

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

In its present situation, Centenary College consists of the West Wing of what was once a 3-building complex, and a frame residence, locally known as the professor's house. Widely separated, these two buildings are set in an open green area on the outskirts of Jackson. The boundaries of the nominated area were chosen to encompass all the land which was controlled by the college when it moved to Shreveport in 1906, minus subsequent intrusions. The intrusions consist of several modern 2-story apartment buildings in the old southern end of the property and some modern frame houses in the northern end.

The West Wing of the main building is two stories high, one room deep, with a two-story free-standing colonnade encompassing the long south front and the east and west ends. The second floor rooms are reached by means of a continuous balcony with three sets of exterior stairs along the front. Originally the stairs occurred at the ends of the building. Each floor was divided into 12 rooms, each with a fan-lit door, a front window and two rear windows. Chimneys were set between each pair of rooms. This room arrangement has been somewhat altered by the breaking through of old partitions and the erection of some newer horizontal plank walls.

The building is constructed of brick laid up in common bond. Each window has a jack arch and each exterior door is surmounted by a round arch. The floors are supported by cypress beams approximately one foot on center. Some of the floor has been covered over with new flooring. The doors and windows are Victorian replacements. Although the shutters have been removed much of the hardware remains. Some of the brick has been broken through on the west end at the ground level.

The colonnade is composed of nineteen stucco over brick, colossal order, Tuscan columns. Though the columns are well proportioned in themselves, the colonnade lacks an entablature of the proper weight. Though this is not a serious visual flaw, it suggests the work of a builder rather than that of an architect. Only two of the original mantels remain, the rest having been removed by vandals.

The roof, which was once covered in cypress shingles, then slate, is now covered in tin.

SPECIFIC DATES	1837
BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Unknown

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Centenary College is of architectural and educational significance. The surviving West Wing, with its front colonnade of 15 free standing colossal Tuscan columns, is a grand and imposing, if impure, example of Greek Revival architecture. Its elongated, galleried plan, one room deep, is unusual for the Greek revival, where box-like temple or peripteral forms predominated. Indeed, there are only about two other examples of this in the state.

Centenary College is also of educational significance. It was one of the most important of the colleges run by religious denominations in antebellum Louisiana history. Edwin Adams Davis names Centenary as one of the four major "church schools" before 1860, the others being the College of St. Charles at Grand Coteau, the College of the Immaculate Conception at New Orleans, and Mount Lebanon University at Mount Lebanon. In addition, the College of Louisiana, which was the forerunner of Centenary on the site, was the second state-supported college in the state's history.

When Centenary College moved to Jackson in 1845, it took over the physical plant of the College of Louisiana, which was being discontinued. The latter institution, the second state-supported college in the state's history, was founded in 1825 by an act of the legislature providing. That a College, to be established in the town of Jackson, situated in the parish of East Feliciana is hereby instituted, which shall be known by the style and title of the College of Louisiana." The act appointed a board of trustees consisting of the governor, the judges of the state

supreme court, and twenty-eight prominent citizens. The curriculum was to embrace the English French, Greek and Latin languages, Logic, Rhetoric Ancient and Modern History, Mathematics, Natural, Moral and Political Philosophy." The act also provided funds for the college. In addition, the police juries of East and West Feliciana parishes were authorized to donate to the college all or part of their land or buildings in or near Jackson which had belonged to "the late parish of Feliciana, and which are now held by the said parishes is their joint property."<sup>2</sup>

Due to the need for a larger campus, the college soon sold the donated lands and moved to a new site in the northeast corner of Jackson. The land was bought from John Horton, Sr. and sons on February 13, 1830.<sup>3</sup> The West Wing (which survives today) was built in 1837 as a duplicate of the East Wing (which does not survive) constructed in 1832-1833. The East Wing was designed by a Captain Delafield of the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, who was a friend of H. H. Gird, the second president of the college. Delafield also supervised the construction of the East Wing. Not much documentary evidence remains concerning the building of the West Wing. There does exist an agreement by which the trustees in 1837 hired "Alex Smith" to perform certain tasks relating to the painting and brickwork on the West Wing in return for compensation of \$17,350.<sup>4</sup>

According to historian Otto Varnado, the College of Louisiana carried on "college work of a fair nature," unlike many so-called colleges of the time. In 1830 there were between fifty and sixty students, and throughout its history the College of Louisiana never had more than a hundred students. In 1831 there were over eighty students and a faculty consisting of five professors and a chaplain. In its final report (1844), the college listed its assets. It owned buildings worth a total of \$70,000, a library of 1600 volumes worth \$4,000, cabinets and collections worth \$1,500, land (140 acres) worth \$2,500, and "apparatus" worth \$2,010. "Founders' donations" in money consisted of \$20,000 and in land \$10,000.<sup>5</sup>

In 1845 the Legislature passed an act providing that the College of Louisiana be sold for an amount not less than \$10,000, specifying "the aforesaid college shall not be appropriated to any other purpose than a literary institution." Accordingly, the college was sold on June 5, 1845, to Edward McGehee for \$10,000, with David Thomas and John McKowen as securities.<sup>6</sup> These men turned the facilities over to the trustees of Centenary College who moved their institution to the Jackson site that same year. Centenary, a Methodist college, was founded in 1839, the one hundredth anniversary or "centenary" of the founding of the first Methodist society by John Wesley. It was first located at Clinton, Mississippi, and later at Brandon Springs, Mississippi, before its removal to Jackson in 1845.<sup>7</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, Centenary College underwent rapid growth at its new campus. A newspaper reporting on the college's commencement of 1847 stated that there were 160 students and praised the quality of instruction as reflected in the students' essays and declamations. In 1857, at a cost of \$60,000 a large central building located between the two wings was erected, containing a sizable auditorium, library rooms, and recitation rooms. (It no longer exists.) As of that year there were nine instructors, four ministers, 116 students, and 5000 volumes in the library. In the session just preceding the outbreak of the Civil War, the college enrolled 260 students. Soon after the war began it apparently shut down completely. During the war it was sometimes used as a military hospital, other times as a temporary barracks for troops. The buildings sustained considerable damage. After the war the history of the college was largely "one of persistent effort to repair the injuries occasioned by that event, and to regain its former status of prosperity and usefulness." The problems of the college after the war are reflected in figures concerning its alumni. In 1886, the college had a total of 259 alumni, but of these 210 had graduated before 1861.<sup>8</sup>

The college's situation had not improved much by 1900. Records of the trustees for that year show an enrollment of 150 students, but the finance committee reported that the treasury was empty. About this time the trustees of the college and officials of the Methodist Church began to consider the possibility of moving the College to a better location. In 1906 they accepted the offer of a 40-acre site in Shreveport, and Centenary College moved to its present location.<sup>9</sup>

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Edwin A. Davis, Louisiana: A Narrative History, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Book Store, 1965), p. 216, 218.

<sup>2</sup>"An Act to Incorporate the College of Louisiana," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Seventh Legislature (New Orleans: M. Cruzat, 1824-1825), pp. 152-158.

<sup>3</sup>East Feliciana Parish Records, Notarial C, pp. 381-383, pp. 55-56; Notarial B, pp. 208-209; Donation Book A, pp. 8-9.

<sup>4</sup>William H. Nelson, A Burning Torch and a Flaming Fire: The Story of Centenary College of Louisiana (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1931), p. 86, hereinafter cited as Nelson, Centenary; East Feliciana Parish Records: Contracts, Liens, and Privileges, located in Clerk's Office safe (Includes architect's drawing of East Wing).

<sup>5</sup>Otto S. Varnado, "A History of the Early Institutions of Higher Learning in Louisiana" (M. A. Thesis, LSU at Baton Rouge, 1927), pp. 29-30, hereinafter cited as Varnado, "Institutions of Higher Learning."

<sup>6</sup>"An Act for the Sale of the College of Louisiana," Acts Passed at the First Session of the Seventeenth Legislature (New Orleans: Magne and Weisse, 1845), p. 37; East Feliciana Parish Records, Auction Sale by Lafayette Saunders, located in Clerk's Office safe.

<sup>7</sup>Edwin W. Fay, The History of Education in Louisiana (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1838), p. 138, hereinafter cited as Fay, Education in Louisiana; Varnado, "Institutions of Higher Learning," pp. 31-32.

<sup>8</sup>Varnado, "Institutions of Higher Learning." pp. 34-36; Fay, Education in Louisiana, pp. 139-140.

<sup>9</sup>Helen R. Bryson, "A History of Centenary College" (M. A. Thesis, LSU at Baton Rouge, 1941), p. 83; Nelson, Centenary, p. 317.

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