

Historic Preservation can be simply defined as the attempt to protect objects that have cultural significance. Although usually a professional endeavor, historic preservation efforts can be found throughout the world in both an organized and individual capacity, all striving to preserve not just a building or area, but the legacy that it represents. Here on the LSU campus, we have our own monuments that are in desperate need of protection. The old Armory has been transformed into the Cox Communications Academic Center for Student Athletes, the Pentagon Barracks has recently undergone a major renovation, but the Huey P Long Fieldhouse, LSU's original student union, sits quietly on Fieldhouse Drive decaying under the weight of neglect. Although the rather unobtrusive building has a definite no-frills façade, one only has to walk through its hallowed halls to feel the pull and the power of the building's storied past. During its heyday, students could enter the "L" room, the nickname for the popular student lounge, study at desks and tables which were scattered around the lounge, listen to music on Friday nights in the Cane – Break room, take advantage of the handball courts in the basement, or check out the Fieldhouse's main attraction its 180 – foot long, 48 – foot wide swimming pool, the largest university and college pool in the country at the time.

The Huey P Long Fieldhouse was designed by the New Orleans architectural firm of Weiss, Dreyfous, and Seiferth, who had been handpicked by Huey P Long to design not only this structure, but also several other significant structures including the State Capital. The crowning achievement of the project and the most popular portion of the Fieldhouse was the swimming pool. The water for the pool was furnished by artisan wells, but the pool's significance lies not only in its exceptional construction and mechanics, but also for its impact on the lives of university students. In a Reveille article from August of 1944 the Fieldhouse was described as a place, "where old friends gather, new friends meet, dates are made, and sometimes broken." However, the pool was not just a purely recreational attraction, it was also used to help treat polio – stricken children and was the home of mandatory swimming classes for each university student. The pool became the battle ground for segregation debate in the summer of 1964. In a Reveille article from June 1964, an announcement proclaimed that an earthquake had damaged the pool and forced it to close indefinitely. When University President John Hunter declared that the pool would reopen solely as a teaching facility and would not longer be accessible to students, it sparked a huge controversy over speculation as to the real reason why it had been closed. The summer of 1964 was the first time that African – American students had been admitted to the university, and several of these students had been denied access to the swimming pool and to other Fieldhouse amenities. During this time, it was standard procedure in the South to integrate

academically, but not to allow integration in social functions. The Fieldhouse pool was unceremoniously reopened in April of 1965, without major incident.

In August of 2000, the LSU Board of Supervisors listened to Chancellor Mark Emmert explain the desperate plight of buildings on campus. In his report, Emmert declared that LSU had over 318,000 square feet of “uninhabitable space,” in other words space that in “such terrible disrepair that we have abandoned it.” In his address to the Board he specifically mentioned that this included over 21,000 square feet in the Huey P Long Fieldhouse, other areas that he stated needed immediate action included the Gym Armory and the Music and Dramatic Arts Building. The Gym Armory has since been turned into the Cox Communications Center, and the Music and Dramatic Arts Building is currently undergoing a major overhaul. However, the Huey P Long Fieldhouse remains unchanged. Emmert went on to explain that if LSU did not take swift action, the university’s core would be subjected to urban decay in its core. Many have accused that rather than restore and reuse existing buildings, LSU was instead creating its own version of suburban sprawl. The University had neglected the Fieldhouse for decades, from the slow decay that led to the pool’s eventual closure to the blatant lack of upkeep on the existing structures, which currently house the Departments of Kinesiology and Social Work. Over the past ten years, there have been at least three fundraising campaigns to raise money to restore the Fieldhouse. All the money that has been collected has been reallocated to other areas around the university, while the Fieldhouse has been left to lie in ruins. The current campaign to save the Fieldhouse is being spearheaded by Aimee Schmitt, wife of LSU Swimming and Diving Coach Adam Schmitt, and although she has unbridled enthusiasm and a clear vision for the future, saving the Fieldhouse will take more than just one person. To succeed Ms. Schmitt needs not only the support of the student body, but also the support of the alumni who made many of their college memories in the Fieldhouse. Huey P Long’s vision for the Fieldhouse was to show the entire nation that LSU was a force to be reckoned with. Under Long’s efforts LSU became one of the finest facilities in the South, with top notch faculties and a winning football team. Under the flagship agenda, LSU is trying to once again regain this prominent status as a force in college education, why not start with the symbol of past success and restore the Huey P Long Fieldhouse?

For more information on the Save Huey P Long Fieldhouse Pool visit saveHPL.org

Huey P Long Timeline

August 1931 – Contract for construction of the Huey Pierce Long Fieldhouse is finalized.

April 1932 – Construction on the Fieldhouse is completed at a cost of \$400,000. After its completion the Fieldhouse housed the LSU Student Union, recreation center, ballroom, post office, beauty parlor, soda fountain, barber shop, the longest collegiate outdoor swimming pool in the world, along with dormitories.

Summer 1964 – First African American students are admitted to the university. Several are denied access to the Fieldhouse’s swimming pool and other amenities.

June 1964 – Alaskan earthquake allegedly causes damage to Fieldhouse pool and is closed indefinitely.

Late 1964 – It is disclosed that the LSU Board of Supervisors had issued a directive that the pool was to be close “. . . before permitting integration of the facilities.” The directive sparked petitions that gathered more than 4,000 signatures both in favor and in opposition.

April 1965 – The Huey P Long Fieldhouse is unceremoniously reopened without major incident.

August 2000 – Chancellor Mark Emmert testifies to the Board of Supervisors that the university had to abandon over 21,000 square feet in the Huey P Long Fieldhouse because of its rapidly deteriorating status.

2003 – The Huey P Long Fieldhouse’s pool is closed because of leaks and its advanced stage of deterioration.

September 2008 – The Fieldhouse sits No. 13 on the University’s list of buildings that need to be renovated. The Fieldhouse sits so low on the list because it isn’t academic or research related, despite the fact that about half of the building is currently being used because of its advanced state of decay.