

Louisiana Tech's former Prescott Memorial Library (1926) is a brick Colonial Revival building located adjacent to the university's original main quadrangle. The one story building is set on a high basement capped with a cast concrete belt course. Despite the loss of its cupola and rooftop balustrade, the library makes a strong architectural statement.

The architects of the elegant, well-proportioned library drew upon various trends in eighteenth century American architecture. The building's brown and red brick resembles the textured effect found on colonial buildings where burnt headers were used. The Palladian Revival taste can be seen in the building's five-part articulation consisting of a central block with a pavilion to each side connected by a hyphen. The pavilions are set at right angles to the main block. This juxtaposition combined with gabled parapets in the Federal tradition on both the main block and end pavilions yields a particularly interesting massing.

The richly articulated main block has virtually identical front and rear elevations. Each has medium weight entablature with a denticular cornice and a handsome swan-neck doorway flanked by two large round arch windows. The windows are quite pronounced because of their size, their multiple panes of glass set above a panel, and keystones and end blocks in contrasting cast concrete. The recessed swan-neck doorways feature paneling, a modillion cornice, a dentil band, and an urn in the broken pediment. The only difference between the two elevations is the staircase. The one on the front of the building has a graceful curving stair to each side. The rear elevation has a simpler straight stair to each side.

The end pavilions are particularly well proportioned. The numerous windows on the main story are strongly articulated, featuring twelve panes to each sash, fairly thick frames, and a jack arch with a prominent keystone in cast concrete. A tablet with a swan neck pediment accents the gables of the end pavilions. The gables of the main block feature a fan form.

There have been the following alterations since construction:

1. As mentioned in the first paragraph, the library originally had a cupola and a rooftop balustrade (see attached). These features were removed sometime between 1946 and 1947, per photos in yearbooks.
2. The interior has been largely modernized, although it appears that it was always functional rather than decorative. Surviving are some of the wall surfaces and some of the openings with their simple surrounds.

Assessment of Integrity

The loss of such a handsome cupola is admittedly a notable one; however, the library is so strongly and intensively articulated that it can absorb the loss better than most. In short, it retains all the rest of its original character-defining features and they are quite numerous, including its striking five-part articulation, gabled parapets, great round arch windows, swan-neck doorways, twelve over twelve end pavilion windows, and various decorative accents. Also, it is worth noting that the library does not look as if it is missing something (as some buildings do when they have suffered a similar loss). As a consummate example of the Colonial Revival style of the 1920s, the former Prescott Memorial Library is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

SIGNIFICANT DATES:	1926
ARCHITECT/BUILDER:	Neild, Somdal & Neild, Architects
CRITERION:	C

The Prescott Memorial Library is locally significant in the area of architecture as a superior example of the Colonial Revival style within Lincoln Parish. In addition, it is one of few high-style, architect-designed buildings in the parish. The library was named in 1942 for Colonel A. T. Prescott, the first president of tech. Prescott made the original donation of books for a library housed at that time in a room in the school's main building.

Lincoln is a predominantly rural parish with Ruston, where Louisiana Tech is located, being the only town of any size. And with a population of about 7000 in 1940, it obviously was not a large urban center. The parish was first settled in the 1830s and '40s by individuals from the Upland South who built log structures. A second phase of settlement came in the late nineteenth century when the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Pacific was built across northern Louisiana and railroad towns such as Ruston came into existence. Today's historic building stock is almost entirely from the 1890 to 1940 period and consists mainly of low-key vernacular buildings representing the commercial Italianate (only two or three examples), the Queen Anne revival, the Colonial Revival, and the Bungalow styles. There are only about ten to twelve high-style, architect-designed buildings.

Among these, Prescott Memorial Library is a particularly convincing example of a distinct phase of the Colonial Revival. After World War I, the Colonial revival entered an academic phase in which architects designed buildings which actually resembled real colonial buildings. Some produced archaeologically correct copies while others borrowed from various periods of colonial architecture to produce buildings strongly evocative of the period. And, of course, this more scholarly phase of the Colonial Revival was given great impetus by the restoration work being undertaken by the Rockefeller Foundation at Colonial Williamsburg.

It is against this background that the main architectural significance of the Prescott Memorial Library emerges. It is a well-done, textbook example of the above described 1920s and '30s phase of the Colonial Revival, with the only competition being a handful of buildings at Louisiana Tech constructed in the 1930s. (These buildings clearly took their inspiration from the library and other buildings then on campus but since demolished.) The 1930s buildings are being nominated for their historical significance using the Register's multiple property format. Some of the 1930s buildings are more strongly styled than others, but in the opinion of the State Historic Preservation Office, none are as convincing and as consummate as the old library. The library is also significant within the overall context of the Colonial Revival in Lincoln Parish -- i.e., in all its phases and permutations. By way of contrast, almost all examples are fairly low-key residences with hesitant touches of the style -- usually a cottage with a one story Colonial Revival gallery. The only major examples, besides the buildings at Tech, are two houses with two story columnar galleries.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Lagniappe (Louisiana Tech yearbook), various issues in 1930s and '40s.

Pearce, Ruby B., Robinson, Sallie, and Graham, Helen, editors. *Alma Mater, 1895-1945: A Memorial History of Louisiana Polytechnic Institute*. n.p., 1945.

Personal communication with Robert E. Middleton, Manager Partner, Somdal Associates. Mr. Middleton, using firm records, was able to confirm that the firm of Neild, Somdal and Neild designed the library.

Lincoln Parish Historic Structures Survey, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.