

14.0 Historic and Cultural Resources

The historic and cultural resources in the City of Monroe give the community its unique identity. As such, it is imperative that these resources be recognized as the City charts its future. State-wide, historic and cultural resources are being acknowledged, not only as an important heritage asset, but also as an economic asset as the State develops a cultural economy. As stated in the Strategic Plan for Louisiana’s Cultural Economy, “Louisiana’s cultural economy is a sustainable, natural resource that cannot be outsourced.”⁵³

The Strategic Plan defines Louisiana’s cultural economy as: the people, enterprises and communities that transform cultural skills, knowledge and ideas into economically productive goods, services and places. It includes culinary arts, design, entertainment, literary arts and humanities, preservation, and visual arts and crafts.⁵⁴ With its distinguished heritage and wealth of cultural assets, the City of Monroe has the framework for an advanced cultural economy within the State.

This chapter provides a brief introduction to the historic and cultural resources that exist in the City of Monroe. The historic background describes the general evolution of the City, detailing a few of the major events that brought the City to where it is today. The chapter also describes historic resources that showcase the City’s heritage and discusses the cultural resources in the City. Together, these sections of the Historic and Cultural Resources Chapter help identify what makes this place unique.

14.1 Historical Resources

The National Register of Historic Places provides three distinct benefits to a listed property: the honor of being nationally recognized; financial incentives and protection as federal or federally-assisted projects are planned. The City of Monroe has 21 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The majority of which are noted for their architectural qualities. Those that are listed as significant for other historic cultural aspects include: the Bright-Lamkin-Easterling House for its state significance in art, the Grayson House for its local significance in educational, Governor Luther Hall House for its significance in local political history, Isaiah Garrett Law Office for its significance in local political history, Logtown Plantation for its significance in local settlement history, Milner Motors for its significance in local transportation and Robinson Business College for its local significance in education and ethnic heritage. Also of note is the G. B. Cooley House, the work of internationally known Prairie School architect Walter Burley Griffin. The architecturally significant Cooley house has attracted international visitors to Monroe.

⁵³ Office of Lt. Governor Mitchell J. Landrieu, Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism. Louisiana: Where Culture Means Business, A Strategic Plan for Louisiana’s Cultural Economy by Mt. Auburn Associates. Executive Summary, February 2, 2007. p. 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid.



Table 14-1 Properties Listed on the National Register of Historic Places

| Historic Place | Address | Date Built | Date Listed on Registry | Level of Significance | Historical Significance |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| Bright-Lamkin-Easterling House | 918 Jackson St. | 1890 | 5/15/1986 | State (Art) and Local (Architecture) | <i>Architecture:</i> Queen Anne Revival Eastlake residence <i>Art:</i> Painted Slate Mantels |
| Bynum House | 604 Grammont St. | c. 1895 | 1/25/1997 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Example of the Eastlake taste within the City of Monroe |
| G. B. Cooley House | 1011 S. Grand St. | 1910 (design) 1926 (construction) | 5/15/1986 | State | <i>Architecture:</i> Louisiana's only known Prairie Style house and the work of Walter Burley Griffin, an internationally known Prairie School architect |
| Grayson House | 2300 DeSiard St. | c. 1905 | 11/17/1999 | Local | <i>Education:</i> Association with African-American educator Emma Blanche Grayson. For several years in the 1930s Miss Grayson played a critical leadership role in improving elementary school education for African-Americans in rural LaSalle and Richland parishes. |
| Governor Luther Hall House | 1515 Jackson St. | c. 1906 | 5/7/1979 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> A turn of the century Neo Georgian residence <i>Political History:</i> Association with its owner, Luther E. Hall, a prominent politician of Northeastern Louisiana during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and Governor of the state from 1912 to 1916 |
| Harvey House | 608 Grammont St. | c. 1880 | 1/25/1997 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> One of few pre Colonial Revival residences remaining in the City of Monroe |
| Isaiah Garrett Law Office | 520 S. Grand St. | 1840 | 7/12/1976 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> The last remaining frontier structure of its type in the city and one of the earliest buildings in the area of any type <i>Political History:</i> Used by the lawyer Isaiah Garrett |
| Logtown Plantation | S of Monroe | c. 1840 | 10/16/1980 | State (Settlement History) Local (Architecture) | <i>Architecture:</i> Entrance portico and its Eastlake dining room <i>Settlement History:</i> The ancestral home of the prominent Filhiol family |
| Lower Pargoud | 2111 S. Grand St. | Late 1830's | 10/4/1984 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Greek Revival plantation house |
| J. S. Bloch Building (Ferd Levi Building) | 101 N. Grand St. | 1893 | 9/30/1980 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> A late nineteenth century commercial building in the City of Monroe |
| Masur House | 901 N. 3rd St. | 1914 | 7/22/1982 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> High Quality Bungalow Home |
| Milner Motors | 212 Walnut St. | c. 1918 (two-story portion) | 7/25/2001 | Local | <i>Transportation:</i> One of very few structures left to represent the historic automobile age in Monroe |
| Mulberry Grove (Layton Castle) | 1133 S. Grand St. | 1814 | 7/7/1978 | State | <i>Architecture:</i> Probably the largest residence ever built in Monroe, it is a local landmark and architectural folly that is probably unique to the state |
| Neville High School | 600 Forsythe Ave. | 1931 | 5/9/1985 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Modernistic architecture within the context of Northeastern Louisiana |
| Ouachita Parish High School / Ouachita Grand Plaza | 500 S. Grand St. | 1924-1930 | 4/9/1981 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Unusual example of early twentieth century eclectic architecture |
| Robinson Business College | 604 Jack McEnery Ave. | 1946 | 4/18/1997 | Local | <i>Education and Ethnic Heritage:</i> Its opening in 1946 represented a breakthrough in professional educational opportunities for African Americans in the Monroe area |
| Roland M. Filhiol House | 111 Stone Ave. | 1895 | 7/7/1995 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Example of the Eastlake taste within the City of Monroe |
| Slagle House | 1400 S. Grand | 1929 | 1/24/1995 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Example of the Tudor Revival style within the City of Monroe |
| St. James United Methodist Church | 916 Adams St. | 1923 | 10/29/1992 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Example of the Gothic Revival style |
| Whitehall Plantation House | Buckhorn Bend Rd. | 1858 | 9/8/1987 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Greek Revival plantation houses |
| Wossman House | 1205 St. John Dr. | c. 1900 | 8/5/1999 | Local | <i>Architecture:</i> Example of the Eastlake taste |

Source: National Register of Historic Places (<http://www.nr.nps.gov/>) and Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation (<http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/nhl/searchby.asp>)



Also listed on the National Register are two Historic Districts: the Downtown Monroe Historic District and the Monroe Residential District. The Downtown Monroe Historic District is architecturally significant as the finest historic central business district in Northeast Louisiana. This district consists of 57 buildings including three pre-Civil War buildings: the Clerk of Court’s Office (c. 1816), the Isaiah Garrett Law Office (1840) and the Fred Levi Building (1854).



G.B. Cooley House, a Prairie Style house by Walter Burley Griffin that is nationally recognized for its architectural significance

The Monroe Residential District is architecturally significant within Northeast Louisiana because of the quality of the area’s landmarks. The District’s historic buildings create a large twentieth century urban neighborhood that is locally known as the Garden District. The Monroe Residential District is comprised of 619 buildings on 315 acres. Of these buildings, those that contribute to the historic character include one and two story residences, 17 two-story apartment buildings,

two schools, two churches and a large park.

Table 14-2 Historic Districts Listed on the National Register of Historic Properties

| Historic Districts | Location | Date Listed on Registry | Date Built | Style |
|--|---|-------------------------|---|--|
| Downtown Monroe Historic District | Roughly bounded by DeSiard, Jackson, Telemaque, and S. Grand Sts. | 9/4/1986 | Pre-Civil War: 4% (2) 1890-1910: 23% (13) 1911-1920: 10% (5) 1921-1936: 28% (17) Intrusions: 35% (20) | N/A |
| Monroe Residential Historic District (Garden District) | Roughly bounded by McKinley St., 7th St., Hudson Ln., and Riverside Dr. | 10/3/1996 | c. 1880-1946 | Colonial/Georgian Revival 12% (70) Bungalow and Bungalow-Like 29% (178) English Cottage 10% (64) Other Styles 3% (17) No Style 27% (170) Non-Contributing 19% (120) |

Source: National Register of Historic Places (<http://www.nr.nps.gov/>) and Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation (<http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/nhl/searchby.asp>)

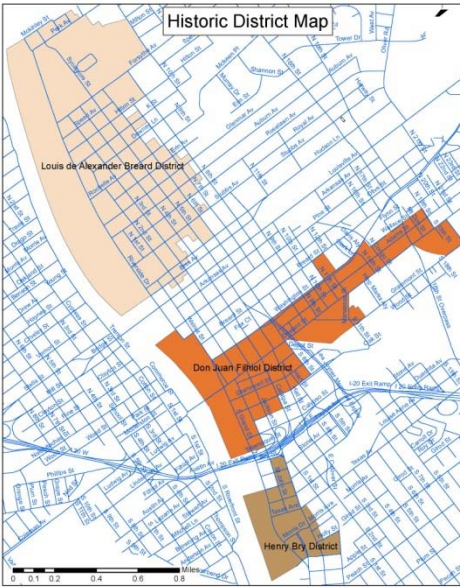
There are also three locally designated historic districts:

- Henry Bry Historic District – This district is on the Ouachita River generally south of I-20 to Plum Street and west of Jackson Street
- Louis Alexander de Breard – This district lies on the Ouachita encompassing most of Forsythe Park and the Garden District residential area to the east, it is also the national district
- Don Juan Filhiol – The local historic district includes the portion that is nationally designated, it follows the DeSiard Street corridor to 23rd Street and 24th Street, with Arkansas Street at its north and I-20 to the south

The figure below depicts these districts.



Figure 14-1 Local Historic Districts



Source: City of Monroe

The City’s historic preservation ordinance outlines guidelines for exterior changes, issuance of certificates of appropriateness, and the criteria the preservation commission should use in making recommendations. The ordinance also spells out processes for variances and appeals of the commission’s decisions.

14.2 Cultural Resources

The following arts and cultural landmarks can be enjoyed by visitors to Monroe and residents alike.

Aviation and Military Museum of North Louisiana

Located at the corner of Kansas Lane and Central Avenue, the Aviation and Military Museum of North Louisiana is in one of the historic buildings from the WWII Selman Field Army-Air Force Navigation School.

The Museum’s mission is to “preserve and promote aviation and military history and the legacy of the men and women who contributed to it.” The museum had a grand reopening in November 2007. Additional information can be found at www.ammla.net.

Biedenharn Museum & Gardens

The Biedenharn Museum & Gardens is located at 2006 Riverside Drive and features the Elsong Gardens, the Biedenharn Home and the Bible Museum. The Museum commemorates Joseph Biedenharn, a Monroe resident who was the first to bottle Coca-Cola. In June 2007, the Louisiana Bond Commission approved \$4.5 million in bonds to expand and renovate facilities at the Biedenharn Museum and Gardens in Monroe. Additional information can be found at www.bmuseum.org.

Brown Bag Concerts

The Brown Bag Concert series is organized by the Northeast Louisiana Arts Council. Local artists perform live music at noon, from April to October, in downtown Monroe. Additional information can be found at www.ulm.edu/~nlac/.

Bry Art Gallery

The Bry Art Gallery is a gallery at the University of Louisiana at Monroe open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Admission is free.



Impresario’s Choice

The Impresario’s Choice is a non-profit organization that offers a Broadway Series at the Monroe Civic Center. Started in 1998, this organization’s mission is “to bring high-quality Broadway musicals on national tour to Northeast Louisiana and to expand the theatre going audience, both in number and diversity.” Additional information can be found at www.impresarioschoice.com.

Isaiah Garrett Law Office

Located at 520 South Grand Street, the small building also known as the Little Red Brick House is a recreated mid-19th century law office museum. The Monroe Committee of the National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Louisiana leased the property from the City and led the preservation effort with such success that it received the Special Award 1994 from the Louisiana Preservation Alliance. This small house museum is open by appointment only for educational purposes and requires two days advance notice. Additional information can be found at www.nscda.org/museums/louisiana.htm.

Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo

The Louisiana Purchase Gardens and Zoo is located at 1405 Bernstein Park Drive. It consists of over 80 acres of zoological park exhibits including about 500 animals; many of which are in naturalistic habitats. The mission of the Zoo is to “help people develop a sustainable relationship with nature.” Additional information can be found at www.monroezoo.org.

Masur Museum of Art

The Slagle House at 1400 South Grand Street was donated to the City of Monroe in 1963 for use as an art museum. This Tudor style building is Northeast Louisiana’s largest visual arts museum and features six to eight temporary exhibits each year as well as a permanent collection. The mission of the Masur Museum is to “provide a quality visual arts experience through temporary exhibitions, educational activities and programs, and collections management, for the citizens of the City of Monroe and the community of Northeast Louisiana.” Additional information can be found at www.monroela.us/masurmuseum.php.



Slagle House, a national register historic property that now houses the Masur Museum of Art.

Monroe Civic Center

Located at 401 Lea Joyner Memorial Expressway, the Monroe Civic Center features an arena, conference hall, convention center, equestrian pavilion and the W.L. “Jack” Howard Theatre. Additional information can be found at www.monroela.us/civiccenter.php.



The Monroe Civic Center



Monroe Symphony Orchestra

The Monroe Symphony Orchestra began in 1971; its mission is to “provide live, symphonic music of high artistic quality for the education and enjoyment of the people of Northeast Louisiana and the region.” The Orchestra’s yearly events feature a subscription season, an educational concert, a mid-season, non-subscription concert and run-out concerts in rural communities in North Louisiana. Additional information can be found at www.bayou.com/symphony/.

Museum of Natural History

The University of Louisiana at Monroe (ULM) features a Museum of Natural History that includes three departments: division of botany, division of zoology and the molecular genetics laboratory. The Museum is housed in four buildings across the campus and works with the University’s Department of Biology. Additional information can be found at www.ulm.edu/biology/museum.htm.

North Delta Music Project

The North Delta Music Project is a non-profit organization working to bring live music to Northeast Louisiana. The Project organizes free concerts in downtown Monroe along the Ouachita River.

Northeast Louisiana Children’s Museum

Located at 323 Walnut Street, the Northeast Louisiana Children’s Museum provides a variety of exhibits geared towards children including traveling exhibits and permanent exhibits such as the Kids Café, Health Hall, the Think Tank, Stuffee and Toddler Town. Additional information can be found at www.nelcm.org.

Northeast Louisiana Delta African American Heritage Museum

The Northeast Louisiana Delta African American Heritage Museum was established in 1994. The museum features material on the civil rights movement in Northeast Louisiana as well as art works by Don Cincone, Bernard Menyweather and Agnes Hicks. It is located at 503 Plum Street, and in 2007 was planning to relocate to Chennault Park. The Museum’s mission is the “preservation and promotion of African American contributions and culture through public education, artistic and cultural events.” Additional information can be found at www.nldaahm.com.

Poverty Point

Northeast of Monroe is the unique prehistoric earth works known as Poverty Point. One of the most important archeological sites in North America, the area is thought to have housed a lower Mississippi Valley culture from between 1730 and 1350 B.C. Additional information can be found at <http://www.crt.state.la.us/parks/ipvertypt.aspx>.

President’s Lyceum Series

The President’s Lyceum Series is a lecture series at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Guests include Steve Forbes, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Ben Stein.

Rebecca’s Doll House

Rebecca’s Doll House is a doll museum located at 4500 Bon Aire Drive. The museum’s collection includes over 2,000 antique dolls.

Strauss Playhouse

Located at 1300 Lamy Lane, the Strauss Playhouse features theater performances of popular plays throughout the year. Additional information can be found at www.strausstheatre.com.



Twin City Ballet Company

The Twin City Ballet Company is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1970. The Company's purpose is to enrich the community with dance opportunities for both viewers and dancers. The Twin City Ballet Company features three performances each year. The Company's annual Christmas performance attracts about 20,000 people to the Monroe Civic Center. Additional information can be found at www.twincityballet.com.

University of Louisiana at Monroe School of Visual and Performing Arts

The School of Visual and Performing Arts is part of the University of Louisiana at Monroe and features art, music, dance, theatre and Louisiana Lyric Opera. Through this school, Monroe features exhibits and performances by young artists. Additional information can be found at www.ulm.edu/vapa/.

14.3 Historic and Cultural Resources Findings

- Monroe has 21 properties and two districts listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Monroe has a number of cultural resources including eight museums, four performing arts companies, two concert series, a lecture series, a zoo, a university visual and performance art school and a civic center
- In 1819, the settlement at Fort Miro was renamed in honor of the steamer James Monroe which visited the area and the then President, James Monroe from which the steamer got its name
- Monroe was the home of Joseph Biedenharn, who in 1894 was the first to bottle Coca-Cola.
- Delta Air Service was founded in Monroe in 1928
- The City's rich aviation history and the men and women who have gone served in the Armed Forces from Monroe and North Louisiana are celebrated at the Aviation and Military Museum