

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

838  
RECEIVED 2280  
OMB No. 1024-0018

OCT -9 2015

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building  
Other name/site number: Otho Plummer Administration Building  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 1026 Mirabeau Street  
City or town: Beaumont State: Texas County: Jefferson  
Not for publication:  Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:  
 national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Mark Wolfe State Historic Preservation Officer Date 10/2/15  
Signature of certifying official / Title  
Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property.  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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 \_\_\_\_\_

for Edson H. Beall Date of Action 11-24-15  
Signature of the Keeper

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	-	buildings
-	-	sites
-	-	structures
-	-	objects
1	-	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** Education: college (administrative building)

**Current Functions:** Education: college (administrative building)

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification:** Modern Movement: New Formalism

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick; Concrete, Metal/magnesium; Glass; Asbestos

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 6-8)

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>A</b>	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
	<b>B</b>	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>C</b>	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
	<b>D</b>	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations:** NA

**Areas of Significance:** Education, Architecture

**Period of Significance:** 1959-1965

**Significant Dates:** 1959

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Pitts, Mebane and Phelps, Architects; Thad Dedrick Construction Co., Contractor;  
Dollinger Steel Company, Structural Steel

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 9 through 19)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheet 20 through 24)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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 #

### Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre

### Coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 30.042740

Longitude: -94.072382

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The Otho Plummer Administration Building is located on a kite-shaped quadrilateral site bounded on the east by the intersection of Martin Luther King Parkway (former Beaumont-Port Arthur Road) and East Virginia Street and a "V" shaped sidewalk joining these two roads to the west. The building lies on the central axis of the campus quadrangle which is formed by the bisection of the above mentioned streets at a 51° 34' angle. The central radius point of the circular building is established by the intersection of the central campus axis line with a line parallel to and extended 250' from, the face of the Lucas Engineering Building.

**Boundary Justification:** The Otho Plummer Administration Building site boundaries were established by the original site plan include on the construction set of drawings issued for bids and construction by Pitts, Mebane and Phelps on January 26, 1959. While the inner circulation road to the west has been permanently blocked for pedestrian access, to and from the campus to the Administration building, the location of western bounding sidewalks remains the same.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Richard Michael Gachot (with assistance from Penny Clark & Charlotte Holliman)

Organization: Lamar University

Street & number: 211 Red Bird Lane

City or Town: Beaumont

State: Texas

Zip Code: 77710

Email: rgachot@gmail.com

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Date: March 2015

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheets 25 through 26)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 27 through 46)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 47 through 58)



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## Photograph Log

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building  
Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas  
Photographed by Brian Sattler, March 2015

Photo 1  
Exterior, Southeast side.  
Camera facing Northwest.

Photo 2  
South entrance.  
Camera facing North.

Photo 3  
West side.  
Camera facing North.

Photo 4  
Northwest entrance.  
Camera facing Southeast.

Photo 5  
North side.  
Camera facing South.

Photo 6  
Exterior walkway, Northeast side.  
Camera facing Northwest.

Photo 7  
Eastside exterior detail.  
Camera facing south.

Photo 8  
Interior courtyard.  
Camera facing Southwest.

Photo 9  
Interior hallway, Building Section A.  
Camera facing Southwest.

Photo 10  
Interior hallway, Building Section A.  
Camera facing West.

Photo 11  
South entrance gate.  
Camera facing Southwest.

Photo 12  
South entrance.  
Camera facing North.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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## **Narrative Description**

The 1959 Lamar State College Administration Building (now the Otho Plummer Administration Building) is a circular 1-story, steel frame and reinforced concrete, mid-century modern structure on the campus of Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. The cylindrical exterior walls have a 155' diameter and are clad in face brick, cement board and an aluminum curtain wall system. Both the flat circular concrete roof and the perimeter walkway cantilever off the face of the building and are joined together by an continuous concrete "fret" structure which surrounds the entire building perimeter providing structural support as well as visual screen between the building precinct and the exterior campus. Three separate entryways lead to a large circular central interior courtyard with fountain and landscaped border gardens. The open-air entry halls separate the building mass into three different programmatic sectors: the upper administration, the business office and the registrar. The siting of the building, at the apex of the original Lamar State College of Technology pie-shaped quadrangle, serves as both a hierarchical symbol of administrative leadership as well as an iconic visual entry marker for the college along the original Beaumont-Port Arthur Highway. With the exception of a later concrete cover walkway leading up to its entry, the building fully retains its historic integrity as built in 1959, both on the exterior and interior.

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## **Site**

The building site, at the pinnacle of the original campus quadrangle, is a kite-shaped quadrilateral lot, formed by the intersection of the old Beaumont-Port Arthur Highway (later Martin Luther King Parkway) and East Virginia Avenue (later Rolfe Christopher Drive). The site surface was left open so as not to distract attention from the visibility of the circular Administration Building. It is covered only with grass, a couple of live oak trees, concrete walks and a small rectangular administrative parking lot adjacent to the building and parallel to Rolfe Christopher Drive. Before the Beaumont-Port Arthur Highway was enlarged to create the current Martin Luther King Parkway, the location served as the main entryway to the campus including entrance pylons on either side of an interior "V" shaped crossroad. The circular Administration Building provided a symbolic and visual terminus point to the original 1941 Master Plan. Starting from the west with the Student Union-Gymnasium a large pie-shaped quadrangle mirrored buildings along a central axis with to the north the Science building, the Library and former Administration building. To the south the Vocations building, the Home Economics building, and the Engineering building which was joined to the former Administration building by a convex covered walkway framing the eastern axial view towards the lot of the future Administration Building.

## **Building**

The Administration Building is a circular 1-story structure. The cylindrical volume has a 155' diameter between exterior walls and an open central courtyard 52' in diameter with fountain and gardens. The perimeter of the building is surrounded by a 6' wide raised concrete walkway covered by the cantilever of a thin slab concrete roof. These two elements are joined together by an unusual 3'-8" wide structural support system in the form of a continuous series of bent posts joined by upper and lower horizontal slabs called a "fret" on the architect's original plans. The fret is attached to the roof by a 6" recessed diamond shaped column and to the ground by a 12" recessed brick rectangular pier. The fret serves as bold visual pattern on the building's exterior unifying the entire structure, providing passageways under its arches and structurally supporting the thin slab cantilevered concrete roof. This roof has a 180' diameter and is open at the center providing light to the circular central courtyard with fountain and planting beds. Access to the courtyard is provided through three separate open air ramped entrance halls with closable iron grille gates. These halls divide the building into three sectors labeled A, B, and C, with each containing a different administrative function. To the left of the main axial entry is sector "C" the General Business Office, to the right is sector "B" the Registrar General Office. Opposite the main axial entry is a volume slightly larger than either Sectors C or B and flanked by two more exterior entry halls again with closable iron grille gates. This volume called Sector A contains the Upper Administration Offices.

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Sectors B and C have a similar floor plan arrangement. Primary access off of the central court through double side doors that lead to a semi-circular public foyer with central glazed in cashier's booth. Beyond this is the private work space with a large open office plan for desks, flanked by perimeter outer programmatic ring, adjacent to the exterior wall, of supporting functions, vault, storage room and executive offices. The Registrar General Office differs slightly in plan with the addition of an IBM machine room for the college mainframe computer center. This room takes up about a ¼ of the entire lower B sector volume from inner to outer wall. The Upper Administration Office is divided by a central radial corridor with smaller inner offices and restrooms facing the courtyard, and larger outer offices including the Dean's Office and reception, the Assistant to the President's office and reception, The President's Office, the Board of Regents' Conference Room, a Publicity Office and mechanical room facing the exterior. A special access doorway and stair provides a private means of entry and egress to both the President's office and the Board of Regents Conference Room.

Access to the central courtyard is made via the three open-air entry halls, which, upon reaching the courtyard, descend three flagstone steps to the lower courtyard ground plane. The interior façade of the courtyard is made up of floor to ceiling brick piers flanking either side of the three entry halls. Between these piers, each sector is illuminated by, a floor to ceiling, aluminum curtain wall. Sectors B & C are divided into seven equal vertical panels each subdivided into four unequal horizontal divisions, an upper opaque square of asbestos cement fiberboard, an upper operable awning window, a large middle fixed widow and a lower operable awning window. Sector A is divided into fourteen equal vertical panels each subdivided into four unequal horizontal divisions. The center six panels as they are adjacent to the restrooms consist of an upper opaque square of asbestos cement fiber board, an upper operable awning window with translucent glass, a large middle and joined lower panel made up of asbestos cement fiber board. The offices on either side of the central restroom core are divided into four equal vertical panels each subdivided into four unequal horizontal divisions, an upper opaque square of asbestos cement fiberboard, an upper operable awning window, a large middle fixed widow and a lower operable awning window.

### **Elevations**

Openings on the exterior wall and walkway vary according to sector. Sectors C and B, flanking the central entry, consist of face brick with raked joint piers joined by a 5'-6" lower horizontal base of brick. This lower base is subdivided into seventeen exterior arc segments, marked by a vertical recessed line of brick headers on either side. Above the brick is an aluminum curtain wall system consisting of a lower module of 2'-7" high operable aluminum windows and an upper module of 5' high fixed opaque panels of asbestos cement fiberboard. In sector C there are two exterior doors at the outer reception rooms. In sector B there is one exterior door at the Registrars outer reception rooms. Sector A (the Upper Administration Office) is divided into three equal sections by four vertical brick piers. The left and right sections consist of a 5'-6" lower brick base that is subdivided into seven and one half exterior arc segments, marked by a vertical recessed line of brick headers on either side. Above the brick is an aluminum curtain wall system consisting of a lower module of 2'-7" high operable aluminum windows and an upper module of 5' high fixed opaque panels of asbestos cement fiberboard. Adjacent to the machine room of the left section is a single bay of floor to ceiling aluminum louvers. The central portion of Sector A flanked by brick piers, consists of a floor to ceiling aluminum curtain wall system with sixteen vertical divisions and four unequal horizontal divisions, an upper opaque square of asbestos cement fiberboard, an upper operable awning window, a large middle fixed widow and a lower operable awning window. An exterior door provides access to a reception area distributing to both the President's Office and the Board of Regents Conference Room. One vertical panel of opaque asbestos cement fiberboard is located at the Regents Conference Room to balance off an interior plan configuration.

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## **Interior**

The floor materials of the interiors of Sectors C & B transition from exterior halls made up of washed gravel with flagstone thresholds at the doorways to interior offices with terrazzo floors. The main open office spaces have suspended ceilings made of plaster acoustic tile and walls of Philippine mahogany plywood on 1/4" stripping with a wood base. The exterior radius of the inner office space is constructed with vertical Philippine mahogany plywood panels at the radius' chords and joined by vertical battens. The outer radius offices adjacent to the exterior wall are also covered with Philippine mahogany plywood panels with the exception of the outer wall itself covered below the aluminum horizontal sliding ribbon windows with Manganese facing tile.

The interior of Sector A (Upper Administration) is floored with terrazzo. Ceilings are suspended acoustic plaster with original 1x4 florescent light fixtures and circular aluminum HVAC diffusers. The interior radial corridor is walled with face brick alternating with recessed custom wood paneled doors and side windows made of a textured translucent glass into each office unit. A flat 15" frieze band of Philippine mahogany veneer joins the lower substructure of the wall to the ceiling. The brick walls are lined with original architect's gouache renderings of many of the campus buildings, including the Administration Building. The majority of these renderings were done by local architect Milton Bell, also a project architect for the Administration Building when he worked at the architectural firm of Pitts, Mebane and Phelps. The interior of the offices are walled with 3/8" thick 4' x 8' Philippine mahogany plywood panels. Along the curved walls these vertical plywood panels are divided into radial chords with joints covered by vertical wooden battens. The exterior walls of the offices are made of Manganese facing tile from the aluminum horizontal sliding ribbon windows to the floor. Unadorned steel columns are visible next to the exterior wall in certain offices based on a 7° 30' radial spacing of the structural steel frame made by the local Beaumont Dollinger Steel Company.

## **Alterations or Changes to the Property**

The Administration Building retains a remarkable degree of its original integrity. The most significant alteration is the addition of a covered concrete walkway joining the Lucas Engineering building and the Wimberley building to the Otho Plummer Administration building in a "T" shaped connection (c.1980). In 1976 the building was reroofed and the HVAC system changed. Further minor alterations include the addition of three new glazed and metal-framed curtain walls inserted at the mid-point of each entry hall. The public foyers for Sectors C & B have been closed to the public to add additional interior working space. Programmatically Sector B, the Registrar's General Office has been changed to the Payroll Office. In the courtyard the fountain has been closed though the structure remains. In 2015 construction will begin for a new administration building to be located at the other end of campus. While the Administration Building was slated for demolition in a 2013 Master Plan, new university President Kenneth Evans has recognized its significance and supports its nomination to the National Register.

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## Statement of Significance

The 1959 Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building (now the Otho Plummer Administration Building at Lamar University) in Beaumont, Texas, was a central component of an ambitious building program at the East Texas public college, and stands as an excellent example of modernist design by Beaumont architect Llewellyn Pitts. As such, the building meets two National Register criteria: A in the area of Education and C in the area of Architecture. In terms of Education, Lamar State College of Technology was the first academic body in the state of Texas to transform from a two-year Junior College to a four-year institution. This was due to its successful service to the war effort both during mobilization and upon the return of the GI's who required vocational training to reintegrate into the work force. As an example of post-war modern architecture, the building stands as a unique example of a circular building in an academic setting that through its form, materials and iconography embody a progressive 1950s positivist idealism in technology. The building simultaneously references the highbrow and lowbrow culture of its day, from the ancient Greek *tholos* to the drive-in restaurant and is an unusual 3-dimensional expression of the University's corporate seal. The property is nominated at the local level of significance.

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## Criterion A: Education

The Otho Plummer Administration Building is an iconic landmark at Lamar University, and reflects the Atomic Age design of the era. When it was constructed in the late 1950s, it was a symbol for progress at an institution which has a heritage of innovation to meet the needs of the students and industries of the region. At that time, Lamar had grown from a tiny junior college which was part of an oil-rich school district in Beaumont to Lamar State College of Technology, a four-year state supported institution which specialized in educating students for careers in the petroleum industry as engineers or geologists. The building, which has housed the president and other high-ranking officials of Lamar, has also been a symbol of Lamar due to its connection to leadership, and its unique architecture. It is an important part of Lamar's folklore and identity, and here a wealth of events took place, not only the decision making of presidents and regents, but parades, protests for African-American rights, and faculty marching to commencements.

## Establishment of Lamar University

Lamar University's history is closely intertwined with the petroleum industry. Indeed the site of Lucas Gusher at Spindletop, near Beaumont, Texas was located only a few miles from Lamar's campus. When the Lucas Gusher exploded on January 10, 1901 it was the dawn of the Liquid Petroleum Age. While previous oil wells had been considered a huge success if they produced 50 barrels a day, the Lucas Gusher initially produced 100,000 barrels a day, providing the impetus to move from coal to new liquid fuels. As Spindletop was the first major oil strike in the nation, it was poorly harvested and drilling crews moved on to new fields. Beaumont, however, retained a vital role in the oil industry as a refining center.<sup>1</sup>

The oil refining wealth of Beaumont, spurred the creation of what was to become Lamar University. The huge Magnolia Refinery, which was located in South Park, a blue collar region of Beaumont was blessed with a tax base which was conducive to the creation of a fine school system. South Park had an ambitious school superintendent, Louis R. Pietzsch, who although raised in modest circumstances, had earned a degree from the University of Texas, and realized that many Beaumonters wished to earn a college degree but lacked the financial resources to achieve this dream.

When Pietzsch attended summer school at the University of Chicago in 1918 he learned of the junior college movement. Returning home, he explored the possibility of a junior college for the South Park School District. At the

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<sup>1</sup> Penny Clark, foreword to *On Our Way to "The Big Day" (and beyond): The Hundredth Anniversary of the Lucas Gusher at "Spindletop"* ed. Penny Clark and Evelyn Lord. (Austin: Nortex Press, 2002, ix-xvi.

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time, junior colleges created by single public school districts were almost unknown. His goal was to enable students to receive a high quality college education, based on the University of Texas curriculum, but at a low cost as they would be living at home the first two years.

In December 1921, voters of the South Park School District made his plan viable by approving a bond issue large enough to construct a three-story high school building that could hold twice as many students as were expected to enroll in South Park High School. On March 8, 1923, the South Park Board of Trustees instructed Pietzsch to proceed with plans for the opening of “a junior college of the first class.” On May 26, 1923, the board selected Pietzsch to be president of South Park Junior College as well as the superintendent of South Park schools. Carl Bingman was named dean of the college and principal of the new high school, and the third floor of the new South Park High School building was to house the junior college.

South Park Junior College began operations of September 17, 1923 with 100 students registering. Most of the college classes took place on the third floor, but classes also convened in other parts of the building. During its first nine years, South Park Junior College earned recognition as one of the finest junior colleges in Texas. In April 1924, South Park became the first college in Texas to be approved by the Texas State Department of Education during its first year of operation. The Texas Association of Colleges granted full accreditation in 1925. That year the positions of college dean and high school principal were separated, adding to the autonomy of the educational institutions.<sup>2</sup>

By 1932 the college had become an increasingly independent institution due to the leadership of Judge J.M. Combs, president of the South Park Trustees. Combs believed that the college had a huge potential for improving life in Southeast Texas. He believed that all students—whether rich or poor—deserved an education, and that the vast industries of the area needed a work force with not only brawn but sophisticated engineering knowledge.

Combs knew that the college faced two big problems: lack of space, and being seen as belonging only to South Park. He solved the first problem by instigating a building program that created almost entirely distinct facilities for the college. Secondly, the board emphasized the regional nature of the college by sponsoring a contest to re-name the college. Twenty-five people suggested the name Lamar College, but on the basis of his essay, Otho Plummer, a graduate of the college and later a regent, was named the winner. The name honored Mirabeau B. Lamar, second president of the Republic of Texas, regarded as the founder of public education in Texas. Although these changes occurred during the Great Depression, a time when many institutions faltered, Lamar continued to grow. College authorities did what they could to help students. In 1938, about half of the students were employed by the college at wages which enabled them to earn all or part of their tuition, fees, and textbooks.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the 1930s, it was obvious that further expansion of Lamar College would impose an unsustainable burden on the South Park School District. Given a choice of finding a wider financial base for the college or curtailing what appeared to be a bright future of growth and expansion, college and community leaders turned to the idea of an enlarged junior college district. A Young Man’s Business League committee, working closely with Lamar College officials and the South Park School Board, spearheaded the creation of a junior college district composed of the Beaumont, South Park, and French School Districts.

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<sup>2</sup> John W. Storey, “Lamar University: the Pietzsch-Bingman Era,” *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record* 33 (November 1997):20-23.

<sup>3</sup> “Officials Cited for Lamar Work,” *Beaumont Enterprise*, August 20, 1939, 4A; “Much of Lamar College Growth in Past Decade Due to Activity of J.M. Combs,” *Beaumont Journal* August 19, 1939; Penny Clark and Brian Sattler, “Texas Roots, Infinite Possibilities,” in *A Texas State of Mind: The Texas State University System Story Still Going Strong after 100 Years*, Fernando Gomez, ed. (Austin: Texas Review Press, 2011, 189-190)

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On September 21, 1940, voters approved the creation of a Lamar Union Junior College District, the issuance of bonds to construct an entirely new facility, a new tax for support and maintenance, and the election of trustees to govern the college. Combs in savvy manner, instructed John E. Gray, then interim president of the college, to conduct a survey of the industries and businesses of the community. Gray found that there was a huge need for vocationally trained office professionals and industrial workers with specialized knowledge. The new campus then had to meet the needs of educating not only liberal arts majors, but people who needed vocational training for business or industry. It was to be located on a 58-acre tract of land on the Port Arthur Highway, just three blocks from what was then the Lamar campus. The location was a plus as it offered easy access to the school whether coming from Beaumont or Port Arthur. It was, however, located on an old tank farm, or oil storage facility, and the bond issue which passed was insufficient to transform the area to an attractive college campus.

Judge Combs, recognizing that war clouds loomed on the horizon, understood that if the college opened a war training school they could receive grants which would enable Lamar to create a college campus, as well as provide training to wartime workers in the shipyards and refineries. Due to Combs' persistence, Lamar received a Works Progress Administration (WPA) grant in 1941, which literally laid the groundwork for the new campus. Combs worked to create a campus which would help Lamar advance in the world. The Board of Trustees had hired two architectural firms to design the new campus, Wallace B. Livesay and Stone and Pitts. Combs, John E. Gray, Lamar's interim president, and the architects took a tour of junior colleges in California and Colorado where they studied their architecture. By December 1941, the last major construction contracts had been awarded. Also in 1941, Lamar began training programs for workers in war industries. The college initially offered 18 vocational classes for men on topics including auto and airplane engine mechanics, marine electricity, and sheet metal work. As the United States geared up for World War II, Lamar began to offer courses 24 hours a day.

A major change took place in 1942 when war industry classes were opened to women 18 years of age and older. Women were taking classes in welding, burning, and pipefitting so they could replace men at the shipyard and refineries. While the college was educating both traditional students and hordes of wartime workers, it was also continuing work on the new campus. In spring 1942, the college began moving to its new quarters; and on June 1 of that year, John E. Gray assumed the presidency. The new campus initially had only five buildings, vocations, the administration building, the science building, the combination building, and the library. Lamar had made great strides during World War II. It had carved out a million dollar campus from an old oil company tank farm and had provided training to over 12,000 war workers who were constructing ships and other desperately needed materials. Lamar had established itself as a place which offered both vocational training in office professions and industrial work such as welding.<sup>4</sup>

The academic year 1945-1946 saw the return of President Gray and a deluge of students as the postwar boom hit Lamar. This boom, which swamped all of the senior colleges and universities in Texas, gave new force to the idea that Lamar should be a senior college. Four-year status had been discussed in the past, but no action had been taken. Early in the legislative session of 1947, a bill to make Lamar a state-supported senior college was introduced by Rep. Jack Brooks, a former Lamar student. Critics questioned why Lamar should be raised in status. Supporters emphasized that the Sabine area was the only area not served by a four-year college; that the area was home of a great industrial, petrochemical concentration; and that the four-year college would emphasize engineering and science. While the measure passed, the comptroller did not certify the availability of revenue and the bill died. Planners returned to the Legislature the following season, finding success in both houses. On June 14, 1949, Gov. Beauford Jester signed the bill that provided for the creation of Lamar State College of Technology; the transfer of all lands, buildings, and equipment of Lamar College to the new college; and an appropriation of \$1 for construction. The new college would emphasize

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<sup>4</sup> Penny Clark, "Astute Leadership and Dynamic Achievement Lamar during World War II" (paper presented at the Fall meeting of the East Texas Historical Association, Nacogdoches, Texas, September 28, 2013)



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engineering, technology, and science. The Board of Regents had the authority to establish other educational programs deemed proper.

At the dawn of the 1950s, President Gray offered the regents his ideas for the development of the four-year institution recommending that the college continue to offer its two-year pre-professional, general education, and technical-vocational programs and add four-year programs in engineering, science, home economics, health and physical education, and business administration. The regents approved, and on September 1, 1951, Lamar officially became a four-year institution. In October of that year, Gray announced his resignation to accept a position as executive vice president of the First Security National Bank of Beaumont.

F.L. McDonald assumed the presidency on June 1, 1952, a position he would hold for almost 15 years. During those years, Lamar expanded in both enrollment and physical size. Its rapid growth may be partially explained by the post-war college explosion that swamped many colleges in the 1950s and 1960s, but Lamar's growth exceeded the average. During much of the period, Lamar was the fastest growing senior college in Texas. It was able to enhance its appeal to students when in 1954 it expanded its focus to a general purpose, regional college offering baccalaureate degrees in most traditional disciplines. Following turbulent and even violent times of racial struggle, U.S. District Court Judge Lamar Cecil ordered the desegregation of the university in 1956, opening the institution's doors to the African-American population and causing enrollment increases.<sup>5</sup>

In the 1950s, Lamar was clearly a college showing remarkable progress in creating an institution which would benefit the area's businesses and industries and enable the students to gain employment after they obtained their degrees. Lamar boasted of enrollment gains from 1951 which were "little short of sensational." Full-time enrollment in the fall of 1951 was 1,036. Nine years later it was 4,366. By the later 1950s, Lamar was "playing a significant role in the economic and educational advancement of the area." While it did have liberal arts programs, such as art, it focused on classes in commercial art or public school teaching so that graduates could become tax-paying contributors to society.<sup>6</sup> Lamar lived up to its name as a college of technology, providing students trained in subjects such as engineering and geology which would enable them to provide the expertise to the ever vital petroleum industry.

A whole new infrastructure was needed to meet the needs of the soaring enrollment at Lamar. While the state had allocated one million dollars to construct buildings for engineering and home economics, no provision was made for Lamar's buildings needs. President F.L. McDonald proposed House Bill 141 which provided for Lamar retaining Lamar retaining what it collecting in tuition for 24 years and issue bonds for permanent construction and equipment. Although there was significant opposition the bill passed. It enabled Lamar to construct a new library and two buildings to house biology and geology and the schools of business and education. The new classroom buildings were adorned with *bas reliefs* designed by noted sculptor, Herring Coe, depicting aspects of those subjects.

In 1955, the Fifty-fourth Legislature approved an amendment to the state constitution, later approved by the citizens of Texas, which placed Lamar in the constitutional building program available to other state colleges. With the money for construction, new buildings quickly emerged on campus including a new library, gymnasium, health center, dormitories, and a student union. In 1959 Lamar completed construction on four new buildings: the Administration Building, Music/Speech, Chemistry, and Vocations.<sup>7</sup>

The new Administration Building was the centerpiece of a college which prided itself on modernity, progress, and practicality. Its buildings were built in a modern style, "eschewing more traditional styles like Colonialism or Greek

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<sup>5</sup> Clark and Sattler, *A Texas State of Mind*, 191.

<sup>6</sup> Lamar State College of Technology, *Ten Year Progress Report*, (Beaumont: 1961?),

<sup>7</sup> *Ten Year Progress Report*

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Revival that would have made it look older and more ‘Ivy League’ like.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed an editorial in the 1958 campus newspaper, *The Redbird*, entitled, “No Ivy Here” proclaimed, “The Ivy League is more myth than actuality. If one should remove the ivy from the walls of these venerable and aged institutions, they would undoubtedly crumble and fall in a great cloud of library dust. . . Personally, we would rather be students here, at Lamar, with this faculty and student body than at any other college or university anywhere in the world. The future center of education and culture is right here, in the Southwest. At Lamar you will have an active role in making tradition (pleasant AND useful and here you will obtain a first class education.”<sup>9</sup>

A year earlier, in 1957, the architectural firm, Pitts, Mebane, and Phelps revised an earlier campus master plan to accommodate recent growth. Part of the plan was a new administration building to be constructed on a triangular plot of land at the intersection of the Beaumont-Port Arthur Highway (now MLK, Jr. Blvd.) and East Virginia Avenue. The original plan called for a T-shaped building with the longest section pointing southeast toward where the highway and street intersected, and the front of the building facing in towards the campus. President F.L. McDonald knew that most people’s first view of the campus would be at the East Virginia Avenue intersection, and he disliked the idea that their first glimpse of campus would be the back of the new administration building. He asked the architects to re-design the building so that it would a better first impression of Lamar’s campus.

L.W. Pitts’ was a seasoned architect, who was a pro at modifying designs to meet the needs of his clients. He responded with a doughnut shaped building that would best utilize the existing space and in essence have four fronts.<sup>10</sup> The building was the perfect symbol for a college which prided itself on being futuristic. Lamar’s alumni publication celebrated the new administration building as “revolutionary,” and an edition of the Beaumont newspaper titled, “The Lamar Story,” included advertisements celebrating Lamar’s “rapid growth and multi-million dollar expansion.” A story about the new “sensationally designed” donut-shaped Administration Building identified it as “the first round educational building in the field of college architecture.” An adjacent advertisement featured symbols of the new era, including streamlined cars which resembled space ships, chemistry beakers, and an atomic symbol.<sup>11</sup>

While the president of Lamar and other top Lamar administrators moved into the Administration Building before Christmas in 1959, the building was not officially opened until February 5, 1960. Then an open house to tour the buildings was held on February 5, 1960 from 7:30-9:30 in the evening. The McDonald administration worked hard on the event, inviting hundreds of important guests, including high school officials, and members of the media whom they wanted to impress. Especially noteworthy was that all four buildings, with the exception of the chemistry labs, were completely air-conditioned, a tremendous boon in Southeast Texas’ subtropical climate. Hundreds of guests were duly impressed by the beauty of the buildings and were especially interested in the donut shaped new administration building.<sup>12</sup>

The Administration Building has remained a focal point on campus for over fifty years due to its being a locus of power at Lamar and its unusual architecture. The “Round Building’s” iconic importance to Lamar cannot be overstated and a few examples include the custom of faculty gathering here to march to commencement, a sketch of the “Round Building” adorning the masthead of the student newspaper from 1964-1971, a black activism protest giving the

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Osborne, “Historic Preservation Study of the Otho Plummer Administration Building, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas,” History, Theories, and Contemporary Issues in Historic Preservation, 2013

<sup>9</sup> “No Ivy Here,” *The Redbird* September 15, 1958, accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/univpress>

<sup>10</sup> Bell interview; Mark Osborne, Historic Preservation Study

<sup>11</sup> “Campus Blooms with New Buildings,” *Bulletin of Lamar State College of Technology* September 1959; “The Lamar Story,” *Beaumont Enterprise* May 31, 1959

<sup>12</sup> “Visitors View New Buildings at Lamar Tech,” February 6, 1960; Special Events and Celebrations 1V.3 Lamar University Archives and Special Collections

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building as a landmark, and the Cardinal Lights, an annual holiday event which included festivities at the Round Building.<sup>13</sup>

### Criterion C: Architecture

The Otho Plummer Administration Building is an exceptional example of post-war American architecture, designed by AIA Fellow and noted Beaumont architect Llewellyn Pitts in 1959 as the capstone to his original 1941 Lamar College of Technology campus master plan. Traditionally college architecture in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in America was drawn from either the Federal style model of the Ivy League or the more ornate classical influence of the French Ecole de Beaux-Arts. The architectural firm of Pitts & Stone however was among a handful of cutting-edge regional modernists, who drew upon functionalism and industrial models of architecture void of unnecessary ornamentation. A perspective drawing for the original Lamar College of Technology done in 1941, embraces the industrial metaphor as a correct expression of a wartime vocational school. Precedents can be found in the Walter Gropius design for the Dessau Bauhaus School (1923) as well as Mies van der Rohe's contemporary design for the Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago (1938). This was a major paradigm shift in academic architecture and Pitts' prescience is to be noted as highly significant.

The Otho Plummer Administration Building was the capstone project of the original 1941 campus master plan. Designed 19 years later it represents Pitts continued allegiance to the Modernist movement with even further originality and architectural significance in the choice of its round form and dissolution of the traditional façade into a multi-layered deep space serving the functional needs of a sun screen as well as a new sculptural form. While the architecture is characteristic of the late Modern Heroic period of 1955-65, with precedents found in the work of Edward Durrell Stone in his embassies and Worlds' Fair architecture, Oscar Niemeyer in his sculptural form and exoskeletal structures, and Eero Saarinen in the use of round form in his two post war University chapels, Pitts' work is an exceptional and original contribution that was recognized and illustrated in a two page spread in the AIA Journal upon his induction to the College of Fellows of the American Institute of Architecture in 1958.<sup>14</sup> Within the local community, the building was also recognized from its inception as "revolutionary," an iconic symbol of both progress and pride for both "town and gown." Period advertisements feature the building with fashionable coeds, similar to those promoting the simultaneous opening of Gateway Shopping City, Beaumont's first suburban-style shopping center. Indeed the sleek low profile and round shape of the Administration building draws references to both the highbrow and popular culture of the 1950s.

The "round" building in architectural history has many precedents ranging from prehistoric dwellings, the ancient Greek *Tholos* and the Roman *Pantheon*. In post-colonial American architecture the circular form is rare, however it was borrowed by Thomas Jefferson for the Rotunda at the University of Virginia and used by the Shakers in an unusual round stone barn design (both in 1826). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a fashion for octagonal dwellings brought about the construction of several round wooden variants. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Buckminster Fuller's early experiments with the Dymaxion House and prefabrication, led to a commission by the US Army in 1945 for a round version. Frank Lloyd Wright's experiments with geometry also lead to round forms in his Usonian Houses of the 1940s-50s (continued by his apprentices Bruce Goff and Don Erickson). During the postwar years, the round form can principally be found in the popular architecture of the World's Fair exhibitions and the functionalist form of the drive-in restaurant, with

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<sup>13</sup> "Is Concrete Beautiful?" *University Press*, December 5, 1975; "Eight Arrests Follow Incident," *The Redbird* April 18, 1969, Been there, done that: Lamar Alumnus Proves Variety Spice of Life," *University Press*, September 21, 1994; "Past and Present: Cardinal Lights Evolves, Expands," *University Press*, December 1, 2004, all accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/univpress>; "

<sup>14</sup> "Favorite Features of Recently Elected Fellows." (Model of Proposed Administration Building – Lamar State College of Technology, Beaumont, Texas) *AIA Journal* (April 1959): 44-45.

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carhop service.<sup>15</sup> In educational architecture the shape was infrequent. Exceptions include the round library at Oxford built in 1749 and Jefferson's classical homage, the 1826 Rotunda. The reintroduction of a round form on an American college campus had to wait until 1955 with Eero Saarinen's two chapels: the Scott Chapel at Drake University and the Chapel at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Outside of religious or sports related structures, post-war programmatic uses for round buildings on university campuses in the US before 1960 are exceptionally rare, suggesting that the Administration Building may in fact be the first round administrative building on an American University campus, as was boasted by the university at the time of construction in 1959.

The decision to design a round building found its origins in the difficult site allocated for the project. A residual triangular lot of land was left over from the original 1941 campus master plan, however the prominence and public visibility of the site would make any building standing there both the entrance to and the icon of the college. Several preliminary design schemes proposed variations including a rectangular building with carillon tower on axis with the campus quad and a "T" shaped building pointing to the apex of the triangular lot. The need to serve both the university as the administrative nerve center as well as the public with an entry marker along the Beaumont-Port Arthur Highway entrance, made the design exceptionally difficult. Apparently President Francis L. McDonald (1952-67) insisted that the building should not turn its "back" to, or provide a rear entry door, to the campus. With the help of architect Pitts, the brilliant solution of a round building with equipotential space was developed, and accepted as the final solution.

At first a modernized version of the ancient Greek *tholos* with an exterior colonnade of vertical columns was used as reference for the initial design phase. Pitts however rejected this in favor of a design that used a more complex exterior screen made of a concrete "fret" work. The source of the "fret" module came from the logo of the *Tau Beta Pi* honorary engineering society, a watch key in the form of the bent of a trestle. This symbolic module was repeated in a circular band around the entire building, which also served as a sunscreen for the exterior colonnade. A second iconographic reference comes from Pitts' own design for the College seal, adopted by the Board of Regents in 1950. This round logo consists of an outer band containing the name of the college, and an inner circle made up of a rotary wheel with cogs and eight interior sectors. At the center radius point is the 5-pointed star of Texas with a pentagon inscribed at its center. In the foreground stands the *Lamp of Knowledge* with a flame burning from its spout. Knowledge gained through technology, again a metaphor for the idealism of the postwar atomic age.<sup>16</sup> After viewing Pitts' logo one realizes the entire building is a three dimensional manifestation of his logo. The circular disk the plan with the inner atrium and fountain as a metaphor for the flame, the outer fretwork sunscreen the rotary wheel cogs folded 90 degrees.

Other areas of architectural significance can be found in Otho Plummer Administration Building's structure and construction materials. The building frame is structural steel supplied by the local Beaumont Dollinger Steel Company. Steel framing is a staple of the post-war modernist movement however the building's radial form required complex engineering and construction supervision. The cast in place concrete horizontal "fret" slabs all followed the radius of the building's exterior making formwork very difficult. The monolithic disk of the thin-slab cantilevered roof was another engineering feat (suggesting unintended allusions to a 50's fad for alien spacecraft!). The exterior curtain wall is a composite of face brick and aluminum framing filled with modular panels of clear glazing or opaque asbestos fiber wallboard.

In conclusion the architectural significance of the Otho Plummer Administration Building is due to the vision and genius of architect Llewellyn W. "Skeet" Pitts. Pitts was a progressive modernist architect who practiced all his life in

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<sup>15</sup> The architectural office of Pitts, Mebane and Phelps was located at 1872 Calder St. in Beaumont, Texas. This was just across the street from the Pig Stand Restaurant #41, built in 1941 using a radial steel structure similar to the Administration Building and supplied by the same the Dollinger Steel Company.

<sup>16</sup> A further reference may have been made to the Rotary Club. Both Pitts (President 1956-57) as well as Lamar President John Gray (President 1952-53) were active members in the Beaumont chapter.

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Beaumont, Texas. He was a part of an as yet unrecognized school of regional modernists including D. Rex Goode, Jr., Howard Barnstone and James Flowers. Born in 1906 in Alabama, educated at the Georgia School of Technology, he moved to Texas in 1927 to practice with the firm of Fred C. Stone. In 1934 he was made a partner in the firm, now called Stone & Pitts. The firm, and its later iteration Pitts, Mebane and Phelps, designed many buildings in the East Texas/Houston area as well as several foreign commissions. Pitts was an active and very well respected member of the Texas Society of Architects, so much so that upon his death in 1967 an annual medal was created by the society called the Medal for Lifetime Achievement in Honor of *Llewellyn W. Pitts* FAIA (see attached biography).

### Architect Llewellyn William “Skeet” Pitts

Architect Llewellyn William “Skeet” Pitts (1906-1967) was born in Uniontown, Alabama and as a child he gained the nickname “Skeet” after a popular comic strip character of the day.<sup>17</sup> His father, William Llewellyn Pitts, was a prominent attorney in Alabama. Pitts attended public schools in Uniontown and graduated from Technical High School in Atlanta, Georgia in 1923. While there he was active in student organizations and during his spare time he gained experience working in an architect’s office.

Pitts continued his education at the Georgia School of Technology where he earned a B.S. in architecture in 1927. While there he compiled an enviable record of sociability, scholarship, and architectural excellence, qualities which would be hallmarks of Pitts’ life. He belonged to organizations including Alpha Tau Omega, a social fraternity; Phi Kappa Phi, an honor society; Pi Delta Epsilon an organization for collegiate journalists, and Tau Beta Pi, an engineering society.<sup>18</sup> Pitts was inspired to design the Greek key exterior decoration of the Otho Plummer Administration Building from the logo of his engineering fraternity, Tau Beta Pi. He was also president of the Charettes Club, an organization for architectural students, and won the students’ medal conferred by the American Institute of Architects. He was also editor of the school paper and a member of the student council. He continued to gain practical experience in architecture by working in the offices of Atlanta architects and teaching architectural design during his senior year.<sup>19</sup> Soon after graduation he was in Beaumont as the resident architect in charge of the construction of the J.H. Phelan House, a palatial home based on an English Palladian model.<sup>20</sup>

In 1929 he joined Beaumont architect Fred C. Stone as a draftsman, and worked on major commissions including Beaumont’s U.S. Post Office and Court House, (now known as the Jack Brooks Federal Building) and the Jefferson County Courthouse (NRHP 1982). In 1934, Pitts joined Stone as an equal partner in the firm Stone and Pitts, which quickly became the most prominent firm in the region. Projects in the 1930s demonstrate skill at producing modernistic designs, best exemplified in the Art Deco style of the First National Bank and Greyhound bus Terminal (demolished), but also modern movie theatres in Beaumont, Kilgore, and Longview. Residences designed by the firm in the 1930s—located most in an upper-class subdivision at the western edge of Beaumont—reflect more traditional revival styles popular at the time, including colonial and neoclassical.

During World War II, the firm designed the Riverside Housing Project in Orange (demolished), built to house shipyard workers. In 1942, Pitts was ordered into active duty in the United States Navy. Commissioned as a lieutenant, he was assigned to the Bureau of Yards and Docks. When he was released from the service in 1945 he held the rank of

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<sup>17</sup> Milton Bell, interview by Penny Clark and Richard Gachot, October 15, 2010, Milton Bell Collection, Lamar University Archives and Special Collections, Beaumont, Texas

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Lynn Clark, *The Texas Gulf Coast: Its History and Development Volume III* New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1955, 114-115.

<sup>19</sup> Bell interview

<sup>20</sup> Dorcy L.H. Walker, A.I.A Emeritus. “The Story of Stone & Pitts, Architects 1929-2003.” On file at the Tyrrell Historical Library Archives, Beaumont; Bradley C. Brooks, “Owen J.T. Southwell, Architect, and the John Henry Phelan House,” *Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record* 35 (November 1999): 3-17

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lieutenant commander. After the war, the firm of Stone and Pitts (and its successor firms) took on larger commercial, industrial and governmental projects, leaving his mark on downtown Beaumont and its immediate area, accounting for over two dozen original buildings and remodeling projects. Commercial and industrial projects from this period (through Pitts' death in 1967) utilized modern forms and materials, and included the White House Department Store (today the Beaumont Municipal Court), Rosenthal's Department Store (demolished).

His design of industrial buildings was particularly outstanding. It included numerous projects (mostly laboratories and office buildings) for petrochemical companies in Southeast Texas, including ten buildings for Gulf Oil, two buildings for Mobil Oil, three buildings for Shell Oil, and five separate projects for Texaco that included a 20-building research center. The firm served as designing architects for seventeen of the more modern Coca-Cola bottling plants located in nine states. The largest of these plants was in Houston, and for the design of the plant, his firm received the First Honor Award of the American Institute of Architects.<sup>21</sup> It was the only building in the South to win such an award in 1952. In the same year, an international building exposition held in Hanover, Germany, it featured a display of distinguished contemporary American buildings, and the design was displayed in an exhibit which toured Europe.<sup>22</sup>

Pitts played a key role in the development of architecture at colleges and universities. He served as the consulting architect for the master planning of Centenary College in Shreveport, also as architect for the master planning of Lamar State College of Technology (today Lamar University) and as designing architect for most of the structures on the campus. Overall, Pitts' firm designed 37 buildings for five universities including the library at Texas Tech.<sup>23</sup> His firm executed the plans for many of the schools of Beaumont, Conroe, Orange, and adjacent communities.<sup>24</sup>

Fred Stone retired in 1957, and the firm changed its name to Pitts, Mebane, and Phelps.<sup>25</sup> In 1960 Pitts' architectural work was recognized with three awards for the Texas Society of Architects' "Architecture of Merit in the Past Ten Years," which was "an exhibition of the best examples of buildings designed by Texas architects and constructed in Texas" during the 1950s. The buildings were judged by a panel of three out of state architects who recognized 51 buildings out of 150 entries. Pitts' buildings recognized included the Coca-Cola bottling plant in Houston, the Gateway National Bank and the campus of what was then Lamar State College of Technology, both in Beaumont.<sup>26</sup> Aside from the First Security National Bank Building, the firm's other major commissions in the 1960s, the firm's other major commissions in the 1960s included the U.S. embassy in Mexico City (with Brooks, Barr, Graeber & White of Austin), and the U.S. Department of Labor Building in Washington, D.C.

Pitts was a leader in his profession. He was elected to the College of Fellows of the AIA in 1958. He served as president of the Texas Society of Architects in 1961, and director of the AIA's Texas Region from 1963 to 1966. He served as the governor-appointed chairman of the Architectural Advisory Committee to the Texas State Building Commission from 1959 to 1962.<sup>27</sup> Pitts was also active in Beaumont's civic life. He served as a director of the First Security National Bank, then Beaumont's oldest and largest bank; as consulting architect to the Beaumont City Planning Commission, president of the Beaumont Country Club, a member of Chamber of Commerce, a member and president of the Round Club, a member of the Town Club and one of its founders; a member of Rotary Club. He was

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<sup>21</sup> Beaumont Commercial District (Boundary and Period of Significance Increase, National Register Nomination, 2008. On file with the Texas Historical Commission and accessed on Texas Historic Sites Atlas, <http://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/index.asp> section 8,31-32

<sup>22</sup> Clark, *Texas Gulf Coast: Is History and Development*, 115

<sup>23</sup> Beaumont Commercial District, 31

<sup>24</sup> Clark, *Texas Gulf Coast: Its History and Development*, 115

<sup>25</sup> Beaumont Commercial District, 31

<sup>26</sup> Architecture of Merit of the Past Decade, exhibit at the Dallas Museum of Art, accessed at <http://files.dma.org/multimedia/document/145253536233807>; "Best Buildings In State During 1950s Chosen," *The Paris News* Paris, Texas August 23, 1960, accessed <http://www.newspapers.com/image/6451861>

<sup>27</sup> Beaumont Commercial District, 31

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chairman of the Major Gifts Division of the American Red Cross fund campaign and vice chairman of the United Appeal fund drive in 1953.<sup>28</sup> Upon Pitts' death in 1967, the Texas Society of Architects named its highest award in his honor.<sup>29</sup>

### **Otho R. Plummer, Lamar University Regent**

Lamar Regent Otho R. Plummer was honored with having the Administrative Building named for him in 1976.<sup>30</sup> Plummer was well-known for his 42 consecutive years on the Board of Regents, a record in Texas and perhaps the nation. He was also well-respected as a successful alumnus, businessman, and Beaumont mayor.<sup>31</sup>

Otho Raymond Plummer was born on December 10, 1906 in Beaumont, Texas. He was educated in public schools in Beaumont.<sup>32</sup> Plummer and his future wife, Elizabeth Aldrich, were enrolled in the second freshman class at South Park Junior College. At the college he excelled in academics, athletics, and student organizations. Even as a college student, he showed exceptional managerial talent, being named as the business manager of four different organizations including the school yearbook and newspaper. He was also a popular student, being named the prince of the college. An excellent athlete, Plummer played both baseball and basketball, showing an exceptional talent for accurate shooting in the latter.<sup>33</sup> Plummer was inducted into the Cardinal Hall of Honor, in recognition of his athletic record at South Park Junior College, his support for intercollegiate athletics as a regent, and his leadership in the community in 1975.<sup>34</sup>

He continued his education at the University of Texas where he obtained a bachelor's degree in business administration in 1928. He initially worked as an advertising salesman for the *Beaumont Enterprise*. In 1930 he married Elizabeth Aldrich. Shortly after his marriage, he opened his own business, the Plummer Printing Company, and soon after bought out the American Printing Company and consolidated both under the banner, Plummer-American Printing Company. The company, located on Bowie Street in Beaumont, was Plummer's headquarters for his printing, advertising, and public relations business for 48 years, until his retirement in 1979.

Plummer gave Lamar its name in 1932. At that time, Judge J.M. Combs, president of the South Park School District board of directors, wished to make the fledgling college, a regional powerhouse not just another part of South Park schools. Combs believed that re-naming the college was a first step in making this a reality. A contest was held to give the college a new name with each entrant to give not only a new name, but an essay describing the significance of the name. A number of entrants suggested naming the college in honor of the second president of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar, but Plummer wrote the best essay describing Lamar's importance as the Father of Public Education in Texas. Plummer had already graduated from Lamar and so did not need the scholarship to Lamar, giving to his brother, Wesley.<sup>35</sup>

Plummer, a lifelong citizen of Beaumont, made many contributions to the city. In 1947, Plummer was chairman of a committee which created the Neches River Festival, the largest social event in Beaumont featuring parades, balls, and

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<sup>28</sup> Clark, *Texas Gulf Coast Its History and Development* 115

<sup>29</sup> Beaumont Commercial District, 31

<sup>30</sup> "Names of Buildings Trace History," *University Press*, August 26, 1984, accessed <http://tinyurl.com/univpress>

<sup>31</sup> "Friends Pay Tribute to 'Giant of a Man,'" *Beaumont Enterprise* October 11, 1989

<sup>32</sup> "Otho Plummer and Lamar University: The Man and His Mission," *Beaumont Enterprise*, October 10, 1989

<sup>33</sup> Bruce Synoot, ed. *The Navigator*, Beaumont, Texas: American Printing Company, 1926

<sup>34</sup> Cardinal Hall of Honor program, November 6, 1982, Cardinal Hall of Honor Records, Lamar University Archives and Special Collections, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas; "Otho Plummer and Lamar University," *Beaumont Enterprise* October 10, 1989

<sup>35</sup> "Otho Plummer and Lamar University," *Beaumont Enterprise* October 10, 1989; "Looking Back from the Journal 1932," *Beaumont Journal* September 11, 1957



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boat races. Plummer was asked to be the business manager of the event a role he would hold until his death.<sup>36</sup> Otho R. Plummer served as Beaumont's mayor in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and his tenure in office was noted for progress for the city. He was appointed mayor of Beaumont in April of 1947 and he was re-elected to a full-term in 1948 and re-elected in 1950 and 1952. His tenure in office began auspiciously. Two months after he took office a six-million dollar improvement bond issue was approved. It was the first bond issue in twenty years. Other accomplishments during his time in office included a new City charter, and an improved infrastructure including new parks, new fire stations, and a new police station.

Otho Plummer began a 42-year record of service as a regent when he was sworn in on Lamar's Board of Trustees in 1946. He was to be re-appointed by seven governors with the last being Governor Bill Clements in 1985. More than 50,000 students graduated from Lamar during his service on the board. Among Plummer's accomplishments was collaborating to make Lamar a four-year institution.<sup>37</sup> As a regent, Plummer was a leader who worked tirelessly to make Lamar a better place. In 1949, he was chosen secretary, a position he would hold until 1958. At that time he advanced to vice-chairman, a position he would hold until 1970. In 1964 a \$1.1 dormitory at Lamar was named Plummer Hall in honor of Plummer's contributions as a regent and the individual who named the college. In 1970 he was named chairman serving in that capacity until 1979 when he was named chairman emeritus. Significantly, he served on the Building Committee of the Board of Regents, playing a key role in the construction of over 50 buildings.<sup>38</sup>

Plummer died at the age of 82, after a long and productive life. He was praised for his "ability to build consensus, demonstrate sensitivity, live without hate, and delight in helping others." Federal judge, Joe Fisher compared Otho Plummer to "a lamplighter, who lights lamps at twilight, one after another. After a while you can't see him anymore, but you can see his direction by the lamps lighted. Otho Plummer was always lighting lamps for the good of the community."<sup>39</sup> His legacy includes two sons, Bill and Robert, who both became college professors; the Otho Plummer Administration Building, and the Otho Plummer Award which is given to the highest ranking man and woman graduating from Lamar's academic colleges.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Otho Plummer and Lamar University," *Beaumont Enterprise* October 10, 1989

<sup>37</sup> "Otho Plummer and Lamar University," *Beaumont Enterprise*, October 10, 1989; "Plummer Won't Ask Re-election," *Beaumont Enterprise*, January 20, 1954

<sup>38</sup> Board of Regents Minutes, Volume I 1949-1951, page 3 Lamar University Archives and Special Collections, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas; Lamar Regents Building Committee file, Lamar University Archives and Special Collections, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas, particularly correspondence from L.W. Pitts to the Regents Building Committee June 11, 1953; "400 Attend Plummer Hall's Open House and Reception," *The Redbird*, November 11, 1964 accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/univpress>; Charlotte Holliman, compiler, "Lamar University System Members of the Board of Trustees/Board of Regents," in *A Texas State of Mind: The Texas State University System, Still Going Strong after 100 Years*, ed. Fernando Gomez, (Austin: Texas Review Press, 2011), 292.

<sup>39</sup> "Friends Pay Tribute," *Beaumont Enterprise* October 11, 2014

<sup>40</sup> "Otho Plummer and Lamar University," *Beaumont Enterprise* October 10, 1989; "LU to Laud Associate Degree Recipients Separately," University Press, March 27, 1981 accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/univpress>;

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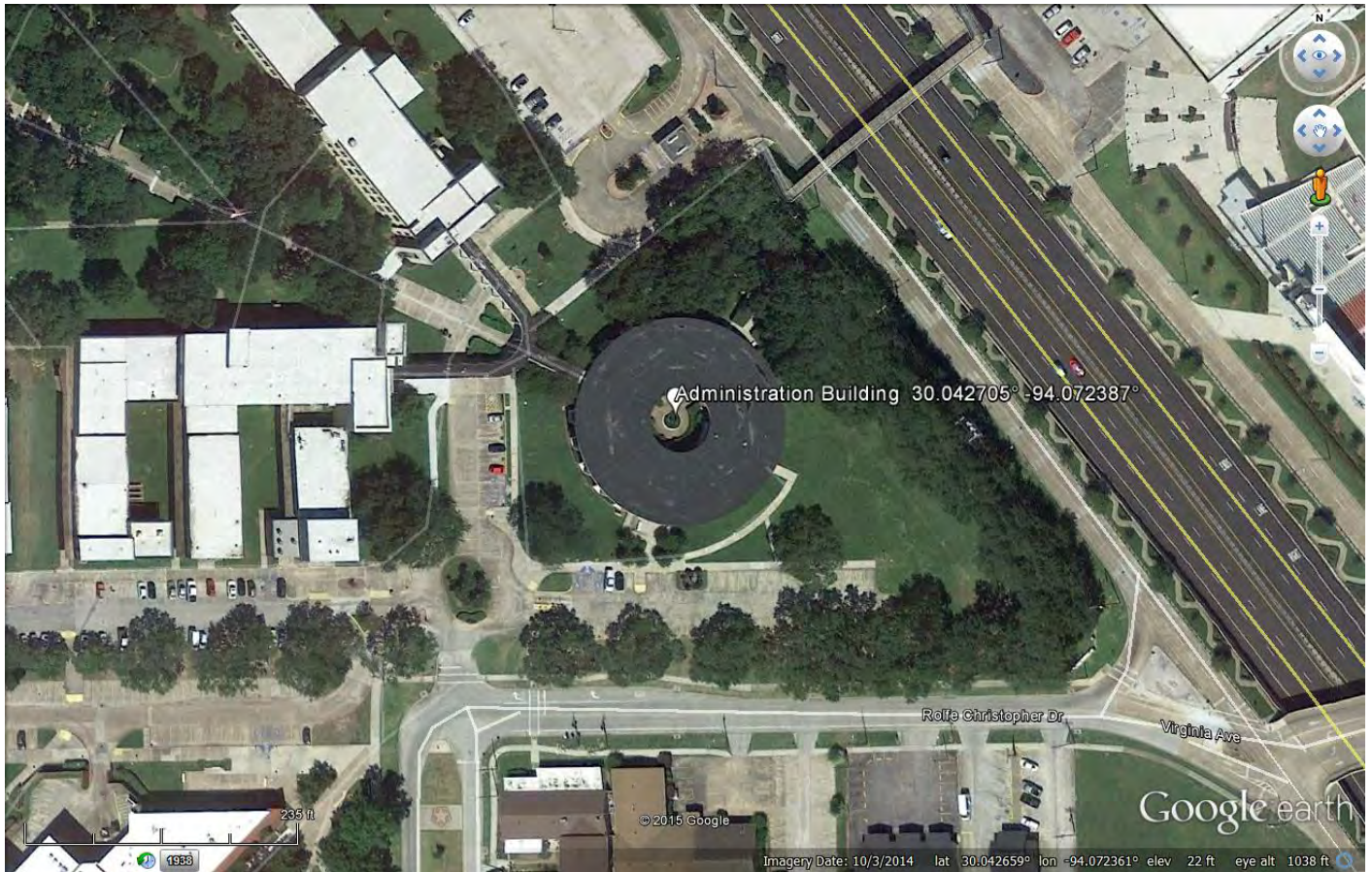


Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

Google Map, accessed March 5, 2015.

Lat: 30.042705°

Lon: -94.072387°





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

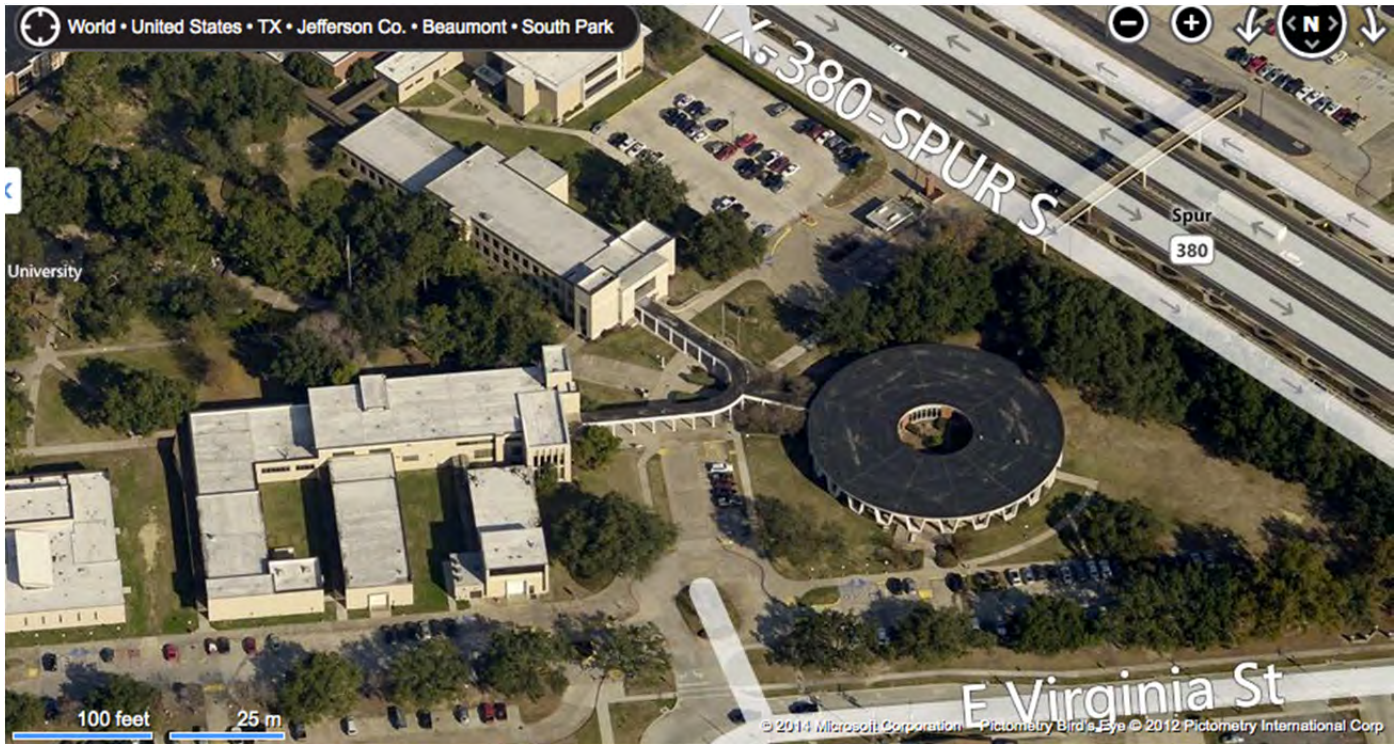


Figure 1. Aerial Map, courtesy Bing. Accessed March 5, 2015.





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas



Figure 3. Logo for Lamar State College of Technology designed by architect Llewellyn W. Pitts, c. 1950.



Figure 4. Birds eye view rendering of proposed Lamar Union Junior College, by Stone & Pitts and W. B. Livesay Architects, c. 1941.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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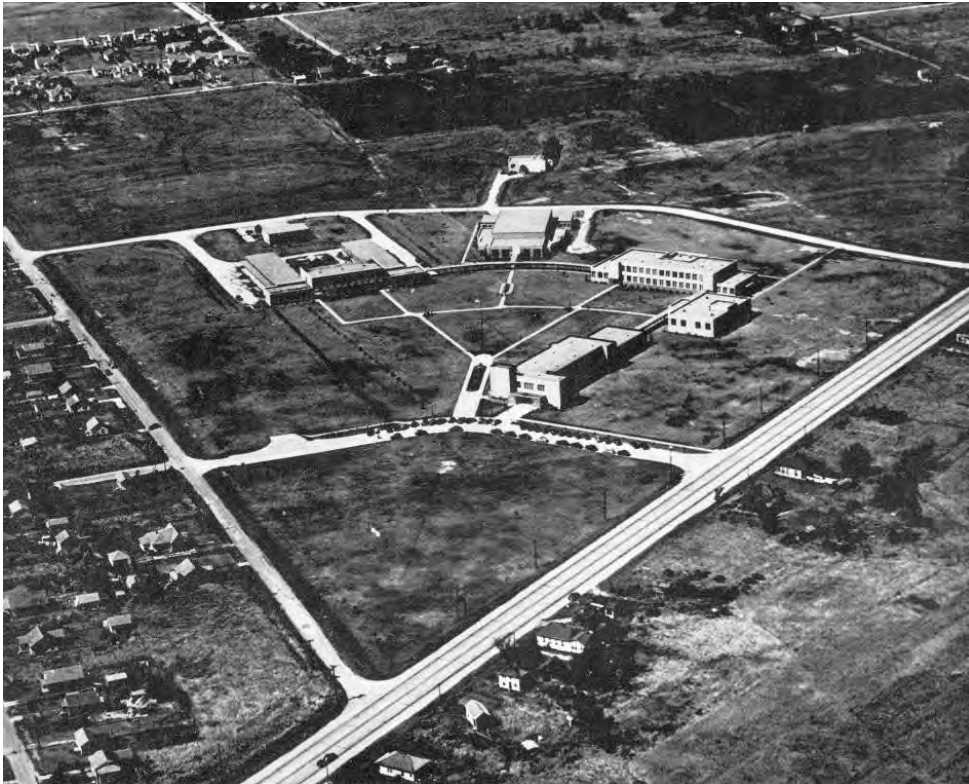


Figure 5. Aerial photograph of Lamar State College of Technology, c. 1949.

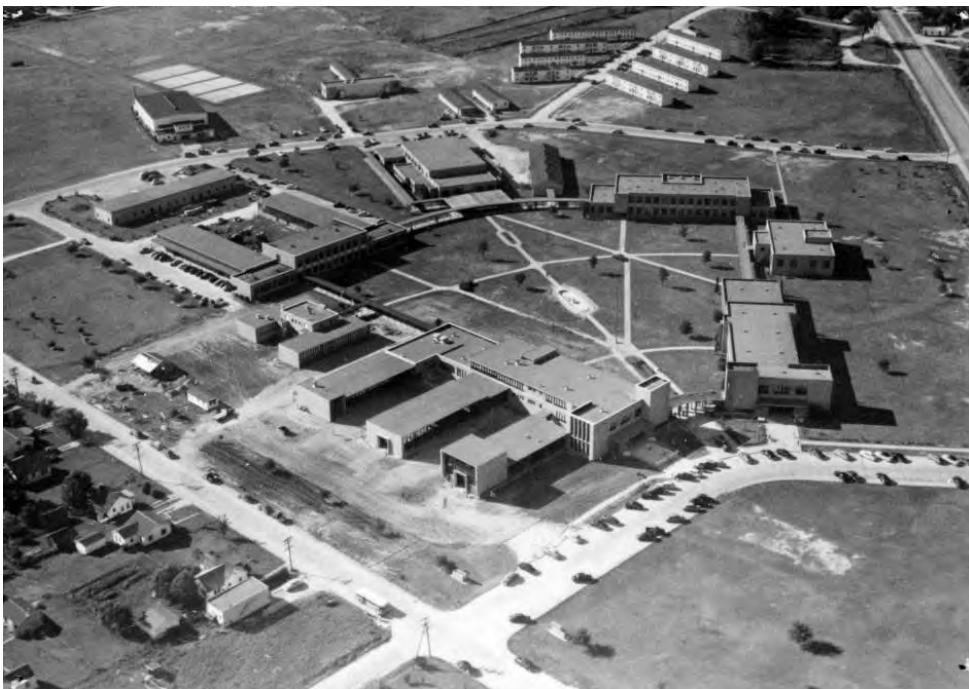


Figure 6. Aerial photograph of Lamar State College of Technology, c. 1951.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas



Figure 7. Proposed Master Plan for Lamar State College of Technology by Stone & Pitts Architects, c. 1953. Note small rectangular carillon tower – scheme A.

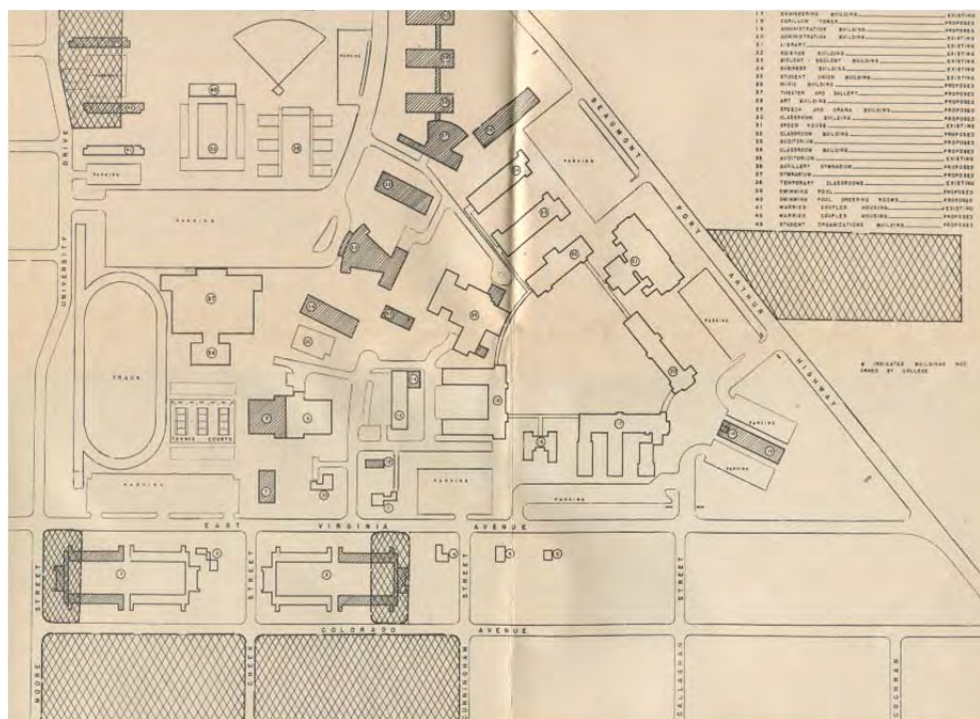


Figure 8. Proposed Master Plan for Lamar State College of Technology by Stone & Pitts Architects, c. 1956. Note rectangular building – scheme B.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

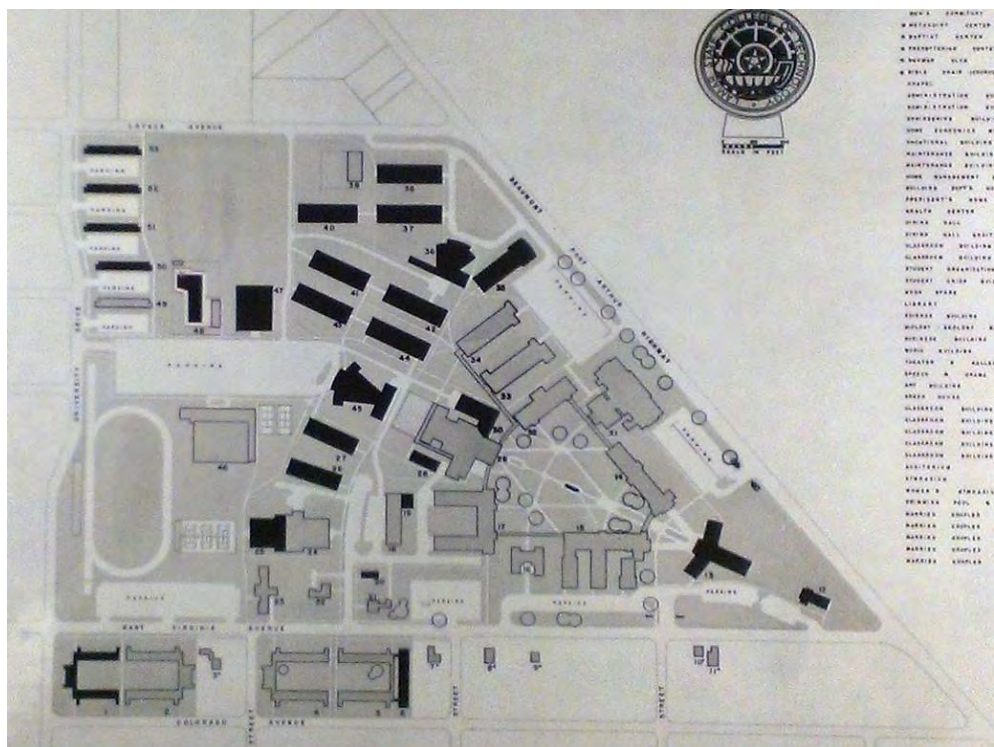


Figure 9. Proposed Master Plan for Lamar State College of Technology by Stone & Pitts Architects, c. 1958. Note “T” building with small chapel – scheme C.

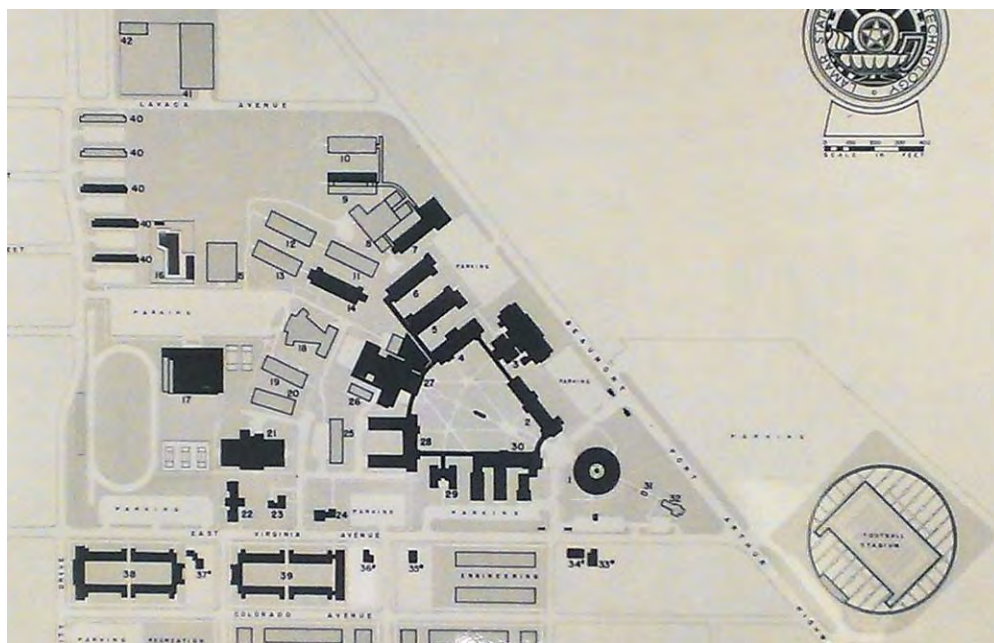


Figure 10. Proposed Master Plan for Lamar State College of Technology by Pitts, Mebane and Phelps, Architects, c. 1960. Final round building – scheme D



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

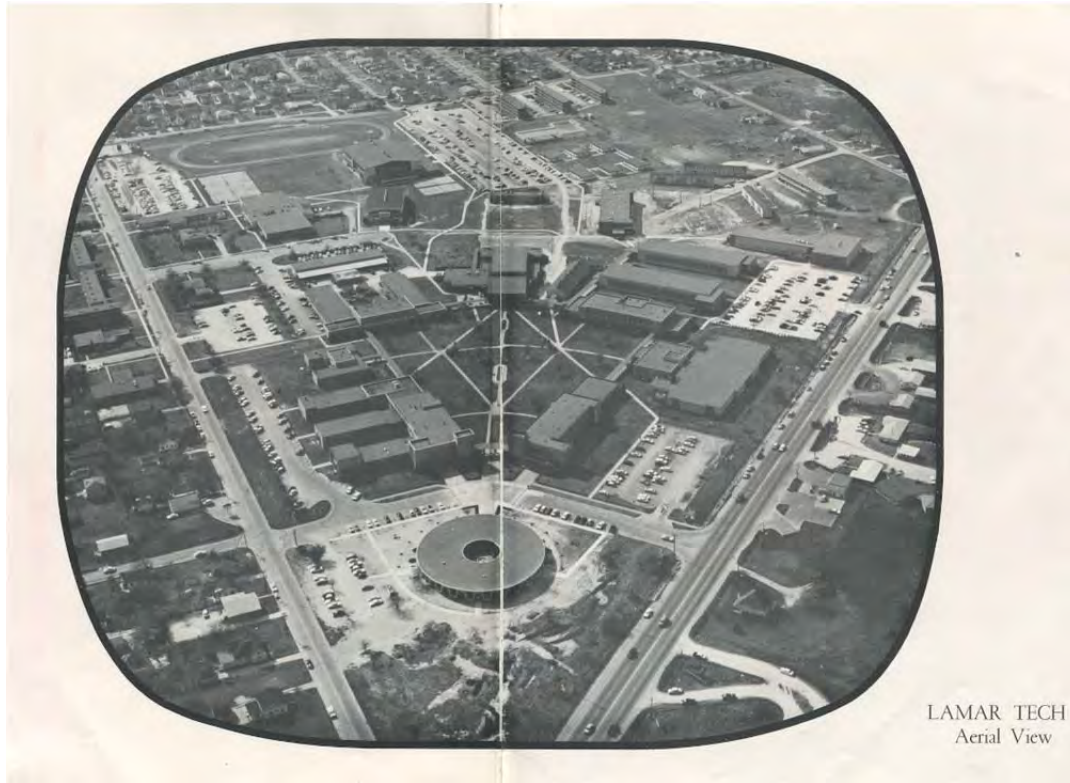


Figure 11. Aerial photograph of Lamar State College of Technology, c. 1960  
(Photograph from Cardinal Cadence Yearbook for 1960)



Figure 12. Architectural rendering of the New Administration Building at Lamar State College of Technology by architect Milton Bell. Tempera on poster-board, c. 1963



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 13. Board of Regents Vice-Chairman Otho Plummer inspects the plans for the new Administration Building. Plummer had won a contest in 1932, which gave the college its name, coming from the Texas father of education Mirabeau Lamar. In 1976 the Administration Building was renamed the Otho Plummer Administration Building in honor of Plummer's service to the University. (Photograph c. 1959).

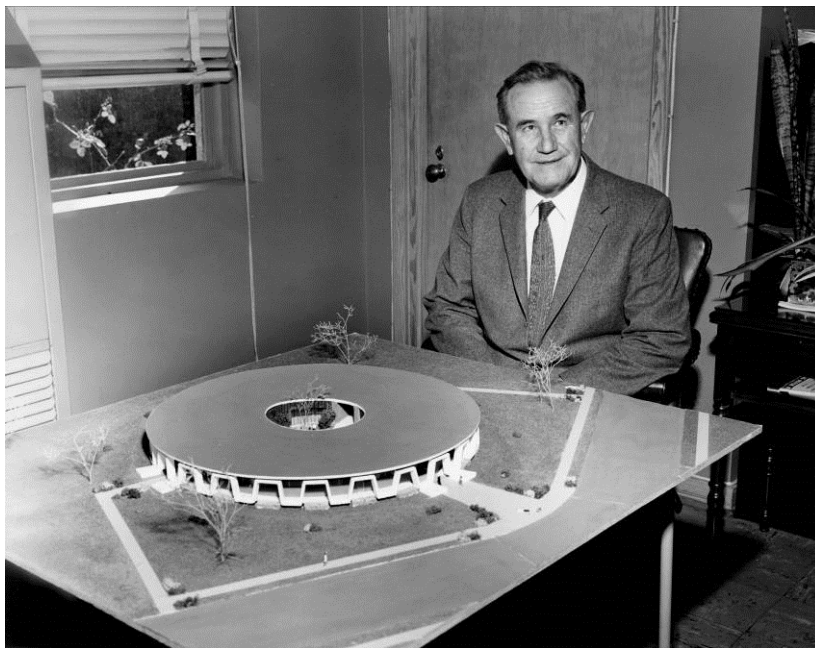


Figure 14. Board of Regents Chairman J.B. Morris inspects the model for the new Administration Building. (Photograph c. 1959).

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

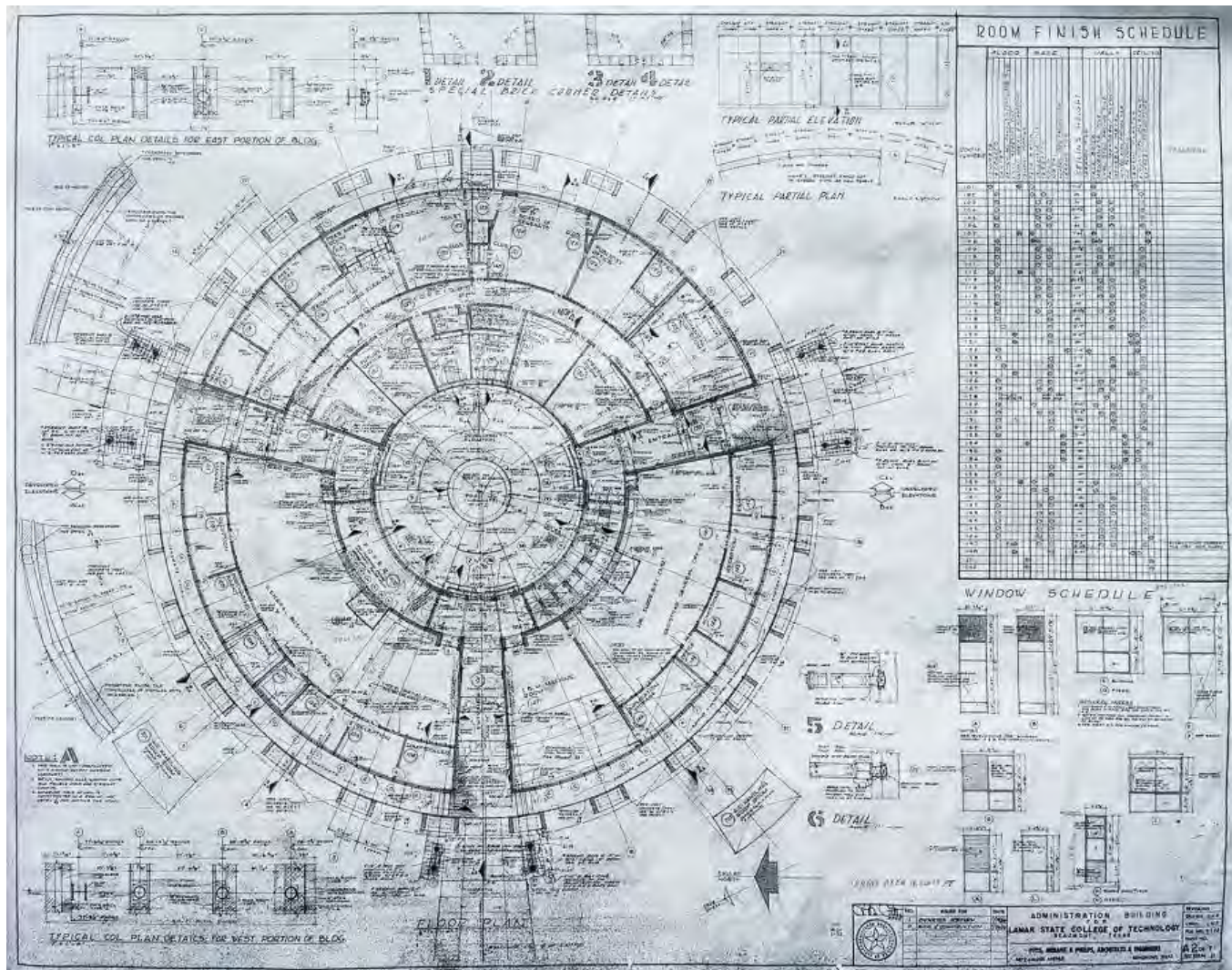


Figure 15. Sheets A1 from the architectural construction drawing set issued by Pitts, Mebane & Phelps on January 26, 1959.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 16. Construction photograph during steel framing, dated May 1959. Note on site concrete casting of perimeter "fret" band. *Pyramid* drive-in movie theater in background (Dollinger Steel Company Archives at the Tyrrell Library).

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 17. Construction photograph during steel framing, dated May 1959. Note on site concrete casting of perimeter “fret” band. (Dollinger Steel Company Archives at the Tyrrell Library).



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 18. Construction photograph during steel framing, dated May 1959. Note exposed rebar for roof support casting. (Dollinger Steel Company Archives at the Tyrrell Library).

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 19. View from “old” Administration Building to “new” Administration Building. c. 1960.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 20. View of round inner courtyard with fountain, lighting and perimeter planting beds, c.1960.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 21. View from exterior entry hall to central courtyard with fountain. c. 1960.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 22. View from entry hall through exterior concrete structural “fret” to old campus quad beyond with Lucas Engineering building on left and Wimberley Building (old Administration Building) on right, c.1960.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 23. View from Beaumont-Port Arthur Road towards new Administration Building, to left Board of Regents conference room, to right President's office, c.1960.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 24. Addition of new covered walkway joining the Lucas Engineering building (left), the Wimberley Building (right) and the Otho Plummer Administration Building (foreground). c. 1983.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas



Figure 25. Advertisement for the newly opened Beaumont *Gateway Shopping City* showing futuristic transportation and science/technology based industry made possible through an education at Lamar Tech (logo displayed). From the Beaumont Enterprise, special supplement "The Lamar Story," May 31, 1959.

Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

KEEP LAMAR TECH  
GROWING

Make your contribution to the Lamar Tech Land Fund, so necessary for planned future expansion. Use your White House Charge Account.

The White House, Beaumont, Texas, Box 3271  
LAMAR TECH LAND FUND

Please send \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to LAMAR TECH LAND FUND and charge to my regular account to be paid by me in the same manner as regular purchases made at The White House.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

*The White House*

Figure 26. The new Plummer Administration building as a progressive fashion statement for young graduates in an advertisement for the Beaumont *White House* Department Store. From the Beaumont Enterprise, special supplement "The Lamar Story," May 31, 1959.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Figure 27. Pig Stand #41 steel framing by Dollinger Steel, Beaumont, Texas, c. 9/4/1941 (Dollinger Steel Company Archives at the Tyrrell Library)



Figure 28. Pig Stand #41 rendering, Beaumont, Texas. Note the neon "fret" motif. c. 2004 (Randy Welton, artist)



Figure 29. Pig Stand #41, Beaumont, Texas, c. 1941 (Beaumont Enterprise Archives)



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building  
Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas  
Photographed March 2015

Photo 1  
Exterior, Southeast side.  
Camera facing Northwest.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 2  
South entrance.  
Camera facing North.





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 3  
West side.  
Camera facing North.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 4  
Northwest entrance.  
Camera facing Southeast.





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 5  
North side.  
Camera facing South.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 6  
Exterior walkway, Northeast side.  
Camera facing Northwest.





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 7  
Eastside exterior detail.  
Camera facing south.





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 8  
Interior courtyard.  
Camera facing Southwest.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 9  
Interior hallway, Building Section A.  
Camera facing Southwest.





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 10  
Interior hallway, Building Section A.  
Camera facing West.



Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 11  
South entrance gate.  
Camera facing Southwest.





Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

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Photo 12  
South Entrance.  
Camera facing North.



*-fin-*







OTHO PLUMMER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

RED  
LU WHITE  
& YOU



































SENIOR  
ASSOCIATE  
PROVOST









OTHO PLUMMER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Jefferson

DATE RECEIVED: 10/09/15      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/04/15  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 11/19/15      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 11/24/15  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000838

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT       RETURN       REJECT      11.24.15 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



**TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

*real places telling real stories*

**RECEIVED 2280**

**OCT -9 2015**

**Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service**

**TO:** Edson Beall  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 Eye Street, NW (2280)  
Washington , DC 20005

**FROM:** Gregory Smith  
National Register Coordinator  
Texas Historical Commission

**RE:** Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas

**DATE:** October 2, 2015

The following materials are submitted:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original National Register of Historic Places form on disk.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Lamar State College of Technology Administration Building, Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas
	Resubmitted nomination.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original NRHP signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
	Multiple Property Documentation form on disk.
	Resubmitted form.
	Original MPDF signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CD with TIFF photograph files, KMZ file, and nomination PDF
	Correspondence

**COMMENTS:**

- SHPO requests substantive review (cover letter from SHPO attached)
- The enclosed owner objections (do ) (do not ) constitute a majority of property owners
- Other:

