

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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Thomas Jefferson High School

other names/site number DHR File No. 127-431

2. Location

street & number 4100 West Grace Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Richmond vicinity N/A  
state Virginia code VA county Richmond (Independent City) code 760 zip code 23230

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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      nationally      statewide X locally. (      See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

W. C. Miller 11/5/93  
Signature of certifying official Date

Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property      meets      does not meet the National Register criteria. (      See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register       
See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register       
See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

Signature of Keeper Date of Action



7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)
MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof ASPHALT
walls CONCRETE
other METAL: Cast iron

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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)

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- 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.

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
EDUCATION

Period of Significance 1929-1930

Significant Dates 1929

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Robinson, Charles M., Architect

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

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

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 12.4 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	280400	4160840	2	18	280260 4160920
3	18	280460	4161220	4	18	280580 4161120

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Landon C. Wellford  
organization Virginia Commonwealth University date February 4, 1993  
street & number 4617 Radford Avenue telephone 804-353-1089  
city or town Richmond state VA zip code 23230

=====
Additional Documentation
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage
or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====
Property Owner
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications 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. 470 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form.
Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Thomas Jefferson High School  
Richmond, Virginia

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**SUMMARY DESCRIPTION**

The Thomas Jefferson High School building, designed by Charles M. Robinson in 1929, is a symmetrical, three-story, poured and cast concrete masonry structure located in the west end area of the city of Richmond, Virginia. An intricate and impressive example of the Art Deco style, this school is one of the most extensively decorated structures in the city. The building is situated on a flat site fronting the 4100 block of West Grace Street in a predominantly residential neighborhood. The site is defined by the city block pattern, with adjacent athletic fields behind the school and a drill field and playground across the street from the main entrance. The largest of the city school facilities erected between 1909 and 1930, the immense scale and horizontal orientation of the building dominates the block and makes the school a visually significant landmark in the surrounding neighborhood. The exterior, comprised of a precast marble chips stone facing, is uniform in color making the considerable ornamentation that is a notable part of this building almost imperceptible from a distance. It is only upon close inspection that the considerable decorative carvings and other embellishments come into view. This extremely rich and varied ornamentation consists of low relief geometrical designs, stylized floral motifs, and miscellaneous animals as well as large sculpted panels, equally distributed on all sides, depicting various academic disciplines. The carvings on the elaborate and diverse panels range from low to high relief on the smooth-faced stone.

**ARCHITECTURAL ANALYSIS**

The main entrance consists of a long flight of stone steps, set between large podiums on either side, which lead up to three arched entrance portals. A large, decorative cast-iron lamp post stands on top of each of these podiums. On either side of these podiums are four stone panels with carved scenes in low relief depicting scenes of initial encounters between Native Americans and the early settlers in Virginia. On the front of one of the podiums, facing the street, the blocks are incised with a quotation from Thomas Jefferson: "TO ENABLE EVERY MAN TO JUDGE FOR HIMSELF WHAT WILL SECURE HIS FREEDOM." On the front of the opposite podium is incised: "THOMAS JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA, 1929-1930." Strikingly geometric in form, the central entrance block, which projects slightly forward, is capped by a pyramidal tower which serves as a strong visual focal point. The sharply defined vertical emphasis of this entrance tower offsets and balances the solid horizontal quality of the building as a whole. Two thin pilasters, which define the tower facade, rise between the entrance portals and are each capped by small busts. These busts, one of a young man and the other a young woman, are not of identifiable individuals but are idealized representations of young America. There are ornamental ram's head keystones above each entrance portal bay and oversized windows and decorative panels above each opening. The corners of the central entrance tower are defined by large buttresses that rise to the base of the pyramidal tower and are surmounted by large busts of Thomas Jefferson. At the base of the pyramid, flanked by the two large busts, is carved in bold letters: "THOMAS JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL". Situated at the pinnacle of the ziggurat is a spherical orb, which was originally surmounted

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by an American eagle. Central to the overall composition is a large illuminated clock that is a prominent feature of the tower.

The main horizontal mass of the school building is symmetrically placed on either side of the dominant central tower block. A slightly projecting stringcourse indicates the location of the second level which is the main level of the building. The symmetrical composition of the facade consists of rows of large six-over-six, double-hung, wooden sash windows vertically aligned and set in bays five across. These windows are defined by large pilasters that rise from the stringcourse and are capped by decorative panels. These large pilasters project forward and penetrate the flat roof line above. Thin pilasters, which project only slightly forward from the plane of the surface, rise from the stringcourse between individual windows and are each capped with small decorative panels that flank the unadorned lintels above the windows. The pilasters on the building offer a clear visual separation from the dominant and horizontal emphasis of the building and provide a relief for the almost sheer wall of fenestration that dominates every side of the building. Central pavilions with pilasters and lower buttresses project out from either side of the tower. Each is capped with decorative panels. Three undersized windows within each pavilion are vertically aligned and have decorative panels above. The central pavilions are flanked by two sets of classroom bays on either side.

The east facade, which faces Malvern Avenue, and the west facade, which faces Antrim Avenue, are symmetrical in composition with a narrow central pavilion flanked by two sets of wider classroom bays. Unlike the major pavilions on the front and rear of the building, these minor pavilions are solid and void of any fenestration. The rear of the building, facing the athletic fields, is similar to the main facade with the exception of the large stairway and the entrance tower. In its place is a central entrance block with three doorways that enter on the ground level. Above the three doorways is a large copper-clad canopy carved with an intricate floral design motif. At each of the four corners are stair pavilions, similar in massing to the central pavilions, that offer coherence to the building as a whole. Abutting these stair pavilions at each corner on the east and west sides of the building are narrow, single-doorway entrance pavilions with small podiums on either side of stairs that enter on the ground floor. These four small entrance pavilions are all capped with copper-clad canopies and feature of a floral design motif similar to the large canopy above the rear entrance. All of the central and corner pavilions are designed as a geometrical composition complete in itself while also being visually part of the whole. On the ground-floor level below the large stairway at the main entrance are two decorative cast-iron grille doors that feature good examples of Art Deco-inspired motifs and designs.

The interior of the building is not as articulated as the exterior, although the decorative cast-iron stairway balusters and newels are worthy of note. The basic plan of the interior is rectangular with a central corridor that extends around the length of the building. Classrooms and offices rim the outer side of the corridor while special-purpose spaces rim the interior side. The floors of the corridors are terrazzo tile and the walls are plaster with a glazed brick wainscot. Picture molding runs continuously along the walls. The walls along the stairways and at the interior entranceway are plaster with a green marble wainscot. The

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building contains some seventy-five classrooms equally distributed on all three floors. A typical classroom consists of wooden floors and plaster walls with a glazed brick wainscot and picture molding above. There are transoms above each classroom doorway, as there are with most of the interior doorways in the building. The ground floor contains the cafeteria and kitchen which is characteristic of most schools built during this era. On the second floor, which is the main level, is an exceptionally large auditorium including a deep balcony that seats 1,650 persons. There is also a gymnasium which is separated from the stage of the auditorium by large folding doors. This serves a double function when the stage needs to be considerably larger. The top floor admits entrance to the balcony of the auditorium as well as the side balconies of the gymnasium. Steps from this floor lead to the tower on top, which houses the planetarium for the Richmond City schools. There are also two small, service-oriented, inner courtyards within the building. The interior of the building is exceptionally well preserved as there have only been fairly minor alterations made since the building opened in 1930. A mechanical equipment room addition was added in 1961 at the basement level and is not visible from the exterior at ground level. A permanent handicapped ramp was added to one of the entrances on the west facade in 1993. This cast-stone ramp replaced a temporary wooden ramp, and is compatible with the existing building in materials, texture, and quality of design.

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**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Thomas Jefferson High School building, completed in 1930, occupies a unique position in the architectural as well as the civic history of the city of Richmond. It is significant for its overall association with an important period of development in the history of the Richmond public school system. The building is also important as a distinctive architectural achievement that was designed by the locally prominent and significant architect, Charles M. Robinson. Within the context of its historical and architectural association, the building holds a unique place as the last of the monumental schools built between 1909 and 1930 and represents the end of an era of significant historic school construction in the city of Richmond which spanned the period from 1869 to 1930. It was also the last as well as the largest school building designed by Charles M. Robinson, who served as the Public School Architect under the superintendent of schools, Dr. J. A. C. Chandler, from 1909 to 1930 and was responsible for the design of over twenty Richmond school buildings and additions during his tenure for the city.

**HISTORIC CONTEXT**

In 1925, Charles M. Robinson, in his Survey of School Housing Conditions for the Richmond Public Schools, stressed the need for a "West End School" because of the oncoming population shift. As a result of major industrialization, the city experienced rapid population growth and an intensive period of development, which began in the 1880's and lasted well into the 1920's. Although some of this development spread to the north of the city, most of the intensive growth and population shift occurred to the west of the city beyond the Fan district. Robinson's survey report of 1925 clearly addressed this situation and expressed his desire that the new school be designed and planned to accommodate the anticipated needs of the future. He was not given permission to present sketches until 1929, however, which were subsequently approved and construction of the new facility began that same year and was completed the following year.

When Thomas Jefferson High School opened in September 1930, with an enrollment of 900 pupils, it was proclaimed the largest and most modern facility built to date in the city. It was designed to accommodate 2,000 pupils and contained a number of modern amenities, the most notable of which was the planetarium housed in the tower on top of the building. In addition, the building was serviced by an elevator. At the same time, the design of this building also shares many of the design features that are common to many of the other public schools of this period. Among these standards were basic classroom sizes and ceiling heights, as well as specific window specifications to allow for sufficient natural light and fresh air. While this building does share many of the characteristics common to the other historic public school buildings, it also varies greatly in terms of its size, the materials employed, and as the only example of a school facility erected in the Art Deco style in Richmond.

By 1930, the onset of the Great Depression effectively ended the period of historic school construction in Richmond. Erected during that terminal year and heralded as a source of

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civic aspiration and pride. Thomas Jefferson High School has functioned as a school continuously from 1930 to the present. During this continuous period of service, the school has embodied the importance of education and has made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of the history of public education in the city of Richmond.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Deierhor, William H. "Sketches of the Richmond Public Schools". 1961; updated by Dr. Sam P. Sentelle, 1974. Typescript, Virginia Department of Historic Resources files.
- Meagher, Margaret. "History of Education in Richmond". Richmond, Va: Virginia Division of the Works Progress Administration, 1939.
- Robinson, David B. "Charles M. Robinson and the Richmond Public Schools". Richmond, 1978.
- Weaver, Paul L., Historic Property Associates, St. Augustine, Fla. "Historic Schools Multiple Property Form Outline". N.d. Virginia Department of Historic Resources files.
- Wellford, Landon C. "Preliminary Information Request" for Thomas Jefferson High School. March 17, 1992. Virginia Department of Historic Resources files.
- White, J. Stuart. The Richmond News Leader, article: "City's Most Beautiful and Biggest School Cost Million", June 19, 1930.
- Winthrop, Robert P. "Richmond's Architecture", reprinted from The Richmond Times-Dispatch Sunday Real Estate Section, August 9 through October 11, 1981.

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Beginning at the intersection of the south line of Fitzhugh Avenue with the west line of Malvern Avenue follow the western line of the sidewalk south 1078.79' to the north line of the alley. Follow the northern edge of the alley west 497.48' to the eastern line of Antrim Avenue. From that point proceed north along the eastern line of the sidewalk 1082.89' to the south line of Fitzhugh Avenue. Return east along the southern line of the sidewalk 496.96' to the point of beginning.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary includes the Thomas Jefferson High School building and the entire extent of athletic and recreational fields. The boundary includes the original site as well as adjacent parcels joined in 1938 and 1961.

BROAD ST.



FITZHUGH AVE

TENNIS  
COURTS

ATHLETIC  
FIELDS

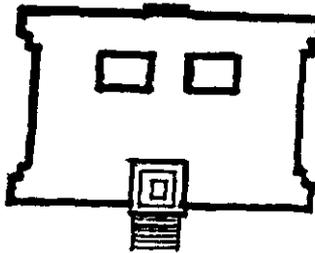
CONCRETE  
WALL  
(REMOVED)

AUGUSTA AVE.

ATHLETIC  
FIELDS

MALVERN AVE

CUTSHAW AVE.



SAUBER AVE.

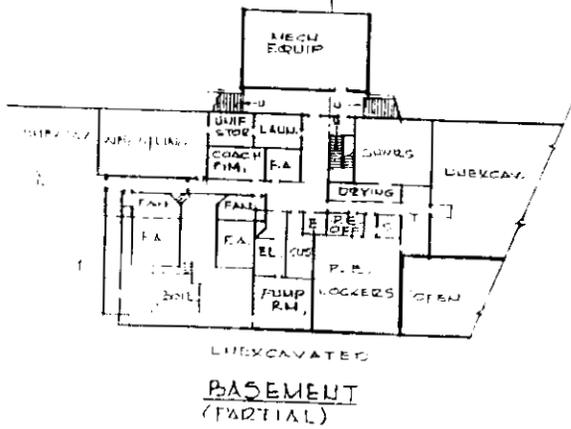
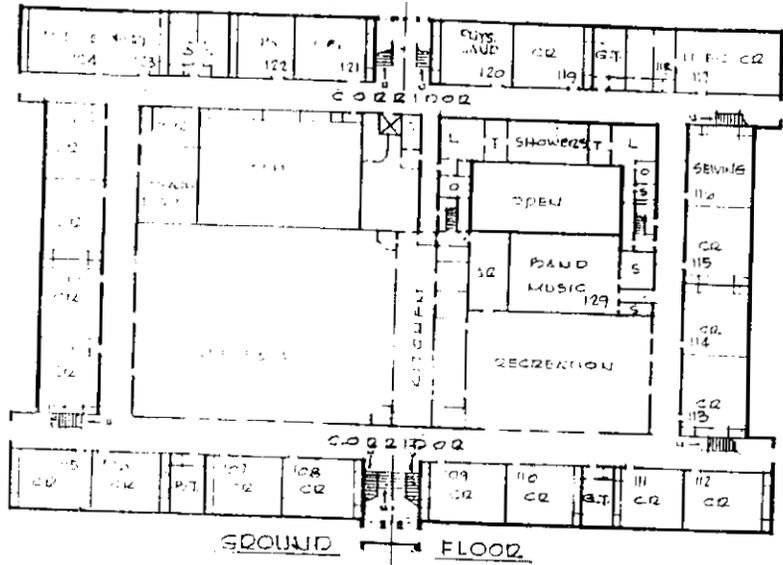
ANTRIM AVE.

GRACE ST.

DRILL  
FIELD

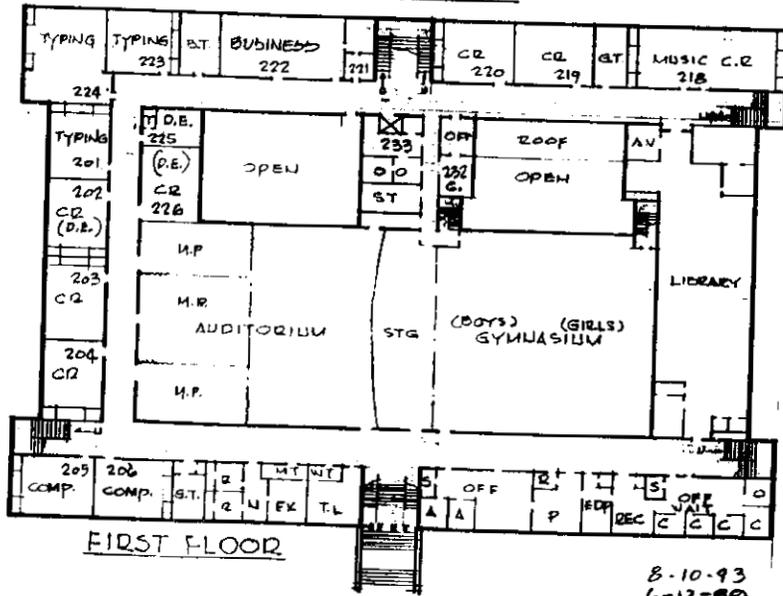
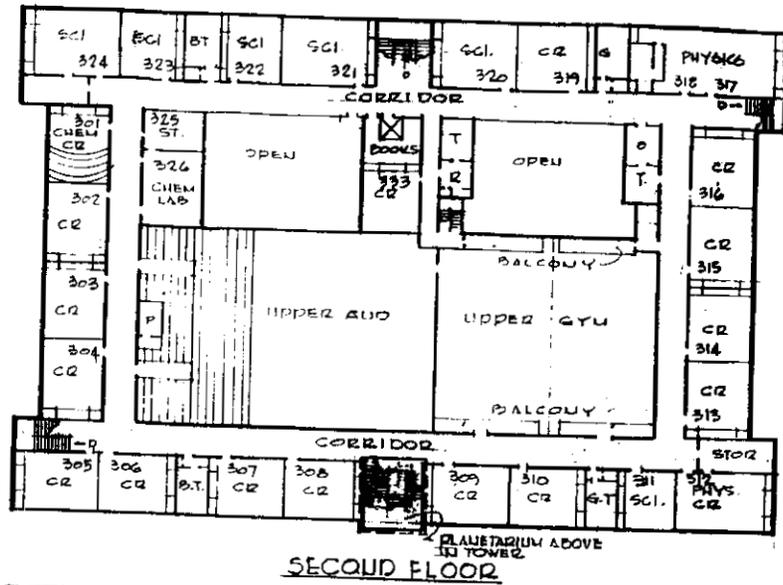
MONUMENT AVE

THOMAS JEFFERSON  
HIGH SCHOOL  
RICHMOND, VA.

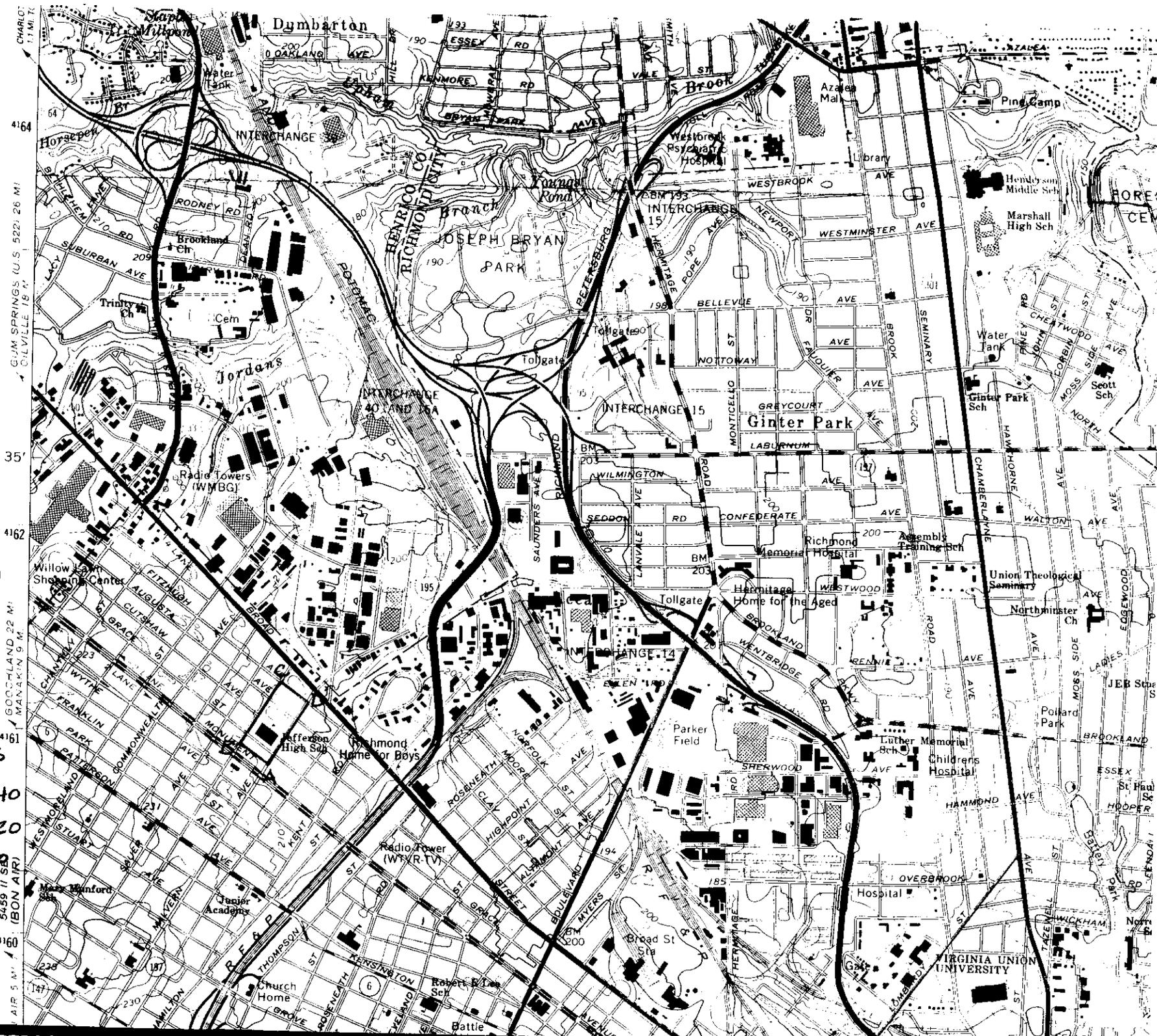


THOS. JEFFERSON H.S.  
 4100 W. GRACE ST  
 SCALE: 1" = 50'-0"

102



8-10-93  
 6-12-89



TOMAS JEFFERSON  
HIGH SCHOOL

RICHMOND, VA.

HR 127-431

ITM REFERENCES

18/280400/4160840

18/280260/4160920

18/280460/4161220

18/280580/4161120

CHARLOTTE, N.C. 17 MI E  
4164  
GUM SPRINGS (U.S. 522) 26 MI  
CIVILVILLE 19 MI  
35'  
4162  
600CLAND 22 MI  
MANAKIN 9 MI  
4161  
AIR 5 MI 1  
5459 II SW  
(BON AIR)  
4160