

983

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 1

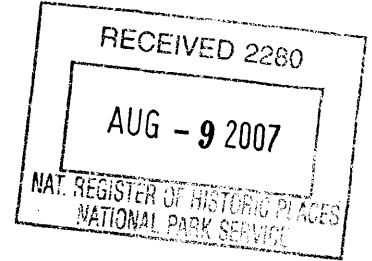
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Old Brusly High School Gymnasium

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 601 North Kirkland Drive

Not for publication: NA

City/Town Brusly

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: West Baton Rouge Code: 121 Zip Code: 70719

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: ___ Locally: X

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

8/8/07
 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

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge 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

Date of Action

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
sites
structures
objects
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

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge 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: Recreation and Culture Sub: Sports Facility
Current: Recreation and Culture Sub: Sports Facility

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Moderne

Materials:

Foundation: Concrete
Walls: Stucco over Concrete
Roof: Metal
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Old Brusly High School Gymnasium (1937) stands facing River Road within an educational campus sited on the west bank of the Mississippi River just north of the small West Baton Rouge Parish town of Brusly. Located at the edge of a residential neighborhood, the concrete building is a reserved example of the Moderne style. Despite some alteration, the gym retains its visual integrity and National Register eligibility.

The formwork for the poured-in-place walls of the original rectangular gym was constructed with long slender wooden boards, the lines of which are still visible on the exterior and interior. Elements of Moderne styling are found mostly on the gym's façade, which is composed of several geometric parts. These include:

1. a central, rectangular, one-story portico with three bays and a central double door leading to the interior,
2. cube-like lower masses flanking the portico. Although these elements project from the sides of the portico, they do not project beyond the sides of the rest of the building behind the façade. Each cube reads as one mass when viewed from the front but actually contains two spaces: an exterior, partially enclosed breezeway in front, and a small interior room with front and side windows behind the breezeway. Both breezeways are open at each end and connect the central portico to the campus grounds.
3. unglazed, rectangular window openings (in the cubes), each subdivided by a geometric pattern of rectangles,
4. a double belt course outlining the upper portion of each cube, and

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 4

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

5. a large curving parapet rising behind the portico/cube composition. This parapet is pierced by a central louvered oculus.

Thick pilasters flank the large curving parapet, mark the corners of the portico and cubes and separate the portico's bays. Interestingly, the edges of the portico's pilasters are chamfered. Beyond the windowed side walls of the cubes, the sides of the gymnasium proper are utilitarian in appearance. Each is composed of a watertable; a set of five large, multi-paned, operable windows; an entablature; and a set of double doors that serves as a secondary entrance to the building. On the north rear corner a crosswalk built at the same time as the gym connects the side doors to another building.

The building's interior displays no stylistic elements, and its floor plan is typical of gymnasiums. The central entrance opens to a small, vestibule-like space flanked by the two previously mentioned rooms within the cubes. During the historic period, these rooms were used as kitchen facilities to serve lunch to Brusly High School's students. Today they are used for storage. A small projection room, apparently reached only by a ladder, is found above the vestibule. The latter opens to a full-size basketball court flanked by rows of bleachers. Concrete pilasters and steel beams supporting the roof are visible above the court. A stage, with dressing/locker rooms behind it, fills the end of the building opposite the main entrance.

Some exterior and interior alterations have taken place, but with the exception of work associated with a 1997 renovation, the dates of the changes are unknown. A historic photo shows what appears to have been a concrete covered crosswalk connecting the north front corner of the gym to another building, but a different crosswalk now stands in its place. At some point after 1947 the building's exterior concrete walls received a stucco finish and paint. Windows and doors have also been modified. The bottom portions of the large side windows received infill, louvered ventilation screens were installed in some of these windows, the original doors to the building were replaced, and a small window to one side of the stage was converted into a door. In 1997 standing seam metal hipped roofs replaced the original flat roofs above the façade's portico and cubes. At the same time, a gabled roof of the same material replaced the original roof above the basketball court, part of which was also flat. All roof changes were attempts to deal with leakage problems. The 1997 work also included the expansion to the side and rear of the dressing/locker rooms behind the stage. This project changed the shape of the building from that of a pure rectangle to that of a "t". Replacement of the original acoustical tiles on the interior ceiling probably also occurred at this time.

Although this list of alterations seems long, the changes are not nearly as significant as a first reading suggests. The most important modification of the historic façade, for example, is the installation of the hipped roofs, and the angle of these is so low that their visual impact is minimal. When viewed from the front, the peaked roof above the gym is totally hidden by the façade's parapet. The layer of stucco now covering the exterior walls is thin, so the lines caused by the wooden forms used to pour the concrete walls still show clearly. The original shape of the modified side windows remains visible, with the result that the windows could be accurately restored. Finally, the acoustical tiles currently covering the gym ceiling are similar in character to those they replaced. The old Brusly High School Gymnasium still retains its historic appearance, and Brusly residents of a certain age easily recognize it as the building where they once played and socialized. As the focus of Brusly's social life 1937-1957, the gym is a strong candidate for National Register listing.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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: Social History

Period(s) of Significance: 1937-1957

Significant Dates: 1937-1957

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Builder: Works Progress Administration

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

The Old Brusly High School Gymnasium is locally significant in the area of social history because, from its opening in 1937 until 1957 (the present fifty year cutoff), it served as the focus of social life for the West Baton Rouge Parish community of Brusly. Information indicates that the gym continued in this role well after the end of the historic period.

Although not incorporated until 1901, Brusly is West Baton Rouge's oldest settlement. Frenchman Jacques Molaison and his family are credited as its first settlers. They arrived at the site in 1785, their ship passage having been paid by the Spanish government. The Spaniards also gave Molaison a land grant, probably located in what is now the southern portion of Brusly. Molaison established a store on his property and, before long, a small settlement known as Molaisonville built up around it. Other early settlers were Acadians who moved to Ascension and St. James parishes after their expulsion from Nova Scotia in 1755 and later moved northward to the Brusly area. To provide a church for his fellow Catholic neighbors, John Baptiste Hebert built a chapel on his area property in the early 1800s. The Catholic parishioners incorporated their religious parish in 1838 and purchased land for a cemetery and new church, the latter completed in 1840. A resident pastor came to Brusly in 1841.

The town, by now called Brusly Landing, received a post office in 1840. There are two theories as to

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 6

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

why the word "Brusly" was chosen for the name. Both have to do with the concept of burning and fires that allegedly took place nearby, as the word seems to be a derivative of the French verb *bruler*, which means "to burn." The "Landing" portion of the name came from the fact that the community had developed as an important Mississippi River steamboat landing. West Baton Rouge Parish was and is a rural, agricultural parish, so most of the boats carried agricultural crops.

Education has been important to Brusly residents since the mid-nineteenth century. A private academy served the area as early as 1847. By the turn of the twentieth century, a parochial school and small one-room public schools had opened. After the electorate approved West Baton Rouge Parish's first school tax in 1910, the school board authorized construction of a new facility to be known as Brusly High School. It opened in 1911 and quickly met the state's standards for high school accreditation while also offering the lower grades. (This building served the community until its replacement and demolition in 1950.) As the student population grew and educational practices changed, other buildings were added to the campus, including a two-room home economics building moved from another site and the gymnasium (a Works Progress Administration project) which is the focus of this nomination.

Although local officials wanted the auditorium/gymnasium primarily for physical education and school assembly purposes, they were always aware that it would be needed for other town events. Until the petrochemical industry brought outsiders to the area in the 1950s, Brusly remained a very close-knit community composed mostly of Roman Catholics whose lives centered upon their local school and church. Several other factors reinforced this inward focus. Travel was difficult for many people. Although a railroad crossed the area just west of town, the trains did not stop at the Brusly freight depot for passengers. Despite the town's relative close proximity to Baton Rouge, the wide Mississippi River still served as a barrier crossed only by a ferry operating some miles away from Brusly and a bridge located several miles beyond the ferry. Automobile ownership was far from universal, forcing many people needing to leave town to hitchhike. During World War II, gas rationing restricted travel further. Thus, Brusly residents continued to look close to home for social and entertainment opportunities until near the end of the historic period for this nomination. The opening of the gym provided a place large enough to host sizeable school and other social and professional events. In fact, by this time it was the only venue in town capable of doing so. The local church was too small, and previously used public and private facilities had closed. In addition to containing a large open floor, a stage, ample bleacher seating, a small kitchenette, and a projection room, the gym was available most evenings and weekends, as well as during the summer.

The gym provided a much-improved location for school-related events attended by students, their families, and other townspeople. For example, the basketball team played on a dirt court until the gym opened, and students sometimes had to sweep water off the court before play could begin. With its hardwood floor and bleachers, the gym provided a more protected and comfortable environment for the players, student body, and the many local fans who turned out to support the team. Pre-gym graduation ceremonies also took place outdoors on the school grounds. The graduates received their diplomas on the porch of the home economics building while the audience sat on the grass. With a stage at one end and plenty of seating, the gym brought a new level of importance and dignity to the public ceremony. The 1937 class was so determined to be the first to graduate in the gym that they insisted upon using it even though the building's hardwood floors were not yet installed. Graduations took place there for many years afterward. Later during the historic period, the gym provided the site for school fund-raising carnivals that included skits by children in the different grades and student kings and queens in formal costumes. The gym also served as the site of non-school activities for children. For example, during the summer someone periodically opened the building at 3 p.m. so kids had a place to socialize and play games like badminton and

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 7

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

shuffleboard. Ballroom dance lessons were also taught to the children during the summer.

Many non-school-related events also drew audiences large and small to the gym. The existence of the projection room made it possible to screen movies for the townspeople's entertainment. On weekends, "pick-up" basketball games played by young men in the community served as a popular diversion for players and watchers alike. During World War II, welcoming events at the gym honored returning military men. Later in the 1940s Brusly's semi-professional basketball team played there. Near the end of the historic period, the West Baton Rouge Parish Knights of Columbus basketball league sometimes used the facility. When a local chapter of the Lions Club formed in 1954, it held its organizational meeting and dinner (wives included) on the gym floor. Afterward, the club periodically held public dances and fund-raisers in the gym.

Photographs and newspaper articles show that the gym's role as the social focus of the community lasted well into the 1960s. However, as television and other types of entertainment became available, people began to look elsewhere for social activity and entertainment. Meanwhile, although newer and more modern buildings had been added to the campus, Brusly High School's enrollment finally outgrew the facility. A new high school opened in 1978, and the old facility became a middle school.

The old gym continues to be actively used by students and teachers for physical education and assembly purposes but no longer serves as the social center of the community. However, it still has a place in the hearts of residents who remember the role it played in their social lives. In the days before television and the Internet, school activities and public entertainments were eagerly awaited diversions in rural and small town America, and Brusly was no exception. The gym served its community as more than an educational institution, for as Town Council member Joanne Bourgeois explained, "Not only was the gym used as a community center, it was also the center of the community."

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

_____ Collection of historical documents concerning Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, submitted by applicant. The collection contains copies of school board minutes discussing construction of the gym, historic photographs of the building and events held there 1937-1957, newspaper articles detailing events held in the gym during that period, and transcripts of interviews with older residents and past students. These interviews took place in 1996 as part of the Town of Brusly Centennial Celebration. Copies of all materials are available in the National Register file.

Folse, Pamela, Editor. *Brusly 1901-2001: A Place To Call Home*. Brusly, LA: The Town of Brusly, 2001.

Kellough, Elizabeth and Mayeux, Leona. *Chronicles of West Baton Rouge*. Baton Rouge: LA: Kennedy Print Shop, 1979.

Letter, Joanne Bourgeois to Patricia Duncan, August 21, 2006.

West Baton Rouge Parish (LA) Planning Board, published in cooperation with State of Louisiana Department of Public Works, Planning Division. *West Baton Rouge Parish Resources and Facilities*. Baton Rouge, LA: West Baton Rouge Planning Board, c. 1947.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 8

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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:

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

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approximately 1 acre

UTM References: **Zone** **Easting** **Northing**
 15 669800 3363160

Verbal Boundary Description:

Please see attached sketch map.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries are drawn five feet from the gymnasium's north and west elevations in order to exclude nearby non-contributing elements. The southern and eastern boundaries follow property lines in order to reflect the setting and the building's relationship to North Kirkland Drive (River Road) and the Mississippi River.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register Staff, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation

Address: P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

Date: Spring 2007

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

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

OMB No. 1024-0018

Old Brusly High School Gymnasium, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA

Page 9

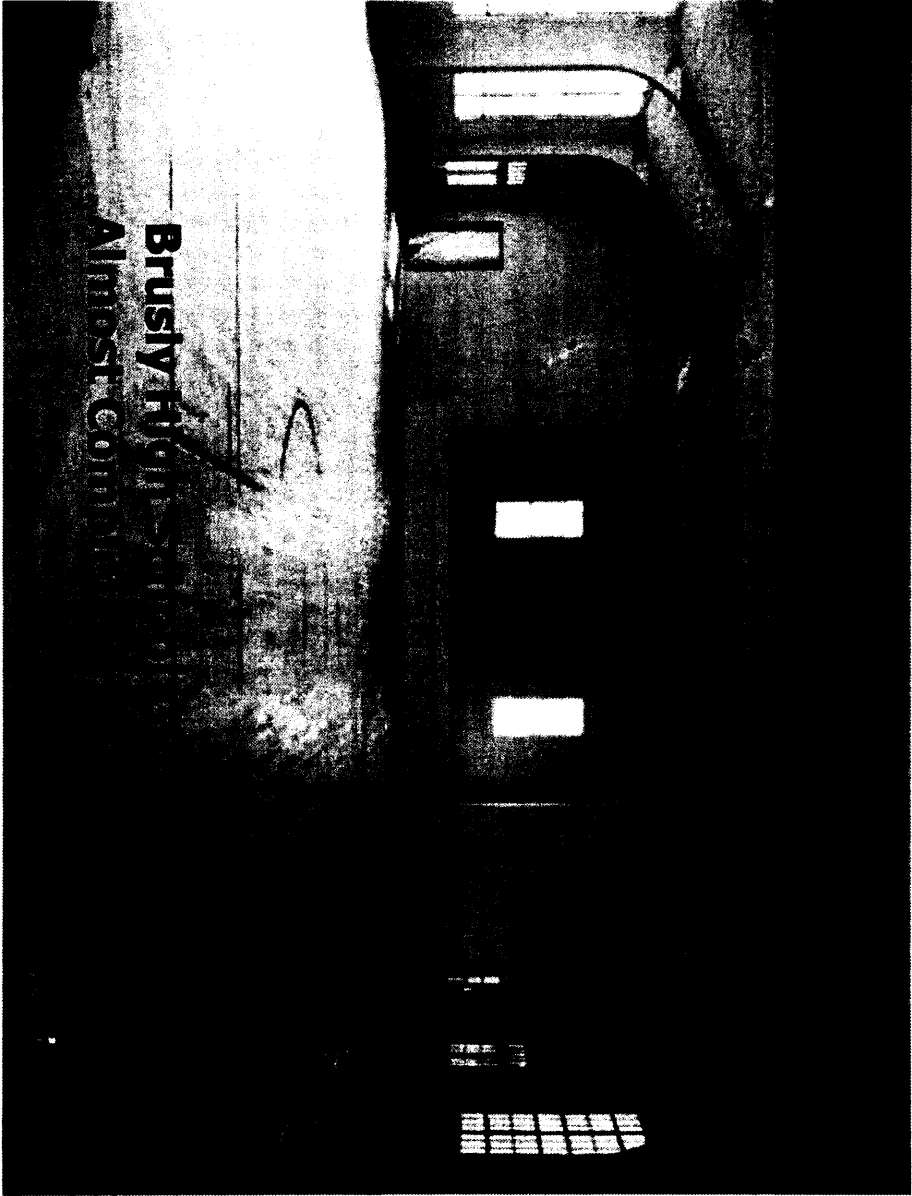
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

PROPERTY OWNERS

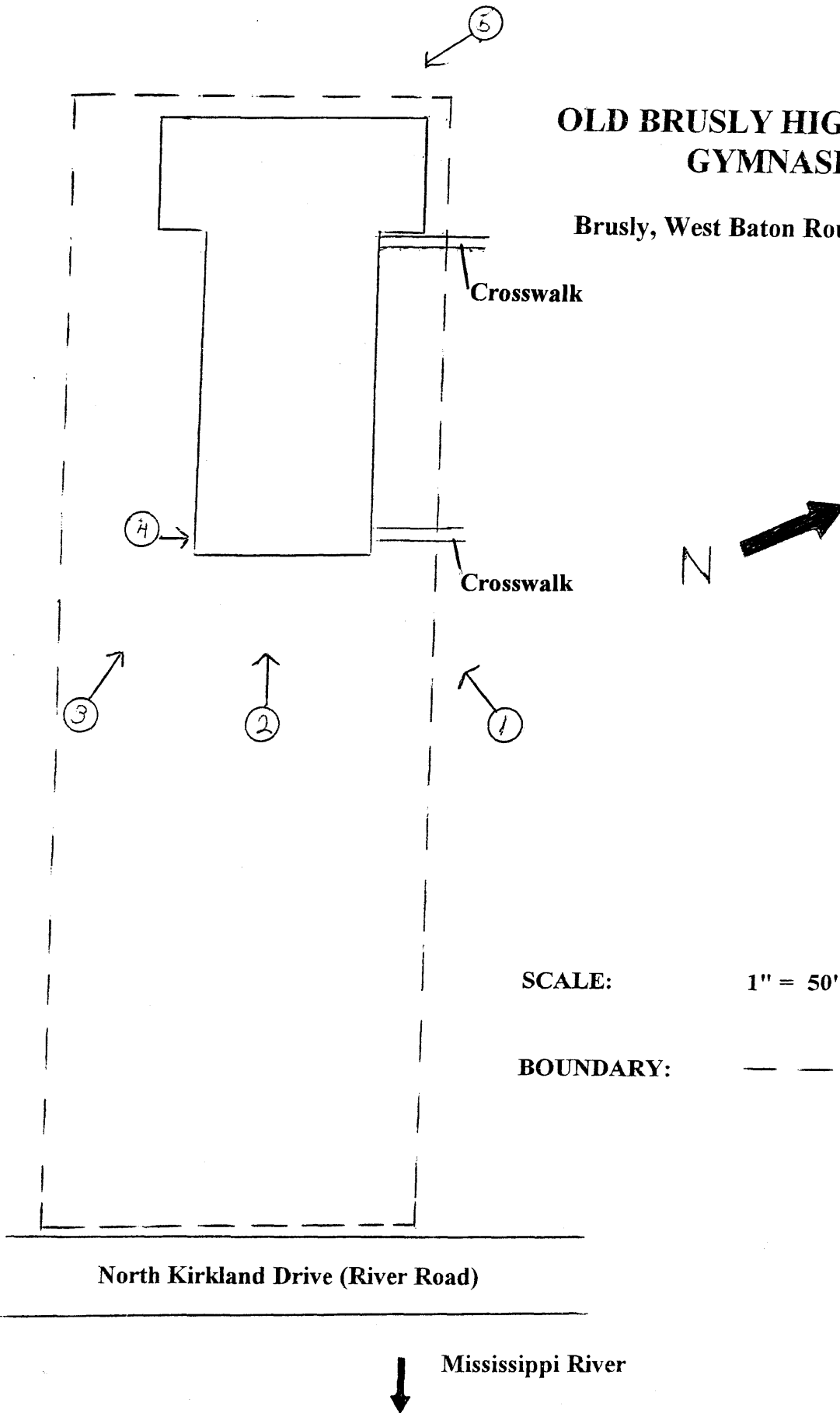
Town of Brusly
Joanne Bourgeois, Town Council Member
P. O. Box 510
Brusly, Louisiana 70719
(225) 749-2909





OLD BRUSLY HIGH SCHOOL GYMNASIUM

Brusly, West Baton Rouge Parish, LA



SCALE: 1" = 50'

BOUNDARY: - - - - -

North Kirkland Drive (River Road)

Mississippi River