

Bastrop High School (1927 & 1930) is a sprawling two-story brick institutional building redolent of early Renaissance England (the Jacobean Period). It is located on a large tract in a mixed commercial/residential area near the downtown of the parish seat of Bastrop. The school looks much as it did when expanded in 1930, with alterations confined to a missing rear gable and some cosmetic deterioration on the interior.

Bastrop High was constructed in two stages. The original 1927 portion faces west with a central range of classrooms and offices, two entrances with pavilions and a pair of side wings extending to the rear. A high single story gymnasium appended at the middle of the rear gave the original building an "E" footprint (see Sanborn map enclosed). In 1930, due to continued population growth, the building virtually doubled in size (same architect, same style). A "C" shaped range of rooms was appended to the east to link with the original building (see map). This created a continuous rectangle of classrooms, offices and other spaces that completely surrounded the gymnasium. In its new condition, the gym was afforded light and ventilation by a pair of narrow light courts. A single new entrance pavilion was added in the center of the now longer north and south elevations. The new rear (east) elevation was given two entrance pavilions to echo the original main front.

The school is raised approximately three feet on a basement story that contains a cafeteria, service space and the boiler room whose stack rises above the building mass. Each of the two upper floors is anchored by a continuous rectangular, mostly double loaded, corridor. The interiors are for the most part unadorned (as was typical). They feature smooth plaster walls and ceilings, a slight wainscot, wood veneer floors, broad black boards, banks of six over six windows with transoms, bungalow looking paneled doors (also with transoms), and transoms set in the walls for ventilation. An exception to the foregoing is the handsome second story Elizabethan looking library in the 1930 expansion with its paneled effects, dark wood shelves and openwork beam ceiling.

The large gymnasium is entered from the first floor and descends to the basement with steps, bleachers and a basketball court. Its flat roof is more or less level with the first story classroom ceilings. The rest of the building is flat roofed too and set behind parapet walls on the school's four public elevations.

Bastrop High School is sparingly though convincingly articulated in the Jacobean style with red brick walls and detailing set off in contrasting white cast concrete. Each entrance pavilion has a great round vestibule arch with impost blocks resting on panels and quoins. Crowning the composition is an angular rooftop gable parapet with upward thrusting finials. Flanking the arched entrances are Baroque-style cartouches. Although these are not, in and of themselves, Jacobean features, they mark the place where figure sculpture would be in a real English Jacobean great house.

The bands of multi-pane classroom windows are particularly pronounced. They are set off by systems of decorative quoins – a feature often found in early seventeenth century English brick great houses (though for corners not windows). The bands of windows themselves are also important in this respect. Broad bands of windows were a common feature in early twentieth century American schools regardless of style. But the Jacobean is one of relatively few historic styles in which windows were conventionally grouped. (In other styles being revived in the early twentieth century windows typically appeared singly.) The heavy horizontal glazing bar setting off the window transoms further enhances the late medieval effect.

Each of the blank end pavilion walls of the west (principal) elevation is marked with a massive panel of decorative diapered brickwork. Finally, the "ancient building" aspect of Bastrop High is given additional emphasis by the red brickwork itself, which is laid up in various tones of lighter and darker red to give texture.

The building has been altered very little since the 1930 addition. One of the gable parapets on the rear elevation is missing. In addition, the flat roof is leaking in various places and there is some cosmetic internal water damage.

Significant Dates: 1927; 1930
Architect/Builder: J. W. Smith Associated (architect 1927 and 1930)
Criteria: A and C

Bastrop High School is of local educational significance as part of a major school building/expansion program in the 1920s necessitated by explosive population growth. Its opening in 1927 and expansion in 1930 improved the overall quality of education in Bastrop by relieving overcrowded conditions – a notable problem in the city during the period. As can be seen in the pages of the *Morehouse Enterprise*, the school, as well as other improvements of the era, were a considerable source of pride. Bastrop High is also of local significance as a major architectural landmark within the town.

Educational Significance:

The parish seat of Bastrop was founded when Morehouse Parish was created in 1844. It retained village status until 1909, when there was sufficient population to be designated a town, although still less than one thousand. This was to change, however, in the 1920s when the population exploded, due largely to the arrival of two huge paper mills (Bastrop Pulp and Paper in 1920 and Louisiana Pulp and Paper in 1925, both by 1927 part of International Paper and expanded). A small farming community rather suddenly became an industrial center, as the population more than quadrupled (from 1,216 in 1920 to 5,121 in 1930). Population continued to increase, although not as dramatically, in the 1930s. The figure for 1940 is 6,626.

All this, of course, literally changed the face of the town -- and all to the good boasted the *Morehouse Enterprise* in issue after issue. Pressure on the housing stock and infrastructure meant a veritable construction boom. The *Enterprise* was already reporting a housing shortage in September 1923, and that was before the town's second paper company, Louisiana Pulp and Paper, arrived on the scene. A survey of progress for 1923 included a million dollar addition to the Bastrop Pulp and Paper Company, the arrival of Southern Glass Company and two large carbon plants, as well as numerous continuing concerns and new fairly small employers. (The carbon plants were a byproduct of the discovery of a major gas field in the area in 1916.) The year 1925 saw particular growth when Louisiana Pulp and Paper was built and began operations. The June 1925 issue of the *Enterprise* referenced building permits for 100 residences, noting that the demand would only increase with the arrival in the fall of families for Louisiana Paper.

Along with all the new houses, new companies, street paving, etc. came a dramatic growth in the school physical plant. Bastrop began the decade with one school (for whites) -- a medium size, two story brick facility built in 1916. As was typical, it housed all grades. Between 1926 and 1930, three new schools were built (for a total of 4 in service), and two of these were enlarged.

With the opening of each school term in the mid to late 1920s the *Enterprise* reported upon increasing enrollment and strains on the physical plant. The candidate was already in the discussion stages in 1924 when a building committee was appointed. In September 1924, the *Enterprise* noted a "large increase" in attendance (projected total of 600) and that the employment of two or three additional teachers was "imperative." "Furthermore, the present overcrowded condition of the building [1916 school] and the continued growth of the town renders necessary the early construction of a new high school building."

The situation only grew worse with the arrival of Louisiana Pulp and Paper in the fall of 1925. In reference to the 1925-26 school year, the *Enterprise* reported a total attendance of nearly 700, and "if the same rate of increase is maintained as for the past two years, it will probably reach eight or nine hundred next year." The roughly 700 enrollment was already enough to cause the school board in September 1925 to institute a policy of half-day instruction for the primary grades (one half taught in the morning/the other half in the afternoon).

The much needed new school, the candidate, did not materialize as quickly as hoped for. Preliminary plans had been completed by May 1925. The architectural firm was J. W. Smith Architects of nearby Monroe. The *Enterprise* reported that a drawing of the proposed school was "prominently displayed in a show window at Snyder's store, where it is attracting much attention." On May 12, a "mass meeting" of citizens was called to present the proposal, and in July a bond issue was passed for \$225,000. Seven acres adjoining the existing school were to be purchased, and the existing school was to be converted to a grammar school, with high school grades in the new building. A contract was awarded in October 1925; it fell though; and in January 1926, the contract was awarded again, this time to P. Oliver and Sons of Lake Charles.

Students even weighed in on the need for a new school. A "High School Notes" column in the December 10, 1926 *Enterprise*, written by students, reads: "The new building is near completion. It is very pretty. The rooms are quite large, especially the library. All students are anxious to move into it. We hope to be in it by the first of the year or at least by midterm. The crowded condition in the old building makes it impossible for us to do our best work."

High school students found in their new "pretty" building nineteen quite spacious classrooms, a library, laboratories, home economics rooms, and a gymnasium. The auditorium in the adjacent older school served both.

But before very long enrollment increases rendered these two large buildings inadequate. An enrollment of roughly 700 in 1925 had increased to more than 1,000 in September 1927. We must have two new primary schools, urged the *Enterprise*. Voters responded by passing a bond issue in October, and the two new grammar schools opened in

September 1928. At the same time the paper reported an enrollment “larger than expected” in Bastrop schools (now 4 in number), which caused a shortage of textbooks. Some 1200 students enrolled the first day, with the number expected to reach 1400 by mid-term. Once again voters were asked to pass a bond issue – this time for expansion of the two-year-old high school and one of the brand new elementary schools. The *Enterprise* reported that temporary buildings were being used for the overflow.

The bond issue passed in June 1929 by an overwhelming majority, resulting in the already large high school being doubled in size in 1930-31 (using the same architect). The March 19, 1931 issue of the *Enterprise* carried a front page picture and article, bragging that the completion of the new unit “makes the Bastrop High School as modern and complete a plant as any in this section of the south.” The building now has 34 rooms, continued the reporter, including four modern laboratories, a large cafeteria, a gymnasium capable of seating more than 1,000, and “every modern convenience.” The four labs (two in the old part, two in the new) made available a separate laboratory for each of the four sciences taught at the school. Other amenities reported in the paper were built-in lockers (“a new feature”), three large rooms for the manual training department, two rooms for the commerce department (with the “latest equipment”), and two study halls. The new library garnered a whole paragraph of description, but it was the public address system that seemed to be of the greatest interest. (“One of the outstanding features of the Bastrop High School is what is called a public address system.” Then the reporter went on to explain how it all worked and the communication wonders it made possible.)

In short, there is no question that Bastrop had “arrived,” so-to-speak. Not only could its citizens boast the latest technological marvels in their schools, but the physical plant finally could meet the demand. And with all manner of classrooms, labs, and the like, students could now “do their best work.” If anything, the roughly 105,000 square foot high school was over-built for the immediate need. But education leaders had planned for the future, which is fortunate because Bastrop’s industrial base expanded in the 1940s (new paper related plants), and the population almost doubled in that decade (12,769 in 1950).

A school doubled in size in 1930 was able to educate high school students, without further expansion, until the middle of the 1955-56 school year. At that time students moved into a new school, and the candidate became a junior high. It served in this capacity until the late 1980s, then was used for various educational purposes for about another ten years. Today it is vacant. “Save our School” activists, working with the school board, are seeking funding sources for a new roof and exploring options for adaptive re-use. A National Register nomination at this juncture will be an important psychological boost for the effort because of the recognition value. Also, should a private developer be interested, National Register listing and the 20% tax credit would be critical.

Architectural Significance:

As noted previously, the parish seat of Bastrop was founded in 1844 and experienced great growth and prosperity in the early twentieth century, particularly the 1920s. The surviving historic building stock dates almost entirely to the twentieth century and is generally quite modest. With the exception of a few notable landmarks, the architectural heritage of Bastrop is characterized almost entirely by simple cottages, low-key folk bungalows, and unadorned twentieth century commercial buildings (almost all of which were covered by metal panels until the last two years). Architectural landmarks are few in number. They include: (1) the newly restored 1915 Beaux Arts courthouse; (2) the Gothic Revival Christ Episcopal Church (1897); (3) the Snyder House, a historic revival house combining English cottage massing with an overall Mediterranean character; (4) the Bastrop High School, and (5) the Classical Revival Methodist church. Two other buildings of note are the Rose Theatre, which has slight influences of the Arts and Crafts taste, and a vernacular Greek Revival galleried cottage. Sadly, other landmarks exist only in photos – for example, a grand Classical Revival city hall demolished in the 1970s.

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