

EAGLES



SECOND WARD

HIGH SCHOOL

History of Second Ward High School

St. John the Baptist Parish was divided two ways. The Mississippi River divided its land mass into the East bank and the West bank and there was a racial division between African American and whites. Both divisions impacted the education of African Americans in Edgard, Louisiana. White students received high school educations decades earlier than African American students. Education on the East bank for African American students relied upon the individual resources of their families after the seventh grade. The East bank also had an advantage for African American students because Reserve, Louisiana had a high school earlier than its West bank counterparts. A bridge across the Mississippi River was not present prior to World War II and in the early postwar years.

Primary education in Edgard began in the various halls and churches supported by transient teachers who lived in the area during the school week and left on the weekends. Students with aspirations for higher education beyond seventh grade traveled to Baton Rouge or New Orleans to attend high school. Following World War II, army barracks were erected to provide physical infrastructure for the primary school. Finally, in 1950, a young and energetic African American was contacted by the assistant superintendent and was assigned the duty of teacher/ principal at the newly created Second Ward High School. The eagles had arrived with their glistening blue and gold colors.

The insightful, and industrious principal had grown up in the parish and he had attended a competitive college preparatory school in New Orleans, McDonough 35. He patterned the offerings at Second Ward after this model. Second Ward was catapulted above the local school for whites with its curriculum. The first graduation class had twenty students exiting the barracks. The second graduation was from a modern building in a newly constructed Second Ward High School physical plant.

Winds of change were not new to the African American community in Edgard and in the mid-1960's preparation was made for integration. Political in-fighting and "white-flight" combined to doom the prospects of continuing the Second Ward High School legacy. Though Second Ward High School was superior in its curriculum to its white counterpart, it was moved from its perch. The prelude to the end arrived when Principal Henry Harris was reassigned to a junior high school on the East bank. The demise of Second Ward High School was assured. The blue and gold eagles were relegated to history. Second Ward High School closed its doors in 1969 just as all its peer African American high schools had done.