

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Silliman Institute is located on the outskirts of the rural parish seat of Clinton. It is still a functioning school and contains numerous outbuildings; however, only the historic portion is being nominated. The nominated area includes the main complex of three attached buildings, a kitchen, a cistern and a modern building which is considered a non-contributing element. The three main buildings (c.1850, c. 1860, 1894) are two to two-and-a-half story brick structures which reflect the Greek Revival, Italianate, and Second Empire styles. Their front galleries connect to form a more or less continuous colossal colonnade, and the buildings themselves are joined by breezeways. Despite the changes described below, the Silliman complex retains those features which establish its significance.

The oldest building, built c.1850 in the Greek Revival style, features a simple temple front. The central entrances on both stories are flanked by 6/6 double hung windows that have lintels with keystones. The interior-woodwork is very plain.

The middle section was built c.1860 and mixes the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. It has a colonnade similar to the one on the earlier building, but it has a tripped roof, and a third story is squeezed into the attic. Central, double glass-paneled doors are on the first and second stories; windows are double hung and are French length on the first floor. Most of the front section of this building is devoted to large rooms with the library being on the first floor.

An unpublished 1941 paper cites the 1853-54 Bulletin and describes the two structures that were built when the school was opened in 1852. One of the buildings described is most certainly the c.1850 structure, but the other one is smaller than the central building. A building was destroyed by fire in 1858 and replaced prior to the Civil War. It is assumed that the c. 1860 building is that reconstruction

The third building was built in 1894 in the Second Empire style. It has galleries similar to those on the other two buildings, but they are built on a slightly higher level. The mansard roof has a plain cornice and dormers with double, narrow windows. The facade has 6/6 double hung windows and central paneled doors; the side elevation has paired, narrow windows that are similar to those in the dormers.

The Second Empire building has the most decorative interior of the three structures. The first floor accommodates two offices with pressed tin ceilings and a large auditorium that has wainscoting, elaborate fluted columns, and a stage. The ornate entrance to the auditorium features stained glass and paneling. The upstairs rooms retain their late-nineteenth century woodwork, and of special interest are the unusual doors on the bathroom stalls.

Although the above three buildings are constructed of brick, the fronts are stuccoed. It is not known whether or not the stucco is original.

Three other structures are included in the nomination. The small, nineteenth century, brick, one-and-a-half story, gabled kitchen is located to the rear of the central building. Because it serves as the school lunchroom, it has received numerous additions that could be removed if desired. The cistern is covered by a wood shingled roof supported by log posts and is situated between the kitchen and main complex. Also included is a modern, one-story, rectangular building that is behind the oldest building. Although it is a modern intrusion, it is so near the oldest building and the kitchen that to exclude it would make it impossible to draw a simple and regular boundary around the complex.

Assessment of Integrity:

Considering that Silliman has been in almost constant use as a school since 1852, there have been surprisingly few major alterations. The pedimented gable end on the oldest building appears to have had a fanlight enclosed when the pediment was re-sided. The building has also had some of its rooms subdivided, probably during the twentieth century. The center building has lost its sizable cupola and balustrade, but its interior appears to have received no major alterations.

Silliman Institute is mainly significant for its surviving Greek Revival inspired features which establish it as part of the local Greek Revival tradition. It is secondarily significant because of the mansard roof in the 1894 portion. This, of course, also survives.

To the rear of the building are modern covered walks. In addition, there is a comparatively modern brick building. Moreover, the old kitchen building has received numerous additions. Despite the fact that this rear area has been significantly intruded upon, it was included in the nominated area because it still contributes to the resource. The old kitchen and cistern are still clearly visible. They show that, unlike their twentieth century counterparts, large nineteenth century school buildings had outbuildings. They, therefore, contribute to one's appreciation of Silliman Institute as a historic school building.

Specific dates c. 1850, c. 1860, 1894
Builder/Architect Architects unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criterion C

Silliman Institute is locally significant in the area of architecture mainly because it is an integral part of an identified architectural tradition native to the Feliciana Parishes. This tradition is characterized by the use of simple, round, two-story, stuccoed brick Doric columns on Greek Revival buildings.

The three main buildings are treated in a stylish, sophisticated, but conservative manner, and they exhibit an interesting combination of architectural features that are heavily dominated by the Greek Revival style. The oldest building is a "full blown" Greek Revival temple, and the other two have the colonnades and symmetrical facades that speak of the Greek Revival as it is popularly known in the South. Nevertheless, the latter two have rooflines that clearly place them within different stylistic categories. The center building was conceived in the Italianate style, but the loss of the cupola and balustrade lessens the statement the building originally made. The third building is characterized by its Second Empire mansard roof, a rarity in Louisiana.* Though the dates of the Greek Revival and Italianate sections are in sync with the popularity of the style elsewhere, the Second Empire section was built after that style's vogue had passed, and the colonnade, which almost stylistically overpowers the mansard, was built long after it has passed out of fashion.

The Feliciana Parishes are known as an important center of Greek Revival architecture in Louisiana. Beyond the usual one-story raised cottages, the Felicianas have a significant collection of larger structures with colossal order columns. The use of simple, round, two-story, stuccoed brick Doric columns has been identified by the noted New Orleans restoration architect Samuel Wilson as a local architectural tradition. The buildings at Silliman exemplify this tradition, even in the 1894 addition. Moreover, they stand as one of about ten major examples in the two parish area. Although Silliman does not stand above the other major examples, it constitutes a vital part of a local tradition which lends architectural identity to the area.

HISTORICAL SKETCH:

The school was chartered in 1852 as the Silliman Female Collegiate Institute and operated, except for the period during the Civil War, until 1932. It reopened in 1966 and currently teaches students in grades K-12.

Announcements containing information about the faculty and course offerings indicate that Silliman was a fairly typical nineteenth century girls' school. The curriculum included courses in mathematics and natural sciences, English and foreign languages, government and history, the fine arts, and, by 1899, typing. This reflected the notion that young women should have a well-rounded education and should not be only accomplished in the fine arts but also be conversant in more academic subjects.

Although the school attracted students from surrounding parishes and from more far flung areas of the state, it was not the only such school in the state or even in the Florida Parishes. However, the longevity and apparent prosperity and prestige of the school make it more noteworthy than the numerous other shorter lived academies.

*Despite the fact that the mansard roof is assessed within the context of the state, the staff does not feel that this warrants a designation of significance on the state level for the entire complex.

Major Bibliographical References

Harris, Jn. F. "History of Silliman College at Clinton, Louisiana," unpublished.

Silliman Collegiate Institute. Bulletin. 1908-09.