

STATEMENT OF HISTORIC CONTEXT

The multiple property submission known as "The 1930s Building Boom at Louisiana Tech" recognizes a particularly critical chapter in the historic of an important state institution of higher learning. Between 1933 and 1937, the enrollment at what was then formally called Louisiana Polytechnic Institute increased by almost 60%, while state appropriations for the school increased by only 17%. Problems related to this enrollment surge caused Tech in 1937 to be placed on probation by its accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. A massive building program financed largely with New Deal relief funds enabled the school to end the decade with an impressive physical plant appropriate for the size of its still growing student body. It seems clear from a study of the development of the Tech physical plant over the years that the building boom of the 1930s represents the single most important period of expansion in the university's history (not taking into account the last fifty years). There was never a period in the university's history when so many large and important buildings were built within such a short period of time (1936-40). It was fortunate that they were built when they were because by the 1939-40 academic year enrollment had increased even further to 2,234, representing more than a 100% increase from 1933.

Background History:

Louisiana Tech opened in 1895 on the edge of a railroad town that had only been founded eleven years before. By the early 1890s various people in the small town of Ruston began to discuss the possibility of a state-supported technical school. On April 2, 1894, the Lincoln Parish Police Jury agreed to hold a special session in May "to take such steps as may be considered necessary to secure for Lincoln Parish the Industrial School for which the next session of the Legislature will probably provide." In the May meeting a resolution of support was passed, and when Representative G. M. Lomax left for the 1894 legislative session, he took with him the draft of a resolution which he introduced proposing the school's creation. Assisting him in passage of the bill was Representative J. T. M. Hancock of neighboring Jackson Parish. Various telegrams were sent back and forth to the state capital in support of the school. One read: "Ruston wants a school. What would be expected of us to get it: Think can furnish buildings and grounds free. Health and morals best in State." Act #68 of the 1894 session established the much desired school at Ruston, which was initially called the Industrial Institute and College of Louisiana. Colonel A. T. Prescott of Baton Rouge was elected as the first president, and the school opened in a two story brick building on September 23, 1895. At the time it was the only state four year college in northern Louisiana.

In its first term the faculty numbered only six, and there were 202 students representing twenty-two parishes. Emphasis, of course, was upon industrial or vocational education. Fields of study included mechanical and industrial arts, domestic science, horticulture, and various business related fields. Upon completion of a general academic curriculum and an industrial subject of his choice, student graduated with a bachelor of industry degree. In May 1897, the first graduate, Harry Howard, received this degree. In the early 1920s the degrees were restructured to include a B.S. in engineering, a B.A. in business administration, a B.A. in education, and a B.S. in home economics. In 1921 the school's name was changed to Louisiana Polytechnic Institute, and in 1970 it became Louisiana Tech University.

The 1930s Building Boom:

In 1935, there were roughly twenty buildings on the Tech campus. By the end of the decade, the number had increased by about one-third, and many of the new buildings were major buildings. Although a dorm and stadium were built in the early part of the decade (both since demolished), they were isolated examples rather than part of the large program of considerable expansion which began in the summer of 1936. In this year construction on a new administration building began. The building was desperately needed because "Old Main," a huge, rambling administration/classroom building, had been destroyed by fire on January 6 of that year. Plans

for a new administration building had already been made before the fire, but now the need was critical. Financed with a state appropriation, construction began in June 1937 on a large three story building which in January 1937 was named for Governor Richard w. Leche. In the early 1940s, the administration building was renamed for former Tech president J. E. Keeny. Undoubtedly a factor in the name change was the fact that former governor Leche had been sent to jail in the aftermath of the famous Louisiana Scandals of 1939. In fact, one of the charges against Leche involved "irregularities" in the construction of the Tech administration building. (See individual form for more information on the building's association with the scandals.)

While the new administration building filled an immediate and important need, it did not even begin to solve Tech's "growing pains" (a term used at the time). As noted previously, enrollment increased by almost 60% between 1933 and 1937. The results were severely overcrowded facilities and other related problems such as a high student-teacher ratio, a low library books per student ratio, etc. In the fall semester of 1937, Tech had requests for housing from 457 women but had accommodations for only 240. Designed to house 164, the men's dormitory managed somehow to provide for 251. finding a room, albeit a cramped one, was only the first hurdle. The next was being assured of a place to eat. The old dining hall had a capacity of 250, but had to serve 540.

The situation came to a head when in 1937 the school was placed on probation by its accrediting agency, the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. In a plea for action, the Tech student body association observed that "the items listed as Tech's shortcomings by the association are based directly upon two major factors: Tech's enrollment has increased remarkably and the legislature's maintenance appropriation for the college has been inadequate to cope with the larger number of students." Factors cited by the accrediting agency included too few teachers for the number of students, crowded classrooms, library facilities that did not meet the minimum standards, and a teaching cost that was too low (a figure arrived at by totaling the salaries of teachers and library expenditures and dividing it by the number of students). The student body association's solution was simple: "It all sums up to one thing: Tech must have more money appropriated by the state." The student "manifesto" continued: "How can a college be expected to accommodate 1,511 students with virtually the same facilities that were available for 957 students five years ago?" Concluding with the statement "It's up to the legislature to get us off probation," the statement was approved by students at a special assembly.

More than students rang the alarm bells. In a February 1938 report commissioned by the president of the school and entitled quite appropriately "Growing Pains," a committee of faculty members and other staff noted that the situation was "critical." The report began with a drawing entitled "outgrowing his Clothes," which showed a boy growing ever larger between 1933 and '37 but with the same suit of clothes on. The caption read: "Forced to wear the same clothes as he grow up, the boy is the image of Louisiana Tech." The report mainly consisted of charts showing growth in various categories such as dorm and dining hall space needed, breakdowns of enrollment growth by degree area, etc. Students taking their meals in the dining hall, for example, increased by 216% between 1933 and 1937. Enrollment in the agriculture department increased by 355%, with the caption noting that "for the lack of farm facilities more than 100 boys were unable to enter Tech this year." Another chart demonstrated that the school of engineering enrollment increased by 268% between 1933 and '37 while the operating budget had been decreased. A summary chart concluded that during the period in question the percentage of enrollment increase was twice that of classroom increase and more than three times that of appropriation boosts. And, of course, the overall situation was only going to get worse as enrollment continued to increase dramatically in the late 1930s (from 1,196 in 1936 to 2,234 in 1939).

It was, however, not to be state appropriations that saved the day at Tech, but a massive building program financed with New Deal relief funds. Tech's initial request, made in 1937, was for about twenty buildings. As the decision was pending, college and state officials sent telegraphs to Louisiana's congressional delegation to stress the urgency of the situation. One

telegram read in part: "Enrollment at Tech. 1783 students to date. Temporarily housed in barns, trailers, et. [sic.] Classroom space crowded to overflowing. Dining hall overtaxed."

Given the demand and competition for federal relief funds, it is little surprise that Tech's initial proposal was scaled back. Nonetheless, many of the major building projects were approved, with construction taking place between 1938 and 1940. The total cost was a little over two million dollars. These buildings, along with the just completed administration building, meant a significant improvement in the physical plant at Tech, and hence the quality of education and student life. They are: Howard Auditorium, a huge facility with classroom wings, costing over one-half million dollars and with a seating capacity of up to 3,000; Bogard Hall, a large "state of the art" building for the engineering department, also costing over one-half million dollars; a men's dormitory (Robinson Hall); a much needed larger dining hall (with the ability to serve 800, in comparison to the 250 capacity of the old dining hall); a two-story brick classroom/laboratory building for the school of agriculture; a small dorm for agricultural students; and a dorm for women, Aswell Hall. All of the 1930s buildings except Aswell Hall and the agriculture dorm are being nominated as part of this multiple property submission. (Aswell is not being included for integrity reasons, as explained in the "registration requirements" section of this form. The small agriculture dorm is slated for demolition.)

In summation, a school that in 1937 was so overcrowded and overtaxed that it was placed on probably ended the decade with an impressive physical plant involving over two million dollars in new construction. There were not adequate dorm and dining facilities. The school's highly ranked engineering department had a new facility probably four times larger than its 1905 predecessor. The behemoth auditorium, with its up-to-date Moderne styling and two large classroom wings, was easily the largest such facility in the region. And there was a quantum leap forward at Tech as well, with a new large classroom/laboratory building and the expansion of its acreage. It is little wonder that the attitude at Tech was completely different than it had been in 1937 when students issued their "manifesto" and a special committee reported on "growing pains." The school's 1941 yearbook dedication reads: "In view of the notable growth of our school, its outstanding increase in faculty and facilities, this book is especially dedicated to the continuance of this vibrant spirit of progress."

Importance of Louisiana Tech:

When it opened in 1895, Louisiana Tech was the only state supported four year college in northern Louisiana, although, of course, the nominated buildings do not represent this early period. During the 1930s, and until the 1960s, Tech was one of only three state supported colleges (for whites) in a large region referred to locally as North Louisiana. The other two were Northeastern State University, founded in 1931 in Monroe (about 30 miles from Ruston), and Northwestern State University, founded in Natchitoches (about 80 miles from Ruston) in 1884 as a two-year teacher training school. In 1917 Northwestern became a four-year college. The region's African-American institution of higher learning was Grambling State University, founded in 1901 a few miles from Louisiana Tech. The only private school, and it was a small one, was Centenary College in Shreveport.

Enrollment figures show that Louisiana Tech during the historic period had students from the majority of Louisiana's sixty-four parishes (counties). Also, given its location, it must have drawn students from nearby Arkansas, Mississippi and Texas. Tech chiefly would have attracted students interested in its core degrees -- engineering, education, home economics and business. Between 1897 and 1945, Louisiana Tech conferred 5,083 degrees, 75% of which were in these four subjects. Over the years, Tech particularly has had a highly respected engineering department. 1930s sources mention its ranking as one of the best in the South.

Because of its status as one of a small number of state institutions of higher learning in a large region, the number of students it educated from all over Louisiana, and the high regard with which its engineering department was held, there is no question that Louisiana Tech fulfilled a

significant role in education. And, of course, it was able to fulfill that role much, much better because of the vast improvements in the physical plant made during the 1930s building boom.

ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

DESCRIPTION

Summary:

The six 1930s buildings being nominated as part of this multiple property submission are all of brick construction and are two to three stories in height. Colonial Revival was the style of choice, clearly in an attempt to harmonize the new construction with buildings then on campus. The exception is Howard Auditorium, an impressive Streamlined Moderne facility. Five of the six buildings being nominated are on the main campus; one is at Tech Farm, a small agricultural school complex about a mile away. On the whole, the candidates have been altered very little on the exterior. Hence they can readily convey their historical significance as components of a massive building program at an important state institution of higher learning.

Background and Overall Setting:

Louisiana Tech is located in one of Louisiana's so-called "hill parishes." Most of the campus is on flat terrain, although there are places where the land rolls ever so gently. The mature vegetation surrounding, and in some cases obscuring, the 1930s buildings dates for the most part from that decade. Most of the 1930s buildings are located in what was historically the heart of campus; however, the land must have been cleared largely of trees prior to construction. An aerial photo in the 1941 yearbook shows the new buildings and little in the way of vegetation near them.

Two of the 1930s buildings, the administration building (Keeny Hall) and Howard Auditorium, are located on the school's old quadrangle, which at the time was an irregular, rather loosely defined parcel of grassy land. The quad today is a shady oasis thanks to trees that must have been planted after the massive building project of the '20s. Keeny Hall was built on the east side of the quad to replace "Old Main," the school's original and much revered main building which was lost to fire in January 1936. Occupying the south side of the quad is the behemoth Howard Auditorium. Photos show that the remainder of the quad in 1940 was occupied by historic buildings. These have since been demolished. There are only two surviving pre-1930s buildings at Tech: Hale Hall, which has experienced a severe loss of integrity, and the former Prescott Memorial library (1926), located immediately to the north of Keeny Hall (see 1941 aerial view). The library is being nominated separately for its architectural significance. As will be explained below, it, and other buildings then on campus, clearly set the tone for the 1930s construction.

The other 1930s buildings at Tech being nominated as part of this multiple property submission are as follows:

- Bogard Hall, a vast building housing the school of engineering which occupies an entire block. It is adjacent to the quad.
- The former dining hall, located relatively near the quad but separated from it by new construction.
- Robinson Hall, a men's dormitory located at some distance from the quad.

- Reese Agriculture Building, the school of agriculture's classroom/lab building, located at Tech Farm.

The Architectural Character

The 1930s construction, with the exception of Howard Auditorium, took its stylistic cue from existing buildings on campus, most notably Prescott Memorial Library. Of the roughly twenty buildings then in existence, several, particularly those on or near the quad, were in some form of the Classical revival or Colonial Revival. It is interesting to note that the 1926 library was designed by the prolific Shreveport firm of Neild, Somdal and Neild, the firm largely responsible for the 1930s building program. (Neild, Somdal and Neild were associate architects for Keeny Hall and the sole architects for the remainder of the buildings.)

It is abundantly clear from the architectural evidence alone that the first new building, Keeny Hall (1936), was a specific reference to its next door neighbor, the 1926 Prescott Memorial Library. This is corroborated in at least one period account. *Tech Talk*, the campus newspaper, in a front-page article in February 1936 reported that tentative plans for the administration building as well as an auditorium had been announced. The style of architecture, noted the reporter, "will be similar to that of the tech Library." Both buildings, the article continued, "will be built of brick of the Library building color." Obviously this early proposal for an auditorium was not the one carried out, at least in terms of the style. All of the 1930s buildings, however, do copy the brickwork of the old library, which is of red and brown brick suggestive of the textured effect found in colonial buildings where burnt headers were used. It is also interesting to note that almost all subsequent construction at Tech has followed this lead, although the new brickwork generally is not as well-done as the older.

Prescott Memorial Library and other buildings of its style then on campus, and in turn most of the 1930s buildings, represent a distinct phase of the colonial Revival which emerged after World War I. In this new scholarly, or academic, phase architects produced building which truly resembled real colonial buildings. Some produced archaeologically correct copies while others borrowed from various periods of colonial architecture to create buildings strongly evocative of the period. This approach received a good deal of impetus from *The White Pines Series of Architectural Monographs*, a monthly magazine published by the White Pines Institute between 1916 and 1929. Although its ostensible purpose was to encourage the use of white pine in construction, it also published scholarly and semi-scholarly articles on Colonial American architecture as well as plans and measured drawings of colonial buildings. Also published were designs for modern buildings in which features were taken from specific colonial prototypes. One also suspects that this phase of the Colonial Revival was given great impetus by the restoration work being undertaken by the Rockefeller Foundation at Colonial Williamsburg.

Prescott Memorial Library and in turn most of the 1930s buildings have the general character and some of the details of major public buildings in colonial America -- for example, those at Harvard University, the College of William and Mary and Williamsburg. "Colonial" features which collectively characterize the 1930s buildings at Tech include the brickwork noted above, an abundance of windows with multiple small panes, jack arches with prominent keystones (the keystones in this case being of a contracting cast concrete), swan-neck pediments, cupolas, and oculi. In addition, some of the buildings share characteristics which would have been thought of at the time as "colonial," but which we would know today as Federal or early Greek Revival. These include gabled parapets and Greek Revival aedicule motifs.

Integrity:

All in all, the six 1930s buildings are well preserved on the exterior. Some are virtually unchanged, while two have new windows with snap-in muntins. To the trained eye these

windows are obvious; however, very importantly, they do replicate the historic glazing pattern. Hence the two buildings in question present their overall historic appearance.

With the exception of Howard Auditorium, the interiors have received notable alterations. Some retain some of their historic character, while others are almost completely modern on the interior. Alterations include the usual dropped celotex ceilings and new floor coverings. Of course, this is typical of historic institutional buildings. Also, it should be noted that the interiors were always very functional; so little has been lost in terms of distinctive architecture. Howard Auditorium is the building which was designed with an important interior, and it survives almost completely intact.

SIGNIFICANCE

For a full statement of significance, see Section E (Statement of Historic Context). To summarize, this multiple property submission recognizes a particularly critical chapter in the history of an important state institution of higher learning. It seems clear from a study of the development of the Tech physical plant over the years that the building boom of the 1930s represents the single most important period of expansion in the university's history (not taking into account the last fifty years). There was never a period in the university's history when so many large and important buildings were built within such a short period of time (1936-40). The six buildings being nominated under this cover form are all major components of the great construction boom of the 1930s. By the end of the decade the physical plant had been increased by one-third. In short, as explained in section E, what had been a seriously overcrowded campus at the beginning of the Great depression ended the decade with an impressive physical plant.

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS:

All of the 1930s buildings at Louisiana Tech were researched and examined by the state's National Register Coordinator. Because all contributed to the significant phenomenon (the 1930s building boom at tech), the registration threshold had to be integrity. As noted previously, Aswell Hall is not being included because of the notable alterations it received sometime between 1949 and 1950 (one over one windows replacing six over six windows, a largely new front porch, and the attachment of a new dorm by way of a one story connector). A small dorm at Tech Farm is not being included because it is slated for demolition.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

The study area was the Louisiana Tech main campus and a nearby small satellite agriculture campus known as Tech Farm. The two are located about a mile apart in Ruston, Louisiana.

SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

This project began when members of Louisiana Tech's honorary history society, Phi Alpha Theta, asked the Division of Historic Preservation about the Register prospects of certain buildings on campus. Accompanying the request was what became the foundation for this multiple property submission, a solidly documented research paper by Phi Alpha Theta member Stephanie Robker entitled "Louisiana Tech: The Building Boom of the 1930s." The state's National Register coordinator, after reading the paper and visiting the campus, concluded that a larger number of buildings than originally proposed appeared to be eligible. In short, it could easily be argued that what was significant was the 1930s building boom in its entirety, and not just some of the buildings. After consultation with National Park Service staff, it was decided to

use the multiple property format and the title "The 1930s Building Boom at Louisiana Tech." (The buildings are not grouped together in such a manner to be all included in a district.) Each of the 1930s buildings was researched, examined and photographed by the state's National Register coordinator. Ms. Robker's paper as well as old photos and other primary sources enabled the state staff to identify the 1930s buildings and evaluate integrity (see bibliography).

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