

Summary Paragraph

Downtown Baton Rouge lies adjacent to the Mississippi River and has a standard grid pattern, with numbered streets paralleling the river. The boundaries of the Downtown Baton Rouge Historic District encompass 43 commercial buildings, most of which are on Third Street (see district map attached). All but three of the buildings are party wall. Block faces have mainly a two to three story scale punctuated by a "tall building" here and there. Contributing buildings range in date from circa 1860 through the mid-1950s. Within this roughly 100 year date range, only four buildings date from before 1900. A little over fifty percent of the contributing buildings date from the 1910s and 1920s. There are eleven non-contributing buildings (26%), almost all of which are significantly altered historic buildings. Even with non-contributing buildings, three parking lots where historic buildings once stood, and alterations to contributing buildings, the proposed district still retains a strong sense of time and place. It conveys enough of its historic identity to qualify for the Register under Criterion A as the commercial center for the capital city of Baton Rouge and surrounding rural areas.

Narrative Description

Methodology:

Each building was examined and photographed to produce the detailed inventory below. Buildings were dated primarily via Sanborn Insurance Company maps. Other sources included historic photographs and the architectural evidence as interpreted by the preparers, who are architectural historians.

Background:

The nominated district is a portion – fortunately the principal portion – of what was historically the downtown business district. As mentioned above, Third Street runs parallel to the Mississippi River. All available evidence (Sanborn maps, photos and interviews) demonstrates that Third Street was the street in downtown during the historic period. It was the place where all the major stores, banks, office buildings, etc. located. There were four-and-a-half blocks of party wall buildings (both sides of the street) from the Old State Capitol on the south to (until the mid-1920s)----the campus of Louisiana State University on the north. (LSU moved from downtown to its present location in the mid-1920s.) Beginning in the early 1930s, with Huey Long's skyscraper state capitol, government buildings began to define the north end of downtown (as they do to a greater extent today). (These buildings are not included in the nominated district because they do not relate to the district's commercial significance. And, in any event, most of them are of recent construction.) The nominated district includes four blocks of Third on the east side and a little over 2 blocks on the west side. (The remainder of the west side has suffered a notable loss of integrity due to the construction of a large high-rise parking garage and beyond that, alterations to historic buildings.)

Historically, at the south end of Third Street business houses continued around the corners onto North Boulevard, a block in each direction. Today one of these block faces survives and is included in this proposal. There are also three historic commercial buildings being included on Laurel Street.

The other main business street, although never as preeminent as Third Street, was Main Street. Main, which is perpendicular to Third, had a mixed residential and business character east of Third, with businesses mainly on the south side of the street. The two block faces of Main Street to the west of Third also had a commercial character. And there were a smattering of business houses along Lafayette Street (parallel to Third, one block toward the river). But like many a downtown across America, downtown Baton Rouge has suffered notable losses, both in new construction and parking lots where historic buildings once stood. A two-and-a-half block section of commercial buildings on Main Street survives, but this strip is severed from Third Street by one-and-a-half blocks characterized mainly by new construction and parking lots. The Main Street buildings were listed on the Register as a historic district in 1985. Little that is historic survives on Lafayette Street. The two notable exceptions, the Heidelberg-King Hotels and the Tessier Buildings, are individually listed on the Register.

Breakdown by Age:

Pre-1880	1 building	2%
1880-1900	3 buildings	7%
1901-1910	4 buildings	9%

1911-1930	17 buildings	40%
1931-1950	3 buildings	7%
1951-1959	4 buildings	9%
Non-contributing	11 buildings	26%

Summary of Styles:

As in any old downtown, there are various buildings in downtown Baton Rouge that might be termed what some call “commercial vernacular.” These workhorses of commerce may be well-detailed but they do not fit into standard stylistic categories. That said, there are probably just as many buildings in the district that are strongly and intensively styled, and they are generally the largest. Styles include Italianate, Italian Renaissance, Classical Revival (the largest category), Art Deco, and several interpretations of the “modern” or “contemporary” look of the 1940s and ‘50s. Refer to inventory below for details.

Tall Buildings:

The first building to “tower” above downtown’s generally two to three story scale was the six story Roumain Building (#6, National Register), erected in 1913 by Joseph K. Roumain to house his wholesale jewelry business. The Italian Renaissance Reymond Building (#1) pushed one more story skyward circa 1920. A few years later (circa 1925) Louisiana National Bank (LNB) erected a twelve-story Classical Revival Chicago Style tower (#32) that, within the context of 1920s Baton Rouge, did indeed seem to “scrape the sky.” The LNB tower remained downtown’s tallest building until Huey Long erected his 34 story State Capitol just to the north of the business district. In the mid-1950s two eight story buildings were erected downtown (#19, built for Fidelity Bank, and #20, an office tower called “The Commerce Building”).

Materials:

Buildings are either brick veneer or stucco-over-brick. The Roumain Building (#6) and the former Baton Rouge Post Office (#43) feature extensive terra-cotta ornamentation. Notable stonework is found on three bank buildings (#s 28, 32 and 36). Two Italianate buildings feature decorative cast iron (Welsh and Levy and Knox, #s 17 & 18), as does the Classical Revival building that has housed Latil’s Stationery for decades (#25).

Inventory:

Note: Only historic names are used to identify buildings in the inventory. Six buildings are individually listed in the Register, as noted.

- 1) 263-265 Third St. Contributing element. Reymond Building (State National Life). Circa 1920 (not on 1916 Sanborn map; appears on 1923 map). Seven story commercial building, occupying a prominent corner location, with Italian Renaissance elements. The latter include 1) the Third St. (entrance) façade with its palazzo-like symmetry, 2) the differentiating of the top story with a strong molded band, creating what is in effect a very deep entablature, and 3) most importantly, the oversized pressed copper rooftop cornice with its prominent sculpted (looking) brackets. Beneath this crowning cornice are two lesser superimposed masonry cornices, one denticular, the other egg and dart. The building is sheathed in brick veneer (now painted) and features decorative brickwork panels between the windows in each vertical bay. The central Third St. entrance bay is wider than the others and, above the second story, is marked by sculpted (looking) masonry panels featuring garlands and a heraldic motif bearing the name Reymond. The building originally had a fixed awning, as evidenced by the decoratively mounted chains. The present fixed awning is new, as is the entire shopfront beneath it. Window openings, generally set in pairs, are original, but the glass is modern. Finally, the principal cornice is damaged in one section due to a recent hurricane.
- 2) 301-307-311 Third St. Contributing element. Triad Building, 1924. Four story commercial building with a prominent corner location. Its longer side, and original entrance, is on Florida Street. Sheathed in tapestry brick in varying colors, the Triad Building is strongly neo-classical. Originally it had a continuous shopfront formed of Doric pillars supporting a somewhat ornamental entablature. About half of this remains (all on the Florida Street

- 3) 313-315 Third St. Contributing element. W. T. Grant Bldg. Circa 1925. Not on 1923 Sanborn map, on 1946 map. Two story masonry commercial building with an upper story sheathed in warm golden brick. Its Chicago-style upper story windows are set off by masonry surrounds in a contrasting color. Its similarly contrasting cornice is surmounted by a paneled parapet with a central contrasting tablet. The entire shopfront system is replaced, but maintains a general classical feeling that is in keeping with the building. The modern dark glass shop windows are not in keeping with the building.
- 4) 331-333 Third St. Contributing element. Circa 1920. Not on 1916 Sanborn map, on 1923 map. Two story commercial building that might best be pigeonholed as Arts and Crafts (colored opalescent tile and the pattern the tiles make in the parapet). The historic shopfront is gone; the current shopfront features a deep inset which provides access to a restaurant. But the upper façade, sheathed in exceptionally fine glazed brick, is visually dominant. The body color is white with deep green accent pieces that have an opalescent effect. Green and white contrasts are also richly worked in the building's shaped parapet. Beneath the parapet, the façade is accented with a strong projecting cornice set on double consoles.
- 5) 335 Third St. Contributing element. 1940s. Not on 1923 Sanborn map, on 1946 map. One story commercial building with a façade sheathed in off-white sheet metal blocks designed to resemble tile. Modernistic shopfront features deeply recessed system of geometrically complex display windows. These complement a lively terrazzo exterior floor treatment.
- 6) 341-343 Third St. Contributing element. Roumain Bldg, 1913, National Register, Favrot and Livaudais, Architects, New Orleans. Six story brick commercial building whose classical façade is richly worked with tile and glazed terra cotta. Very long pilasters rise to a pronounced projecting modillion cornice. The façade features considerable bas relief. Indeed, the overall effect (elaborateness and splendor) borders on the Beaux Arts. The central entrance is marked with a classical fixed awning and a historic ornamental street clock (the only one in Baton Rouge). The shopfronts either side of the entrance are modern.
- 7) 359 Third St. Non-contributing element. New reproduction two story old-style brick commercial building. It and #8 below are part of the same business and bear the same address.
- 8) 359 Third St., Contributing Element. Circa 1920 (not on 1916 Sanborn map, on 1923 map). Two story common bond brick commercial building with a corner entrance and capped by a corbel table. About ten or fifteen years ago a 1960s slipcover was removed and the building was restored. Upper story windows are grouped in threes. Lower story shopfront dates from rehabilitation of 10 or 15 years ago. It and #7 above are part of the same business and bear the same address.
- 9) 240 Laurel St. Contributing element. Brunswick Bldg. Circa 1905. (Sanborn maps are inconclusive in dating this building.) Two-story brick commercial building with a prominent, boldly shaped parapet. Facade has been stuccoed and all windows are modern replacements. Nonetheless, the building contributes to the district by virtue of its distinctive massing, parapet brickwork and fenestration pattern.
- 10) 226 Laurel St. Non-contributing. Originally a low-key early twentieth century, one story, brick commercial building. Large shopfront has been fitted with a new, very conspicuous varnished natural design. Because the shopfront dominates the façade, the building is being classified as non-contributing.
- 11) 222 Laurel St. Contributing element. Circa 1905. (Sanborn maps are inconclusive in dating this building.) Two story, hipped roof commercial building laid up in common bond brick (now painted). The shopfront was installed recently when the ground story was renovated for a bar.

- 12) 212-18 Laurel St. Non-contributing. An older building with a completely new stucco façade, including conspicuous natural wood finished windows and door on the first story.
- 13) 210 Laurel St. Contributing element. Circa 1955. Not on 1950 Sanborn map but is 50 years old. Small single story commercial building in what was known at the time as the "Contemporary" Style. Its simple, very rectilinear shape and exceptionally large shopfront windows are strongly within the International Style tradition. Its wide and shallow bricks, laid up in variegated tones of gold, beige and brown, suggest the natural stonework found in some of Frank Lloyd Wright's organic designs.
- 14) 421-23 Third St. Contributing element. Circa 1915 (not on 1911 Sanborn map; first appears on 1916 map). Two-story commercial building with a marked cornice and a parapet culminating in a pediment shaped top. Building is shown in 1984 survey of downtown Baton Rouge with a slipcover. Presumably present upper story windows survived behind the slipcover. As part of a recent rehabilitation project, brick façade was stuccoed over and shopfronts were renovated, including two new fixed awnings. Building is nonetheless being counted as a contributing element because it retains its distinctive massing and original fenestration pattern.
- 15) 431 Third St. Non-contributing element. Older narrow two story commercial building with a damaged Carrara glass upper story façade and a modern, historically inappropriate, lower story façade.
- 16) 447 Third St. Contributing element, Kress Bldg, circa 1935, National Register. Richly worked beige iron-spot brick commercial building in the Art Deco style with a lively two-story (principal) façade on Third St. The building has an "L" shape that cuts through the block and presents a secondary four story façade on Main. The fixed awning is original; the shopfront is modern. This address also covers the next two buildings. The three buildings were recently rehabilitated (using the federal tax credit) as a single development project.
- 17) 447 Third St. Contributing element. Knox Building, 1887, National Register. Small two-story masonry commercial building with significant cast-iron details (window lintels and quite prominent cornice, complete with a crowning rooftop pediment). Rare surviving example of an Italianate commercial building within East Baton Rouge Parish. This address also covers #s 16 and 18. The three buildings were recently rehabilitated (using the federal tax credit) as a single development project.
- 18) 447 Third St. Contributing element. Welsh and Levy Bldg, 1887, (National Register). This imposing three-story masonry commercial building with an abundance of cast-iron details occupies a prominent corner location. Of the few commercial Italianate buildings that survive in East Baton Rouge Parish, this is by far the largest and the grandest. This address also covers #s 17 & 18. The three buildings were recently rehabilitated (using the federal tax credit) as a single development project. The present shopfront level dates from the rehabilitation. While not an exact copy, it is in keeping with the building.
- 19) 440 Third St. Contributing element. Fidelity Bank, 1957. This address is shown as "under construction" in the 1957 Baton Rouge City Directory. Eight story brick, late International Style commercial building. The painted exposed brick side elevations feature International Style signature ribbon windows. The Third St. facade is a more complex composition. Here the ribbon windows are woven into a network of vertical silvery "I" beams and matte gray metallic panels. The gray panels have slight projecting edges top and bottom that together form horizontal lines across the façade and act, along with the ribbon windows, as counterpoint to the vertical "I" beams. The overall effect is that of a glass-fronted office building in the manner of Mies van der Rohe.
- 20) 400 Third St. and 333 Laurel St. Contributing element. 1954-55. The Commerce Building. Eight story brick corner commercial building strongly in the tradition of the early International Style (pre-glass tower phase). Its mass appears to float above a recessed first story system of shopfronts. On the Third St. elevation, the first and second stories extend north of the main building mass to form a party-wall link with the adjacent building (also a mid-1950s high-rise, see #19 above). The plain flat brick elevations are cut with extensive bands of International Style signature ribbon windows. The old main entrance on Laurel St. features a jutting polished granite surround surmounted by the words THE COMMERCE BUILDING in stylized brushed aluminum lettering. The only alteration has been the present dark gray paint scheme, which is not in keeping with the International Style's iconic off-white color preference.

- 21) 358 Third St. Contributing element. Fuqua Bldg, 1905, National Register. This three story brick commercial building, a restrained example of the Renaissance Revival style, features square head windows on the second story, round arch windows on the third, and a quoin-like treatment at the corners of the upper stories. The original modillion cornice was reproduced as part of a tax credit project several years ago. Shopfront is non-historic. The building is individually listed in the Register under Criterion B because of its compelling association with the career of Louisiana Governor Henry L. Fuqua.
- 22) 344 Third St. Non-contributing element. Belisle Bldg. 1912. Listed on the National Register in 1993 for its significance under Criterion C, this originally two story commercial building has been greatly enlarged and renovated since then with a strongly modern feeling (new modern third story; new shopfront level). Because the non-historic elements now dominate, the building is being classified as non-contributing.
- 23) 336 Third St. Contributing element. 1913, Louisiana Theater. This two story building was originally a theater with a stage built mainly for showing moving pictures. The upper façade features salmon-colored brick laid up in decorative patterns with accent blocks and contrasting strapwork. These elements set off a band of windows (glass & sashes replaced). The façade is surmounted by a distinctive cornice. The original lower façade is gone and has been variously patched-in by different businesses over the years.
- 24) 334 Third St. Non-contributing element. Narrow historic two-story commercial building with completely new stucco façade.
- 25) 324-26 Third St. Latil's Stationery. Contributing element. Circa 1915. Not on 1911 map, on 1916 map. This fairly wide two-story commercial building has a brick upper façade featuring free-standing Corinthian cast-iron columns, Greek fretwork, a marked frieze formed of brick headers, and a denticular cornice. The parapet features an ornamental band of Vitruvian scrollwork. The lower façade has been variously altered over the years and currently provides for two visually disparate shops.
- 26) 320 Third St. Non-contributing element. One to two story meeting facility with a modern façade designed in what might be called a post-modernist Palladian style.
- 27) 302 Third St. Contributing element. 1940s. Single story unadorned brick building with interior frame walls. It has been the site of a varied collection of small shops for much of the 20th century. Its present appearance reflects a 1940s remodeling. The building is much noted for its period rooftop neon Coca Cola sign, recently restored.
- 28) 236 Third St. Contributing element. Louisiana National Bank. Built sometime between 1908 and 1910. This two story beige brick and cast stone building is articulated in the Colossal Composite Order, with pilasters on the long side elevations and columns set in antis on the façade. In roughly the 1960s the in antis condition was filled in and a modern façade was attached. In about 1985 the building was rehabilitated. The in antis condition was restored, with new cast stone columns being placed where the earlier ones once stood. Unfortunately, the capitals for the replacement columns are over-scaled. However, the overall effect of the building's classical styling is convincing and compelling.
- 29) 232 Third St. Non-contributing element. Originally this was a three story brick Italianate commercial building. In about 1920 it received a new more classical façade. About ten years ago this façade was stripped off, leaving an exposed rough surface of broken bricks. The present low-key, historic-looking façade was executed some two to four years ago.
- 30) 214 Third St. Contributing element. Mayer Hotel. Circa 1915. Shown on 1908 and 1911 Sanborn maps as a two-story building; shown on 1916 map as the present three-story building. The façade's classical vocabulary makes extensive use of quoins on the second and third stories. Colossal pilasters (capitals replaced) set off bays. The building is capped by a pronounced cornice, a parapet with strongly molded panels and a central bas relief scroll volute flourish. The balcony and the shopfronts are modern.
- 31) 200 Third St. Contributing element. Masonic Lodge (St. James Lodge #47, Free and Accepted Masons). The present exterior treatment of this large corner three story building dates to 1954. In that year, the 1907 home of

- 32) 150 Third St. Contributing element. Louisiana National Bank (LNB). Circa 1925. Not shown on 1923 Sanborn map, but is pictured in 1928 Chamber of Commerce publication. LNB moved to this building from building #28. Occupying a prominent corner location, this twelve story building for a few years was the tallest building in East Baton Rouge Parish (until Huey Long completed his 34 story statehouse in 1931). A skyscraper after the Chicago tradition, it has a two story limestone-clad base, a buff brick shaft of nine stories and a lavishly ornamented top of two stories. The upper two stories feature colossal fluted pilasters, bas relief panels and a richly worked diapered-brick entablature with a crowning modillion cornice. The main entrance (Third St.) is imposing, featuring a two story archway flanked by paired fluted colossal pilasters. Windows are set in pairs or in groups of three. The only noteworthy change has been the replacement of all the windows with single-pane dark glass units.
- 33) 136 Third St. Contributing element. Circa 1920. Not on 1916 Sanborn map, on 1923 map. This small brick two-story commercial building has wide bays and large multi-pane upper story windows which give it something of an industrial feeling. It has modest Arts and Crafts tile touches. Present shopfront windows are modern. The drive-through open bay (left side) is not from the historic period.
- 34) 132 Third St. Non-contributing element. Per a 1984 inventory of downtown Baton Rouge, this is an older building that was renovated to resemble a New Orleans style Creole townhouse.
- 35) 130 Third St. Non-contributing element. This is a very modest, small, single-story shop, perhaps 30-40 years old.
- 36) 124 Third St. Contributing element. Union Bank and Trust Company (became City National Bank later in historic period). Circa 1925. Not on 1923 Sanborn map, pictured in 1928 Chamber of Commerce publication. This is a handsome two story limestone-clad building with coupled colossal Composite Order columns and pilasters, a fully articulated entablature, and a parapet with ornamental bas relief panels. Its banking hall is noteworthy for its pronounced and striking Art Deco character. This may represent a renovation to the building, perhaps ten years or so after it was built.
- 37) 108 Third St. Non-contributing element. Small one story limestone-faced commercial building that is less than 50 years old.
- 38) 301-03-07 North Blvd. Contributing element. Circa 1860 – circa 1870. Combining elements of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles, this two-story stucco-over-brick corner building is Baton Rouge's oldest commercial building. It has a regular bay pattern and paneled parapet blocks marking the corners and the centers of each façade. At the center of each facade, a pair of paneled parapet blocks flank a slight pediment shaped top. The stucco is scored to resemble cut stone. There are small coupled brackets on the first story cornice and on the second story entablature. These suggest the early stages of the transition between the Greek Revival and the Italianate styles. From a stylistic standpoint, this would place the building in the 1855-1870 range. An early 20th century photo shows a very shallow cantilevered balcony that was accessed via second story windows (six over six with jib doors). This feature was probably original. The same photo (and Sanborn maps) show the building with a first story canopy/gallery. This feature was not original. Today the balcony and the canopy/gallery are gone, and the sections of the window openings that once held jib doors have been filled in. The present upper windows (wooden and six-over-six) are mid- 20th century replacements. The present shopfronts are 20th century, but of long standing.
- 39) 311 North Blvd. Contributing element. Circa 1915. Not on 1911 Sanborn map, on 1916 map. Two-story brick Italianate commercial building with segmental arched windows on the upper story and pronounced corbelled brick brackets accenting a plain entablature. It is an interesting example of how long the commercial Italianate persisted. Shopfront is modern.

- 40) 315 North Blvd. Contributing element. Circa 1915. Not on 1911 map, on 1916 map. The façade of this two story brick commercial building has been stuccoed over. This work changed the upper story segmental arch windows into square head openings. Although stuccoed over, the brick corbelled brackets are still recognizable. First story archway (drive through) probably dates from the time the building was part of an auto repair facility (early twentieth century). Shutters have been added to upper story windows. By massing, fenestration and brackets, the building still conveys enough of its historic appearance to be classified as a contributing element for the purposes of this nomination. Originally this building and #41 below were part of the same building. Today they are separate buildings under separate use.
- 41) 321 North Blvd. Contributing element. Circa 1915. Not on 1911 Sanborn map, on 1916 map. Two story brick Italianate commercial building with segmental arched upper windows and pronounced brick corbelled brackets supporting a plain entablature. It is an interesting example of how long the commercial Italianate persisted. Shopfront is modern. Shutters added to upper story windows. Originally this building and #40 above were part of the same building. Today they are separate buildings under separate use.
- 42) 327 North Blvd. Contributing element. Fraternal Order of Eagles Building. Circa 1925. Not on 1923 Sanborn map, on 1946 map. Two story brick building with commercial space below and meeting space above. Handsome central archway leads to a central hall used to access the upper story. Building has a brick cornice and a carved eagle marking the second story center. Shopfront windows replaced.
- 43) 355 North Blvd. Contributing element. Old U. S. Post Office. 1894 (National Register). A buff brick and terracotta essay in the Italian Renaissance style, this building originally served as the Baton Rouge Post Office. It is now a private club. Some years after the Register listing (1980), club members elected to construct a dark glass addition on the second story above the historic entrance colonnade. This was done to expand the food and liquor service on the second floor. Despite this admittedly visually jarring addition, the building is so intensively styled that it still makes a strong historic statement.

Non-contributing Buildings:

Each building was evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine the visual impact of alterations. In cases where the alterations were visually dominant, the building was counted as non-contributing. In other cases, typically involving large and/or strongly styled buildings, the alterations were not visually dominant, and the buildings were labeled contributing. Almost all buildings have had their shopfronts replaced, as is typical in historic central business districts across the country. Here again, a judgment call was made on contributing/non-contributing status based on the visual strength of the remainder of the building.

Assessment of Integrity:

The context for evaluating integrity is Third Street itself – for it was the heart of downtown Baton Rouge – the preeminent street. Only small parts of what was historically the Third Street commercial corridor are not being included in this nomination. Historically, there was a building at the northeast corner of Main and Third and one on the northwest corner of the same intersection. They are long gone. At the south end of the district, part of the west side of Third is being excluded due to a parking garage (built within the last three or four years) immediately beyond Building #1. The parking garage has a large footprint and is several stories in height. Beyond the parking garage, going south on that side of Third Street, had they been included, are one contributing building and three buildings that would be classified as non-contributing due to alterations.

Even with these losses, three parking lots where historic buildings once stood, and alterations to existing buildings, the proposed district meets the litmus test for nominations under Criterion A. Someone from the historic period would notice some changes, yes, but they would still readily recognize Third Street as a much cherished venue. Add to this the survival of the row of party wall buildings along North Boulevard. In short, losses notwithstanding, the proposed district has a strong sense of time and place.

SIGNIFICANT DATES: c. 1925-1959
 ARCHITECT/BUILDER: NA
 CRITERION: A

The Downtown Baton Rouge Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A because it was the center of commercial activity, providing goods and services for Baton Rouge and surrounding rural areas. Most notably, the district's main street, Third Street, was the place in Baton Rouge -- to shop, meet your friends for a meal, go to the movies, locate your office, do your banking, etc. By circa 1925 most of the present buildings in the district were there and engaged in commerce; hence this date was chosen as the beginning of the period of significance. The period of significance ends in 1959 to coincide with the National Register's 50 year threshold. Very importantly, a 1959 cutoff coincides quite well with the beginning of the end of downtown Baton Rouge's commercial pre-eminence (see below). The geographic context for evaluation is East Baton Rouge Parish and the surrounding rural parishes of West Baton Rouge, East Feliciana, West Feliciana, Pointe Coupee, Livingston, Ascension and Iberville. For residents of these areas, Baton Rouge was the place for a "big city" downtown experience.

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

Historical Background:

The City of Baton Rouge has quite a long history, tracing its earliest European settlement to colonial-era military forts. The legislature incorporated the town in 1817, and in 1846, it became the capital of Louisiana. The new center of state government was a small place (in contrast to New Orleans, where the capital had been located previously). On the eve of the Civil War, there were only 5,428 inhabitants (4,181 whites and 1,247 slaves). Union forces captured Baton Rouge in 1862. An estimated one-third of the community was destroyed during the conflict.

Baton Rouge began to rebound (after the war and Reconstruction) in the 1880s. In 1882, the capital was moved back to Baton Rouge. (The seat of government moved around during the Civil War, and after the war, returned to New Orleans.) The next year, 1883, saw the arrival of Baton Rouge's first railroad – the New Orleans and Mississippi Valley Railroad connecting the town with New Orleans. By 1890, the population had reached 10,478, a three-fold increase from 1860, but still a relatively modest population.

Baton Rouge's agriculture-based economy was to change forever with the arrival of Standard Oil of Louisiana in 1909. In that year Esso Standard Oil filed a charter to build a two million dollar refinery on a 213 acre cotton field north of downtown. Upon completion, the refinery created 700 new jobs in a town of some 15,000 people. Oil from Oklahoma and Texas arrived at the refinery via a pipeline and was shipped out via the Mississippi River. Looking back on Standard Oil on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, one journalist wrote: "The magic of oil became a part of Baton Rouge's life in the Spring of 1909. Nothing has been the same since, nor will it ever be again. Up until that time Baton Rouge was no different from a dozen other river towns, pleasant and sleepy."

Over the next decades, Baton Rouge emerged as a petrochemical giant. Standard Oil continued to expand and numerous other petrochemical industries located in the city. In addition to being the innermost deep water port on the Mississippi, Baton Rouge was served by six trunk lines of railroad. By the late 1920s, Standard Oil of Louisiana was the largest oil refinery in the world. In 1927, more than 6,000,000 tons of oil products were shipped in and out of the plant, carried by 582 ocean-going vessels to all of the world's principal ports. With industrial growth, of course, came population growth. By 1940, the population was 34,719.

World War II brought unprecedented industrial growth to Baton Rouge. The city's many existing petrochemical plants expanded greatly and new ones arrived. By the end of 1942, Standard Oil's Baton Rouge plant produced three-fourths of the nation's aviation fuel, and its chemical products division made much needed synthetic rubber. The Aluminum Company of America, which opened a plant north of the city in 1942, employed 800 people and produced enough aluminum each month to make 2,000 fighter planes.

The 1940s were years of transformative growth. As new areas were annexed and new people moved to the city, Baton Rouge's population expanded almost four-fold in one decade, to a population of 125,629 in 1950. The population in 1960 was 152,419. One in five Baton Rougeans during the '40s and '50s worked in the petrochemical industry.

Downtown Baton Rouge:

Until supplanted by shopping centers in the 1960s, downtown Baton Rouge was a mecca for residents of the city and parish as well as surrounding rural areas. In particular, Third Street was the place to “see and be seen.” Everyone knows “it is *the* street of Baton Rouge,” noted one observer in a privately published ode to Third Street written in 1954. “You have never been to Baton Rouge,” he concluded, “if you have not been on ole Third.” During the weekdays the street was abuzz with the many professional people who had offices there and housewives doing some shopping and perhaps meeting a friend for lunch. And these were the days when a day-long Saturday in downtown Baton Rouge was a much treasured, much anticipated family event.

City directories and reminiscences paint a vivid picture of the dazzling variety of merchandise once sold in extant buildings within the district boundaries. Quoting again from the 1954 ode to Third Street: “Up and down this street you can ‘window-shop’ to your heart’s desire. . . . Many of the display windows are simply marvelous So up and down this old street you can spend your hard-earned money both quickly and easily, because there is really something there for you to spend it for.” Three buildings remain to represent the major retail stores (the anchors): (1) Welsh and Levy, the place for men and boys clothing, opened in Building #18 in 1915 and remained there until the late 1960s. (2) Kress 5 & 10, Building #16, offered a huge variety of merchandise, from painted turtles for children, to cosmetics, to books, to fabric. (3) Dalton’s Department Store, located in the lower floors of Building #1, is remembered not only for its merchandise but for the Green Room, a popular café. Sadly, the buildings that housed Sears and Penneys are gone, as is one other major department store building, Rosenfeld’s, located across from Welsh and Levy. Specialized retail stores represented in extant buildings include Latil’s Stationery (still operating in Building #25), a drugstore (Building #2), Fuqua Hardware (#21), and a number of women’s clothing stores and shoe stores. A sporting goods store and a novelty store were housed in extant buildings on North Boulevard.

In terms of eateries, the building housing the Green Room (see above) survives, as does the Kress Building, with its once popular lunch counter. Other eateries/bars were at 311 and 315 North Boulevard (#s 39 & 40), and 240 Laurel (#9) was the home for years of the Crescent Cocktail Cove and Restaurant.

The district’s five high-rise buildings were the places to go for any number of professional services. Offices on the upper floors housed a large number of physicians, dentists, lawyers, and insurance agents. Other professions represented in smaller numbers include contractors, realtors, dressmakers, beauticians, architects, accountants and photographers. The oil industry was represented in the Louisiana National Bank Building (now State Office Building). Shell Oil had offices there as well as legendary Baton Rouge oil producer Claude B. Pennington, Sr. Finally, banking services were available through three institutions: Union Bank and Trust/City National Bank (#36); Louisiana National Bank (in two different buildings, #s 28 & 32); and Fidelity National Bank (#19), which replaced an early banking house with the present building in 1956. Services provided in the row of buildings along North Boulevard included shoe repair, a newsstand, a barber, a school of dance and a laundry.

Downtown Baton Rouge (especially Third Street) continued to be the commercial center of the city until roughly the early 1960s. Strip shopping centers arrived in the city in the mid-1950s, most notably with Delmont Village several miles north of downtown and the smaller Westmoreland Shopping Center about three miles to the east. Despite the appeal of these novelty shopping experiences, downtown continued to hold its own. The beginning of the end came in 1960, when Bon Marche Mall opened some distance to the east of downtown. Initially Bon Marche was an open air shopping experience, not the enclosed mall it became several years later. Downtown Baton Rouge responded in a manner typical of cities across America. Third Street was rebranded as Riverside Mall. Nonetheless, downtown Baton Rouge was virtually abandoned by the 1970s. Today, thanks to an aggressive revitalization program spearheaded by the Downtown Development District, downtown is once again thriving.

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