Metro Council member W.T. Winfield stands in front of historic Scott Street School, which he attended for half-days only as an elementary school student more than 40 years ago.

**Scott Street School a bright spot in BR history**

By CHANTE DIONNE WARREN

The bricks are a bit dingy and the paint is cracking, but Scott Street School still holds a bright spot in Baton Rouge history.

The neoclassical structure, which overlooks North 19th Street, is the oldest surviving relic of the days when black children finally got to attend decently built public schools, if only for half a day.

“We were placed on a platoon system,” recalls Metro Councilman W.T. Winfield, who attended the school in 1950.

“The elementary school kids would go to school in the morning and then the junior high kids would go in the afternoon,” Winfield said.

Today’s Louisiana Special is another in a series of features called **LOOKING back**

in which veterans of politics, civil rights, business, education, law enforcement and other high profile occupations compare today’s scene to those of years past.

The State Review Commission for the National Register of Historic Places has nominated the building at 900 N. 19th St. to be included on a list of national landmarks.

“Scott Street School is the only surviving symbol of the coming of age for blacks in East Baton Rouge Parish,” said Patricia Dunecan, architectural historian for the state Division of Historic Preservation.

The school and others like it were built only after decades of pleading by black leaders in Baton Rouge.

As far back as Reconstruction, black Methodists and Baptists conducted schooling for their children, according to a thesis written in 1937 by the late educator James M. Frazier, a member of the “colored building committee” that advised the School Board.

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Frazier was president of the now-closed Leeland College and principal of McKinley High School.

In 1877, the School Board recognized the need to open public schools for black children, but the buildings often were old and dilapidated, with no heat, drinking water or sanitary toilets, according to Frazier's account.

"The schools were ill adapted, but that's all they had," Duncan said.

Because of the inadequate public school buildings, some parents continued sending their children to black private schools, according to Frazier's thesis.

But not all parents could afford tuition fees.

By 1913, after much persistence by blacks, the parish School Board erected the first modern school building for blacks.

Between 1916 to 1917, Reddy Street School, later Reddy Elementary, was built to handle increasing black student enrollment. Reddy was closed in 1981 by federal court order.

Scott Street School was built in 1920 for students in first through seventh grades. It contained 14 classrooms, a library, principal's office, restroom and other modern equipment.

Historian Edna Jordan Smith said the platoon system started in the 1940s because the black schools were so crowded.

As more schools were built to handle growth in the city, Scott Street School eventually dropped its platoon system, Winfield said.

Blacks helped to buy the land until the government could build additional schools, Winfield said.

The Scott Street School building is owned by the School Board and is leased by Head Start, a learning program for pre-schoolers.

City-parish crews are repairing the building's roof, and painting both the exterior and the interior.

Winfield carries vivid memories of his days at Scott Street School, where the average classroom contained 30 to 35 students.

"Scott Street School was the center of the black community in the '30s, '40s, '50s, '60s, for this side of town," Winfield said.

Winfield attended Scott Street in first and second grade, but was later moved to Eden Park and then Greenville schools.

"Students had to rely on our teachers and their school supplies," he said.

"We loved our teachers and we didn't think anyone else in the community knew more than they knew."

"It gives me a great deal of joy and pride to know that an institution and site of community pride remains intact after all these years, particularly since it remains in use as an educational facility," Winfield said.

"The elementary school kids would go to school in the morning and then the junior high kids would go in the afternoon."

— Metro Councilman W.T. Winfield
former Scott Street student