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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

APR 07 1989

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

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

1. Name of Property

historic name McNeese State University Auditorium  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number Ryan Street, McNeese State University N/A not for publication  
city, town Lake Charles N/A vicinity  
state Louisiana code LA county Calcasieu code 019 zip code 70609

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Leslie Tassin April 3, 1989  
Signature of certifying official Leslie Tassin, LA State Historic Preservation Officer Date  
Dept. of Culture, Recreation & Tourism  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Delores Byers Entered in the National Register 5/15/89

for Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/college  

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/college  

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Modernistic  

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concretewalls brick  

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roof tarother   

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The McNeese State University Auditorium (1939) is a monumental, blond brick Modernistic structure located at the head of a live oak lined axial green. Located at the main entrance, it forms the focal point for the campus. The auditorium has been little altered since construction.

The auditorium space has no fly gallery. It is encompassed on three sides by an access corridor which widens in front to provide for a grand lobby. It also provides for side exits on each side of the building.

The planning of the facility is axial and symmetrical. The long front green culminates in a three part entrance leading to a three bay vestibule. Three rear doors on the vestibule open into the grand lobby. In the lobby these doorways are separated by streamlined rounded piers which emphasize the front-rear axis of the building. The doors which lead from the grand lobby to the auditorium space are not directly on axis with the entrance vestibule, but the proscenium is. Either side of the lobby is an alcove with a staircase leading to access corridors which serve the "U" shaped auditorium gallery. Above the lobby is a central lounge with a huge dynamic looking ogee mold which makes the transition from ceiling to wall along one side.

The auditorium has an overall boxy four story cruciform shape with three story wings which almost fill in the corners of the cross. This gives the building a subtle cut-away massing.

Despite the monumentality of the facade, it has a certain elegance due to its well proportioned shape and the classical delicacy with which its Modernistic features are handled. The central portion of the facade is ornamented with subtle brick fluting which curves inward to form three deeply cut slit openings which provide for the entrance doors below and the lounge windows above. The lounge windows themselves are covered by geometrical metal grillwork. The side portions of the facade feature narrower slits, each surmounted by a single carefully placed oculus. Access to the front is gained via broad spreading steps with curvilinear platform sides.

Vertical brick flutes articulate the side elevations as well. Here the overall effect is massive starkness. Some of the side window slits have beveled sides formed of multiple brick corners.

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Continuation Sheet**

McNeese State University Auditorium, Lake Charles, Calcasieu Parish, LA

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Some of the interior spaces are more striking than the exterior, although less elegant. The vestibule features halo style frosted glass lights, patterns of reeding, and terrazzo floor stripes emphasizing the axial character of the space. More elaborate, the lobby features the aforementioned rounded axial piers separating the entrance doors. It also has a streamlined corbel style ceiling, halo glass lights, marble wainscoting, and multicolored terrazzo floors. The terrazzo design consists of a central stripe pattern which leads the pedestrian down towards the side corridors, into the entrance doors to the auditorium space, and up the front stairs. In the aforementioned upstairs lounge the ogee mold and the adjacent wall are enlivened by a broad vertical band of fluting. The auditorium space is relatively low key, with fluted strips and suspended halo style chandeliers.

Since construction the only changes have been the changing of the exterior doors, the loss of three chandeliers in the lobby, and the installation of notice boards in the vestibule.

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1939

Significant Dates

1939

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Weiss, Dreyfous & Seiferth, Architects  
Caldwell Brothers & Hart Contractors

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

The McNeese State University Auditorium is locally significant in the area of architecture both as the work of an important firm and as a local architectural landmark within the city of Lake Charles.

The auditorium was designed by the prominent architectural firm of Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth. Competent but stylistically unadventurous, the firm was indeed prolific. Specializing in government projects, it was certainly Louisiana's most productive firm during the 1920s and '30s. In fact, with over 400 commissions, it ranks on the world scale with the likes of Sir Gilbert Scott. Weiss, Dreyfous and Seiferth had much to do with remaking the building scape of official architecture in South Louisiana with commissions such as the State Capitol (NHL), the Governor's Mansion (N.R.), and numerous university buildings, hospitals, etc. McNeese Auditorium assumes a degree of local prominence in this regard as the only example of the firm's work in the regional urban hub of Lake Charles.

In addition, the auditorium is a local landmark among the city's much dwindled stock of pre-World War II non-residential architecture. Due to the booming prosperity of first the lumber industry, and later the oil industry, Lake Charles had a truly fine downtown representing eclectic architectural taste of the period c.1910 to c.1940. But the city remained prosperous in the 1950s, '60s and especially during the oil boom of the late 1970s and early '80s. The resulting relentless campaign of demolition and modernization destroyed virtually the entire downtown and the bulk of the city's non-residential historic architecture as a whole. The McNeese Auditorium is one of only about ten noteworthy buildings in this category to survive.

All of these are important, but the McNeese Auditorium derives additional significance from two factors:

1. Of the aforementioned coterie of landmarks, it is the only example of the Modernistic taste, the others being Gothic, Renaissance, or some form of neo-classical.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Auditorium cornerstone.

Taylor, Joe Gray. McNeese State University, 1939-1987. First chapter of manuscript copy, National Register file, LA State Historic Preservation Office.

- Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
  - previously listed in the National Register
  - previously determined eligible by the National Register
  - designated a National Historic Landmark
  - recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
  - recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A 15 478900 3338550  
 Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

D \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description Please refer to enclosed sketch map.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification Boundaries do not follow property lines because to have done so would have meant including the entire university campus. Instead, the boundary lines discretely encompass the nominated resource.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

ASSISTED BY MCNEESE STATE UNIVERSITY AUDITORIUM NATIONAL

name/title National Register staff REGISTER COMMITTEE, MAVIS RAGGIO, CHAIRMAN  
 organization Division of Historic Preservation date February 1989  
 street & number P. O. Box 44247 telephone (504) 342-8160  
 city or town Baton Rouge state Louisiana zip code 70804

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2. It is also the only one to feature the added monumentality of an approach with an axial tree lined green. The others are all either set directly on the street or a short distance back.

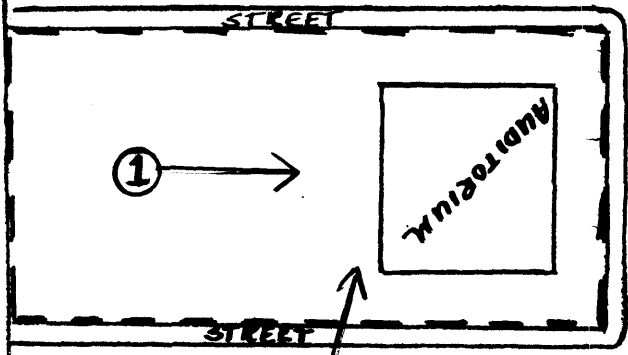
Historical Sketch

McNeese University was founded in 1939 as a division of LSU, offering only the first two years of higher education. Originally called Lake Charles Junior College, the name became John McNeese Junior College in 1940 in honor of a pioneer Southwest Louisiana educator.

The campus site was donated by the Calcasieu Parish Police Jury, and the final plans called for a classroom building, an auditorium, and an exhibition arena. Funds for the new institution came from a local bond issue, a grant from the Public Works Administration, and an appropriation from the state legislature.

Advanced to four-year status and separated from LSU in 1950, the University was renamed McNeese State College and its administration was transferred to the Louisiana State Board of Education. Act 138 of the 1970 Louisiana Legislature gave the institution its present name, McNeese State University.

RYAN ST.



McNeese State University  
Auditorium  
Lake Charles  
Calcasieu Parish, LA

--- BOUNDARY

1" = 50'

