

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Vernon Parish Courthouse (1910) is a stuccoed masonry neo-classical building with two principal stories and a third story cupola. It is located on a landscaped square in the Leesville central business district. Despite alterations, the building retains its National Register eligibility.

The essentially square building mass has four small wings which project diagonally at each of the corners. This creates something of an overall "X" shaped plan. Each side of the building has a four-column colossal composite order pedimented portico with relief work in the tympanum. The main entrance portico (which faces Third Street) and the corresponding rear portico are slightly larger than the two side porticoes. The front and rear porticoes also project further from the building than the other two. Windows and doors are plainly cut through the walls with almost no detailing. Each corner of the building is trimmed with quoins, and the entire building mass is surmounted by a full entablature and a parapet. The large hip roof culminates in a sizable Baroque domed cupola with a clock on each face.

The ground story has a cruciform hall plan with the courtroom space upstairs. As with most of Louisiana's old courthouses, the interior of the Vernon Parish Courthouse has been considerably modified over the years and does not contribute much to the building's architectural value. Nonetheless, it retains the following original features: (1) the paneled wainscotting in the major public spaces both upstairs and down, (2) the two original staircases with their heavy, paneled newel posts and decorative metalwork balustrades, (3) the decorative balustrades and other woodwork encompassing the legal bench, (4) the decorative frontispiece to the safe, (5) various interior doors and doorways, and (6) the blue and brown tile floors on the ground level.

Since construction the following changes have been made in the courthouse:

1. As previously mentioned, the interior has undergone many alterations including the installation of false ceilings and plywood paneling and the partitioning off of a portion of the courtroom.
2. In the 1970's a brick annex was built behind the courthouse. An enclosed passage was constructed from the rear courthouse entrance door to the annex which passes under the rear portico.
3. The original entrance doors have been replaced with glass doors.
4. Handicapped entrance ramps have been installed.

Assessment of Integrity:

Despite these changes, the courthouse retains the features (mentioned in Item 8) which establish its architectural significance. Moreover, the large annex hardly touches the original building. The classical courthouse stands forth from the annex and dominates the square.

Specific dates 1910
Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criterion C

The Vernon Parish Courthouse is locally significant in the area of architecture within the context of Vernon Parish. The Louisiana Comprehensive Historic Sites Survey has recorded eighty-nine 50+ year old structures in Vernon Parish, most of which are cabins and bungalows. From among this group the Vernon Parish Courthouse is by far the most architecturally pretentious and sophisticated. It followed the prevailing taste for neo-classical architecture in public buildings of the early-twentieth century. In doing so, it far outstripped the handful of substantial residences and large commercial buildings in the parish. It is one of the parish's largest buildings and it has the only fully articulated dome. Moreover, it is the only building to feature pedimented porticoes of any kind, let alone composite colossal order ones. Other significant features include its distinctive exterior shape, its use of quoins, which is unusual in the parish, and its parapets. Taken as a whole, the courthouse represents Vernon Parish's most distinguished work of historic architecture.

Major Bibliographical References

Louisiana Comprehensive Historic Sites Survey, Vernon Parish.

Brasseaux, Carl A., Conrad, Glenn R., and Robinson, R. Warren. The Courthouses of Louisiana. Lafayette, LA: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1977.