Silliman Collegiate Institute for Young Ladies in Clinton was for 79 years the Louisiana school to which many of the area's oldest and more prominent families sent their daughters. From its founding in May, 1852, until its doors failed to open for the new term in August, 1931, scores of women from well-known families attended the school, many to become leaders in Louisiana education. Even today, 35 years after the last class was graduated, local Silliman alumnae, from as far back as the turn of the century, speak often and fondly of their college days.

As for the boys, a history of the college printed in the 1926 yearbook notes that “the question of admitting boys to Silliman came up as early as 1875 but the board passed a resolution excluding boys over 12 years of age.”

Youngsters of both sexes could enter the Silliman primary and preparatory departments. Boys attended through the sub-freshman year (approximately the eighth grade), but all higher classes and the college department were restricted to girls. Though in earliest days Silliman did award bachelor's degrees, it was always equivalent to a modern junior high college in number of years study offered. Silliman prided itself on its outstanding music department.

The only other two-year college in the area in former years was the Normal School, (now Northwestern) at Natchitoches, which was co-educational. Many Silliman graduates went on to Newcomb or Louisiana State University, and later earned Master's degrees as well.

For awhile, the Clinton Military Academy (later Loutherm Academy) was located near Silliman.

Silliman College on Bank Street, south of the Marston home, is set in a ten-acre grove of beech and magnolia trees and consists of three two-story white painted, brick buildings. Each building is fronted with large white Doric columns, and all have a second-story gallerie running across the collective front. The three buildings are connected by breezeways. The central structure was
began in 1852, but was not completed until after the Civil War. The halls were erected at a later date. The college was incorporated in 1852 and named for William Silliman, member of the original board of trustees. Fifteen years later, Silliman donated the property to the Presbyterian Church of Louisiana.

During the siege of Port Hudson, several buildings in Clinton, including Mason Hall, Marston House, and Silliman College, were used as Confederate hospitals.

During later years of the war, under the administration of Henry Watkins Allen, the Confederate governor of Louisiana, a medical laboratory was established at Silliman where opium, castor oil, and other medicines were produced for the army.

Social life was all-girl, including teas, May Fetes and afternoon walks with a teacher. There were no sororities, but a literary society was founded in the school's early days and remained popular with students who qualified for membership. Until about 1912, there were no sports at all, but by that date a tennis court became a new campus feature.

Gradually attitudes changed and the social life broadened ever so slightly. There were dances occasionally, but they were very well chaperoned.

Eldon Roard, a columnist for The Memphis Press Scimitar, grew up in Clinton and wrote in a magazine article: “the Silliman girls were glamour girls and heart throbs of the day, but courting them was difficult. It had to be done very formally under the watchful eyes of chaperones. No going off for buggy rides and that sort of thing.” He remembers that one of the belles of the school was a “dark-haired beauty, Eugenia Sentell.”

Junior and senior girls acquired a special privilege - they could leave the campus, with permission, to go for walks without a teacher present. That means, one graduate recalls, the girls could cross the street to the Red Cross Drug Store and have ice cream. “This was a wild thing to do. And we used to dance in our rooms sometimes if we weren’t caught. But there were no real dances, ever.”

The boarding school girls were marched by two’s every Sunday in cap and gown to the church of their choice. Catholic, Jews, and other Protestant denominations were all represented in the Presbyterian school.

One strict rule of Silliman was that the girls could not go within ten feet of the white fence that surrounded the school.

Talking at the dinner tables were considered the height of rudeness. Some alumnae recall, during their attendance, being assigned for meals to tables of eight or ten over which a teacher presided.

Of course, a lot of the rules were broken. Silliman considered between-meal snacks harmful, but when the bread wagon came along, the girls bought its goodies even though they were forbidden to do so.

Infractions of the rules meant demerits and bad reports to one’s parents. If a girl received too many black marks, she was expelled.

There was, of course, a uniform - a navy blue oxford gown which was required wear for off campus. It included a matching mortarboard, and school officials considered it neat and stylish. A brief train, touches of lace, and a sash and streamers were permitted, but teachers carried scissors to snip off streamers they felt were immodestly long and flowing.

“It was an excellent school,” says Mrs. Florence McKinney Peters, first honor graduate of 1904. “I know people from other schools didn’t get what we did. But,” she adds, “I don’t believe it would work today – the girls today want to be where the boys are – but it was a good school in my day.”

\[1912\text{ Regulations}\]  
Visitors will not be received during school and study hours, nor the visits of young gentlemen at any time, unless they bring letters of introduction from parents to the president, and then only at his discretion.

Attended by a teacher, students are required to take a walk in the afternoon when the weather is suitable.

To gain admission to Silliman, a girl need not be rich, but she must show that her surroundings and taste have been wholesome.

The course of study has been brought up to a high standard and is designed to give a breadth of culture beyond the usual routine of female schools.

Boxes of eatables are entirely unnecessary, and parents are most earnestly requested not to send them. Experience has taught us that irregular eating injures the health of girls and is the source of continual anxiety and increased labor to us.

It is the purpose of the founders and directors of this institution to provide, at the lowest possible cost, an education that pertains to strength, refinement, and Christian grace in womanhood.

\[\text{EDUCATION – 1969}\]  
Ten state-supported institutions of higher learning which award degrees in all major fields are situated in every section of Louisiana. Twelve privately endowed colleges of high national ranking are located in the State. An important part of Louisiana’s education system is the trade schools which teach courses designed to meet specific job requirements and diversified industrial economy.