

Fair Park High School (1928, 1931) is a sprawling three-story building incorporating archetypes and features from various aspects of the classical tradition. Its red brick walls are trimmed in limestone. The school is located in a park-like setting on Greenwood Road in western Shreveport across from the Louisiana State Fairgrounds. Despite an admittedly major change in the central tower and window replacement, Fair Park would still be easily recognizable to someone from the historic period.

The façade of the main block is articulated in a five-part manner, which was very standard for large American school buildings of the early twentieth century. There is a central entrance marked by a pediment resting on colossal pilasters, hyphen classroom wings and end pavilions. As was often the case, the pavilion facades are almost blank. A high basement forms the first story. The central entrance is marked by three arched openings. As built in 1928, the center was crowned by a three-stage tower in the manner of English architect Sir Christopher Wren. (In America the tower reminds one of William and Mary and Colonial Williamsburg.) It consisted of a high brick base with an oculus on each side and a balustrade (stage 1), surmounted by a slender wooden pavilion with round arch windows and pilasters resting on its own low brick base (stage 2), which was surmounted in turn by a domed cupola (stage 3). Today stage 3 and all but the low brick base of stage 2 are missing. They were replaced with a small dome-like top. (This was done in the 1980s when the original cupola began to leak.)

At the east end, set back from the main building, is a two-story auditorium wing with an off-center entrance marked by a pedimented pavilion. Extending westward at a right angle from the rear of the auditorium is a one story industrial arts wing. (See attached for building footprint.)

Other noteworthy classical exterior features include the decorative swags and shield in the tympanum of the main block, the niches with urns set in the ground story of each end pavilion of the main block, and alternating triangular and segmental pediments over the openings of the piano nobile of the entrance pavilion. As with most schools of the period, windows are large and are set in groupings or bands. Most of the school's original 12/12 windows have been replaced with metal windows featuring horizontal panes. Original large steel windows (with arched tops) survive on the auditorium's side and rear elevations, and the original multi-pane steel windows remain on the industrial arts wing.

Awash in oil money, Shreveport was experiencing explosive population growth in the 1920s, which is why Fair Park was built in the first place. In 1931, just three years after it opened, the school received a two story classroom addition on the west side of the main block. The addition echoes the classical styling of the original building but in a much more low-key manner. Like the auditorium on the east side, it is set back from the main block. It features standard classical elements – a symmetrical façade, round arched entrance doors, and a pair of round windows – but there is no sculpted ornament. In 1937 the wing received a partial third story at the rear.

The school has a standard floorplan of long halls with classrooms to each side. The 1931 wing has the same interior detailing as the original school. With the exception of acoustical tile ceilings, the interior looks much as it did in the historic period. The halls feature a high (6-7 foot) green glazed tile wainscot and bands of lockers. The floors are of reddish brown tile laid in a decorative pattern. Classroom doors have a large operable transom above, and transom-like windows between classrooms and the hall provide additional ventilation. In the entrance lobby cast concrete posts covered largely in a light color tile set off a staircase at each side. The staircases feature an openwork design in steel, as do the staircases at the front and back of the 1931 wing. Staircases at each end of the main block are of concrete. The cavernous auditorium has a curved ceiling, a balcony section, and a proscenium ornamented with two floral bands.

Non-historic alterations:

In addition to the previously described tower alteration and window replacement, the brick has been

sandblasted. A relatively small two-story wing has been added on the east side at the rear corner of the auditorium.

A free-standing 1956 gym connected to the 1931 wing via a covered walkway is being excluded from the nominated acreage.

Assessment of Integrity:

While the tower alteration and the window replacement have had a notable impact upon the appearance of the school, they have not done so to such an extent that it would not be readily recognizable to someone from the historic period, which is the litmus test for Register eligibility under Criterion A.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1928, 1931
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Edward F. Neild, architect
CRITERION: A

Fair Park High School is of local educational significance as part of a massive school building campaign in the teens and '20s necessitated by the city's oil boom-driven population explosion. Its opening in 1928 improved the overall quality of education in Shreveport by relieving overcrowded conditions – a chronic problem in the city during the period.

The discovery in 1906 of one of the world's largest oil fields, the Caddo Field, launched an era of booming prosperity and skyrocketing population growth in Shreveport (almost a fivefold increase from 1900 to 1930). Between 1908 and 1918 oil production increased eleven-fold, and in 1911 the world's first over-water oil well was drilled in Caddo Lake. Shreveport was inundated with new citizens, and elsewhere in the parish new oil booms towns seemingly sprang up overnight. The boom continued into the 1920s; and even in the 1930s, oil helped Shreveport escape the worst of the Great Depression.

All this, of course, literally changed the face of the city, as old Victorian homes and commercial buildings were demolished to make way for new "temples of commerce" and institutional buildings. The pace of construction was so rapid in the teens and '20s, when the city's population doubled in a ten year period, that the local paper carried on the front page a standing feature called "See Shreveport Grow Day by Day," as it heralded new building permits. Skyscrapers, new subdivisions and major institutional buildings were being constructed at a dizzying pace and often with no expense spared.

Needless to say, as new people moved to Shreveport at a rapid pace and as the city annexed new areas, there was immense pressure on the city and parish infrastructure. Schools seemed to be overcrowded as soon as they were built. Between 1900 and 1920, for example, the white school population increased 317% and white school enrollment increased 265%. Meeting the needs of a school population increasing at such a rate was a serious challenge indeed. At one point (1916) the Caddo Parish School Board considered, but then rejected, the idea of dividing the school population in half and teaching one half in the morning and the other in the afternoon. A cheap expedient, until new schools could be built, was the erection of temporary frame buildings, known at the time as "the shacks."

When the oil boom began in 1906, Shreveport had one public school. Just a few years old (1899), the large three story building was officially named Shreveport Central High School, but was generally called the Hope Street School because of its location. As was typical of the time, it housed all grades and was for whites

only. As school enrollment climbed rapidly, a larger school was needed. In 1910 a new school was built to house the high school grades, while the 1899 school housed the elementary grades. In 1917 a large brick school was constructed for blacks of all grades.

In the teens and twenties, as school enrollment continued to outgrow facilities, a series of elementary schools and two high schools, C. E. Byrd (1925) and Fair Park (1928), were built for white students. Perhaps nothing tells the story of the demands on the school system better than the construction of the two high schools, both vast in size, some three years apart. Byrd, a huge building located on a twenty acre campus in the southeastern part of the city, opened in 1926 with 63 classrooms and a 2,000 seat auditorium. The next year it was announced that another large high school would be erected soon to serve the western side of the city. Two years after Byrd opened, Fair Park welcomed students to its large plant, including 32 classrooms and an auditorium. By its second year, the school had 735 students and 29 teachers. Enrollment continued to escalate, necessitating the construction of more classrooms in 1931, just three years after the school opened.

Schools like Byrd and Fair Park and others elsewhere in the parish clearly reflect the overriding theme in Caddo Parish public school history in the early twentieth century – a physical plant that was hard pressed to keep pace with the oil boom-driven population explosion. Almost as soon as a new school was built to provide some relief (for example, Fair Park), it too was overcrowded and had to be expanded. Because smaller classroom size is a benchmark for quality education, it is clear that the construction of a school like Fair Park was of considerable importance. It and Byrd in some respects represent the culmination of the early twentieth century massive school building program. And it is worthy of mention that virtually all the teens and twenties schools survive and are still in their original use.

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