

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Baton Rouge High School (1926) is a three to four story neo-Gothic brick and terra cotta building located in an older residential area of Baton Rouge. Since its construction the building has only undergone relatively minor alterations.

The high school has an impressive presence, partly because of its spreading park-like setting. The main entrance is located at the head of an axial green lined with live oaks and cedars. Evidently these trees were planted at or about the time the school was built. Today they have grown to such an extent that the building is completely obscured from many parts of the property.

The plan is fairly conventional for a large high school of the early twentieth century. The central monumental entrance opens into a minimal lobby which leads in turn to a continuous hallway running from end to end of the building. Behind the lobby, set on axis with the main entrance, is a large auditorium with a mezzanine. At each end of the building is a short rear wing which provides for additional classrooms. The major staircases are set at the points where these rear wings intersect with the main part of the building.

The exterior is intended to be redolent of English late Gothic academic buildings, yet there is much about it which is not Gothic. Indeed, in many ways it is a standard early twentieth century institutional exterior. For example, it is symmetrical, it has a flat roof with a relatively flat parapet, and it is divided into bays with groups of windows separated by continuous vertical shafts. In addition the facade is composed of a central pavilion with wings and a pair of end pavilions. This type of five-part composition is Baroque if anything, certainly not Gothic. Yet the high school has an overpowering Gothic character. This is derived from two principal factors:

1. The fact that the central pavilion is raised a full story above the rest of the building and features barbican style crenellated side towers and a great lancet gateway entrance
2. The fact that the exterior is intensively treated with terra cotta late Gothic ornamentation. This includes rows of foil panels, panels with tracery patterns, shields, and copious lancets.

These motifs are emphasized and repeated within the various panels by the use of protruding moldings in elaborate profile and by the use of bolection. Many of the principal elements of the building culminate in four-center pointed arches with intricate moldings. All of this yields a considerable sculptured richness. In addition, the exterior derives considerable verve from the contrast of red brick and white glazed terra cotta. There are also a few non-Gothic decorative elements such as lozenges, bulbous finials, and a central crowning pelican.

Most of the building's interior spaces are unornamented. Noteworthy elements include transomed doors, relatively plain chair rails, and granite niches for drinking fountains. Many of the classrooms have bands of interior windows designed to aid ventilation. The building's only ornamented spaces are the lobby, the library, and the auditorium. The lobby features Gothic glass doors with elaborate tracery patterns done in brass. Although the library has plainer glass doors, it also features a cornice and a few lancet ornamented pilasters. The auditorium is fairly elaborate, featuring a plaster panel treatment which echoes the building's exterior.

#### Alterations:

As previously mentioned, since construction the high school has received only minor alterations. Most notably, a single story cafeteria wing has been added to the rear, but this is not visible from the front. In any case, it is dwarfed by the original building. Other changes include the installation of acoustical tile in some of the classrooms, the installation of ceramic tile below the

chair rail in some of the hallways, and the enlargement of the library. In our view, none of these changes has affected the school's National Register eligibility.

Specific dates                    1926  
Builder/Architect                Architect: William T. Nolan

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)  
Criterion C

Baton Rouge High School is locally significant in the area of architecture as one of the most important early twentieth century eclectic buildings in the Florida -Parishes (This eight parish region covers an area of 5,117 square miles, making it slightly smaller than Connecticut and Rhode Island combined.)

Eclecticism was the dominant form of architectural practice during the early decades of this century. With increased learning, architects and clients began to require that buildings be constructed in this or that particular historical style as opposed to the generic Queen Anne or Italianate of the previous generation.

A good summation of this movement is provided by Walter C. Kidney in his book The Architecture of Choice:

"Not only were the forms of historic architecture valuable through their beauty, but they came to our times freighted with historic associations that every cultured person was familiar with, and that seemed to suggest, even to demand, that a certain building, in a certain place, be built in some one of a rather restricted range of styles. . . . When style was thus determined, a house was usually Georgian, Tudor, or Cotswold (Anglo-Saxon home atmosphere), unless it was a mansion and intended to look like one, in which case it might have been Jacobean or one of the Louis (aristocracy of wealth). A church-- if not Colonial -- would, for an old and ritualistic sect, be Gothic (Christian heritage); if it was for some new sect, like the Christian Scientists, it might be decently but noncommittally wrapped in something classical. A synagogue, in the absence of a true Hebraic architecture, was usually Byzantine or Moorish. A school was Tudor or Jacobean (Oxford, Eton). A theater was either Louis XV (courtly diversions) or-- especially if a movie house -- something utterly fantastic, with some sort of high pressure Mediterranean Baroque providing the norm (place of illusions)."

In the eight Florida Parishes early twentieth century eclectic architecture is mainly confined to homes and small scale commercial buildings. Hundreds of these survive, but large scale examples are relatively rare. In fact, there are about a dozen if Louisiana State University is counted as one.

Baton Rouge High School is conspicuous among this group for the following reasons:

- 1 As a single building, it is one of the largest examples in the region, if not the largest.
2. It is the most intensively styled example, thus giving a powerful and evocative flavor seldom found among eclectic buildings in the area.

3. It exemplifies the eclectic tendency to use a historic style for a symbolic purpose -- i.e., the late Gothic style for an educational institution.

Major Bibliographical References

East Baton Rouge Parish School Board Records.

Conveyance Records, East Baton Rouge Parish.