

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Bunche LibraryOther names/site number: Ralph Bunche Library

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 1100 Section StreetCity or town: Rayne State: LA County: 70578Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title: Carrie Broussard, State Historic Preservation Officer **Date**
Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation, and Tourism
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

**State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☐

Public – Local

☒

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐

Site

☐

Structure

☐

Object

☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education/Library

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education/ Library/Museum

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style/Wood Frame Vernacular

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Wood with batten paneling

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Bunche Library is eligible for listing for its historical significance at the local level in the areas of Education and Ethnic Heritage: Black. The Bunche Library is one of the only known examples of black libraries in the region. Sitting prominently in the primary corridor of a public housing neighborhood of Rayne, Louisiana, the freestanding Bunche Library has an air of monumentality in the predominantly black residential neighborhood. Built in 1953, the modest building was constructed as a one-room garage-style structure, with most of the materials used being wood. Although the structure needed some work due to neglect over the years, the interior has undergone no modifications during its restoration. There has been no major alteration to the front, except for the reconstruction of the original porch with in-kind materials, adding a handrail attached to the front steps and landing for safety purposes to comply with existing building code enforcement laws.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Narrative Description

Setting:

The building is currently located next to the Rayne Chamber of Commerce within the gateway to the City of Rayne. The original setting of the library was the between two residential buildings within a prominent African American neighborhood in Rayne. The lot featured a large tree in the front yard and a walkway directly abutting the sidewalk that led community members to the front porch. The building was moved eight blocks away on the same street to its current setting. The new setting reflects a similarly situated mixed-use African American neighborhood with public housing and city offices. A new walkway was created that directly abuts the sidewalk and leads patrons to the reconstructed front porch.



Figure 1: Ralph Bunche Library in original location

Exterior West Elevation (Façade): Photo 1

The Bunche Library is of wood construction with a gabled roof with exposed rafter tails, the exterior sheathed in board and batten siding, and situated on concrete piers. The front façade features a reconstructed porch utilizing in-kind wood materials to recreate the original porch that was lost. The porch includes a gabled roof overhang supported by two simple square columns similar to the original construction. The façade is punctuated by a single entry door to the left and a two-over-two window to the right. The door features a screen in the same pattern as the original depicted in historic photographs.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Exterior North and South Elevations: Photo 2-3

The library had two original two-over-two windows on the North and South elevations. These appeared to be covered with faux board and batten panels over the original siding which helped protect the original construction.

Exterior East Elevation (Rear) Elevation: Photo 4

The rear of the library retains the same board and batten siding and features one two-over-two window.

Interior: Photo 5-6

The interior of the library was largely empty. Drywall has been installed over the original wood paneling. The floor and ceiling are tongue and groove and mostly intact with only a few boards needing replacement.

Integrity:

The Library sustained deterioration over the years from neglect and weather. The Bunche Library originally was on private property and was unable to be relocated to its original location. The interior has undergone restoration to repair and replace damaged wood. The replaced wood was consistent with the same type of wood and material from the period of construction. On the exterior, some of the side and rear windows have been replaced, and a handrail has been added to the front landing. The building does, however, retain its identity in the community.

Despite these alterations the building retains integrity of setting, design, workmanship, feeling, and association. These alterations do not detract from the building's significance as the only public library available to the African American community during the period of significance. During its operation, the library had a prominent place in the community important center of the African American community. A rededication of the library was held on June 19, 2024, Juneteenth Day. Every first Saturday of the month, a different civic organization hosts an open house and children's event at the library. Today, it remains easily recognizable to library patrons who visited during the period of significance.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☒ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Education

Ethnic Heritage: Black

Period of Significance

1953-1980

Significant Dates

1953 – constructed

1980 - closed

2024 - reopened

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Sennette, James

Smith, Earl

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Bunche Library is significant at the local level under Criterion A, in the areas of Education and Ethnic Heritage: Black. The library building was the site of expanded learning opportunities for Rayne, Louisiana's Black population as it was the only public library in the city dedicated to their use. Additionally, the library came to serve as a small gathering place for many facets of the community. It was also frequently used as a meeting place for the Black Girl Scout troop and others to hold meetings. Due to closure and neglect, the building required structural reinforcement but still maintained the integrity of setting, design, feeling, and association. The building's period of significance is tied to its time as a library, from its opening in 1953 to the complete desegregation and consolidation of the City of Rayne libraries in 1980.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

In the early twentieth century, American libraries were in a period of transition. The end of the nineteenth century had seen libraries largely move from private to public. In Rayne, Louisiana, the city's public library was founded in the late 1940s and did little to increase access for Black citizens. This aspect of public education was exclusive to the white community. Black access to libraries was limited to bookmobiles established by community and faith-based organizations.

Concurrently, in 1890 philanthropist Andrew Carnegie began an unprecedented campaign to fund the construction of public libraries nationwide. Over the next three decades, Carnegie would donate \$45 million for the construction of 1,689 public library buildings. With cities often unwilling to fund the construction of facilities dedicated to African American use, many Black communities relied on grants from the Carnegie Foundation. However, most small rural communities did not get to benefit from these grants.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

In the City of Rayne, a plan was developed for a library that would be exclusively for the education of the Black population. This effort was due in large part to Our Mother of Mercy Catholic Church spearheaded by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. The head librarian of the Acadia Parish Library and the mayor at the time, Mayor Gossen, championed the efforts and extended his full support of the project.

(Figure 2, Newspaper Article library plans announcement, 1953)

Branch Library Opened For Rayne Negroes

On Monday, March 9, plans for a branch of the Acadia Parish Library for the colored in Rayne materialized and preparations for the establishment of the branch were discussed.

At a meeting prior to the Monday meeting plans for the library were inaugurated with a committee appointed to find a suitable place for the library. Selected to serve on this committee were Victoria Boudreaux, Earl Smith, and O. Welcome.

Welcome reported several locations selected by the committee which were taken into consideration. Of these the location chosen was the Sennett building located at 305 Reynolds St. Work is scheduled to begin immediately on the building. It will be moved up to the sidewalk and will be properly cleaned and renovated. This site was chosen for the library because of its central location.

Present at the meeting were Mayor W. J. Gossen, who made known his interest in any project of benefit to the community, Mrs. Virginia Wilkins, parish librarian, who is instrumental in the establishment of the library, and the Sisters of Our Mother Of Mercy school.

Mrs. Wilkins gave the committee

(Continued On Page 4)

Branch Library—

Continued From Page One

the authority to rent the proposed building to house the library and it was decided that the library branch be named, the Brunche Library.

The formal opening of the library will be held as soon as work on the building has been completed. In the meantime Mrs. Wilkins will receive applications for the position of librarian in the new library.

The library will only be open a few hours a week until a suitable circulation can be obtained to warrant having longer hours. During the next few months a reading club will be organized similar to the club organized this past summer at the Rayne branch of the Acadia Parish Library.

Mrs. Wilkins stated that the library will be complete from pre-primer books up including a wide selection of reference books and encyclopedias.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

On May 24, 1953, the Bunche Library in Rayne officially opened its doors to encourage and support the public education of African Americans in the community during the segregation era. The library was originally located at 305 Reynolds Street in the African American community. The selected location of Section Street was in a portion of the residential area of the African American community. It was spearheaded by the Our Mother of Mercy Catholic Church, built by prominent African American community leaders, and fully supported by the Acadia Parish Library. The library was named after Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, a renowned diplomat, civil rights activist, and leader. The rudimentary architecture of the building reflected the humble origins of many Black libraries of the time. From the beginning, the patrons took ownership of their library. The library opened without fanfare, only a photo taken in front of the building and published in the local newspaper.

(Figure 3, Newspaper Article from opening, 1953)



BUNCHE LIBRARY COMPLET-
ED—Earl Smith and James Sen-
nette proudly hold the newly
painted sign for the colored libra-
ry, while Mrs. Montez Guidry, li-
brarian of the Rayne Branch of
the Acadia Parish Library, (left)

and Mrs. Virginia Wilkins, Parish
librarian (right) look on and offer
suggestions as to where the sign
would make the best showing. In
the background is the library all
freshly painted by Sennette. The
building is located at 305 Rey-

nolds. Smith is the chairman of
the building committee, and is re-
sponsible for building shelves in
the library and getting the build-
ing in shape. Official opening has
been set for Sunday, May 24.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

The Bunche Library building is the only remaining library building that served the Black population during the segregation of public libraries. In anticipation of the *Brown vs. The Board of Education* case that would mandate the desegregation of public schools and overturn the precedent of "separate but equal" facilities, the Sisters of The Blessed Sacrament and the Acadia Parish Library worked to faithfully to apply these principles to the libraries.

(Figure 4 Newspaper Article from Our Mother of Mercy public meeting, 1953)



BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

The building was in operation as a public library for the African American community until it was officially closed due to consolidation with the city's main library in 1980. The building was moved to its new location in 2024 and officially reopened to the public on June 19, 2024. While there is little documentation about the educational and community efforts of the Bunche Library, it is a crucial cornerstone of the history of African American public education in the city of Rayne. During its operation, it served as the sole public library and gathering space for the African American community hosting many community events and meetings including for children's groups like the Black Girl Scouts. Access to public education during this time was limited to the African American community. The library offered vital services that helped bolster education in children through reading, writing, and tutoring. But it also became a vital service to adults as well offering many of the same services to improve reading, writing, and the basics of finances, career development, and even voting rights. The Bunche Library is the oldest known Ralph Bunche Library in the United States and is a prominent symbol of unity and progress. The library continues to foster education in the community hosting civic organization meetings and children's event at the library every first Saturday of the month. Today, it remains easily recognizable to library patrons who visited during the period of significance.

(Figure 5, Newspaper Article announcing new librarian, 1953)



Name of Property
BUNCHE LIBRARY

County and State
ACADIA PARISH, LA

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Ethel Augustus, 3rd Librarian of Bunche Library, Oral interview.

“Historical Library Reopened in Rayne.” KATC News Website. <https://www.katc.com/homepage-showcase/historical-library-reopened-in-rayne>. Accessed September 22, 2024.

“Negro Library to Open Soon.” *Rayne Acadian-Tribune*. April 3, 1953 Accessed via www.newspapers.com.

“Ralph Bunche.” The Nobel Prize website. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1950/bunche/biographical/>. Accessed October 1, 2024.

“Rayne Negro Library Now in Operation.” *Church Point News*. June 2, 1953, Accessed via <https://acadia.advantage-preservation.com>

Traci Bias Donatto, Oral interview.

Weigand, Shirley A. and Wayne A. *The Desegregation of Public Libraries in the Jim Crow South: Civil Rights and Local Activism*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 30.247336 Longitude: -92.270568

2. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The resource is bounded by Section Avenue to the West, the Rayne Chamber of Commerce building and Oak Street to the North, a parking lot and the main Blvd to the East, and the Acadia Parish Fire Protection District building to the South. See boundary map.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The chosen boundary reflects the new location of the library. The original location was situated between two residential homes in a predominantly African American neighborhood. The new location of the building reflects a neighborhood-like setting with a mixture of residential properties and city offices.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Denise Underwood
organization: Rayne Historic Preservation
Commission
street & number: 305 East Louisiana Avenue
city or town: Rayne state: LA zip code: 70578
e-mail: denisea.underwood@gmail.com
telephone: (770) 362-9294
date: August 23, 2024

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: Acadia Parish Bunche Library

City or Vicinity: Rayne, Louisiana

County: Acadia Parish

State: Louisiana

Photographers: Denise Underwood, Jerrell Underwood, Lisa Soileaux

Date Photographed: February 2024 to June 18, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 6: Exterior: West elevation (Front façade), camera facing east
- 2 of 6: Exterior: South elevation, camera facing North
- 3 of 6: Exterior: North elevation, camera facing South
- 4 of 6: Exterior: East elevation (Rear), camera facing West
- 5 of 6: Interior conditions before, camera facing west
- 6 of 6: Current Interior, camera facing west

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State



Photo 1

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State



Photo 2

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State



Photo 3

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State



Photo 4

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State



Photo 5 – Interior before

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State



Photo 6 – Interior after with original library sign

BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Additional Figures

Figure 6 Newspaper Article, 1953

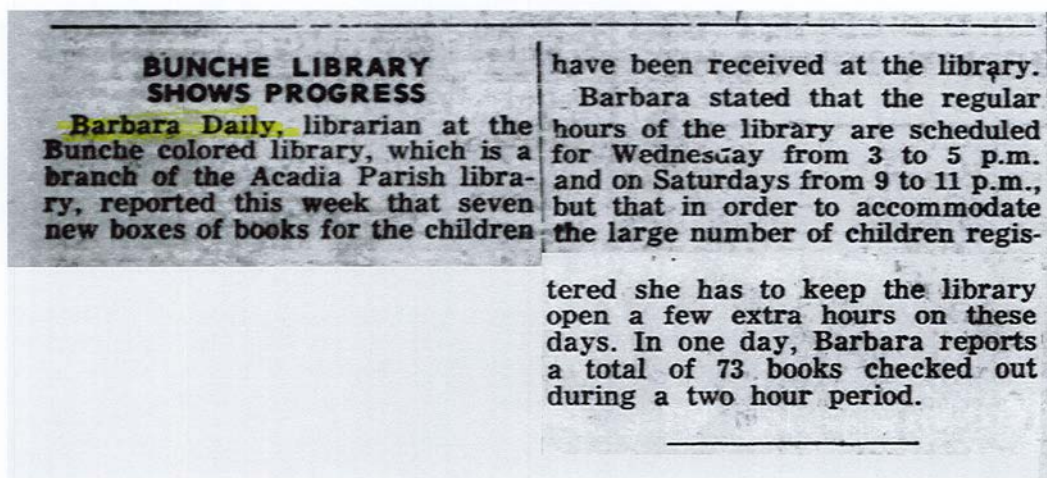
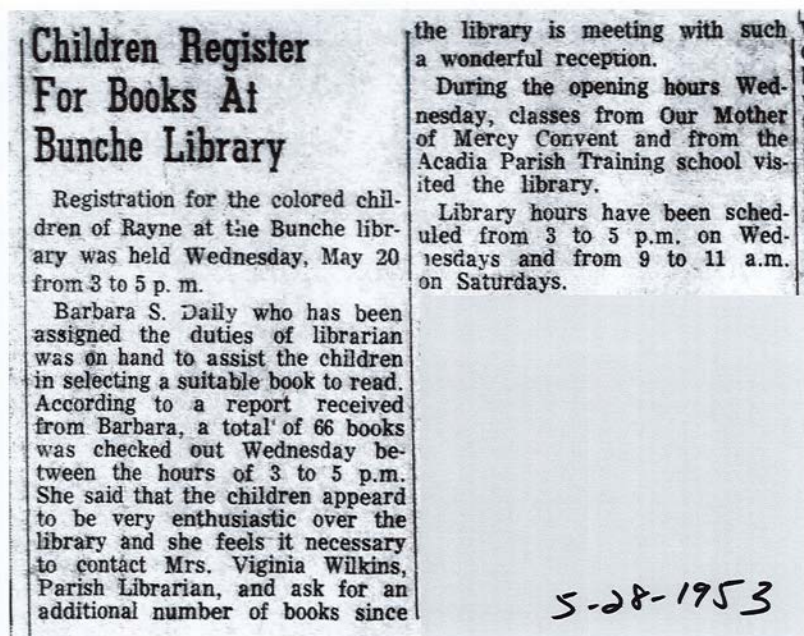


Figure 7 Newspaper Article, 1953



BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Figure 8 Newspaper Article, 1966

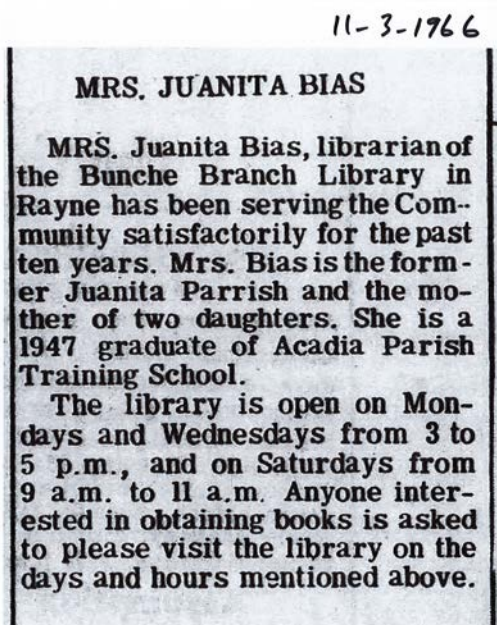
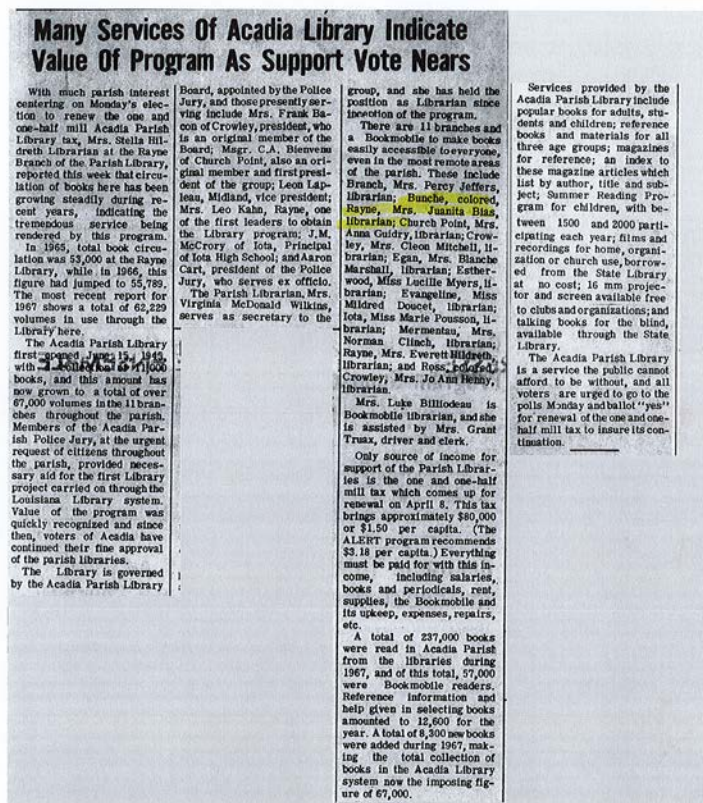


Figure 9 Newspaper Article, 1968



BUNCHE LIBRARY

Name of Property

ACADIA PARISH, LA

County and State

Figure 10 Newspaper Article, 1968



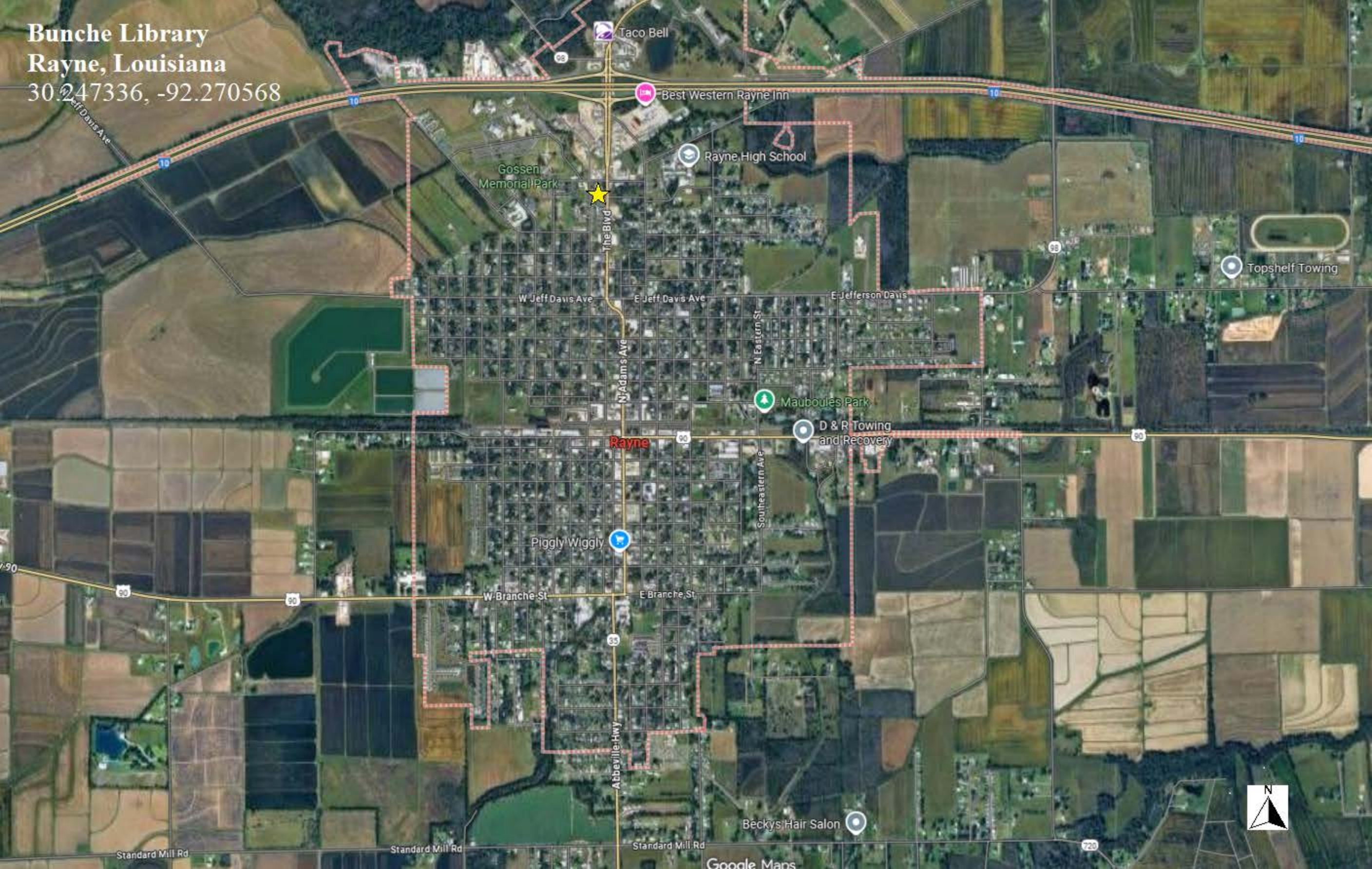
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

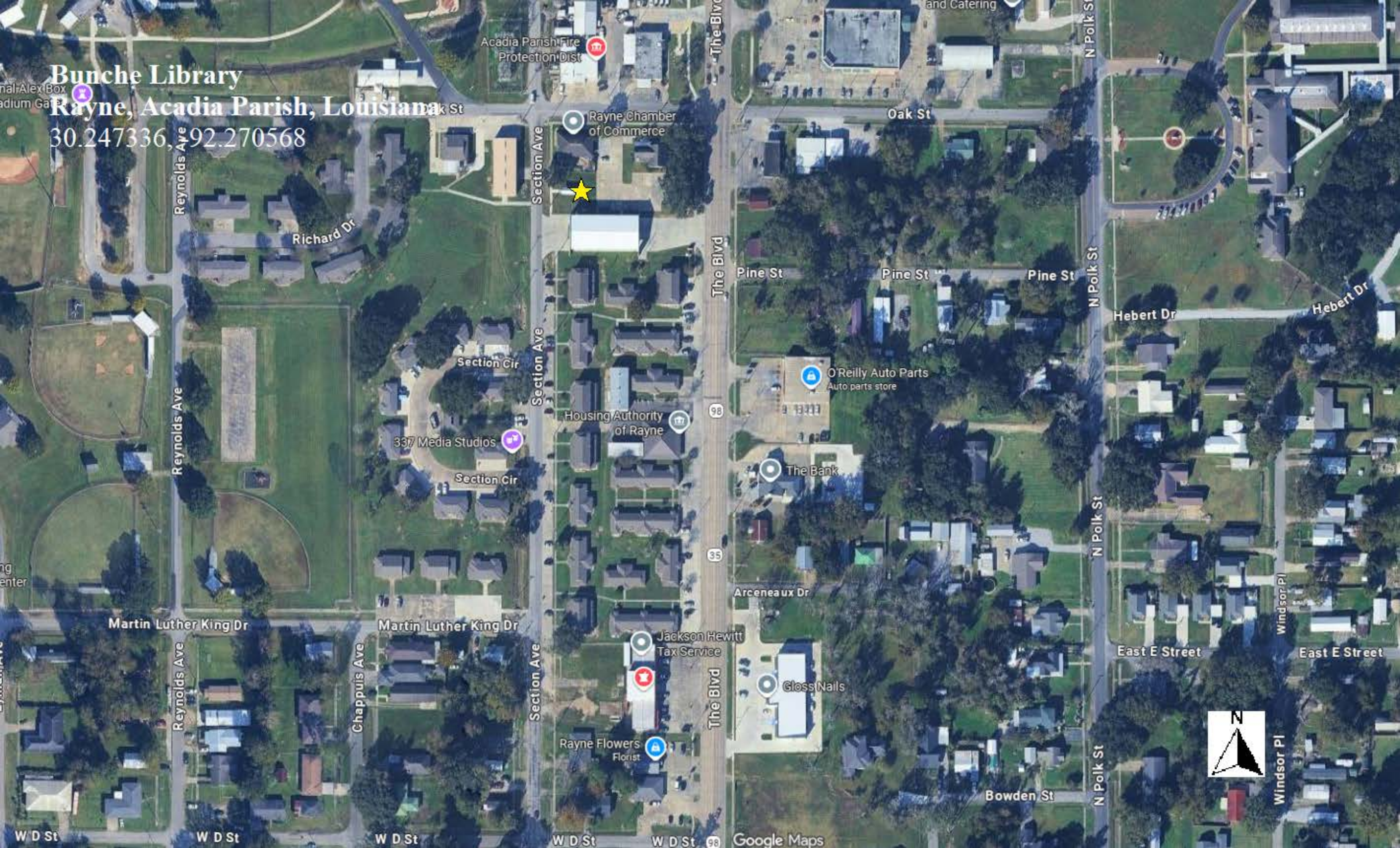
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

Bunche Library
Rayne, Louisiana
30.247336, -92.270568





Bunche Library
Rayne, Acadia Parish, Louisiana
30.247336, 92.270568

Acadia Parish Fire Protection Dist

Rayne Chamber of Commerce

Oak St

Section Ave

The Blvd

Pine St

Pine St

Pine St

N Polk St

Hebert Dr

Hebert Dr

Section Cir

Section Ave

Housing Authority of Rayne

O'Reilly Auto Parts
Auto parts store

The Bank

337 Media Studios

Section Cir

98

35

Arceneaux Dr

Martin Luther King Dr

Martin Luther King Dr

Jackson Hewitt
Tax Service

Gloss Nails

Rayne Flowers
Florist

East E Street

East E Street

Bowden St

N Polk St

Windsor Pl

Windsor Pl



Google Maps