



## Founding Fathers

The city of Leesville was established as the county seat in 1871, after the parish was created from parts of Rapides, Natchitoches, and Sabine parishes.



Dr. Edmund E. Smart donated a portion of his plantation for the town, including the entire city block for the Vernon Parish Courthouse. He served as treasurer for the new city in 1871 and went on to serve in the Louisiana House and Senate.



Dr. Smart's father, John R. Smart, lived on his own plantation called the "Retreat" which was located about 4 miles north of Leesville. Senator Smart served in the Louisiana House and Senate, both before and after the Civil War, and introduced the original act to create the new parish. He named the new city "Leesville" in honor of Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

The current Vernon Parish Courthouse is located at 215 South Fourth Street in the historic First National Bank building. The *historic* courthouse at 201 South Third Street is the third to be built on this, the original site. The first, built in 1871, was a simple wooden building. The second was built in the 1880s and was an elaborate Romanesque Revival structure. Unfortunately, this grand structure had to be destroyed when the tower began to pull away from the main building due to problems arising from artesian wells on the site.

[www.VentureVernon.com](http://www.VentureVernon.com).



**Vernon Parish Tourism Commission**  
201 South 3<sup>rd</sup> St.  
P.O. Box 349  
Leesville, LA 71496

(337) 238-0783  
(800) 349-6287  
(337) 238-3403 (Fax)  
[www.VentureVernon.com](http://www.VentureVernon.com)

## LEESVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT

❁ *Walking Tour* ❁

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## Leesville, Louisiana

Located near the center of the parish, Leesville has served as the parish seat since creation of the parish in 1871. History buffs will love the Historic Downtown District centered on Third Street. The district offers a variety of artistic entertainment through art exhibits, musical performances, and several annual festivals which are held throughout the year.

Visit our website at [www.VentureVernon.com](http://www.VentureVernon.com) or call 1-800-349-6287 for more information.



Second Vernon Parish Courthouse



# Venture into the Past...

## 1. Vernon Parish Historic Courthouse, 1910 –

This Beaux-Arts style building is the third courthouse to occupy this site. Built in the shape of a Greek cross, it has two full stories and a third story cupola which has a clock on each side. The bell which was originally housed inside the cupola can be seen in the gazebo on the courthouse lawn. Corinthian columns, topped by elaborately decorated pediments, flank each entrance.

## 2. Smart Plantation Home, 1858 –

The oldest building in Leesville, the Smart Plantation house was the home of Dr. Edmond E. Smart, *Father of Leesville*. The city was laid out and built on his plantation after he donated land for the Courthouse.

## 3. Lyons-Stelly Home, 1900 –

The Benson H. Lyons House is a large Queen Anne Revival style residence with prominent Eastlake features. The double wraparound gallery outlining three sides of the home is bedecked with elaborate woodwork which makes this one of the most pretentious homes in Vernon Parish.

## 4. Lyons Building, 1907 –

The Lyons Building is Italianate in style. The flat roof, imposing cornices, and arched windows combine to form one of Leesville's most elegant buildings. It is remembered by many as the location of both the "Happy Hour Café" and the office of Dr. I.O. Winfree, a dentist who practiced for over 50 years in this location.

## 5. Leesville Hotel, 1907 –

This hotel had thirty-five guest rooms and was the latest in high style when built. A combination of Mission and Classical style, the hotel originally had a large two-story porch with Roman columns in the center of the main façade. The infamous Bonnie and Clyde were among some of its most notorious guests.



13. Interior shots of the National Hotel in its hey-day.

## 6. Ward House, 1920's –

The Ward House is an early 1920's property that was first built as a boarding house by Mrs. Ward, who was known for her gracious hospitality and comfortable accommodations. The house with its large L-shaped porch supported by sturdy columns is an example of Arts & Crafts architecture. John Beck's Pub is located inside the completely renovated Bed & Breakfast.

## 7. Booker-Lewis House, 1904 –

The Booker-Lewis House & Restaurant offers a graceful balance of elegance and country charm. Built in the Queen Anne Revival style, the house retains many of the original windowpanes and all of the original Louisiana yellow pine door casings and floors. It was originally built for Mr. H.T. Booker, a bookkeeper at the Nona Mills Lumber Company.

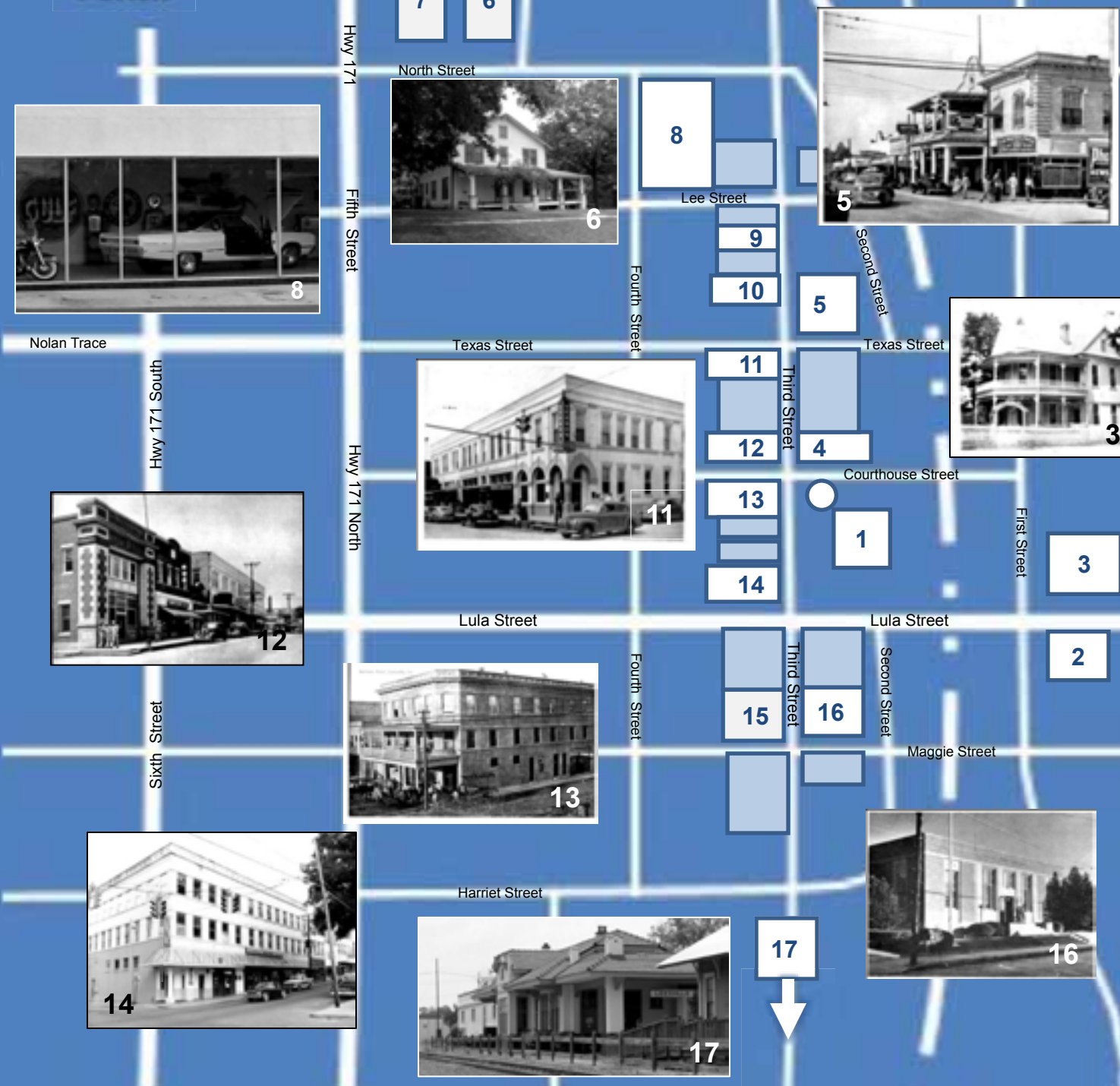
## 8. Cain Motor Company –

Originally a car dealership, the property is currently owned by a local businessman and houses his collection of retro memorabilia. Through the windows you can view vintage vehicles, an original soda fountain, antique gas signs and more.

## 9. Dreamland Theater, 1915 –

The original theater at this site was an open-air theater called the Aero-Dome. There were no walls or roof, merely a fence around the property. In the 1920's a Moorish movie palace with Spanish tile, twisted columns and niches on the second floor facade, was built and called the Dreamland. Later renamed the Vernon Theater, this movie house played movies from the years of Tom Mix to those of Jane Fonda before it closed and was reopened as Celebrations, a hall currently available for parties and special occasions.

# Vernon Parish Tourism



3. Smart Plantation House

## 10. Red Hound Building, 1917 –

The Red Hound Building first served as a U.S. Post Office. In the 1930's it became the Red Hound Bar and remained so until the 1970's. Generals Eisenhower and Bradley often met Patton here during the Great Louisiana Maneuvers in the early 40's.

## 11. Vernon Bank, 1907 –

The Vernon Bank was located in this large commercial building built in 1907 by George R. Ferguson of the Nona Mills Lumber Company. The bank portion of the building had a Romanesque style façade with arches over the windows and a corner entrance with Corinthian columns. In the 1950's, the exterior facade of the main floor was covered with tiles. Today, the exterior has been restored and is almost identical to the original.

## 12. Merchants & Farmer's Bank, 1928 –

The distinguished Merchants & Farmers Bank building is built in the English Revival style. Hallmarks of this style are corner quoins and classical architectural devices such as the egg and dart molding across the main façade. The bank originally had a bronze clock on the front and still has its beautiful white marble counters.

## 13. National Hotel, 1907 –

The National Hotel was lavishly decorated. The original building featured a two-story gallery on the front to welcome visitors. The lower floor held the lobby, a variety of offices, and a restaurant in the rear which opened onto Courthouse Street. Guest rooms were on the upper floors.

**14. First National Bank, 1907 –** Built in the style popular for large commercial buildings at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and used as a bank, this large building also housed the opera house known as the National Theater. Although the bank closed during the depression, the theater continued to present concerts and traveling shows for many years. This building now houses the Vernon Parish Courthouse.

## 15. Vernon Parish Veteran's Plaza, 2000 –

The Vernon Parish Veteran's Plaza was built to honor all Vernon Parish veterans. Since it was begun, the memorial has grown to contain seven stone tablets engraved with the names of Vernon Parish vets. At the site, the American flag towers above the flags of the five U.S. military branches, including Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, and Coast Guard, as a POW flag flutters to the side, alone, but not forgotten.



Military Parade marching down Third Street.

## 16. U. S. Post Office, 1936 –

Built by the WPA during the Great Depression, the U.S. Post Office is built in the Art Deco style. The main facade features bas-relief sculptures heralding the advent of air mail. Inside is another bas-relief sculpture created by Duncan Ferguson, a New York artist brought to Louisiana by Huey P. Long to start the art school at LSU.

## 17. Museum of West Louisiana, 1900's –

The Museum of West Louisiana is housed in the historic Leesville KCS Depot building. From 1916 until 1968, the railroad served as a primary travel and transportation center for the city of Leesville and all the surrounding area. In 1986 the building was restored to serve as a storehouse of artifacts illustrating the history, culture, and resources of Vernon Parish and the West Central area of the Louisiana Territory.