Remembering Our Roots

A look at historical Louisiana schools, past and present.

Source information for Louisiana historical schools.
Remembering Our Roots

Reminiscing is a pastime we all engage in from time to time. Remembering where we came from, the people we knew, and the places we’ve been connects us to our past and shapes our future.

In this year’s annual report, we step back in time to recall some of our oldest existing school buildings and their unique stories. Many of these schools are listed on the National Register of Historic Places maintained by the Division of Historic Preservation in the Louisiana Office of Cultural Development. Some are recognized for their architectural style; others for their historical or cultural significance.

More than physical structures, in many ways, these schools are sacred spaces that brought communities together and opened the doors of opportunity for generations of students. They are also important reminders that getting an education hasn’t always been easy—whether the obstacles to attending school were societal or geographical.

*Remembering Our Roots* celebrates some of our oldest gathering places for learning and the deep and lasting impact they have on us to this day.

Below, we provide photos, information, and source material for each of these historical schools located throughout the state.

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The Bayou Boeuf Elementary School holds major historical significance for the small, close-knit community in Lafourche Parish because it was the only elementary school in Bayou Boeuf for almost half a century. In the school's early days, students living across the bayou from the school had to travel by boat to attend class because there was no bridge to cross. Not only is Bayou Boeuf Elementary the quintessential little, red schoolhouse of early 20th century rural America, it is also Louisiana's oldest one-room school in continuous use.

Sources:

Booker T. Washington High School, built for African American students before integration, was called one of the most modern schools in the country. Centered in Shreveport’s largest African American neighborhood at the time, the school was the hub of the community and a symbol of hope and change. During the Civil Rights Movement, the school hosted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; became a center for peaceful demonstrations; and was the site of a notable confrontation between students and Shreveport Police after the Birmingham church bombing in 1963 that killed four young African American girls. Booker T. Washington High School is still in use today.

Sources:
Harahan Elementary School • Established 1926 • Harahan

At over 80 years old, Harahan Elementary School is a stunning example of early 20th century architecture thanks to the unique design of its entrance way. Most of Louisiana’s surviving school buildings from the 1920s have a central entrance leading to internal corridors. The Harahan Elementary School entrance, however, features a two-story domed rotunda with a large curving staircase. The state’s office of historic preservation notes that no other school in Louisiana has a comparable entrance, making Harahan Elementary one of a kind.

Sources:


Hungarian Settlement School • Established 1928 • Albany

The Hungarian Settlement School is a lasting reminder of the history and heritage of Hungarian immigrants in Livingston Parish. Hungarians were attracted to the area by the Charles Brackenridge Lumber Company, which advertised in Hungarian newspapers promising employment and land. The actual wooden structure of the school was built in 1908 and was known as Springfield School. In the late 1920s, it was moved to Hungarian Settlement and became the Hungarian Settlement School. Although a typical school for children during the day, the school played an important role as an adult education center in the evening, offering many classes related to naturalization. The Hungarian Settlement School is now the Hungarian Settlement Museum.

Sources:

When it opened in 1895, Louisiana Tech, then named Industrial Institute and College of Louisiana, was the only state-supported, four-year college in North Louisiana. Between 1933 and 1937, enrollment at Louisiana Tech surged by almost 60% with little additional state revenue to support the growth. Accreditation problems quickly arose because of the enrollment-funding gap. During this time, President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the New Deal—a series of social programs in response to the Great Depression. A massive building program, financed largely with New Deal funds, helped transform the school’s grounds into an impressive university campus appropriate for the size of its still-growing student body. There was never a period in the university’s history (1936-40) when so many large and important buildings were built within such a short period of time.

Sources:

McKinley High School was the first school in Baton Rouge built solely for the purpose of providing a high school education to African Americans. For many years, it was the only secondary school for African Americans within a 40-mile radius of the capital city. McKinley High School was considered extravagant compared to other African American schools in the state, which were typically very meager structures. The building now serves as the McKinley Alumni Center, hosting community events and preserving the history of the school.

Sources:
The Plaisance School has both state and national significance because it is one of the last remaining Rosenwald Schools in Louisiana. The Rosenwald rural school building program, started by Sears and Roebuck president and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, was a major initiative that sought to provide public education to African Americans in the early 20th century South. Out of 393 Rosenwald Schools built in Louisiana between 1914 and 1932, only two survive in recognizable form—one is the Plaisance School. Additionally, the Plaisance School is one of a very few Rosenwald Schools still in use as an actual school. It is now an elementary school. The Plaisance School remained the only public school for African Americans in Plaisance until the 1960s.

Sources:

Routhwood Elementary School • Established 1958 • Newellton

Built three years after the ground-breaking school desegregation case, Brown v. Board of Education (1954), Routhwood Elementary was the first school for African American students in Newellton, Louisiana. Prior to Routhwood’s construction, African American children in Newellton either attended school in local churches or were bussed 12 miles away to Tensas High School. Routhwood Elementary was integrated in 1970 following a court order requiring all area schools to be desegregated. Unlike other African-American schools of the 1950s, many of which were closed after integration, Routhwood Elementary remained open for three decades, educating all children.

Sources: