Students, faculty discuss oldest building on campus' history, importance

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Originally known as Southwestern Louisiana Industrial Institute and later as the University of Southwestern Louisiana, the University of Louisiana at Lafayette has undergone many changes over the years.

But even during its long tenure, many buildings still stand from the original construction of the university.

"I believe Foster Hall is the oldest building that is still standing," Kyle Sarver, the Associate Director for New Student Orientation, said in an email.

According to the UL Lafayette website, construction was completed in 1902 after that of the (Old) Martin Hall, which was demolished in 1963.

Foster Hall is currently one of the many buildings that makes up the UL Lafayette Quad.

Nestled next to many seemingly similar buildings, Foster may appear insignificant to the average hurrying student.

Yet, the age of the building indicates a hidden history.

Sarver, who also teaches a UNIV 100 class focused on the history and traditions of UL Lafayette, shared some of the history he had about the old building.

"Foster Hall's original purpose was as a dormitory for girls (and was originally named 'Girl's Dorm')," Sarver said. "It was renamed to Foster Hall in 1920 in honor of Governor Murphy Foster, who signed the bill into a law to create SLII (Southwestern Louisiana Industrial Institute - the university's original name) in 1898."

Foster Hall also mentioned how the building has changed over the years.

"While the building was originally used as a girl's dormitory, in 1905 DeClouet Hall was built and became 'New Girl's Dorm' and Foster Hall became a boy's dormitory. It was renovated in 1969 to become a 'Student Services' building," he said.

Foster Hall continued to change, shifting to fit other needs of the university.

"Foster Hall is currently home to the offices of Student Financial Aid, Work Student, Undergraduate Admissions and Recruitment, and Veteran's Services," Sarver said.

One student, who spent a lot of time in Foster last year, commented on the status of the building.

"Foster Hall is one of the setting stones for how our university is designed. It gives us a more traditional and classic feel compared to the newer buildings or like Tech, where it feels more industrial," said Nova Vernon, a sophomore from Monroe, LA.

She praised the apparent age of Foster.

"It makes our campus feel homier," Vernon said. "Because of the way it's built, it feels older and fancier with all the brick."

Sarver concluded, sharing one of his favorite quotes about the university:

"There is a quote from the Lafayette Gazette on September 16, 1899 that I always enjoy every time I read it. I believe it rings true today. It says 'We are not to think of the Industrial School as a temporary thing, for it is not. It is an institution for all time. A hundred years from now, it will be amongst our descendants, a hundred times more efficient. Its influence will have spread, and the parish of Lafayette will point with pride to the school, and honor the memory of those whose public spirit has built it.'"