

Towering over the Mississippi River, the Old State Capital has stood through the Civil War, a fire that gutted its inside and now, over 40 wedding weekends a year.

At the Rotary Club of Baton Rouge Wednesday, Sept. 24<sup>th</sup> Mary Durusau, the building's director, spoke on how the building is a constant in Louisiana's rich political history and a symbol of what's to come.

Durusau said the thing she loves most about the building, and its history, is that there's so many stories told and so many yet to be told.

The building attracts over 50,000 visitors annually from 80 countries, she said. Durusau encourages visitors as she says she's very proud of what they do.

"Our mission is to educate the public about our rich political history and to inspire engaged citizenship," she said.

Designed by James Dakin, the building opened in 1849, 60 miles from New Orleans, officially making it the state capital of Louisiana, according to Durusau. She said Dakin projected the building to cost around \$100,000 but ended up being four times more expensive.

According to Durusau, most of the information on Dakin's building process is available from his detailed diary. She said he wrote about everything from the quality of the bricks to obtaining the correct supplies.

Another rich piece of history comes from the building's house chambers. Here, Louisiana voted to succeed from the union in 1861, and it is open for tours today.

Throughout the building's use, some opposed its design, including the infamous Gov. Huey Long who hated the building and, according to Durusau thought it was a "sham castle not worthy of the state of Louisiana." Long pushed for the construction of the modern state capital that stands today.

Durusau said that while in use for legislation, the building was not beautiful like it is today. Durusau describes the space as loud, with spittoons on the floor for chewing tobacco and frequent physical fights.

Fortunately, that is not the case for the building today. Under Gov. Buddy Roemer \$6 million was appropriated to renovate the building beginning in the 1990s. The renovation was not without challenges according to Durusau, including the finding of an unidentified bone during excavation, which was most likely an animal and mold found throughout.

Today the building proudly does lots of work with the local youth, including the Youth Legislature program and many field trips. Durusau said people often come back and share memories of their time in these programs.

"They remember it, it's impactful to them," she said.

They also have traveling exhibits come through the building. Durusau said the most recent is an exhibit from Vietnam combat artists in partnership with the LSU Fashion Design Department.

According to the official website, other upcoming events include a book club discussion and author talk on “Were you There? A Biography of Emma Wakefield-Paillet,” Spirits of Louisiana, An Evening with Veterans and the Ghost of the Castle Show.

The Louisiana Old State Capitol is open Tuesdays through Fridays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

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