon was confined to the precincts of St. Augustine throughout his stay in Macao.<sup>14</sup>

His elevation to the rank of cardinal, and subsequent death on 8 July 1710, resulted in the appointment of a new papal delegate to resolve the dispute.<sup>15</sup> The bishop thereupon modified his attitude and attempted to placate the outraged Augustinians, but this only confirmed their suspicions. Eventually the authorities resolved the impasse by expelling the Augustinian order. The friars were deported to Goa on 18 January 1712.<sup>16</sup>

The monastery was abandoned for nine years. In 1721 João V ordered its reconstitution and directed the Macao Senate to make an annual contribution towards its upkeep. This confirmation of the Augustinian stand resulted

in much local bitterness, particularly as it was followed in 1724 by the appointment of the new Augustinian Superior, Eugenio Tregueiros, to the Macao Bishopric.<sup>17</sup>

There is no further mention of St. Augustine's until 1778, when it is recorded that nearly all the valuable ornaments in the church and sacristy were stolen by a Chinese.<sup>18</sup> He demanded, and received, the payment of a 500 taels ransom before its return. This sum was loaned to the prior by the citizens of Macao at an interest rate of seven per cent.

From 1780 to 1834 the Augustinians declined in status due to a shortage of priests and the active participation of those who remained in the political disputes of the Miguelists and the Conservatives.<sup>19</sup>

14. C. R. Boxer, 'The Portuguese Padroado in East Asia and the Problem of the Chinese Rites, 1576-1773', *Boletim Instituto Portugues de Hong Kong*, no. 1 (July 1948), 199-226.

15. Pereira, *Efemérides*, p. 2.

16. Bento da Franca, *Subsídios para a História de Macau* (Lisbon, 1888), p. 100.

17. João do Casal (Casal), Bishop of Macao 1690-1735, and Eugenio Tregueiros, o.s.a., Bishop of Macao 1735-1739. An account of his life may be found in Pe. M. Teixeira, *Macao E. A. Sua Diocese* (Macao, 1940), pp. 196-205.

18. de Nazareth, *Mitras Lusitanas*, p. 389.

19. Ljungstedt, *A History of Portuguese Settlements in China*; and Pereira, *Efemérides*, p. 101.

On 20 October 1834 the Portuguese home government promulgated a decree expelling the religious orders and confiscating their properties, but it was only in September 1836 that the Augustinian properties, which included six houses and buildings worth approximately 5,000 patacas, were auctioned.<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine's was then in use as a parish church, for Ljungstedt states that the religious procession of Our Lord the Good Jesus of Passos was still carried out after this date.

In 1856 the monastery, like many other abandoned church buildings in Macao, was used as a barracks for a battalion of troops for a short time, but it was later handed back to the authorities for use as a shelter for the destitute. It was only occupied briefly until the inmates were transferred to the Convent of St. Clare.<sup>21</sup>

On 6 June 1857 the residential building was transformed into a military hospital and many changes were made in the structure.<sup>22</sup> An interesting report of the adaptation was made by the then Chief Surgeon of Macao, Dr. Lucio Augusto de Silva, in these words:

The building is on a hillock, sited in the centre of the streets inhabited by the Portuguese, about 200 paces from the Se [Cathedral]. It is higher than any of the adjacent buildings which are further away. The sea, and a large part of the northern, eastern and southern areas of the City can be viewed from it. The building is constructed in four blocks about an internal courtyard. The south wing forms the main elevation and on the top story the following general purpose rooms are provided; an office for recording information relating to patients, a reception room, the head nurse's room, a surgical instrument store and two rooms for officers; one containing four and the other two beds. Adjacent to and in front of these units is a corridor which has a window opening to the east at its end.

The East wing contains two wards separated by a small room in which medical equipment is stored. There are thirteen beds in the one ward and fourteen in the other; each of them is able to accommodate a further two in times of emergency. A corridor, having its windows facing onto the internal courtyard, is parallel to these two wards.

[in front of this] on the ground floor, there is a theatre for autopsy and a ward accommodating 18 beds which has, however, only been used on one occasion when the building was white-washed.

In the northern [block] there is a long corridor which affords access to the dressers and the assistant dressers, two seven-bed wards, a second dressers' room and a dressing and utensil store. At the extreme east there is a latrine. Opening off the corridor are three rooms for junior officers, containing two beds, which have windows onto the internal courtyard. Underneath this block are bathrooms and a laundry.

The West wing is a corridor which has windows facing onto the central courtyard only, the opposite side adjoining the church lacks

ventilation and contains thirteen beds only. The corridor below this [unit] serves as a passage leading to the sacristy of the church.

The hospital has two gardens, one of which is adjacent to the North Wing. This serves as a kitchen area for the Chinese servants and includes a well with good and abundant water. The other is adjacent to the East Wing. Trees have recently been planted to provide a small walking [area] for the patients.

The building is old and during periods of heavy rain and strong wind the roof being in need of repairs requires continuous maintenance. Every year the roof receives further damage; only a costly renovation would provide the building with all the requirements of a good hospital.

The monastery reconstruction plan is based upon this description, but the complex was very much larger than anything existing at the present time (fig. 1). Nevertheless, the property adjoining the church does show traces of the old foundations and contains scattered fragments of the former cloister capitals. The reconstruction should be treated with reservation, however, for, at the best, it can only provide a rough approximation of the former appearance of the monastery.

After the Macao government built the hospital of San Januario, the monastery buildings were sold to Artur Basto. He later demolished them and built a residence, the adjoining Villa Flor. After his death this property was acquired by its present owners. Throughout this period the church remained untouched.

On 17 April 1884 an agreement was reached between the authorities at Macao and The Brotherhood of Our Good Lord of Passos whereby this St. Augustine's organization agreed to accept future responsibility for the church and its maintenance.<sup>23</sup> Commander Lourenco Marques took an active part in influencing the authorities to accept this arrangement, and it is pleasing to record they have never had cause to regret it. The church has remained untouched since this date.

St. Augustine's is one of the longest churches in Macao and the plan form is similar to the Monastery of St. Dominic's which was built in the same period.<sup>24</sup> It was probably created by joining two churches together. A small chapel, later the sanctuary, was built first and was expanded to the present plan after the establishment of the monastery and the subsequent desire for more space.<sup>25</sup> A series of rising levels lie before the approach to the high altar. Behind the altar screen is a shrine six feet above floor level which houses a statue of Christ and the Cross, commonly

20. A pataca was a Macao coin which was valued at approximately 320 reis or five escudos. The total value of these properties was therefore about £300. Braga, *A Ingreja*, p. 337.

21. *Boletim de Governo de Macau* (Macao, 1857), pp. 821-822.

22. Dr. Lucio Augusto da Silva, *Relatorio Cerca do Servico de Saude de Macau, a apresentado ao Conselho de Saude Naval e do Ultramar* (Macao, 1857).

23. The Brotherhood of Our Good Lord of Passos was also called The Brotherhood of Our Lady of Penha. It was developed by the congregation after St. Augustine's became a parish church.

24. M. Hugo-Brunet, 'The Church of St. Dominic at Macao', *Journal of Oriental Studies* iv, nos. 1 and 2 (1957).

25. The Monastery of St. Dominic (St. Domingo) had a similar internal arrangement. See Hugo-Brunet, 'The Church of St. Dominic at Macao'.



Fig. 2. Drawing of southwestern elevation (courtesy of A. H. Wahab).

known as The Jesus of Passos.<sup>26</sup> The statue is lighted from two small windows on either side and has a low ceiling coinciding with the roof of the apse. It is painted in dark colors, mauve, blue, and brown predominating. There is a noticeable interplay in the ceiling levels of both sections as well as an arched division between the later section of the church and the sanctuary. This arrangement was sound in terms of function because it divided the congregation from the clergy and the altar.

The high altar is the dominant element in the church seen from the point of entry. St. Augustine's has a gallery at the rear over the entrance, which was used by the choir and the catechumens. The gallery is U-shaped and stretches three-quarters of the length of the aisles. It is supported on corbelled brackets and has a white timbered balustrade which curves in front of each window. Below the gallery there is a floral-bracket support of stucco. The interior of the church is simple and the interplay of volumes is such that the longitudinal axis is accentuated throughout. The walls are painted white and the woodwork brown—the only other colored elements being the altars, religious objects, statues, and floor tiles. The high altar was Spanish in inspiration. It is made of wood and is decorated in white and gold.

The sanctuary is approached from the nave through the arch and is defined by a timber railing and one step. Half-

<sup>26</sup> The Jesus of Passos is a fine example of eighteenth-century Macao church sculpture. The statue is believed to weep on occasion, in which case it heralds disaster or calamity. The brotherhood received its name from it.



Fig. 3. Interior, with high altar (photo: author 1956).

way between the nave and the high altar the floor is raised five steps. The altar is raised a further three steps. The surface is covered in blue, ochre, red, and brown patterned tiles  $9'' \times 9'' \times \frac{1}{2}''$  in size. The processional way in the center is laid in a pattern of white tiles, while the skirting is formed by double tiles.

The high altar, situated as it is in the center of the sanctuary, required delicate treatment to relate it in its setting and to ensure that it did not appear as an isolated element. The backpiece incorporates a statue in a central niche framed on either side by three composite capitals with high bases and terminated by decorative urns. A small classical pediment is placed above it to house a fresco. The backpiece is elaborately carved and decorated. The altar-table is made of Italian marble and is original.

St. Augustine's contains four subsidiary altars, two of which are placed against the wall at the end of the aisles. Two others are adjacent to this and are built into the aisle walls. These have altars of Italian marble and are enclosed by two composite capitals and a classical pediment. In the center of each are the containers for the host, which are flanked by two saints.

The columns between the aisles and the nave are square, elaborately fluted and capped by rectangular capitals with highly stylized acanthus leaves or other floral decorations. The soffits and surrounds of the spanning arches are treated in stucco with flowering wreaths alternating with a stylized geometric design between the arch panels (fig. 3).

The workmen who built the church were Chinese, and because materials from the mother country were expen-



Fig. 4. Southeastern aisle, altar, and part of choir gallery (photo: author 1956).



Fig. 5. Northwestern elevation of sanctuary chapel (photo: author 1956).

sive, those used were mainly local. Tiles were employed extensively because they were easily obtained as well as being traditional elements in Portuguese architecture. Walls and beams were larger than were structurally necessary because the builders worked by rule of thumb, and it is interesting to note that the church has always withstood typhoon weather effectively. Local brick and timber were the main structural materials, while surfaces were rendered with a plaster made of lime from sea shells, sand, and molasses. The windows were originally made with small strips of translucent conch shells set in timber frames.

The limewash color was carefully chosen to keep the interior cool, and this effect was intensified by the provision of shutters, the thickness of the walls, and the high ceilings. The church was further insulated by the monastery and the administration blocks on either side of the most extensive wall surfaces.

Two doors are placed symmetrically in the northwest and southeast aisle walls, one being larger than the other (fig. 1). The southeast door originally led to the monastery buildings, but it is rarely used nowadays. The northwest door leads to the administration block, which has a subsidiary entrance. The windows of the nave are small, irregularly set, and have stucco decorations above their arches (fig. 7). They may have been added later for they lack uniformity and are smaller in size than is the case in other Macao churches. There is evidence of the use of a module, for the aisles are approximately half the size of the nave and the height of the columns is exactly twice the width of the aisle.

The roof is constructed with Chinese tiles, timber trusses, and purlins in the round of Chinese fir. There are two separate roof sections, each of which supports a boarded ceiling divided in sections by the tie beams (fig. 3). The ceiling is bordered with a decorated fretwork design where it adjoins the arcade and the cross beams, while light chandeliers are suspended from carved ceiling roses of acanthus leaves (fig. 3). The ceilings of the aisles are formed with cured boarding.

The northwestern elevation of the church is obscured today by a block of meeting rooms and small chambers. The present elevation is simple and contains a series of similar shuttered windows on two floors (fig. 6). The ground floor has a stone plinth and is demarcated by three mouldings, one above the ground-floor windows, another being rectangular in shape forming the sill of the first-floor windows, and yet another taking the form of a moulded scroll ending in two volutes between these. The roof is behind a parapet wall with a tiled coping.

The belfry tower adjoins the administration block and the sanctuary in the northwest. It was probably added later and was not part of the original conception. It was skilfully sited to become a landmark in the town, and it was visible from three intersecting streets.

The intermediate walls of the administration block are framed partitions on the first floor, although they are solid load-bearing on the ground floor. The entrance hall incorporates a timber staircase to the choir gallery, as well as providing an entrance to the church through a side door. Window sills and the floor are made with floral patterned tiles of an earlier date. The building was colored



Fig. 6. Belfry, and part of administration block and sanctuary chapel (photo: author 1956).



Fig. 7. Window detail, choir gallery (photo: author 1955).

yellow externally and the decorative motifs, stringcourses, eaves, and window surrounds were picked out in white.

The southwest elevation (fig. 2) is remarkable for the crude spiral scrolls and inverted volutes used to emphasize the windows. These are placed between the sills and the architraves. A stop is provided on both sides of the façade by a fluted pilaster on a rectangular base which includes a cornice supporting an acanthus leaf capital. Three steps lead to the main entrance. The axis of balance in the elevation is resolved by a dual column Doric portico, the central window and a statue niche. This portico incorporated two robust finials on rectangular bases above the portico cornice and directly above the outer columns.

The pediment cornice and the main gallery window are situated above the entrance, while two tiers of windows of different sizes are spaced in the left and right panels. All of the windows are surrounded by robust scrolls reminiscent of Flemish strapwork. Smaller stucco scroll volutes were placed below the windows. The pediment composition is terminated by the statue of the Virgin and Child and a floral stucco panel. On either side of the pediment are two triangular right-angled panels. A small cross stands on the apex of the roof but is not seen easily from a distance.

The present church is in fair condition although there are marked signs of white ant infestation in the timber work—particularly in the ceiling. St. Augustine's cannot be seen to its best advantage today because of the encroachment of the outbuildings and adjoining villa garden walls. The church exterior does need complete renovation, repainting, and reconstruction. St. Augustine's



Fig. 8. Choir gallery and rear of nave (photo: author 1955).

functions as a parish church at the present time, and was particularly favored by refugees during the war. The building is, fortunately, situated in the older section of Macao where the adjoining structures are in harmony with it. St. Augustine's adjoins a cobbled square shaded by a large tree on the western side, and it is one of the few Macao churches still retaining the original design.