

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Plaquemine High School building is a three story brick and concrete structure erected in 1911. It is centrally located within the community in a mixed residential and commercial area. Designed primarily in the Beaux Arts style, it also displays Neo-Classical decorative elements. The school has endured surprisingly few changes over the years, hence its National Register eligibility remains intact.

The three-story structure is composed of a concrete raised basement surmounted by two additional stories of brick. Elements which contribute to the Beaux Arts character of the building include:

- 1) five part symmetrical plan with a central projecting pavilion, two projecting pavilions, and two hyphen-like connectors.
- 2) overscaled architectural elements which combine to make the central pavilion the structure's climactic feature. These elements include four monumental Roman Ionic columns in antis, colossal corner piers, a monumental flight of stairs rising to the main entrance on the second floor, and a large cast concrete tablet which highlights the pavilion's crown.
- 3) side elevations divided into three bays by monumental piers identical to those on the central pavilion. Each side elevation contains its own slightly projecting central bay, reflecting the Beaux Arts tendency to emphasize advancing and receding planes within the same elevation.

Most of the school's decorative elements are executed in cast concrete. Neo-Classical elements include 1) molded pier capitals featuring roundels, 2) a molded entablature which extends around much of the structure, 3) a second tablet, this one located above the facade's second story door and 4) a dentil band located beneath the central pavilion's overhanging cornice, and 5) a tall brick parapet with coping. Other interesting features include bands of large sash.. windows with cast concrete sills, high ceilings, and large glass transoms above classroom doors. Classrooms, with accompanying cloakrooms and original slate blackboards, and an auditorium with a balcony occupy the ground (basement) and second floors. The third floor contains only classrooms and cloakrooms.

The school has experienced relatively few changes since completion. These include the installation of a fire escape on the facade, the construction of rear one story wings on the ground floor to house additional restrooms, the removal of the words "High School" from the face of the central pavilion's large tablet, and the painting of the original beige brick in a shade of red. The restroom wings are not visible from the front and, thus, do not impact the facade. Because the tablet itself remains intact, the loss of its former wording is hardly noticeable. The presence of the fire escape is unfortunate but, because it is recessed between projecting pavilions and painted the same color as the surrounding brick, its visual impact is lessened. Finally, the painted brick does not detract from the building's appearance. Instead, the dark color provides a better contrast for the light colored cast concrete elements which decorate the building. As one of the City of Plaquemine's most important architectural landmarks, the Plaquemine High School building is a prime candidate for the National Register.

Significant dates

1911

Architect/Builder Stevens and Nelson, Company, Architects
 Caldwell Brothers, Contractors

Criterion C

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Plaquemine High School building is locally significant in the area of architecture because of its status as a landmark among the city's late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings.

Located on the west bank of the Mississippi River at the mouth of Bayou Plaquemine, the City of Plaquemine was incorporated in 1838. However, most of the early buildings have been lost to "cave-ins" which repeatedly plunged local streets, businesses and residences into the eroding waters of the river. A major cave-in took place in 1888, but there were many others. The result is that much of the original town of Plaquemine is gone, and its surviving collection of historic buildings dates primarily to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This collection, as verified by the Iberville Parish Historic Structures Survey, consists of approximately 300 structures. With several notable exceptions, most of these are small, vernacular Creole, Italianate, and Queen Anne cottages, shotguns, bungalows, and two story commercial buildings. The High School is one of the exceptions. One of only a handful of Plaquemine structures to have been designed by an architect, it is quite large, impressive in scale, and makes its own high style design statement. Thus, it is a grand and monumental landmark when compared to the smaller, vernacular cottages and businesses which surround it.

Historical Note

The Plaquemine High School building was erected in 1911 at a cost of \$46,805. Although its role as a high school was reflected in its name, it actually served elementary as well as high school students. It served in this capacity until 1931, when a new high school building was completed. At that time, the older building was re-christened as the Plaquemine Elementary School. The building continued in use as an elementary school until the end of the 1986-87 school year.

Major Bibliographical References

Historic Structures Survey for Iberville Parish.

Grace, Albert L. The Heart of the Sugar Bowl: The Story of Iberville. Baton Rouge: Franklin Press, 1946.

Riffel, Judy, Ed. Iberville Parish History. Dallas, TX: Curtis Media Corporation, 1985.