

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

The Arcadia Colored High School Historic District consists of four contributing buildings set on approximately 4.6 acres bounded by Crawford Avenue on the west and Napoleon Street on the east and is located on 6th Street in Arcadia, Bienville Parish, Louisiana. The site is flat and grassy with a scattering of mature oak trees. The four buildings are nondescript, one-story, brick and concrete block educational facilities of the 1940s – 1950s. The earliest building was constructed c. 1942 and the other three were built in the 1950s with the last completed c. 1955. Together, they form the remainder of what was once a denser school campus. They have suffered some deterioration during years of vacancy, but would be easily recognizable to any alumni or person familiar with the Arcadia Colored High School (formerly known as Bienville Parish Training School and later known as Crawford High School) during the period of significance. Thus, they retain their National Register eligibility. There are no non-contributing elements.

Narrative Description

In the 1950s, the campus of the Arcadia Colored High School (renamed Crawford High School in 1959) was composed of ten or so buildings: the original school building, at least two separate classroom buildings, a lunchroom building, an agriculture shop, a home economics building, a combination office and bookroom building, the principal's house, the administrative building, and the auditorium-gymnasium. The principal's house was later relocated to an adjoining street and several of the early classroom and miscellaneous buildings demolished c. 1971. Although some of the campus' buildings are now gone the remaining three classroom and administrative buildings and the auditorium-gymnasium possess enough integrity in terms of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association to convey important elements of the school as it existed during the period of significance. There are no modern intrusions in the district. The surrounding neighborhood is filled with modest homes, mostly of the period, including the former home of the founder of the school and the home originally constructed as the principal's residence.

Inventory:

1. Classroom Building A (contributing) c. 1942 (*Photos 2, 3, 4, and 5*)

This four-classroom building is the oldest surviving building on the campus. Based on the evidence of a 1941 Sanborn map that does not show a footprint of the building, and memories of alumni who cannot recall the building ever not being there, it is estimated to have been constructed c.1942. The four-room plan is very much like a simplified version of the Rosenwald Fund's "Four Teacher Community School to Face East or West" except that the classroom windows actually face north and south. As in the Rosenwald plan, the building has four ample classrooms with entrances on the gable ends. It is one story, constructed of painted concrete blocks on a concrete foundation with an asphalt gable roof that features deep eaves. The gables are clad in vertical wood siding with large wooden louvers at the peaks for attic ventilation. The entrances are sheltered by simple gabled porches supported by steel columns that are likely not original. Under each porch are two wood entrance doors. Those on the east end had glass on the top half (now boarded over) and three panels on the bottom half. Those on the west end have two wood panels with no glazing. The north side of the building (Photo 3) features a row of ten large, twelve-light, steel-frame windows that would have provided ample daylighting in the classrooms (now boarded over). The south elevation (Photo 4) may originally have had the same configuration, but now possesses six windows (boarded over) plus two oversized double doors. These doors facilitated use of the southern rooms for teaching industrial education, particularly automotive shop as indicated by the words "OIL CHANGE", "TUNE-UP", "BRAKE SER.", and "ENGINE REPAIR" stenciled on one interior wall. Alumni also recall 4th and 7th grade classes being taught in this building. The rooms are connected on the interior by a single door in each of the four interior walls that divide them. The walls are painted concrete like the exterior and the doors are wooden with two panels. A few wood framed chalkboards remain.

2. Classroom Building B (contributing) c. 1955 (*Photos 6 and 7*)

The construction date of this west-facing, two-classroom building is uncertain, but students recall it as the newest of the campus' buildings, built sometime during the 1950s. It was used for business and typing classes. The one-story, wood-frame building has a running bond red brick veneer and an asphalt side gable roof with a small, central lower cross gable supported by metal poles projecting over the entrance. The roof features deep boxed eaves and a raking cornice. Louvered vents are located in the peaks of the gable ends above a soldier course of brick. The bottom half of the front brick walls are gray while the rest is red, with some areas being painted in a matching red color (possibly as graffiti coverage). The door is flanked by two banks of four aluminum sash windows composed of three lights with horizontal divisions and brick sills. These windows are mirrored on the rear elevation, but there is no rear entrance. The side elevations have no windows or doors. As in Classroom Building A, the entire interior space is taken up by the classrooms. Each of the two is 25' X 25'. There is no hallway. The north classroom has two small closets built into its north wall. The interior finish is gypsum board, some of which has been torn out. In the wall between the classrooms is a doorway and bank of five framed openings allowing for communication between the spaces.

3. Classroom and Administrative Building (contributing) c. 1951 (*Photos 8 and 9*)

This one-story, south-facing brick building is the most stylized of the campus' four buildings. Its mid-century modern aesthetic is asserted through the horizontality of the design, its flat roof with deep eaves and its clean, sharp lines. At the same time, the building is wrapped by a plain frieze with a small molded cornice that demonstrates a continuing attachment to traditional elements. The front façade is symmetrical with two recessed entrances providing access to the interior via doors set perpendicular to the front. The side walls of the entrances project past the front elevation, creating elements that straddle the line between modernistic fins and deep pilasters. The rear of the facility is accessed through four separate doors, but these are not recessed and are spaced across the elevation. Paired and single aluminum sash windows light both the front and rear of the building, while there are no windows on the sides. All windows are presently covered by heavy, custom security bars. The plan is composed of four large interconnected rooms, plus a small bathroom. Three main interior walls are arranged parallel. Two are concrete block and one is covered in fiberboard faux wood paneling. The bathroom is tucked into the rear corner of the easternmost room and is enclosed by paneled partition walls. The concrete block walls have approximately six-foot wide doorways without doors. The wall panel that separates the westernmost room has a single hollow core door. It is the only room that can be closed off from the others.

4. Auditorium-Gymnasium (contributing) 1954 (*Photos 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14*)

The auditorium-gymnasium was constructed in 1954. According to a plaque on the gymnasium wall, the architect was C. Scott Yeager (of Alexandria, LA) and the contractor was McInnis Brothers (of Shreveport, LA). Its steel I-beam frame is clad on the exterior by red brick below the roofline and asbestos shingle on its north gable end and south gable-on-hip end. Although it utilizes modern construction methods and materials like aluminum awning windows, it is not modern in style. In fact its boxed eave returns are markedly traditional. Yet, with no other feature that could be called Colonial Revival, the building may best be termed "no style". The interior is very intact and retains its original bleachers, stage, wood paneled walls and wood tongue-and-groove floor among other features. Its plan is mostly composed of open space with the stage on the south end and a small kitchen on the north end. The bleachers run along the east and west sides. The kitchen retains its original cast iron sink and stove/oven unit and has a Dutch door for food service.

Each of the four buildings retains a great deal of integrity. The losses they have suffered are moderate deterioration and vandalism due to their years of vacancy. There is no doubt that they are still familiar to alumni and would be easily recognizable to anyone from the historic period. They remain in their same location and retain substantial design, materials, and workmanship to help them all retain a historic feeling and association. The Classroom and Administrative Building and the Auditorium-Gymnasium still define the public front of the campus. Because of these factors, the Arcadia Colored High School, which served the educational needs of African Americans in and around Bienville Parish, remains eligible for listing on the National Register.

Significant Date(s): 1942, 1950, 1964

Architect: Yeager, C. Scott

Criterion: A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Arcadia Colored High School Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of education and ethnic heritage because it provided very important educational opportunities for African Americans within the Bienville Parish region. Most significantly, it was the first and for many years, only school in Bienville Parish to offer secondary education for African American students. As the Bienville Parish Training School and later, the Arcadia Colored High School/ Crawford High School, it provided students with a well-rounded educational foundation that enabled them to progress to college and pursue many different professions. The campus' oldest building has a period of significance commencing with its construction c. 1942 and terminating fifty years ago, in 1964. The three younger buildings that date to the Arcadia Colored High School era have a period of significance beginning with the c. 1951 construction date of the classroom and administrative building and also terminating in 1964.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

At the beginning of the twentieth century, public education in Louisiana was in a terrible state of affairs. The state constitution of 1898 had legally mandated the already status quo segregation of schools by race, and at that time students of all races were severely underserved.¹ The state's public school system was characterized by crude, deteriorating school houses and abysmally low attendance. During the first two decades of the century, great improvements were made in school house construction, curriculum standardization, and attendance through transportation advances and consolidation. However, these developments generally applied only to the white schools. In Louisiana's underfunded dual school system, African-American schools received little to no investment from their parish school boards. The disparity this created between the two separate and supposedly equal school systems was blatant. Not least of the neglected aspects of African-American education in the state was secondary level instruction.

High school education, which was being so improved for white students, remained non-existent for black students in Louisiana until the second decade of the century. It is indicative of the statewide circumstances that in 1900, the school board of the relatively progressive city of New Orleans officially *reduced* education for African Americans to just five grades.² Throughout the state, particularly in rural areas, there had never been much opportunity for secondary education for African Americans and the sentiment against it by parts of the white population was strong. A compromise between the demand of African Americans for secondary education and the reluctance of certain whites to provide it was found in the concept of "county training schools." An African-American educator, Professor A. M. Strange of Tangipahoa Parish, first proposed the idea of a school that would emphasize agricultural training and home economics in 1910. Through his efforts, the Tangipahoa Parish Training School was opened in 1911. Seeking financial support for the school, he wrote to James Dillard, an agent of the John F. Slater Fund, a northern philanthropic institution supporting improvements for African- American education in the South. Dillard required that the school be a public facility and through the negotiations between Strange, Dillard, and the parish school board, the concept for the county training school formula was born. The Slater Fund outlined the goals of county training schools as providing a central school emphasizing industrial and agricultural education and preparing students to enter normal (teacher training) schools.³ The focus on teacher training was extremely important because the African-American schools that did exist across the state were severely lacking in qualified teachers. Tangipahoa Parish Training School was the first county training school in the south and one of the first rural secondary schools for African Americans in the country. Many others across the south were soon to follow, but over a

¹ Rodney Cline, *Education in Louisiana – History and Development* (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1974), 34.

² Donald E. Devore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans, 1841-1991* (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991), 118.

³ Ken Chujo, "The Negro Division: Public Education Policy for Black Louisiana, 1916-1941," in *Education in Louisiana*, ed. Michael G. Wade (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1999), 305.

decade later, in the 1923-24 school year, just sixteen of Louisiana's sixty-four parishes had a parish training school. Among those few was the Bienville Parish Training School.⁴

According to a history of the Bienville Parish Training School, it "grew out of an urgent need for a place that would provide education for the students who had completed the eighth grade at the St. Duty Rosenwald School."⁵ It opened in 1923 under the leadership of educator Byrd Theron Crawford. Crawford was a graduate of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and had come to the area in the 1910s at the invitation of his classmate and brother-in-law Charles Grambling, founder of the North Louisiana Agricultural and Industrial Institute (later the Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial School, now Grambling State University).⁶ B. T. Crawford led the St. Duty School and then took a position in extension work in another parish before being asked by members of the St. Duty C.M.E. Church to return to Arcadia to lead a new school, which would be the Bienville Parish Training School. The school was established with assistance from two of the major philanthropic agencies dedicated to the advancement of education for African Americans in the South, the Rosenwald Foundation and the Slater Fund. The Slater Fund provided assistance for the salaries of industrial teachers at parish training schools while the Rosenwald Fund assisted in the erection of the actual school buildings. The Bienville Parish Training School was erected in 1922-1923 at a total cost of \$11,040.00. To this sum, the Rosenwald Fund contributed \$1,500.00, while the school board provided \$8,540.00, and the African American community itself provided \$1000.00.⁷ This substantial contribution reflects the dedication of Arcadia's African American residents to education. It also supports the assertion of one scholar that while the Rosenwald Fund had an immeasurable impact on African-American education across the south, "It was black southerners' enduring belief in universal schooling and their collective social actions to achieve it that made possible and sustained the Rosenwald school building program."⁸

The original Bienville Parish Training School building was based on the Rosenwald six teacher community school plan 6-A for a north or south facing school. This plan featured six classrooms oriented around a central auditorium, plus an office and a library. Rosenwald Fund records note expenditures of \$120 each for a high school library and an elementary school library.⁹ A modest wood-frame teacher's house was constructed on the site simultaneously. When the school was documented for the 1924 Arcadia Sanborn map, it had no electricity and was heated by wood stove. By the next Sanborn map update in 1941, it had expanded to include three additional classroom buildings and a dormitory. The presence of the dormitory speaks to the importance of the Bienville Parish Training School as one of the only schools for African Americans in the area, and the only one providing secondary education. Students are known to have traveled from neighboring Claiborne Parish to the north and Lincoln Parish to the east, as well as from throughout Bienville Parish to obtain an education at the school.¹⁰ The original school and ancillary buildings were demolished after a new high school was constructed in 1971 at a new site.¹¹

Although parish training schools were aimed at providing secondary education and teacher training, in the early years, most were predominantly focused on elementary education while providing some higher level training for the small numbers of students able to pursue it.¹² Like its counterparts throughout the state, the Bienville Parish Training School taught the primary as well as secondary grades, with fewer students able to

⁴ National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Tangipahoa Parish Training School Dormitory, Kentwood, Louisiana. Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1979.

⁵ "A Brief History of the Bienville Parish Training School," 1970 Crawford School Reunion program, National Register File, Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

⁶ National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Grambling State University Historic District, Grambling, Louisiana. Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2010.

⁷ Fisk University, "Fisk University Rosenwald Fund Card File Database," (accessed May 15, 2003).

⁸ Patti Elizabeth Smith, "Rosenwald Schools in Louisiana: History and Administration," in *Education in Louisiana*, ed. Michael G. Wade (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1999), 352.

⁹ Fisk University.

¹⁰ Liza Patton, Reverend James Patton, Deborah Sapp, Douglas Sapp, Esther Sullivan, Lacy Washington, and Betty Wilson, interview by author, Arcadia, LA, June 29, 2013.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Chujo, 305.

complete the course of study through to graduation. Its first graduating class is recorded as having just six students.¹³ In the 1923-24 school year, when the Bienville Parish Training School opened, there were only fifteen other parish training schools and four black four-year high schools in the state. During the following decades, secondary education for African Americans in Louisiana slowly but steadily expanded. In 1929-30, there were still thirty-seven parishes without state approved black high schools. In 1944-45, the number of black four-year high schools had grown to eighty and one was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, but thirteen parishes remained without approved high schools for African Americans.¹⁴ During these years, the Bienville Parish Training School continued to be a beacon of education for young African Americans in Arcadia and the surrounding areas. Its number of graduates grew quickly from its small start and by 1929, it had twenty-six graduates, most of whom were female.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, the number of graduates fluctuated up and down, but did not grow substantially. It was during this period, c. 1942, that Classroom Building A was added to the expanding campus. In the World War II years, the financial challenges of keeping the school operating increased, but with B. T. Crawford as principal, it endured. In 1948, the Bienville Parish Training School lost its beloved leader. Following the passing of B. T. Crawford, A. R. Rollins was elected to the position of principal. When he assumed his new role, the school campus included the original school building, two separate classroom buildings, a lunchroom building, an agriculture shop, a home economics building, a combination office and bookroom building, and the principal's house. At that time, there were fourteen teachers and 478 students in grades 1-12.¹⁵ It was during the 1950-51 school session that the Bienville Parish Training School was renamed Arcadia Colored High School. Despite the name change, the school continued to serve grades 1-12 and no significant changes are known to have been made in its mode of operation.¹⁶

The 1950s were a time of growth and improvement for Arcadia Colored High School. The faculty and student body increased and new programs and buildings were added, including three of the surviving buildings: Classroom Building B, where business and typing classes were held; the Classroom and Administrative Building; and the Auditorium-Gymnasium. The last of these three, completed in 1954, was a very important addition for the assembly, performance, and athletic space it provided. While elementary students were instructed in a basic curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic, those in the junior and high school level grades were also taught agriculture, life, and career skills. Students learned everything from how to raise a pig and prepare meals to sewing and proper etiquette.¹⁷ In 1957, Arcadia Colored High School was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.

With a final name change in 1959, Arcadia Colored High School became Crawford High School in honor of its founder. As such, it continued to serve the greater Arcadia community through the 1960s. By that point, there were two other high schools in Bienville Parish for African Americans, Southside in Ringgold and Shady Grove, but both were some thirty miles away.¹⁸ Crawford High School provided a diverse curriculum that included history, English, art, music, advanced math and algebra, chemistry, social studies, speech, drama, Louisiana history, and American history. Alumni remember some of the educational disadvantages that the unequal public support created in their school, such as old text books passed on from white schools that were missing pages, but most of all they recall receiving a quality education and credit the excellence of their teachers. As

¹³ "A Brief History of the Bienville Parish Training School."

¹⁴ J. B. Cade, "The Education of Negroes in Louisiana," in *The African American Experience in Louisiana: Part B*, ed. Charles Vincent (Lafayette: University of Southwestern, LA, 2000), 232, first published in the *Louisiana Colored Teacher's Journal*, 27 (1948): 7-11; Minns Sledge Robertson, "Development of the High-School Program," in *Education in Louisiana*, ed. Michael G. Wade (Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1999), 272, first published in Minns Sledge Robertson, *Public Education in Louisiana After 1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Department of Education, n.d.g.), 55-82.

¹⁵ "A Brief History of the Bienville Parish Training School."

¹⁶ This may be part of a broader pattern in the renaming of parish training schools as other high schools for African-American students were finally being opened. The 1950s was a time when a number of modern school facilities for African American students were built. Such name changes, thus might not have indicated any change in the structure of the school itself. According to the National Register nomination for the Tangipahoa Parish Training School, "From 1955 until 1969, although its operations continued in much the same manner, its name was the O. W. Dillon Memorial School. In 1969 with the coming of integration, it became Kentwood Elementary School."

¹⁷ Esther Sullivan, Arcadia Colored High School alumna and former teacher, telephone interview by author, February 28, 2014.

¹⁸ Patton et al, interview by author. Southside High School was established by Tracy Washington and Shady Grove by O. J. Lewis. Sullivan, interview by author.

one graduate of the Arcadia Colored High School concluded, "One thing about those teachers back there then, they taught the whole child and they taught what they knew and they gave it to the students and I feel like the students were very successful then because they [the teachers] taught them everything they knew."¹⁹ Because of the education they received at the school, many alumni were able to continue to universities and have pursued a variety of professions. A notable number of graduates went on to become teachers themselves because of the school's early emphasis on teacher training as well as its proximity to Grambling State University. Grambling, which was known as the Louisiana Negro Normal School from 1928-46, offered two year education degrees and was the only institution of higher learning for African Americans in north Louisiana until the late 1960s.²⁰ Four year education degrees were also pursued out of state at institutions like Michigan State University, Tuskegee Institute, and Columbia University. Thus, the school which began in 1923 truly had a profound impact on education for African Americans in the town of Arcadia and surrounding areas for over forty years. The four buildings of the campus that survive today are significant for the role they played in this history during the twenty-two year period of significance window between 1942 and 1964.

¹⁹ Esther Sullivan, in Patton et al interview by author, Arcadia, LA, June 29, 2013.

²⁰ National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Grambling State University Historic District, Grambling, Louisiana, (Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism, Office of Cultural Development, Division of Historic Preservation, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 2010).