

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Calcasieu Parish Courthouse other names/site number

2. Location

street & number Ryan St. (corner of Kirby St.) city, town Lake Charles state Louisiana code LA county Calcasieu Parish code 019 zip code 70601

3. Classification

Table with 3 columns: Ownership of Property, Category of Property, and Number of Resources within Property. Includes checkboxes for private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal, buildings(s), district, site, structure, object, and resource counts.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official Leslie Tassin, LA State Historic Preservation Officer, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism Date October 2, 1989

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. determined eligible for the National Register. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper (handwritten) Date of Action (handwritten 11/2/89)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Classical Revival
Italian Renaissance

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete
walls brick
roof tar
other copper
terra cotta

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Calcasieu Parish Courthouse (1912) is a monumental brick and terra cotta building of two principal stories. Located on a well treed public square in Lake Charles, the building is derived from neo-classical sources. Various alterations and additions made since construction are regrettable, but they have not diminished the courthouse's architectural status within Lake Charles and hence its National Register eligibility.

The plan is very axial with a central entrance under a colossal pedimented Roman-Doric portico. All of this is surmounted by a faceted copper dome on a drum. The building takes the form of a very stunted cruciform shape with the entrance at one end of the cross. Inside the entrance vestibule is an imperial staircase which leads to the principal courtroom on the second floor. The first story is served by a pair of wide axial corridors which meet in a squarish, rather abbreviated rotunda. This area has a flat ceiling, entablature-like beams, and four free-standing Tuscan columns. The columns and the accompanying pilasters are ornamented with small lion's heads on the capitals. This area, and many other parts of the first story, feature numerous egg and dart moldings.

The main staircase, which is adjacent to the entrance, is ascended back to front. It features marble treads, steel term-styled newel posts and oeil-de-boeuf motifs set in its openwork balusters. This imperial stair ascends to the main courtroom area, which is the building's most unusual feature.

The central courtroom, a large squarish space with rounded corners, is completely surrounded by a wide access corridor. It is lit from above through a series of Roman lunettes which form part of a large Roman lantern protruding one story above the rest of the building. This lantern is not readily apparent from the street, being obscured by a decorative parapet wall and roof-top urns. It is this lantern which supports the copper drum and dome. The dome structure, which is smaller in area than the lantern, contains a second interior dome which forms the uppermost part of the main courtroom space. This saucer shaped second dome is no longer visible from within the courtroom, having been covered by a false ceiling.

The central courtroom is three bays on a side with curved corners, each of which contains a curved ear molded window looking out into the encircling access corridor. There are also sets of ear molded windows on the sides of the courtroom which also look out into the corridor. Each bay is marked by a set of Mannerist superimposed pilasters surmounted by double consoles. Here too, egg

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Continuation Sheet

Calcasieu Parish Courthouse, LA

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and dart moldings are liberally used. The room's paneled entablature is surmounted by a massive cove mold into which the Roman lunette lights fit in a manner resembling groin vaulting. Each "vault" is separated by a decoratively paneled strip. Overall, the courtroom has a rich and sumptuous character.

The exterior features a rusticated brick base, a terra cotta water table, a colossal piano nobile and a full terra cotta entablature with a balustrade and urns. The aforementioned lantern has a terra cotta balustrade of its own, the only part of the lantern which is evident from the street. This second balustrade adds to the building's overall rich Beaux Arts effect. This effect is enhanced still further by the oversized Renaissance window and door surrounds, also of terra cotta. They, together with the many other architectural members, yield a rather more flamboyant effect than one would have found on a real Renaissance building.

A noteworthy detail is the terra cotta tympanum of the entrance portico. This features a prominent bas relief pelican flanked by bas relief sheaves of wheat and corn.

Alterations

Aside from the covering of the dome, the courthouse has undergone the following major alterations:

1. A pair of two story side wings have been added which are noticeable mostly on the rear elevation. Various doors and passageways have been installed in the old part of the courthouse to gain access to these wings.
2. The ancillary courtrooms which surround the main courtroom have been variously modernized with alterations such as lowered ceilings and new paneling.
3. Glass partitions have been inserted on the first floor which partially obscure the original axial corridors.
4. Two small areas in the rear axial corridor on the first story have been partitioned off.
5. Fire doors have severed the axial view from the staircase to the downstairs "rotunda."

CONTINUED

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Continuation Sheet**

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6. A similar set of fire doors has severed the view from the upper part of the stairhall into the access corridor which encircles the main courtroom.

7. The rear elevation has been fitted with a large metal awning.

Assessment of Integrity:

Despite these admittedly significant alterations, the principal architectural features of the courthouse still stand forth. Fortunately, the large wing additions are set mainly to the rear, and thus the impressive front, with its colossal portico and dome, still dominates the downtown area. Most of the interior alterations have been made in secondary spaces. The principal courtroom remains almost entirely intact. The shallow dome is also still intact above its covering. Finally, the doors and glass partitions which block certain interior views have not destroyed the plan or the arrangement of spaces and are easily reversible changes. In summation, the features which establish the courthouse's eligibility (its front and the principal courtroom area) still make a powerful impression on even the casual observer.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

architecture
politics/government

Period of Significance

1912
1912-1939

Significant Dates

1912
1912-1939

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Favrot and Livaudais

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Calcasieu Parish Courthouse is architecturally significant on the local level within the context of Lake Charles. This significance has three aspects, two of which are interrelated: (1) It is an important work of a high style practitioner. (2 and 3) It is the city's finest example of the neo-classical influence, and as such, it is also the city's grandest building. The courthouse is also of local significance in the area of politics/government because it was the focal point of parish governmental/political history from its completion in 1912 through 1939 (the Register's 50 year cutoff for significance).

Architectural Significance:

There is no doubt that of the many architectural styles devised over the ages, the neo-classical influence possesses the qualities of grandeur and monumentality to the greatest degree. There is also no doubt that of the many hundreds of 50+ year old buildings in the regional commercial center of Lake Charles, the neo-classical ones are the grandest. This is true be they soberly Colonial Revival or opulently Beaux Arts. The city has numerous examples of the Queen Anne Revival and bungalow styles, along with Gothic Revival and Mission, and while these may be striking, evocative, or elaborate, they are not particularly grand. The grandest neo-classical residences feature two story paneled columns, rather like a latter-day version of the Greek Revival peripteral mode. There are also some residences with colossal pedimented porticos, and while these are impressive, their scale is domestic. Compared to these, the parish courthouse is a major landmark. It is huge and richly ornamented with terra cotta. More importantly, it features Lake Charles' only example of a colossal pedimented portico surmounted by a dome.

In addition, the courthouse represents the work of the prominent New Orleans firm of Favrot and Livaudais. Although no specific study has ever been done on this firm, there is general agreement that it was a high style, competent, professional group of architects and that it was extremely prominent in the early twentieth century. Practicing the historicism which was then in vogue, it grew

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Brasseaux, Carl A., Conrad, Glenn R., and Robison, R. Warren. The Courthouses of Louisiana. Lafayette: University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1977.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property @ 3 acres

UTM References

A

1	5	4	7	9	0	0	0	3	3	4	3	6	6	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

C

Zone			Easting					Northing						

B

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D

Zone			Easting					Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description Please refer to enclosed sketch map.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification Boundary lines follow property lines along the east, north and west sides. They cut in closely along the south side to exclude various modern buildings on the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title National Register Staff

organization Division of Historic Preservation date August 1989

street & number P. O. Box 44247 telephone 504-342-8160

city or town Baton Rouge state LA zip code 70802

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Continuation Sheet

Calcasieu Parish Courthouse, LA

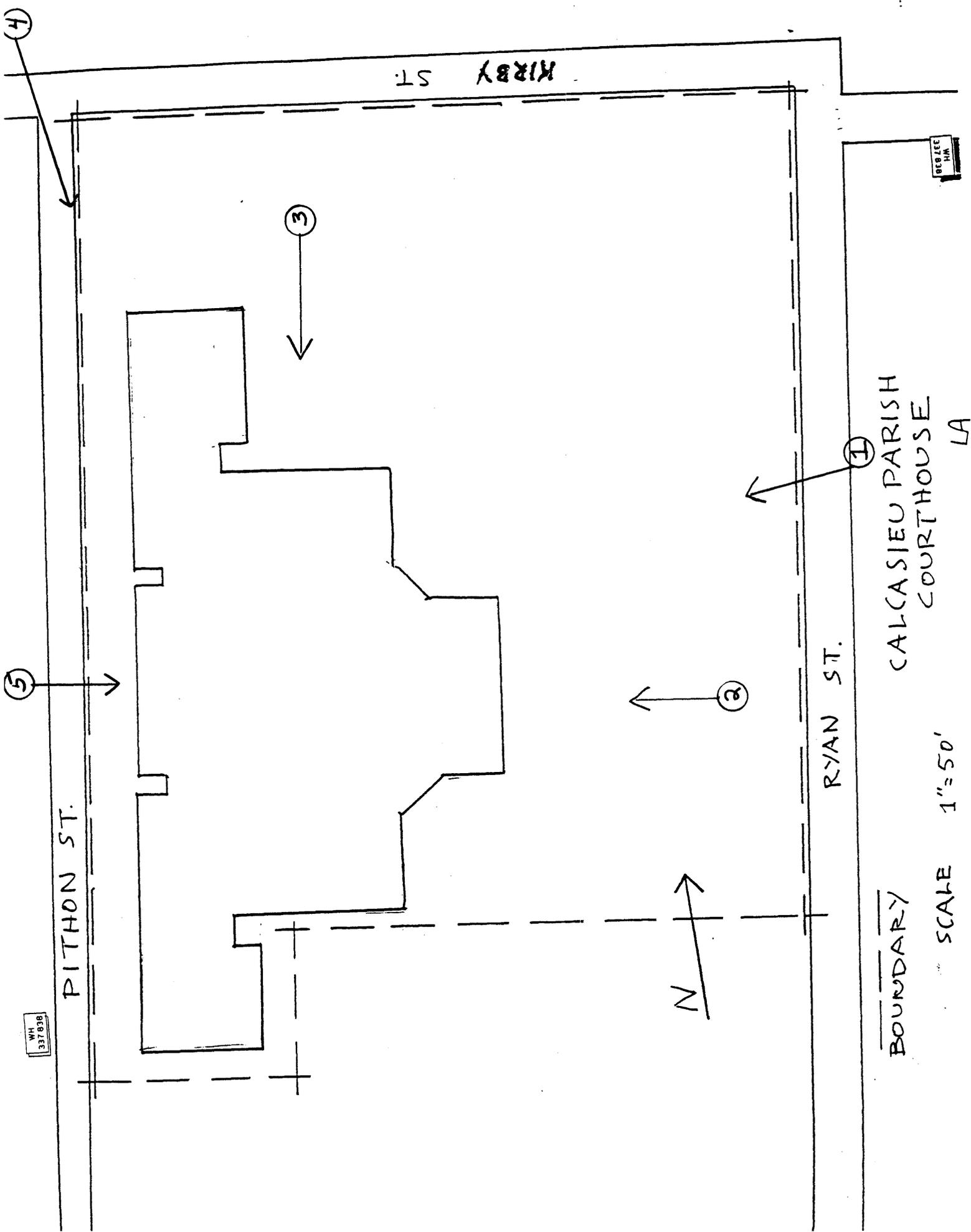
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to be perhaps the largest architectural firm in New Orleans, the state's largest, most cosmopolitan urban center. For many years Favrot and Livaudais and Emile Weil vied for business across Louisiana. It is an open question as to which of these firms ultimately had the larger practice, but there is no question that they were the two major architectural firms in early twentieth century New Orleans. Favrot and Livaudais' best known works include the Hibernia Bank Building and the Cotton Exchange Building, both of which are landmarks in the New Orleans central business district. The firm also designed numerous public buildings, including courthouses, schools and libraries, across the state.

After the fire of 1910, Favrot and Livaudais were hired to build a new city hall and parish courthouse. In the next two decades they received various other major commissions, including a Roman Catholic cathedral, a neo-classical bank, and various schools and mansions. Of these, there is no doubt that the courthouse is the most visually prominent and monumental. It also features the most complex and unusual plan, with its encircling corridor and Roman lantern lit principal courtroom.

Historical Significance:

Because of its very function, the Calcasieu Parish Courthouse was by definition the focal point of the parish's governmental/political history. When Lake Charles became the parish seat in 1852, "Imperial Calcasieu" was quite a large parish. The year the present courthouse was completed, the parish shrunk to its current size when Jeff Davis, Allen, and Beauregard parishes were created. (Cameron had been carved from southern Calcasieu and western Vermilion in 1870.) The act creating these three parishes was signed on June 12, 1912, and the courthouse was completed on July 2. Although the grand new courthouse presided over a smaller empire, it was the centerpiece of parish government during a critical time as the economy shifted from dependence on lumber to one that was more diversified and industrialized. The climax came in the early '20s when the parish's only sizable town, Lake Charles, decided to finance locally a badly needed deep water port. The parish governing body, the police jury, called a special election in 1922 and a bond carried at the polls. The port opened in 1926 and launched Lake Charles as a major industrial center.



KIRBY ST.

3

1

CALCASIEU PARISH
COURTHOUSE
LA

RYAN ST.

2

N

SCALE 1" = 50'

BOUNDARY

4

5

PYTHON ST.

WH
337838

BCB LEE
HM