

Louisiana Tech's Howard Auditorium (1939-40) is a huge three-part facility consisting of a Modernistic auditorium at the center with a sizable two story classroom building to each side. The classroom wings are in a low-key traditional neo-Williamsburg style more typical of other 1930s buildings at Louisiana Tech. Also, like other 1930s buildings on campus, the auditorium's red and brown brickwork produces a textured effect. The facility spreads across the south side of the campus' original quad. Howard has received only minimal alterations since construction on both the exterior and interior.

Howard Auditorium has a distinctive composition and massing. The flanking classroom wings, connected to the rear of the auditorium by two story hyphens, read as independent buildings, each under its own hip roof. Also, their facades do not face the same direction as the auditorium, but instead are at right angles to the auditorium facade (see aerial view). The auditorium culminates in a gently curving facade pierced by three massive square head openings. Each interior space is clearly articulated on the exterior. To the rear, towering above the rest of the building, is a hipped roof section marking the fly gallery. The auditorium space itself is a rectangular mass under a separate roofing system -- a flat roof with a skirt (see aerial view and overall view). The side walls of the auditorium are pierced with a band of five narrow vertical windows (apparently to enable multiple uses for the facility). Staircases on each side of the facade are marked by lower sections, each with a tall, massive opening like those on the facade. Also clearly articulated are one story hallways on each side of the auditorium leading to the previously mentioned hyphens. Noteworthy details on the exterior of the auditorium include panels in enameled aluminum above the major openings depicting a stylized musical form (perhaps a lyre), cast concrete surrounds emphasizing openings, and Modernistic light fixtures.

The classroom wings are reminiscent of small manor houses found in colonial Virginia. Distinguishing features include their overall form (i.e., a fairly unadorned hipped roof building, in this case with three small dormers front and rear) and certain details such as jack arches over the windows with prominent keystones and brown and red brick to provide a textured effect. Each classroom wing has three prominent cast concrete openings, one on the facade and one on each side. All are articulated as round arches with flanking pilasters and a crowning entablature. "Music" is inscribed in the entablature of the opening on the facade of one wing, while "Drama" is found on the facade of the other wing.

The interior of the auditorium (with originally a seating capacity of 2500 to 3000) is a *tour de force* of curving forms in the Streamlined Moderne taste. Curves and undulations are everywhere; there is seldom a straight line. Spreading across the front of the auditorium space is a linear lobby featuring the slight curve of the facade on one side and an undulating wall to mark the rear of the seating space. Above is a boldly curving ceiling. Regrettably, its original plaster surface has been covered in a modern aluminum material with a ribbed pattern, although the all important shape is still there. On each side of the lobby is a staircase set at a very slight angle (undoubtedly because of the curving facade wall). As the stair turns to ascend to the balcony the walls curve boldly. The staircase's brushed aluminum balustrade features a simple geometric pattern, culminating in an eye-catching spiral newel post.

The auditorium space is a particularly consummate interpretation of Streamlined Moderne curving forms. Its full impact is best experienced first-hand rather than via a narrative description. The ceiling swoops upward from the stage in a grand dramatic gesture. Multiple layers emphasize and carry the curving forms to the rear where there is a sinuous balcony balustrade. The walls at the side of the stage undulate in a marked fashion and the stage itself has an elaborate, boldly curving shape with curving steps to each side.

As would be expected, the interiors of the classroom wings are functional and mundane in comparison, although they are not without interest. For example, their hallways feature a curving form as they connect to the halls on the sides of the auditorium. Floors are of beige and brown terrazzo, and there is a tall wainscot done in cream colored tiles with a black tile trim. The

western wing consists of classrooms and offices off hallways, while the middle of the eastern wing is taken up with a small secondary auditorium with a simple curving proscenium.

Alterations since the building was completed in 1940 have been relatively minimal. They include:

1. As previously mentioned, the ceiling of the lobby has received a modern treatment. Also at this time new light fixtures were installed in the lobby.
2. The classroom wings retain their original character with the exception of celotex ceilings.
3. The auditorium has new seats.
4. The windows on the classroom wings have been replaced, and while the replacements replicate the six over six appearance of the originals, they have snap-in muntins.

Assessment of Integrity

When one considers the size of Howard Auditorium and the wealth of original character-defining features which survive, it is well preserved indeed. The auditorium building, easily the most significant part of the facility, is unchanged on the exterior and has received only one notable change on the interior -- the 1970s looking shiny aluminum covering on the lobby ceiling. While this is unfortunate, it is only one change, and very importantly, the significant aspect of the lobby ceiling survives -- its distinctive curving shape.

SIGNIFICANT DATES:	1939-40
ARCHITECT/BUILDER:	Neild, Somdal & Neild, Architects Nathan Wohlfeld, Contractor
CRITERION:	A, C

Howard Auditorium is of local significance in the area of education because it is an important component of a major chapter in Louisiana Tech's history, the great construction boom of the 1930s which increased the physical plant by one-third, including numerous major buildings. See the multiple property cover form "The 1930s Building Boom at Louisiana Tech" for a fuller statement of significance. Additionally, Howard Auditorium is of statewide architectural significance as a superior example of the Streamlined Modern taste. It is among about ten to twelve major examples of the style within Louisiana.

A distinct strand within the overall Modernistic movement, Streamlined Moderne has as its signature curving fluid forms. This sleek, sophisticated style which symbolized motion could be seen across America beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the early '50s -- from major urban examples (large institutional, such as Wright's Johnson Wax Building) to small diners. However, Louisiana for the most part remained architecturally conservative, and as a result, with some notable exceptions, the state is not regarded as a mecca for scholars and fans of Modernistic architecture, whether it be Art Deco or Streamlined Moderne. Of the latter style, there are some ten to twelve major examples. Major examples are defined as good-size buildings convincingly and intensively articulated in the style, in contrast to low-key buildings which might best be termed "hesitantly Streamlined Moderne." Of course, Howard Auditorium is among this handful of landmarks. The building's subtle slightly curving facade only begins to prepare the viewer for the multitude of boldly curving forms on the interior.

Historical Note

Howard Auditorium was completed in 1940 and a cost of \$540,536. It is named for Harry Howard, the college's first graduate (1897).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See multiple property cover form bibliography.