

## GULF PARK COLLEGE, LONG BEACH, MISSISSIPPI

### Mississippi Landmark Significance Report

prepared by  
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Chief Architectural Historian, MDAH

#### ML log #:

1. Date considered by committee: February 11, 2010
2. Name of property: Gulf Park College (now Gulf Park campus, University of Southern Mississippi)
3. County: Harrison
4. Address of property: 730 Beach Boulevard
5. Owner of property: University of Southern Mississippi
6. National Register Status: eligible, not listed



**Summary:** Established as a for-profit junior college for women in 1919, Gulf Park College (which now forms the historic core of USM's Gulf Park Campus) is eligible for Mississippi Landmark designation for both historic and architectural significance. Historically, it was at the forefront of the junior college movement in the South, pre-dating the 1922 legislation establishing public junior colleges; and architecturally, the three remaining early buildings were the work of two regionally known master architects, Rathbone DeBuys (1874-1960) of New Orleans and N.W. Overstreet (1888-1973) of Jackson.

#### History:

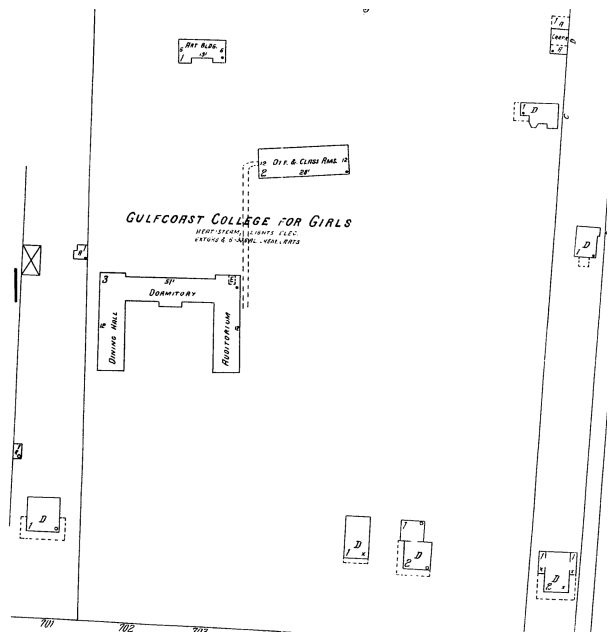
Gulf Park College for Women was founded in 1919 by a group of local citizens, including Col. J.C. Hardy, headmaster of Gulf Coast Military Academy, who believed the Mississippi Coast needed a college for women. Established as a private, for-profit institution, the college, which opened in 1921, included four years of high school classes and two years of college-level courses, a common combination in the early years of the junior college movement. Richard G. Cox, first and long-time president of Gulf Park, joined the college after serving as the Dean of Studies at Ward-Belmont Junior College for Women in Nashville. Cox led the school through its most productive years, 1919-1950, remaining as President Emeritus until his death in 1964. Cox was a nationally recognized leader in the junior college movement—he served as president of the American Association of Junior Colleges in 1931—and Gulf Park benefitted from his guidance, becoming accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1926.

Settling on a large parcel of Gulf-front land at the eastern edge of Long Beach, construction began soon after the organization of the college. The board hired Rathbone DeBuys, a prominent New Orleans architect with family connections on the Mississippi Coast, to design the new campus, complete with a dormitory (Hardy Hall-see Attachment A), academic building (Attachment B), music building, an infirmary, and an 800-foot pier extending from the center of the campus into the Mississippi Sound. DeBuys also designed the drives and sidewalks that created one focal point in front of Hardy Hall and another in front of the academic building, and in 1923 came back to help create the Art Studio building. For whatever reason, DeBuys was not hired back in 1926 to design a new dormitory, Lloyd Hall. Instead, the board hired Jackson architect N.W. Overstreet, who maintained a branch office on the Coast during the late 1910s and into the 1920s. Overstreet's Lloyd Hall kept the general Mission-style established by Debuys, but the single wing of the building created a slightly asymmetrical arrangement with the administration building and Hardy Hall. It is possibly that Lloyd Hall was meant to be expanded later in order to create a U-plan building similar to Hardy Hall, which would also place the administration building at the exact center of the triangular core.

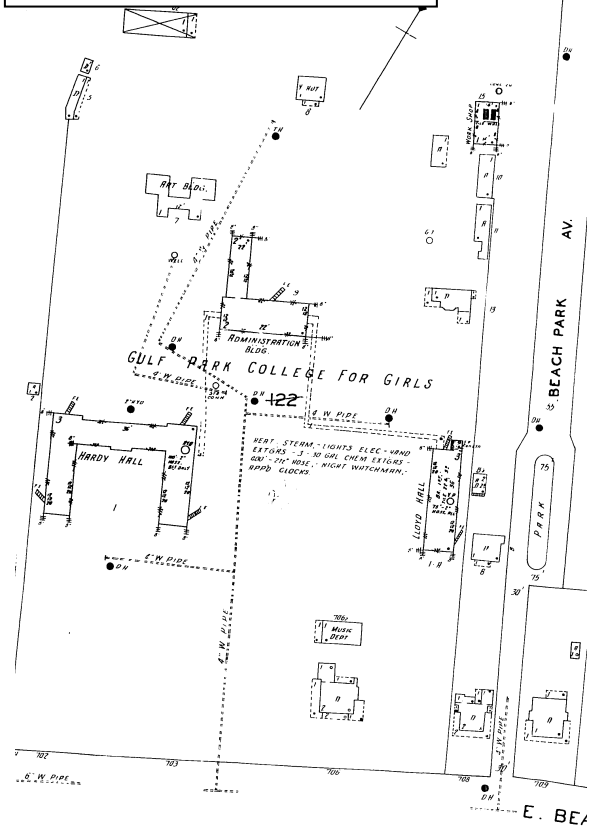
Gulf Park's student population, housed in the dormitories Hardy Hall and Lloyd Hall, stayed constant around 250 after the construction of Lloyd Hall in 1926. Changes in the economy and society after World War II brought struggles to the college, and it changed its status to non-profit institution in 1949 in order to be able to accept donations and possibly build an endowment. While student population continued to remain steady, and even climbed to 375 after the construction of Elizabeth Hall in 1963, women's colleges in general struggled to define their mission once many private and public colleges began accepting women. Severe damage from Hurricane Camille in 1969 dealt a death blow to the college, destroying several beachfront buildings and damaging other structures, and the last class of students graduated in May, 1971. The campus was sold to the State of Mississippi, and it opened as the Gulf Park campus of the University of Mississippi in the fall semester of 1971.

When USM took over the campus, it inherited eleven substantial historic buildings, and an additional number of secondary buildings such as stables (for horseback riding), a swimming pool and pool house, and playing fields. Most of the substantial buildings survived, with alterations, until Hurricane Katrina: these included the administration building, Hardy, Lloyd, and Elizabeth Halls, the old president's house, the old art studio (later Cox Library), Sara Smith Art Studio, and the old business manager's house. Hurricane Katrina, in August 2005, washed through the entire Gulf Park campus, all the way to the railroad tracks. The most significance damage occurred to those buildings closest to the beachfront—the old president's house and dean's cottage were washed completely away—but in addition, the old art studio, to the rear of Hardy Hall, partially collapsed after being washed through by the storm surge. The three largest buildings—Hardy Hall, Administration Building, and Lloyd Hall—were also heavily damaged by the strong surge, but because of their substantial construction were able to withstand the blow better than the smaller buildings.

Gulf Park Campus 1924



Gulf Park Campus 1930



**Historic Significance:** Gulf Park College was one of the first, if not the first, junior colleges in Mississippi. Established and opened before the passage of the legislation that laid the groundwork for a public junior college system in the state, Gulf Park pre-dates the earliest public junior colleges, Pearl River Junior College and Hinds Junior College, which grew out of the agricultural high schools at those campuses. Although it never called itself a junior college, Gulf Park from the start combined a four-year high school curriculum with two years of college, a common mode of operation for junior colleges in the first several decades of the movement. Since Mississippi's was the first public junior college system in the country, Gulf Park would also be considered a very early (although not the first) such institution nationally. Locally, Gulf Park College provided the only college education—even one limited to the first two years—for women on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, a role considered so important that private investors created this for-profit institution rather than wait for a public college to open.

**Architectural Significance:** The three remaining buildings of Gulf Park College, built in the Mission style popular on the Gulf Coast in the 1910s and 1920s, show the work of two master architects, Rathbone DeBuys and N.W. Overstreet. Rathbone Debuys (1874-1960) of New Orleans graduated from Tulane with degrees in both civil engineering and architecture. In addition to his New Orleans landmarks (Loyola University and the U.S. Immigration Station, among others), DeBuys designed the Lauren Rodgers Museum and First Presbyterian Church in Laurel, and the Post Office in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, all of which are listed on the National Register. N.W. Overstreet (1888-1973), considered among many to be the dean of Mississippi architecture from the 1920s through the 1960s, was also one of the founders of the Mississippi chapter of the AIA in 1929. Through his succession of firms, including the most prominent Overstreet & Town, he was responsible for hundreds of landmark buildings around the state, including the scores of schools and numerous courthouses.

**Resource Description:** The historic core of the Gulf Park College campus fills the southern half of what is now the University of Southern Mississippi's Gulf Park campus. While the original campus extended, as it does now, from the beach road (now Highway 90) to the L&N Railroad, the north section of that historic campus was used mainly for recreational purposes such as horse riding and swimming, and new buildings, erected since USM's acquisition of the property in 1971, now stand on this once-open space. In addition to the three remaining historic buildings, the campus boasts a number of mature live oak trees, most famously the Friendship Oak, a tree near Hardy Hall said to be hundreds of years old.

**Integrity:** The major changes to Gulf Park occurred soon after the college closed and the campus was acquired by the State of Mississippi. At that time, the formerly open area to the rear of the campus began to be built upon. This area is not included in this designation. Alterations also occurred to the historic core of the campus, including replacement windows and interior modifications in all three of the buildings proposed for designation. However, these buildings should be understood as a historic district, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and by that definition, the campus retains a high degree of integrity: the grounds, buildings, and circulation patterns have held together and are still very recognizable, even as the surrounding landscape for miles in either direction has been swept almost clean in the destruction of Hurricane Katrina.

#### **Designation Intent/Property Description:**

The Mississippi Landmark designation encompasses the historic core of the former Gulf Park College campus, from the beach road (Hwy 90) north to an imaginary line running east-west to the rear (north) of the Administration Building (see attached map). Within this designated boundary are the three remaining historic buildings dating to the early years of Gulf Park College (Hardy Hall, Administration Building, and Lloyd Hall), the system of drives, walks, and plantings, the mature live oak trees, the large open space at the front of campus, and the original piers flanking both the pedestrian entrance and the two drives into campus. In addition, the 1963 Elizabeth Hall, the work of Bay St. Louis architects Oubre & Wagner, stands within the stated boundaries of the Landmark designation. Although a fine modernist interpretation of the arched Mission style of the earlier buildings and worth rehabilitating for future use, Elizabeth Hall is not itself within the intent of this designation.

The interior spaces of Hardy and Lloyd Hall have been heavily modified and even gutted in the past: Lloyd Hall appears to retain no original interior features. Hardy Hall does retain several first-floor features: its open lounge area with brick fireplace, the large open space that originally served as an auditorium and more recently as a cafeteria, and the original open arcade along the southern façade that was later enclosed. Those original features that remain in these two buildings should be retained, and exterior features such as windows should be replaced with a design more appropriate to the original architecture than the current replacements are. The upper floors of both Lloyd and Hardy appear to have already been gutted, and are of less consequence from a preservation perspective. The Administration Building, retains more of its original or historic interior material than the other two buildings, including original floorplan, stairs, and many walls. The interior of this building, befitting its function as a classroom and office building, is simply detailed.

Regarding the landscaping and layout of the historic core, care should be taken in any rehabilitation plan, to maintain the focal points that historically defined the campus: the fountain in front of Hardy is one of the remnants of these focal points, but originally the Administration Building had its own focal point, a circular drive just to the front of the Friendship Oak and directly in front of the Administration Building. This in fact was the focal point of the whole front campus, connecting the Administration Building by sidewalk with the pedestrian entrance gate (still standing) and the pier into the Mississippi Sound beyond. Six original stuccoed piers.entrance gates that flanked the drive and walks onto campus also still stand at the edge of Highway 90 and are within the scope of this designation.



This artistic representation of the Gulf Park campus, dating to about 1948, shows the major buildings and the circular patterns of drive and walks. The six stuccoed gates fronting onto Highway 90 are also clearly seen.

Property/Designation Description:



Red line indicates boundary of designation

**HARDY HALL, GULF PARK COLLEGE, LONG BEACH, MISSISSIPPI**

**Mississippi Landmark Significance Report**

prepared by  
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February 11, 2010

**Resource Description:** Hardy Hall is Mission-style three-story, brick and stucco, U-shaped building, built 1920-1921 by New Orleans construction firm Chevally & Fursden (who also built the old Mississippi City School, now Lynn Meadows Discover Center) and designed by architect Rathbone DeBuys of New Orleans. Originally housing all students, Hardy Hall also contained an auditorium, dining room, reception rooms, and sun parlors facing the Gulf on all floors.



The two forward-facing wings flanking the center courtyard feature stepped-gable parapets, a geometric motif of terra cotta in the upper wall, and five bays of round-arched windows on all three floors unified by a single concrete sill. The center block is accessed through a formal courtyard focused on an original fountain. The main entry bay, which is set below a stepped-gabled parapet and slightly projects from the rest of the wall, features round-arched openings framed by simple cast-concrete or terra cotta colonettes. This entry bay is flanked by three bays of rectangular-headed tripartite windows. All windows are replacements—either with a single pane of glass or with metal-framed 1/1 double-hung sash— but the windows fit the original openings and the fenestration patterns remain. Originally, an arcade lined the front of the center block, serving as a primary circulation space between wings; the center section of this arcade, the section in front of the main entrance, was enclosed in a c.1980 renovation, and a new flat-roofed one-story arcade was added to the front.

On the interior, many changes occurred in the c.1980 renovation: ceilings were dropped and all original trim and finishes were removed. However, the large auditorium space was retained, along with the fireplace and mantle in the parlor at the main entrance, and the basic double-loaded corridor plan was retained.

**Historical Significance:** Hardy Hall was one of two major buildings originally built on the Gulf Park campus, and came to represent the gracious hospitality advocated and taught by the college. The most prominent building on the campus, it is the one represented in almost all of the early promotional literature for the college

**Architectural Significance:** Hardy Hall was designed by New Orleans architect Rathbone Debuys, a regionally significant architect who designed numerous landmarks listed on the National Register and several designated as Mississippi Landmarks. While the building has been altered, it still maintains enough integrity to convey its original style and grandeur as a landmark on the campus and the Gulf Coast.

**Integrity:** Several changes have occurred to the building in the last 30 years: the windows have been replaced with fixed panes of glass and metal frame sash; the arcaded main entrance has been obscured by a later arcade in front of it; much interior detailing, although undoubtedly simple, has been removed. However, the building's style is still very evident, and the exterior changes are completely reversible—pictures of the building with its original wood casement windows abound. Realistically, the interiors of most institutional buildings often change over time as new uses come and go—several important features have been retained, if in a somewhat obscured state, and can be restored in the repair from Katrina, including the originally open arcade opening onto the

central courtyard, the parlor mantle and fireplace, the large open space in the west wing that served originally as the auditorium, and even the double-loaded corridors above.

Hurricane Katrina damaged the building when its storm surge washed through the first floor, rising almost to the ceilings. Initial assessments by FEMA's engineers rated the building as 60% damage, excluding contents. A large proportion of this damage was in the one-story, non-historic kitchen addition to the west side of the building, which completely collapsed. The rest of the first floor in the historic section was severely abused and virtually no surface was untouched by the damage; however, since the finishes were mostly non-historic, their loss was less damaging to the integrity of the building than it would have been. The historic finishes that had not been removed from the building are, for the most part, still intact, and can be repaired and restored, hopefully in a more sympathetic fashion than previously.

**Designation Intent/Property Description:** The designation applies to the exterior and interior of the building and the central courtyard. Since the exterior will be undergoing a full renovation, this will be a good opportunity to reverse some of the more unsympathetic changes that have occurred to the building, most importantly the window replacement and the arcaded addition at the front entrance. On the interior, the front parlor with its mantle and fireplace, and the open auditorium space should be retained, but upper floors, already heavily modified, are of less significance. If possible, restoring the sun parlor areas overlooking the Gulf would go far toward reclaiming the building's original spirit and use.



**ADMINISTRATION BUILDING, GULF PARK COLLEGE, LONG BEACH, MISSISSIPPI****Mississippi Landmark Significance Report**

prepared by  
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 February 11, 2010

**Resource Description:** Gulf Park College's Administration Building forms the center of the triangular grouping at the historic core of the campus. A two-story stuccoed building, it maintains the Mission style architecture of contemporary, Hardy Hall, but instead of the arcaded breeziness of Hardy, the administration building has a more formal composition, relying on a central arched entrance and terra cotta decoration above to serve as a focal point. Visually, the south façade is broken into seven bays, symmetrically spaced, with the center entrance bay and two single-window bays interspersed with four groups of five windows. The windows have all been replaced with metal-framed 6/6 sash, c.1980, but they maintain the dimensions of the original openings, thus retaining the fenestration pattern. Befitting the more formal usage of this building, the entrance is raised from ground level by concrete steps. A rear wing, added to the building in 1930 to provide extra laboratory and classroom space, maintains the same scale, massing, and style of the original. On the interior, although the finishes are simple and utilitarian, as is expected in an administration building, they are mostly original to the building. These include a damaged encaustic tile floor in the entrance hall, 6-light hallway transoms, and original multi-light wood doors.



**Historical Significance:** Gulf Park's Administration Building was one of two major buildings originally built on the Gulf Park campus. The building has historically served as the daily center of campus, housing classes, laboratories, and administrative offices.

**Architectural Significance:** The Administration Building was designed by New Orleans architect Rathbone Debuys, a regionally significant architect who designed numerous landmarks listed on the National Register and several designated as Mississippi Landmarks. The building is also the least altered in the last 30 years, still retaining many original interior features, and perhaps just as importantly, its location serves as the visual focal point of the historic core of the campus.

**Integrity:** The most significant change to the building was the replacement of the windows around 1980 and the replacement of the exterior doors, probably at the same time. While the current windows are not in keeping with the multi-light sash originally in the building, they do fill the original openings, and they will themselves be in need of replacement during future repairs. On the interior, the doors have been replaced, which is a common change in institutional buildings, but as with the windows, these will once again need to be replaced in future repairs.

**Designation Intent/Property Description:** The designation applies to the exterior and interior of the building, including the c.1930 wing at the rear. New windows will undoubtedly be needed in the coming repairs, and early photos show that the original windows were of a 6/6 double-hung-sash configuration. These photos also show that the original front entrance was composed of double-leaf, 8-light doors, topped by a round-arched transom with a circular mullion.



**LLOYD HALL, GULF PARK COLLEGE, LONG BEACH, MISSISSIPPI****Mississippi Landmark Significance Report**

prepared by  
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 February 11, 2010

**Resource Description:** Lloyd Hall, the second dormitory on the campus of Gulf Park College, is a three-story, stuccoed brick building, designed by Jackson architect N.W. Overstreet in a Mission style complimenting both Hardy Hall and the Administration Building. Lloyd Hall also serves as the third point in the triangular core of the campus, and possibly was meant to be enlarged into a U-shaped building similar to Hardy Hall—such an enlargement would have created a symmetrical arrangement with the administration building at the geographical center. Unlike the earlier two buildings, Lloyd Hall, built in 1926, retains many of its original wood windows with concrete sills. On the primary façade (S), a stepped parapet similar to that of the administration building is centered over five window bays composed of multi-light wood casements with round-arched heads and unified by a single sill. Side elevations feature paired double-hung 4/4 windows.



Two entrances are on the west elevation, both set in a projecting vestibule and topped by a stepped parapet. The exterior doors have been replaced and are currently badly damaged from the storm. A stair tower was added toward the front of the west elevation probably in the 1980s, sheltering that entrance. The interior, which was changed from a dormitory to office and classroom space, does not retain much of its historic character, the only evidence of early construction being remains of wood lathe on the center hall wall.

**Historical Significance:** Lloyd Hall, although not an original building to the campus, became a part of the landscape very soon after the opening of the college. Serving as a second dormitory, the building allowed the student population to grow to 250, a number that sustained the college through most of its existence, until the opening of Elizabeth Hall in 1963.

**Architectural Significance:** Lloyd Hall was designed by Jackson architect N.W. Overstreet, whose career spanned 50 years from 1912 until his death in 1973, and who designed numerous landmarks listed on the National Register and designated as Mississippi Landmarks. Lloyd Hall, while smaller than Hardy Hall, exhibits the same massing, scale, Mission style as the original buildings, and show great sensitivity toward the overall design of the campus. Moreover, its exterior is the most intact architecturally, as it has retained its wood windows.

**Integrity:** Lloyd Hall retains its exterior integrity to a higher degree than the other two historic buildings on campus, with its original wood windows intact. The stair tower is set back from the façade and is in keeping with the style of the main building. The interior retains almost no original fabric, except for the center hallway walls. The building was washed through on the first floor in Hurricane Katrina, and this area would have been lost even if it had retained its original finishes. Overall, compared to other comparable buildings on the Coast after Katrina, Lloyd Hall retains a moderately high degree of integrity.

**Designation Intent/Property Description:** The designation applies to the exterior and interior of the building. The original features on the exterior should be refurbished during future repairs, and perhaps doors more sympathetic to the original style could be replicated. The interior, already gutted once, is of less concern, except for possibly keeping the center hallway as the main circulation pattern for the building.

