

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Plaisance School

Other Name/Site Number: Plaisance Rosenwald School

2. LOCATION

Street & Number 3264 Hwy 167

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Plaisance

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: St. Landry Code: 097

Zip Code: 70570

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: Statewide: X Locally:

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker Deputy SHPO, Dept of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

January 13, 2004 Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 2

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. 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 Keeper: Daniel J. Urie
Date of Action: 8/23/04

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property
Private:
Public-Local: X
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property
Building(s): X
District:
Site:
Structure:
Object:

Number of Resources within Property
Contributing
1

Non contributing
buildings
sites
structures
objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 3

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: education Sub: school
Current: education Sub: school

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: no style

Materials:

Foundation: brick
Walls: weatherboard
Roof: asphalt
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Plaisance School is a one story frame building sheathed in clapboards. It was constructed in 1920 under the Rosenwald Rural School Building Program (see Part 8). Like most Rosenwald schools across the South, it is a utilitarian “no style” building. Located in the small rural community of the same name, the school has remained in continuous educational use since its construction over 80 years ago. It is now on the edge of a circa 1960 campus of one story brick veneer buildings. Because the school has been in constant use, there have been various alterations, some notable. But despite these alterations, the school retains sufficient integrity to convey its significance in the history of black education. Its importance is underscored by the extremely low survival rate of Rosenwald schools in Louisiana.

Rosenwald schools were built to a variety of standardized plans. The candidate is one of the four-teacher models. Wider than it is deep, the building has a fairly low pitch gable end roof with exposed rafters (as one would typically see in bungalows). Until very recently, the staff of the Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation had no reason to question the authenticity of the roofline. It looked so much like the typical Rosenwald school. The various models and buildings shown in Rosenwald Fund photos at Fisk University were typically of the gable end variety (perhaps as much as 75-80%). As this nomination approached the final stages of preparation, the Division staff was shown an early photo of the school that, most surprisingly, showed a hip roof with a slight kick at the eaves (see attached). Former graduates said the roofline was changed to the present gable end configuration in about 1960. The present gabled porch at the center replaced what was originally a gabled porch, but one with a steeper pitch and a slight kick at the eaves.

The Plaisance School retained its original windows until sometime in the 1990s (see attached early 1980s photo). A band of six, six-over-six windows was located on each side of the façade and rear elevations (to provide ample light for the four classrooms). The side elevations were without windows. (The blackboards are located here.) A single six-over-six window was located to each side of the front door. While the window frames survive (both inside and out), the window sashes on the façade have been replaced

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 4

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

with modern metal windows with five horizontal panes; four on the south side were enclosed when the school was air-conditioned for the first time in the 1990s. An identical treatment is at the rear (i.e., one side a band of replaced sashes, the other side with four enclosed).

The floorplan consisted of two back-to-back classrooms on each side. The central section contained a narrow hall at the very front with a small office to each side (corresponding to the previously mentioned single windows flanking the entrance). The narrow hall led to a wide circulation space between the two rear classrooms. Much of this survives, with the following exceptions: (1) The wall between the two classrooms on the south side has been removed. (2) The wide circulation space at the rear center has been subdivided. (3) A low partition wall has been added in one corner of a classroom to create a separate space.

At one time the school had a rear wing at the center. It is known to have been there in 1950 (per the recollections of a former teacher). Whether the rear wing was original or an addition cannot be documented at present, although one suspects the former. Rosenwald Fund Floor Plan No. 4 for a four-teacher school shows the candidate's floor plan plus an auditorium wing placed at the center of the rear (see attached).

The original interior sheathing on both the walls and ceiling was beaded board. This treatment survives unaltered in one of the small offices. Elsewhere, while the ceilings retain their original height, they are covered in bagasse panels. Walls are covered in either stained plywood panels, or on the south side in celotex tiles. (This now quite large space was created when a wall between two classrooms was removed, as noted above. It is used for band practice – hence the acoustical tiles.)

Surviving original visible details on the interior (besides the walls and ceiling of the one office) include blackboard frames, interior transom windows in the two northern classrooms, and various doors.

Additional exterior alterations include the replacement of the front door, the placement of a flat roof metal breezeway on the north side of the façade to provide access to an adjacent building, and a metal covered area that abuts the northern side elevation at the rear.

Assessment of Integrity:

There is no denying that the Plaisance School has undergone notable alterations since its construction. But within the context of Rosenwald schools in Louisiana, what is more remarkable is the fact that the Plaisance school has survived at all, let alone with much of its original character and fabric intact. Generally Rosenwald schools were abandoned in more modern times as new brick schools became available for African-Americans. They then fell victim either to outright demolition, demolition by neglect, or incorporation into a modern structure. As explained in Part 8, 393 Rosenwald schools were built in Louisiana. Today, there are only two known survivors that retain any integrity, and the candidate is the only one in its original location -- in the same community it was built to serve and still in educational use. (The staff of the LA SHPO occasionally hears of a surviving Rosenwald school, only to find a modern-looking building – i.e., a severe loss of integrity).

The candidate has not only survived but has retained its overall form, general appearance and much (if not a majority) of its historic fabric. In regard to historic fabric, the school retains its original weatherboards. Surprisingly, the exterior has not been covered with brick or synthetic siding. And while there have been alterations to the bands of windows (as explained above), over half of the original window sashes survive (on both the exterior and interior.) Even with the alterations, the window pattern is still

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 5

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

unmistakenly that of a school. Other original features include the pattern of a front door with a window to each side, side elevations without windows (where blackboards are located), the blackboards themselves, various doors, the interior transoms between the two northern rooms, and the sheathing in one room. (The other sheathing survives behind modern coverings.) As an extremely rare survivor within Louisiana of what the National Trust for Historic Preservation has identified as an "endangered" category of fragile resources, the Plaisance School is an important Register candidate to convey the contributions of the Rosenwald Fund to black education in Louisiana during the era of segregation.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National
Register Criteria: A X B__ C__ D__

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions): NA A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__

Areas of Significance: education; ethnic heritage (black)

Period(s) of Significance: 1920-1953

Significant Dates: 1920

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: unknown

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 6

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Plaisance School is of state significance in the areas of education and African-American heritage because it is a very rare survivor to represent the most ambitious school building program in the state for black children in the early twentieth century. Out of 393 Rosenwald schools built in Louisiana between 1914 and 1932, there are only two known survivors (at least in recognizable form) – the candidate and a school moved recently to Donaldsonville. The period of significance spans from the year of construction (1920) to the present Register fifty year cutoff (1953).

Termed “the largest school building program for African Americans in the South since Reconstruction,” the Rosenwald Fund’s benefactor was Julius Rosenwald of Chicago, president of Sears, Roebuck and Company. While Rosenwald provided the all important funding, the program was actually the brainchild of famed African-American educator, Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Washington had already established several rural schools near Tuskegee when in 1913 he sought Rosenwald’s permission to use \$2,800 remaining from a gift to Tuskegee to construct six more schools. Rosenwald visited the “model” rural schools, was impressed with what he saw, and soon provided funding for an additional 100 schools in Alabama. Named the Julius Rosenwald Rural School Building Program, the work expanded to other states by 1915. It operated out of Tuskegee until 1920, when an independent office was established in Nashville. Each state hired an African-American Rosenwald building agent. By the time the fund closed in 1932, over 5,300 schools had been built in 15 states at a total cost of \$28.4 million. One in every five rural schools for blacks in the South was a Rosenwald school. (The ratio was higher in Louisiana – 1 in 4.)

The Rosenwald Fund provided matching grants to construct school buildings, teacher cottages and/or shops. Schools were built to a variety of standardized plans provided by the fund, ranging from small one and two teacher units to the largest, which housed 7 teachers. The school plans recommended proper site orientation, construction materials, finishes and furniture. Rosenwald schools were almost entirely of wood frame construction. Most were very plain, with no attempt at styling. A minority featured modest Bungalow or Colonial Revival details.

The Rosenwald Fund came with numerous guidelines and requirements, including minimum school year requirements and local financial support for matching grants. Essentially the schools were public-private partnerships with the major players being the Rosenwald Fund, local school authorities, and the black community. The sites and buildings of all schools aided by the fund had to be the property of the local school board. To receive aid, the people of the community in question had to secure a cash match, whether it be from school funds, private contributions or a combination thereof. Labor, land and material could be counted toward the match.

While the Rosenwald Fund envisioned financial support from local whites, their contribution was small across the board (and this is to be expected given a number of factors). Of the \$28.4 million total, the Rosenwald Fund provided \$4.3 million, blacks \$4.7 million, local governments \$18.1 million (64%), and whites 4%. Given their generally impoverished state, for rural Southern blacks to have raised \$4.7 million is quite remarkable. Quite simply, the desire for education was that fervent. From all over the South Rosenwald agents reported stories of great sacrifice and ingenuity in raising funds.

There was no question that the need for decent school buildings was great. Not since short-lived

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 7

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

experiments in Reconstruction had there been such an ambitious program for African-American education. Louisiana's story by and large parallels that of many a Southern state. After Reconstruction, when white Democrats regained control of the state, retrenchment was the watchword of the day. Funding for public education in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century was insufficient for even a single school system, let alone the dual system mandated by segregation. In short, white schools received little funding and schools for blacks even less. The situation was at its worst in rural areas.

So-called public schools for blacks in Louisiana were typically a public-private effort, with school authorities providing some funding and local sources (often churches) providing a building and other resources. Schools were often located in churches or lodge buildings, and teachers were poorly qualified. As T. H. Harris, State Superintendent of Education from 1908-1940, observed in his autobiography: "In most cases Negro churches were used for schoolhouses and the only equipment in these churches were the benches used for church services. The school term was from two to four months and the teachers were uneducated and wholly unequipped to instruction children."

And while public funding for black education increased in the early twentieth century, it remained most definitely a separate but unequal system. In the first three decades of the twentieth century public education for whites improved dramatically as "modern brick schools" were built in town after town. But such fine facilities were virtually unknown to blacks. Funding statistics per child tell the tale. A September 1918 Board of Education report observed that in 23 parishes less than one dollar was spent on each black child, while in the same parishes between fourteen and twenty-nine dollars was spent on each white child.

The gap was filled in many private ways. In South Louisiana, the Catholic Church provided parochial schools. And, most fortunately, educating southern blacks became the focus of various northern philanthropic foundations, with huge sums of money being poured into the cause. The largest of these by far, indeed a name synonymous with black education in the rural South, was the Rosenwald Fund. Rural Louisiana received its first Rosenwald school in 1916, and by 1932, there were 393 in the state. Of the fifteen targeted states, there were only four with more schools funded than Louisiana (Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas). Given the breadth of the project in Louisiana, it is little wonder that the name Rosenwald is a special one to older African-Americans. Many recall a picture of Rosenwald next to that of Washington and Lincoln being common in the schools, and the annual Rosenwald Days held at namesake schools throughout the South are well documented.

The official Rosenwald Fund archives, held at Fisk University in Nashville, show that Louisiana's 393 schools (roughly one of every 4 rural black schools) were located all over the state and were in various shapes and sizes. The funding breakdown of the 393 schools plus 31 teacher cottages and 9 shop buildings was: \$457,318 from blacks, \$70,407 from whites, \$855,781 from public sources, and \$338,000 from the Rosenwald Fund. The schools had a combined capacity of 51,255 pupils. Distribution ran from 5 or 6 per parish (county) to as many as 37 (Caddo Parish). There were generally fewer schools per parish in heavily Catholic South Louisiana, particularly in the Mississippi River parishes. But even Catholic areas needed Rosenwald schools. (There were not enough parochial schools, and there were Protestants in need of better schools.) Catholic St. Landry Parish, where the candidate is located, had five Rosenwald schools.

Tragically, Louisiana has lost almost all of its Rosenwald schools. Except for two known survivors, they exist solely in photographs housed at Fisk and in the memories of African-Americans of a certain age. The Division of Historic Preservation has been looking for Rosenwald school survivors for two decades, on and off. The two known to survive in recognizable form are the candidate and a school recently moved to

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 8

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Donaldsonville (to save it from demolition by neglect). The candidate is quite well documented as a Rosenwald School. The school now in Donaldsonville has not been documented as such, but it looks exactly like one of the Rosenwald models.

The Plaisance school's survival (quite remarkable given the foregoing statistics) is undoubtedly due to its continued use for education. Rosenwald fund records show that it was built in the 1920-21 school year at a total cost of \$4500, with the fund providing \$1200; blacks raising \$3,100; and school authorities and whites contributing a paltry \$100 each. The foregoing lopsided breakdown graphically illustrates the desire for education at great sacrifice. Keep in mind that this was a rural population without a middle class. People making contributions would have been sharecroppers and tenant farmers for the most part.

The candidate remained the only public school for blacks in Plaisance until circa 1960, when the adjacent brick facility was constructed. During most of the historic period (1920-53), grades 1-6 or 1-7 were taught there. In the late 1940s Plaisance was able to secure high school classes, some of which were apparently taught in the candidate as well as a couple of satellite buildings added at that time (no longer extant).

Today the Plaisance school is one of very few surviving Rosenwald schools still in their original use in the fifteen states where the Rosenwald Fund operated. States across the South are seeking to identify and recognize Rosenwald schools. In fact, Rosenwald Schools are now "high on the radar screen" among preservationists in general. Sadly far more have been lost than survive. In 2002 the National Trust for Historic Preservation placed Rosenwald Schools on its 11 Most Endangered List and launched a Rosenwald School initiative to help identify and preserve the relatively few known survivors.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 9

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Anderson, John D. The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935. University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Embree, Edwin R. and Waxman, Julia. Investment in People: The Story of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Harper and Brothers, 1949.

Mansell, Jeff and Brinkley, Trina. "The Rosenwald School Building Fund and Associated Buildings." This is a National Register multiple property "cover" form for Alabama.

Plaisance school historic photos (2). Copies in National Register file.

Porter, Betty. "The History of Negro Education in Louisiana." M.A. thesis, Department of History, LSU, 1938.

Rosenwald Fund Archives, Fisk University, Nashville, TN.

Rosenwaldplans.org. This, the official Rosenwald School website, reproduces various primary sources, including the school plans.

Special Report on Negro Education in Louisiana, Session 1923-1924." Bulletin No. 104, Louisiana State Department of Education, November 1924.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- ___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
___ Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
___ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
___ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State Agency
___ Federal Agency
___ Local Government
___ University
___ Other (Specify Repository):

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Plaisance School, St. Landry Parish, LA

Page 10

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreeage of Property: less than an acre

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 583160 3387480

Verbal Boundary Description: See attached sketch map.

Boundary Justification: As noted in Item 7, the Plaisance school is now on the edge of a non-historic campus. Hence boundaries were chosen to encompass the historic school (the significant resource) while eliminating less than 50 year old buildings to the north.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: November 2003

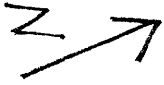
PROPERTY OWNERS

St. Landry Parish School Board
P. O. Box 310
Opelousas, LA 70571-0310

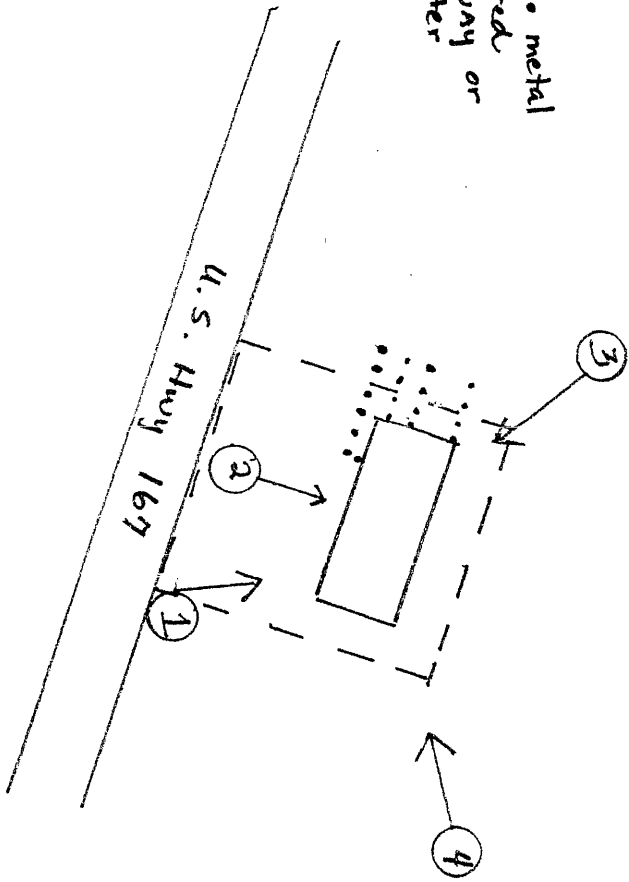
Plaisance School
St. Landry Parish, LA

1" = 40'

BOUNDARY

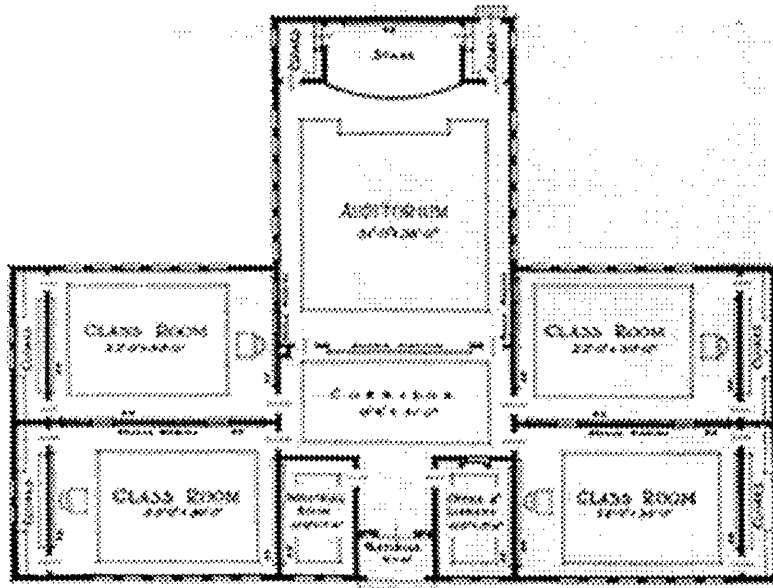
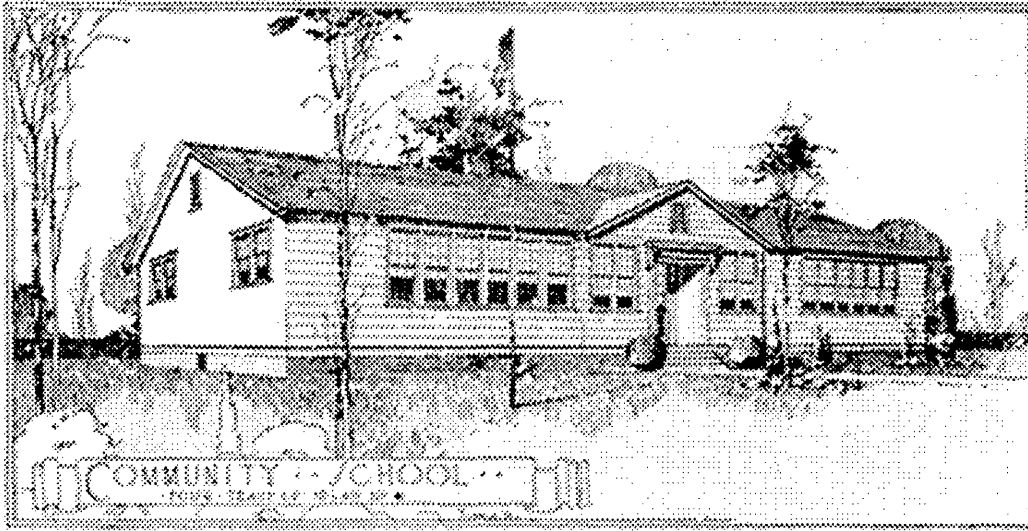


••• metal
covered
walkway or
shelter

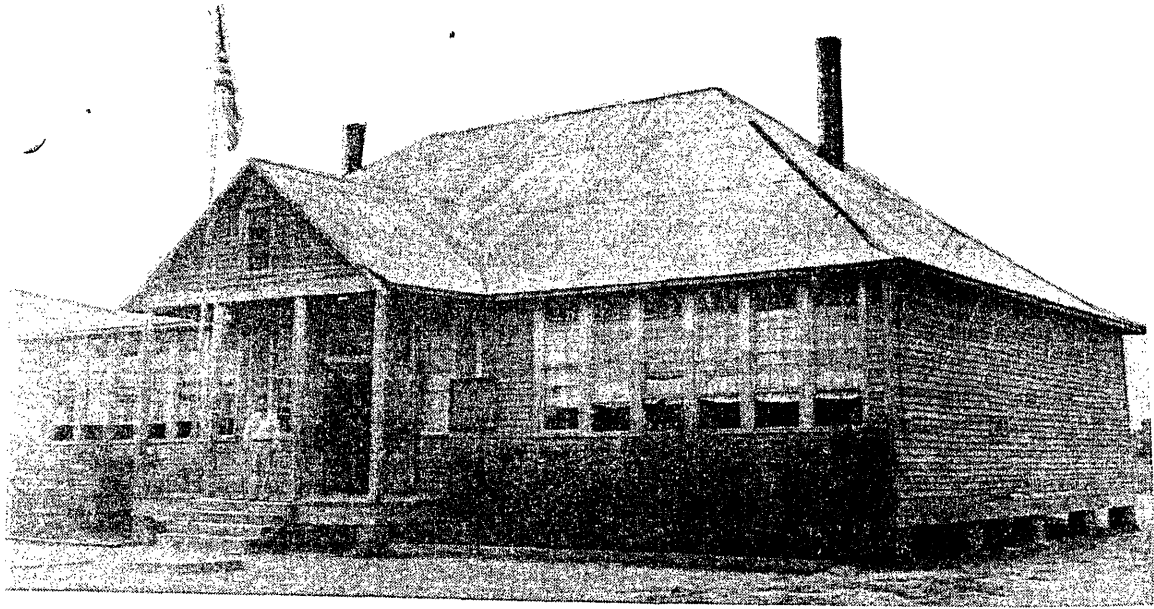


Back to School Plans

Four Teacher Plan E/W with Auditorium
Rosenwald Foundation



FLOOR PLAN NO. 4
FOUR TEACHER COMMUNITY SCHOOL
TO FACE EAST OR WEST ONLY



Plaisance School
original roofline and porch

St. Landry Parish, LA

Plaisance School
St. Landry Parish, LA



c. 1980

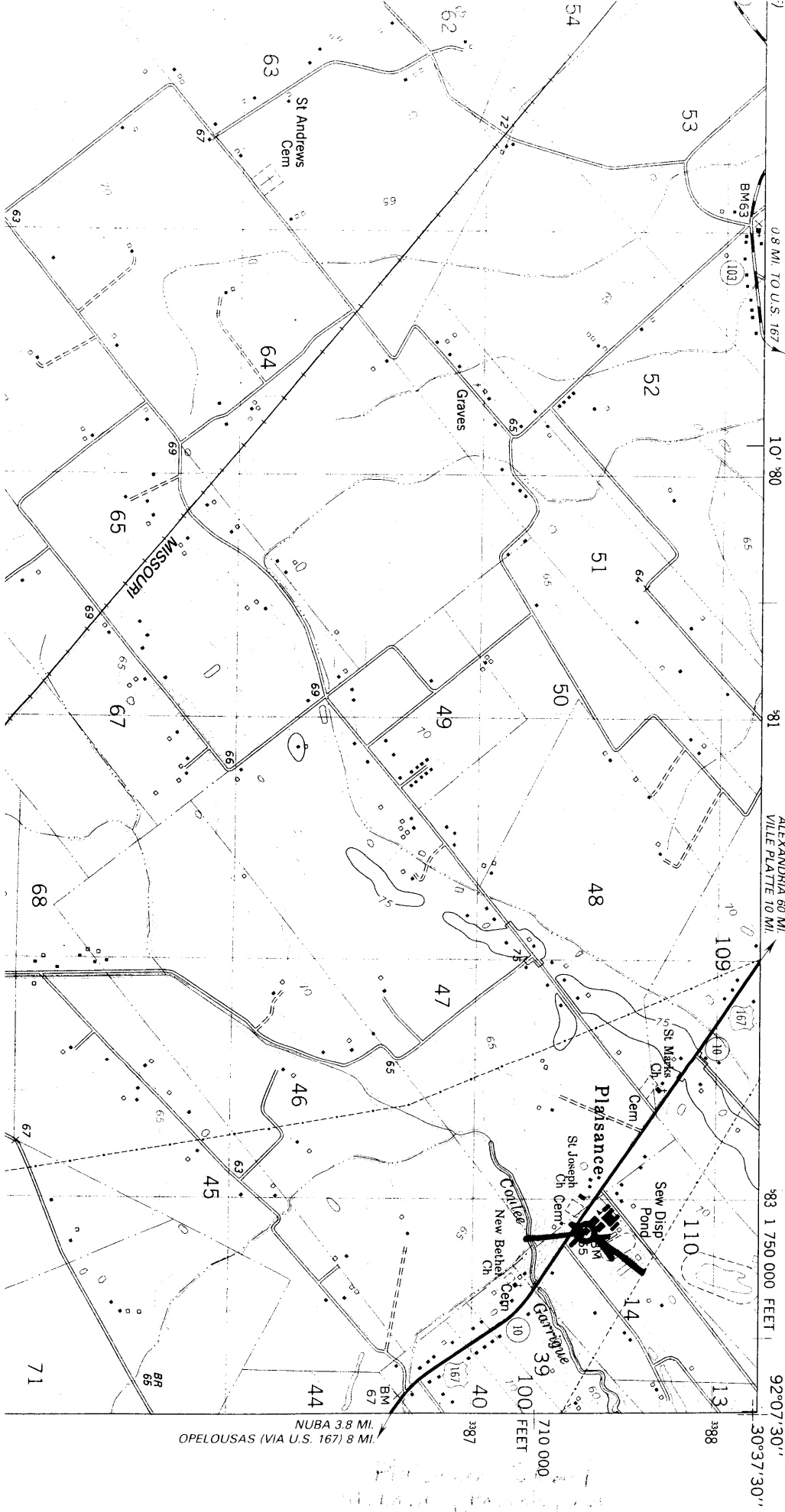


LOUISIANA
PUBLIC WORKS
ENGINEERING

LAWTELL QUADRANGLE
LOUISIANA
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
SW/4 OPELOUSAS 15' QUADRANGLE

SCALE 1:750,000 FEET

73°45'11" N
(BEGGS)



NUBA 3.8 MI.
OPELOUSAS (VIA U.S. 167) 8 MI.

0.8 MI. TO U.S. 167

ALEXANDRIA 60 MI.
VILLE PLATTE 10 MI.

83 1 750 000 FEET

92°07'30"
30°37'30"

710 000
100 FEET