

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Bossier High School is a large, two-story brick and stone building constructed in the Neo-Classical style in 1923. It stands within a campus encompassing three city blocks. Also within this compound is a second Neo-Classical style classroom building erected in 1928. This two-story masonry structure, which stands in front of the older structure, is being counted as a contributing element to the nomination because it is part of the school and because its construction is part of the story of the “coming of age” of education in Bossier City. Despite some alteration, the schools remain eligible for National Register listing.

The plan of the 1923 building is typical of the period. A large entrance opens into a minimal lobby which leads in turn to a continuous hallway running from end to end of the building. Classrooms line each side of this hall. AN auditorium, located across from the main entrance, projects toward the rear. This plan gives the building an overall “T”-shape configuration.

The facade’s overall rectangular mass, its large expanses of plain wall surface, and its preponderance of linteled openings categorized the school as an example of the Neo-Classical style. In addition, Classical decorative elements are found on the projecting pavilions:

- 1) The central pavilion resembles a temple in which four colossal stone pilasters support an entablature surmounted by a triangular pediment. The pilasters rise from simple bases and are capped by capitals featuring attenuated acanthus leaves. The entablature, which has a recessed central panel, displays four roundels, one above each pilaster capital. The pediment, which also has a raking cornice, is decorated by a bas relief urn and swag motif. Swags also fill panels between the end windows of the central pavilion’s first and second levels. The building’s entrance is located between the two central pilasters. It is distinguished by a broken semi-circular pediment supported by shorter pilasters resembling their colossal neighbors. An urn rises through the break in the pediment’s cornice.
- 2) The end pavilion’s side elevations resemble the temple-like treatment of the central pavilion, including the use of roundels on the entablature, an urn and swag motif within the pediment, and panels with bas relief urns and swags between the first and second level windows. However, the space between the central pilasters of this composition is filled by a tall arched window distinguished by a large stone window box. A door is located below the latter.
- 3) The end pavilions’ facades include four brick pilasters with bases and capitals identical to those on the central pavilion. These support an entablature featuring brick laid in a decorative pattern. Roundels, one above each pilaster capital, are superimposed upon the patterned brick. This ensemble is capped by a semi-circular pediment with a heavy cornice and central roundel motif flanked by swags.

Other decorative elements found on the 1923 building include first level window lintels which extend to create a high watertable; a belt course below the cornice; a parapet with coping encircling the building; and a pressed metal ceiling in the upstairs hallway, downstairs library and some cloakrooms. Alterations to the building include the installation of new floors, the introduction of dropped ceilings in most areas, and the replacement of the original multi-pane glazing with modern windows containing large horizontal panes, most of which are tinted blue.

The 1928 building repeats many of the Classical decorative motifs found on the earlier building but uses them differently. Its facade exhibits a three-part composition consisting of a long, recessed central element flanked by projecting end pavilions. Twin entrances are located on each end of the recessed section. These are composed of pedimented door surrounds surmounted by large arched windows. The door treatment features prominent rusticated stone pilasters superimposed upon rusticated surrounds. The pilasters support an entablature containing a reeded panel. This entablature, in turn, supports a heavy broken pediment pierced by an urn. Additional Classical elements found on this building include horizontal panels with bas relief swag motifs above the arched windows, brick pilasters

with capitals identical to those on the 1923 building, brick quoins on the corners of the projecting end pavilions and at intervals within the central section, and stone shields decorating the end pavilions. Although not a Classical motif, bricks laid in diamond patterns also distinguished the projecting end sections. Finally, a stone belt course and a parapet with coping encircle the building. The floorplan of the building consists of one long hallway with classrooms on each side. This hall is distinguished by a brick wainscot and a brick floor laid in a herringbone pattern. Alterations to the 1928 building include the lowering of its classroom ceilings, the replacement of its original glazing with the same type of tinted window installed in the older structure, and the construction of a covered walkway connecting one of the entrances to the 1923 school.

Although the installation of the modern tinted windows in both buildings is regrettable, the exteriors of the 1923 and 1928 buildings otherwise look almost exactly as they did when constructed. Thus, there is no doubt that any former student returning to the campus today would easily recognize his former school. As the symbol of the coming of age of education in Bossier City, the Bossier High School is a prime candidate for National Register listing.

Non-Contributing Element

A one-story brick gymnasium building with an asphalt shingle roof also stands within the campus. It was constructed in 1955.

Significant Dates: 1923, 1928

Architect: Edward F. Neild
Builder: Caldwell and Company

Criterion A
Area of Significance: Education

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Bossier High School is locally significant in the area of education because its construction represented a "coming of age" for public education in the Bossier Parish community of Bossier City. As will be explained below, the erection of a large modern brick school made possible improved education in various respects, not to mention its considerable symbolic value as a milestone.

Bossier City traces its founding to the establishment of a trading post in 1834. A townsite, carved from a local plantation, appears to have been laid out by the Civil War. Although concrete information on education in the community before c. 1915 has not been uncovered, one can assume that the trends observed in the remainder of the parish also applied to this community.

Before 1845 education in Bossier Parish was a completely private affair, with tutors teaching children on local plantations and private schools sharing space with local churches. Although the Louisiana constitution of 1845 mandated the creation of public school systems in each parish, this law appears to have made little difference because monetary support from the state capital seldom arrived. In fact, as late as 1871 the state owed Bossier parish around \$40,000 in support funds for the so-called public schools which had been established. Because of an overall lack of commitment to public education, private schools (one opening as early as 1859) played an important role in providing education to the parish's children for many years. Although the situation must have improved over time, these early schools often sadly lacked adequate physical facilities and supplies. At this time school terms ranged from five to six months in length. By 1920, 34 schools operated in the parish. However, this number did not correctly reflect the status of education in the region because the majority of the 34 were small and poorly staffed. For example, ten of the schools had only one teacher, nine had only two, one had only

three, and one had only four. In addition, the 34 total reflects the division into separate systems for white and African-American students.

The first Bossier City school about which information is known began operation some time before 1915. (Its exact date of construction is unknown.) A 1915 photograph shows a two-story, frame structure to which a smaller two-story wing had been added. The wing was constructed in 1915 to provide space for domestic science and agriculture classes, which were apparently needed to help the school earn accreditation as an official high school. This accreditation was achieved in 1917. Although the school produced its first high school graduates (a class of six) in that year, it also continued to teach children of all ages and grades.

By this time the largely agricultural Bossier Parish had expanded its economic base to include manufacturing and industry. In 1919 the parish supported 23 factories, most of which were located in Bossier City. The community was the only town of any size within Bossier Parish, and its growing population put major stress on its frame school. By 1921 the enlarged building was sadly crowded, housing 11 teachers 51 high school students, and 246 pupils in lower grades. To address the crowding problem, the Bossier Parish School Board called for a special election to vote a one-mill school improvement tax; but the outcome of this request is unclear. What is certain is that the board again called for an election on January 5, 1922. This time the electorate approved a \$150,000 bond issue to build a new school in Bossier City.

Although its name implied that it taught only senior level students, in reality Bossier High School continued the practice of educating students of all levels under one roof. Completed in 1923, the building was huge. Containing an auditorium, library, cafeteria, and office space as well as seventeen classrooms, this building obviously represented a considerable improvement in the physical plant, which translated into a considerable improvement in the quality of public education provided in Bossier City. This transition from frame school buildings to "modern" brick facilities is a recognizable chapter in the history of public education in the state, with the latter universally by their very nature considered to be better. The *Annual Report of the state Department of Education in Louisiana* for 1924-1925 bragged that the number of brick school buildings in the state had grown from 40 in 1900 to 388 in 1925. By way of explanation, the report noted: "In the early years the custom was to erect cheap frame buildings. The custom now is to use permanent materials. . . ."

Bossier City's new school was such an improvement that it received much-deserved praise from the media of the day. "It is certainly a magnificent building," crowed the *Bossier Banner* in a June 7, 1923 article. The *American School Board Journal* agreed, providing pictorial and written coverage in one of its 1923 issues. By 1924 the school served a total of 510 children. However, the town continued growing at a startling rate, with its population almost quadrupling from 1,094 in 1920 to 4,003 in 1930. As a result, the still new Bossier High School experienced severe overcrowding in a surprisingly short time. To address this need, the School Board constructed a new building in 1928. Located directly south of the 1923 building, the new structure raised the number of available classrooms to 36. Elementary school children were assigned to the newer building, and high school classes remained in the 1923 structure.

Together the two buildings comprising Bossier High School served the educational needs of the community's children until 1939, when continued growth caused the School Board to construct a new three-story high school elsewhere in town. However, the 1923 and 1928 buildings continue to function in the community's educational life as the Bossier City Elementary School. As a symbol of education's "coming of age" in Bossier City, the Bossier High School is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1915 photo of previous Bossier City school (copy in National Register file).