

A restrained example of the Classical Revival style, the Main Building of Francis T. Nicholls Junior College (now Nicholls State University) is a two-story brick structure with a one-story rear wing. It stands within the outskirts of the Lafourche Parish seat of Thibodaux at the head of a broad, sweeping lawn which borders Bayou Lafourche and Louisiana Hwy 1. Although the building's rear elevation and interior have received alterations, the facade looks remarkably as it did when the facility was completed in 1948. Thus, the structure's National Register eligibility remains intact.

Designed by the firm of Favrot and Reed, the building exhibits several Classical architectural elements articulated in concrete. The most pronounced is the treatment of the main entrance as a temple. It features a large pediment with a raking denticulated cornice. Below the pediment is an entablature with a denticulated cornice and a wide frieze where the words "C. C. Elkins Hall" indicate the building's modern name. Four colossal pillars with Corinthian capitals, necking and molded bases give the appearance of supporting the entablature and pediment. The latter is pierced by a large oculus decorated by voussoirs. Behind the temple front the facade features a door with an aedicule style surround. (This motif also ornaments the doors on each side of the building.) The surround is surmounted by a window featuring shoulder molding. Shoulder molding also highlights the first story windows which flank the door. The two other second level windows behind the temple front feature simpler yet still prominent lintels.

Also of interest on the facade is the decoration of pavilion-like elements located on each end of the building. Treated identically, each "pavilion" features two pairs of colossal pilasters with Doric capitals and necking. The pilasters support an entablature almost as bold as that on the temple front, except that the former lacks the dentil treatment found on the latter. Although not of Classical derivation, the treatment of the brick on the end "pavilions" is also of interest. It is laid in a pattern which creates two panels, one above the other. The entablatures of the temple front and pavilion-like elements are joined by a more narrow entablature which encircles the building and is abutted by the top portions of the second story windows.

The plans of both floors are organized around long hallways which bisect the building horizontally. Except for the installation of an elevator in the hall space immediately opposite the main entrance and the removal of student lockers which once lined them, these hallways remain open and intact. However, with only one or two exceptions, the large classrooms and offices which once filled the building on either side of the halls have been subdivided to create a larger number of small offices. A modest addition to one side of the one-story rear wing and the building of crosswalks connecting the side entrances to newer structures nearby are the only alterations to the exterior. Thus, former students who attended Francis T. Nicholls Junior College during its opening term would easily recognize the Main Building should they return to the campus today. As the symbol of the coming of age of higher education in the Lafourche region, the building is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

Significant Date: 1948  
Architect/Builder: Architect: Favrot and Reed  
Criterion A

The Francis T. Nicholls Junior College Main Building is locally significant in the area of education as the symbol of the arrival of higher education in Louisiana's Lafourche/Terrebonne region. With the opening of the junior college (all of whose facilities were originally housed in this one building) in Thibodaux on September 23, 1948, the opportunity to obtain an education beyond the high school level was made available to most of the area's students for the first time.

Nicholls was originally planned to serve the citizens of Southeast Louisiana living between the Mississippi and Atchafalaya rivers in Ascension, Assumption, Lafourche, St. Charles, St. James, St. Mary, and Terrebonne parishes. Because bayous Lafourche and Terrebonne provide a geographic anchor for this area, it will be referred to as the Lafourche/Terrebonne region for the purposes of this nomination. Characterized by a rural nature (including large expanses of wetlands) and (until recently) a population consisting mostly of trappers, fishermen and farmers, this relatively remote region has traditionally been underserved. Until the opening of Nicholls, schools in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lafayette were the only options for students desiring post-high school education. However, a number of factors prevented most students from attending these institutions. Firstly, although not impossible, commuting was made difficult by the distances involved (four to five hour round trips upon two-lane bayou roads) as well as by the problem of crossing the Mississippi (which until 1960 was spanned by only one bridge in Baton Rouge and one in New Orleans). Another serious impediment was finance, for the cost of boarding either in dormitories or off-campus housing was out-of-reach for many. Finally, according to Dr. Alfred N. Delahaye (Professor Emeritus of Journalism at Nicholls and the author of a soon-to-be-published history

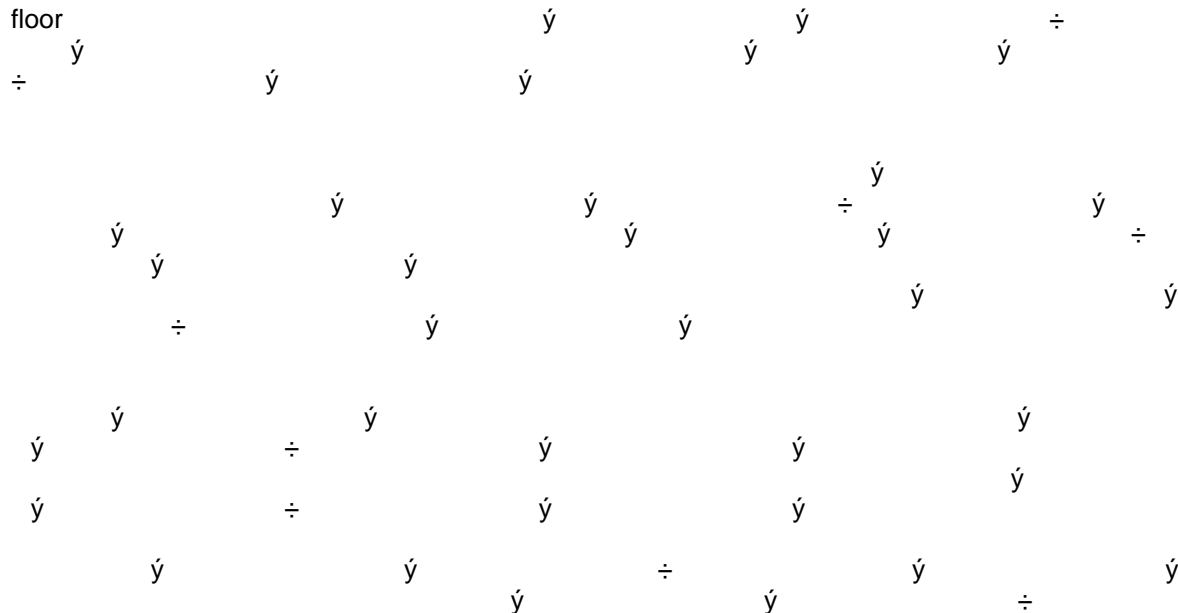
of the school), a strong sense of place and family often prevented students from leaving the area for any reason. As a result of these factors, higher education was not readily available for the majority of the region's high school graduates until the opening of Francis T. Nicholls Junior College.

The movement to obtain post-high school learning opportunities for the area's citizens actually began in 1938, when the state legislature passed a law creating a trades school for white citizens at Thibodaux. However, this facility never materialized. Over the years local civic leaders and educators (a group eventually known as the junior college committee) expanded their goal--championing the creation of a two-year junior college which would offer academic courses. In 1944 the legislature finally responded by amending the 1938 act to provide for a combination junior college and trades school. The institution was to be named for former governor Francis T. Nicholls, a Donaldsonville native who later settled in Lafourche Parish. It was to be located in Thibodaux and to be administered by Louisiana State University (LSU).

Although the new law allocated \$375,000 for the creation of the school, the state held these funds while the junior college committee and the state's Attorney General negotiated over the legalities of acquiring a site. (The AG would not allow the Lafourche Parish Police Jury to call a tax election to fund the purchase and also ruled that the local School Board did not have the authority to donate a site to LSU.) Not until May 1945, after the committee had recommended that part of the \$375,000 be used for site acquisition, were the funds finally transferred to LSU. Nicholls would be the third junior college in the university's system.

On November 14, 1945 the LSU Board of Supervisors spent \$29,500 to purchase a 108 acre campus paralleling Bayou Lafourche on the outskirts of Thibodaux. Later they would purchase an additional 90 acres. By late January 1946 a newly constituted Executive Building Committee (which included local leaders as well as representatives of LSU) had instructed the New Orleans architectural firm of Favrot and Reed to prepare plans and cost estimates for the junior college's first building. This work took slightly longer than a year to complete. When the committee opened construction bids on April 10, 1947, it found the lowest to be \$406,000. The contractor chosen to complete the work was Romero & Theall of Youngsville, Louisiana. Ground was broken on May 9. Because the contractor hired local labor for the project, the junior college brought an immediate economic benefit to Thibodaux. LSU used the construction period to finalize its choices for the new school's administrative staff and faculty. Charles C. Elkins, then director of the university's remedial reading bureau, was named as the junior college's dean in April 1948. Administrators were allowed to move into the almost-complete building the first week in September, but student registration had to be postponed until September 23 while the structure received more finishing touches.

By registration's end, 161 people had enrolled in the new junior college's day classes. Less than a month later over 140 more would enroll when the institution began offering evening extension courses for older, working students. These first scholars found a state-of-the art educational building containing 31,000 square feet on two floors. The facility included six general classrooms; an additional lecture room; a commerce (business) room; two science laboratories; and a home economics department with separate sewing, living and cooking rooms. Support spaces included a library, "social room," dining room, and combination post office and bookstore. Twelve administrative, business and faculty offices were also located in the structure. Finally, the building provided students with lockers, which outlined the hallways on both



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