

Program Summary:

This adaptive reuse development transformed an historic primary school building into a modern coworking space to bookend a lively downtown district.

Program Statement: Responding to the need for flexible work environments less than 5 miles from Downtown New Orleans, this adaptive reuse project revived a vacant but historically significant structure. Once home to Gretna's first primary school, the building now serves as a social and economic hub within a vibrant historic district. The main floors of the old school had been gutted and lost much of their historic detailing, save a crumbling plaster auditorium arch along with some interior door casings. These elements were rehabilitated to qualify for Historic Tax Credits. The ground floor now includes a retail tenant, while the upper floors house the co-working center that is the catalyst for the project. The old double-height auditorium is repurposed as "The Commons". Under the restored arch, a custom curved banquette complements a restored auditorium stage, also serving as a meeting space made private by a sweeping stage curtain. The building's grand hallways flood rooms with daylight and accommodate a mix of desk space. Private offices, flexible conference rooms, phone booths, and break areas support a wide range of work styles across all floors. Generous daylighting reduces energy needs while elevating moods. The integration of a museum and small retail tenant supports community inclusion and long-term economic resilience. This project repositions a historic asset to meet the evolving needs of a modern, diverse workforce.

RR-65.01

Building Area: (sf)
18,796 SF (gross)

Cost per Square Foot:
\$270

Construction Cost
\$2.7MM

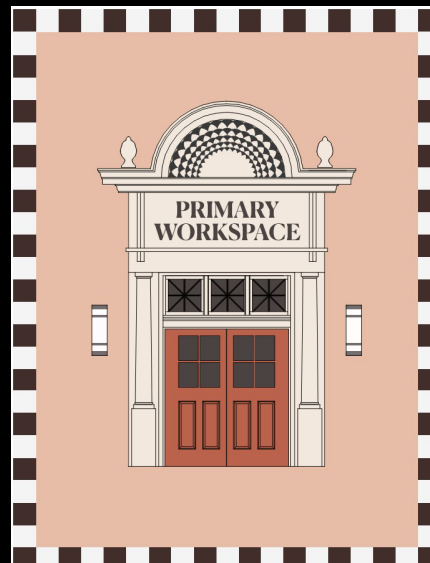
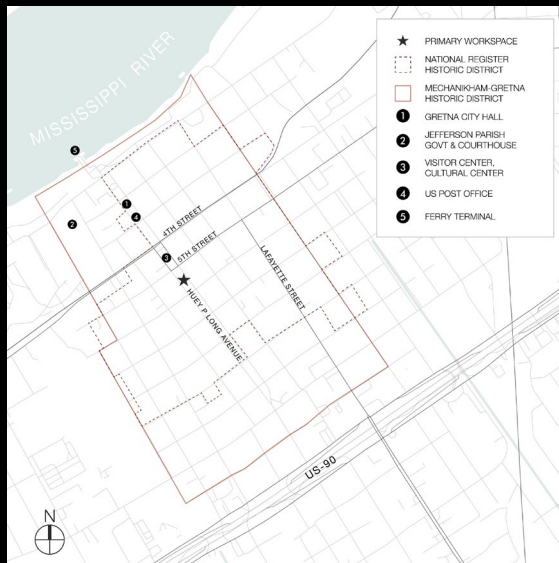
Date of Completion:
December 2024



RR-65.02

The historic Gretna Primary School sat mostly unused in the center of the main boulevard at the most visible entry point to historic downtown Gretna, a charming commercial center growing in popularity in the New Orleans metro area. Iconic from the exterior, it was a mystery to most residents what was on the inside.

Putting this building back into service not only introduces fresh use to a booming mixed-use district, but took what was a mystery to the community and turned it into a beating heart, with spaces for local events, a new outdoor plaza and a tenant space for a small business to serve the new population of office workers supplied by the co-working space.



RR-65.03

A Building Saved is a Green Building

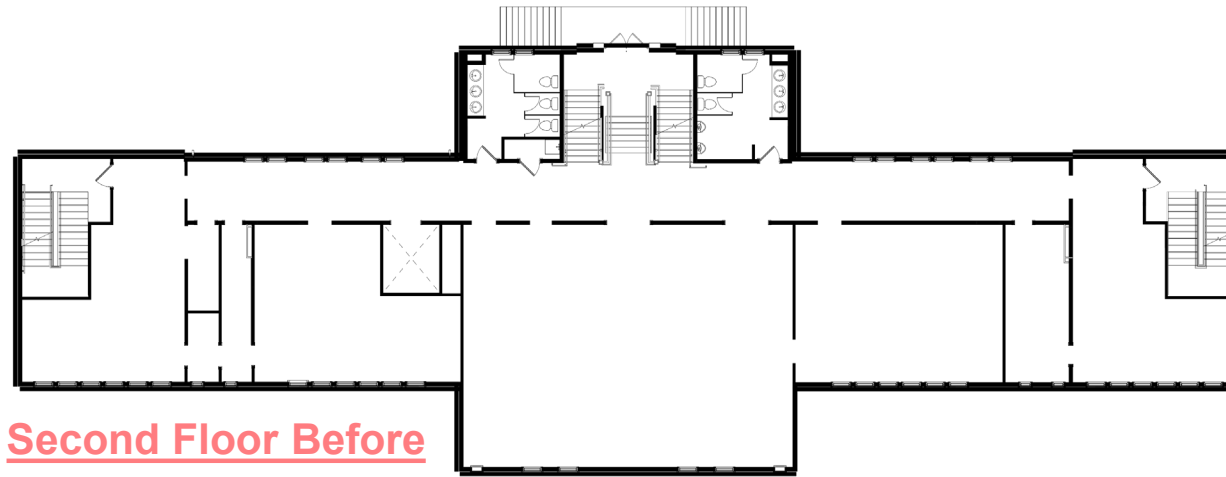
Saving from the wrecking ball an excellent example of early 20th century institutional architecture, the entire exterior was evaluated for weak points and leaks, patched and repaired, and refreshed. All the historic windows were restored, flashed and repainted.



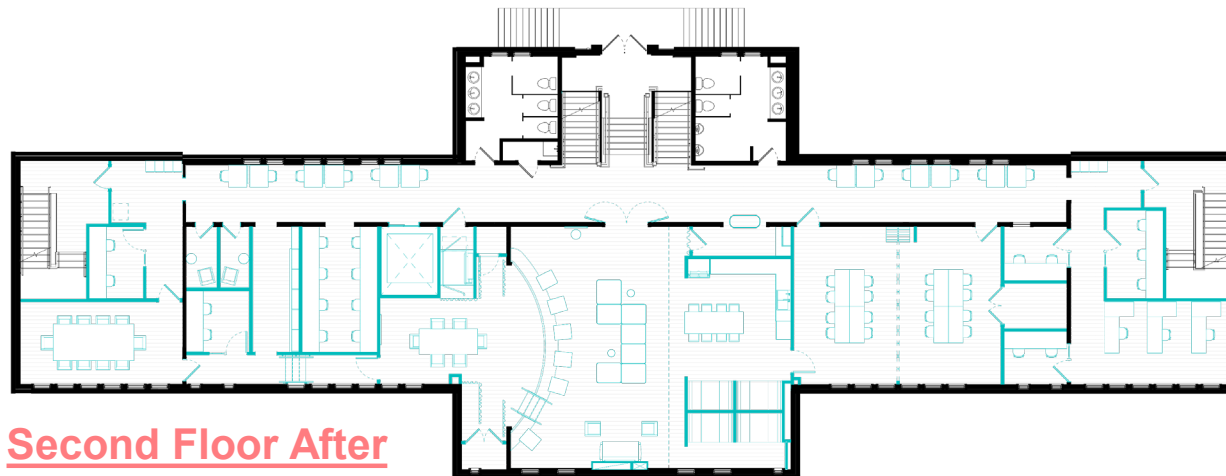
RR-65.04

Second Floor Plan

Fallow for fifty years, the upper floors of the school had been previously gutted and retrofitted with fire exit stairs and an unfinished elevator, with no remaining historic finishes except for the pine flooring, old interior door casings and transoms, and the upper half of the old plaster proscenium arch that once dominated the school's auditorium.



Second Floor Before



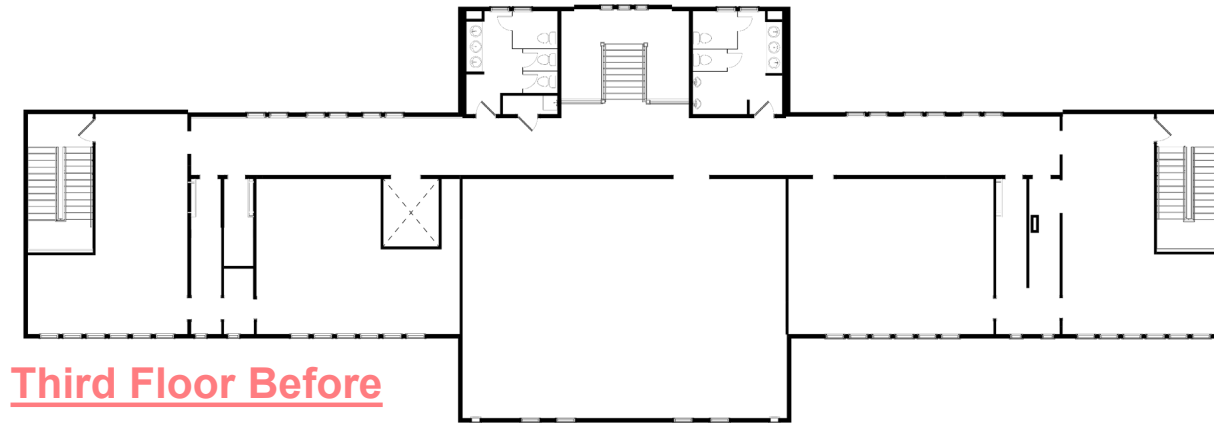
Second Floor After

RR-65.05

Third Floor Plan

The ghosts of old classrooms remained but were too large of a spatial unit for some of the new office program.

The coworking space intervened by keeping the auditorium and major circulation spaces in versions of their old roles, while inserting new small offices in the center of the floor plate to showcase the building's exterior walls and windows in circulation spaces.



Third Floor Before



Third Floor After



RR-65.06

Design for Economy & Resources

The remains of the grand plaster proscenium arch clung precariously to the ceiling framing in an otherwise unfinished double-height space. The space, once host to school assemblies, was reimagined with activity once again centered around the grand arch - this time a backdrop for impromptu meetings, coffee breaks, and occasionally business and community events.

RR-65.07

Restoration of Significant Spaces

Now called "The Commons", the former auditorium was the highest priority for historic restoration guidelines, as were both historic halls immediately adjacent the space that ran the length of the building, and the grand split staircase connecting the light-filled circulation spaces.

Reusing these spaces similarly to how they were originally built to operate connects the building's role in the community's past to its present.





RR-65.08

The Heart of Primary Workspace

The Commons having been gutted, interventions that were not restorative were treated with a modern minimal aesthetic to contrast with the inherited historic material.

Glass-paneled railings, walnut reveal panels and modern decorative lighting give the space a new functionality while not drawing focus away from the historic arch, window and door casings, and the sheer volume of the old space.

Decorative lighting integrated into acoustic baffles assists with the comfort of the space for speaking events and having multiple casual conversations.

RR-65.09

Designing for groups of all shapes and sizes

Furnishings included flexible, minimal seating to allow for a variety of function types, and continuous booth seating along a recreated stage apron that provides hot desk working spaces when not being used for a stage event.



RR-65.10

Shining light on the interiors

Smaller offices in the center of the floor plate utilize the generous window area on the exterior via borrowed light and openings. Smaller offices needed to be kept to the center due to the fact that the historically significant zones were often along the building's exterior walls. Some important openings were repurposed as reception desks, phone booths and mail centers, furnished with warm wood tones, rich textures and soft lighting.





RR-65.11

Let's meet in the hallway after class

The hallways, once filled with teachers and students moving from class to class, become generous spaces to grab a desk and have a quick chat with a guest or another office tenant. Historic door and window casings and transoms that remained were restored where possible and replicated when necessary to keep the feeling much as it may have in its school years.

RR-65.12

Designing for Change

With many differently-sized potential tenants, meeting spaces need to be flexible. This conference room has a movable partition that terminates at a historic mullion, splitting a large conference room into two medium sized versions when needed.

