

The old clock stopped at 4:27

The old dial clock is perched high on a wall in the large and very spacious teacher's lounge at Ruston High School.

The clock remains forever frozen at 4:27 a.m.

No one knows for sure who installed the clock or when, but people in the know at Ruston High will tell you that the clock has a story.

According to the Dec. 4, 1995 edition of the *Ruston Daily Leader*, ninth- and 10th-grade students at the school were scheduled to attend an assembly at the school's auditorium the next day.

A Lincoln Parish Sheriff's deputy named Mike Stone, who since moved on to bigger and better things, was scheduled to speak about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse. Stone, however, never got the chance to speak to the students, at least not on the following day, and certainly not in the school's then 60-year-old auditorium.

Somehow, some way, something sparked a fire in that auditorium in the early morning hours, while most of the school's teachers and students were home sleeping.

Members of the Ruston Fire Department received their first call about the fire around 4:30 a.m., according to the Dec. 5, 1995 edition of the *Leader*.

"Smoke was visible outside the building, and flames engulfed the auditorium's orchestra pit and stage area," according to the *Leader*.

The fire scorched most of the auditorium and probably would have spread to the rest of the school, were it not for firefighters arriving quickly and stopping the fire.

I was a senior at the school and remember the day well—I was scheduled to take a test that morning, and, for whatever reasons, I wasn't ready. Classes were cancelled for the day, and, as insensitive as it sounds, I was

glad to have another day to prepare for my exam.

One friend of mine feared for the longest time that he might have accidentally started the fire.

A teacher, after all, had asked him to go inside the auditorium on the night before the fire and turn the stage lights on. He spent most of the next day wondering if he was also supposed to turn them off later for safety reasons (because he didn't do it).

He probably felt indescribable relief when the Louisiana Fire Marshal ruled that an electrical problem had sparked the fire.

The clock in the teacher's lounge stopped ticking at the exact minute that the fire burned through the school's electrical wires—at 4:27 a.m.

The fire affected other clocks in the building in the same way, but administrators removed those clocks many years ago as part of a minor upgrade to the school, said Mike Milstead, Ruston High School's current principal.

Fourteen years have since passed, and school administrators never got around to fixing the clock in the teachers' lounge. Milstead said it's likely that no one will ever repair it.

School administrators could replace the dial clock with a more modern digital device, but they probably won't, he said.

"In a way, the clock is a memento that might increase fire safety awareness among our students and teachers," Milstead said.

Teachers and anyone else who use the lounge, meanwhile, will have to rely on their watches or their cell phones if they need to know the current time.



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