

**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 Robert E. Lee High School
other names/site number DHR File No. 132-0037

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number 274 Churchville Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Staunton vicinity N/A
state Virginia code VA county Independent City code 840 zip code 24401

=====

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 nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

Signature of commenting official/Title 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 the Keeper _____
Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Education Sub: High School

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Vacant Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE;BRICK

roof SLATE

walls BRICK

other WOOD

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)

- 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.
X 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 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

Period of Significance 1926 - 1954

Significant Dates 1926; 1954

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

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder T. J. Collins & Son

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

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

Name of repository: Historic Staunton Foundation, City of Staunton; Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5.3 acres

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

Table with 4 columns: Zone Easting, Northing, Zone Easting, Northing. Values: 17 668422 4224986, 2, 3, 4

Verbal Boundary Description: Property is described as Property 11447 by City of Staunton Assessor's Office. It is illustrated by warm grey tone surrounding building on attached Site Map. Three public streets, Churchville Avenue, Albemarle Avenue, and Dupont Avenue form the boundary on three sides.

Boundary Justification: The high school has historically occupied the 5.8 acres illustrated on the Site Map

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mark McConnel, AIA
organization SFCS Inc date 8/25/08
street & number 305 South Jefferson Street telephone 540.344.6664
city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24011

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 Gypsy Hill Investments LLC
street & number 126 Garrett Street telephone (434) 760-1549
city or town Staunton state VA zip code 24401

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.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 1

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Robert E. Lee High School was built in 1926 with later additions on just over five acres within the City of Staunton. The impressive Colonial Revival-style building, constructed on a commanding bluff above Gypsy Hill Park, has the original two-story brick central block topped by a slate hipped roof with a cupola in the center and strongly detailed pediments facing the street. Flanking the central block are two wings added in 1954. The west wing, which contains the cafeteria and classrooms is two stories. The east wing, which contains the gymnasium, industrial arts area, classrooms, and locker rooms is three stories. Colonial Revival-style details are visible at all three main entrances, above the large auditorium windows, and in each pediment which have well proportioned cornices. Cut stone cornices, entrance surrounds, bas-relief panels, and large arches connecting the wings as well as brick quoins at the original building corners contribute to the building's stately appearance. The original windows are still intact throughout the entire building and consist mostly of nine-over-nine wood sashes with a few steel windows in the gymnasium addition.

A two-story brick building sits south of the cafeteria wing of the school. Built in 1961, the non-contributing building has served as administrative offices. The football field serves as the foreground for the school, lying between the main (north) façade and Churchville Avenue, seven stories below. The concrete bleachers, a contributing structure, retain the steep slope and create a theater setting for the field, lorded over by the school above.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

SITING

Robert E. Lee High School has two main entrances – one on the north elevation visible from Churchville Avenue and one on the south elevation facing the main access road, parking lots, and the neighborhood beyond. The main school office is adjacent to the entry from the south and indicates that this entry was used as the main access point for the building.

Robert E. Lee High School is surrounded on three sides by fairly modest residential neighborhoods. The fourth side (west) touches the large and historic Gypsy Hill Park. The environs include mature trees and landscaping. The school building itself is located on a very prominent bluff, created during the construction by carving a bench into a significant hillside, with the finished first floor approximately 75 feet above the main thoroughfare of Churchville Avenue. Between Churchville Avenue and the steep slope up to the school lies the school's football field with concrete bleachers cast into the face of the hill, acting as a stepped retaining wall. This yard is almost devoid of trees, with only two large trees flanking the central section of the school and two ornamental trees obscuring a small area of this central section. Two flagpoles flank the main axis. A small service road passes between the top of the bleaches and the north elevation of the school building with very little room on either side. Two highly decorated entries in the central block (1926) of the school open onto this road.

The south elevation opens onto a service road (bus drive) very close to the building; in fact the pavement is separated

from the building façade by a small sidewalk for 2/3 of the building's length. Adjacent to the eastern third of the

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 2

building, the drive widens into a parking area with grass between the pavement and the building. A tall stone retaining wall abuts the southern side of the drive for the majority of its length. Above the retaining wall is a stand of small caliper trees screening a parking lot owned by the school but accessed through the neighborhood to the south. The east yard adjacent to Albemarle Avenue consists of a very small strip of green space almost entirely consumed by walks, steps, and lower level areaways. The west yard is a terraced green area from the building to Dupont Avenue.

Robert E. Lee High School was constructed in 1926 and opened in January 1927 with two substantial wings to the east and west added in 1954. The area of the building is 114,000 square feet with 36,500 square feet being in the 1926 (original) building area and the remainder being divided between the two 1954 additions.

ELEVATIONS

Original or Central Portion

The central (1926) block of the building has a mid-section on the north elevation that is one-story tall equaling two stories on the wings of that same section. The mid-section is constructed mostly of brick laid in Flemish garden wall bond (three stretchers between each header) and is heavily detailed with classical pilasters of brick with stone capitals and bases surmounted by a stone cornice and a parapet of brick with bas-relief inset sculptured stone panels. This mid-section is divided into six bays, each separated by a pair of brick pilasters and each virtually consumed by 9-foot-by-15-foot windows with pivoting sections. There is a third story behind this double height façade but it is set so far back as to be invisible. Visible, however, is a small portion of the slate pitched roof surmounted by a very large cupola. This tall story is flanked by three-story wings with classically detailed entrances and pediments facing the street. The first floor of these original wings is devoid of openings except for the entrances, which are not centered in the plane. The second and third floors are separated from the first by a stone water table and have four nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash windows symmetrically arrayed with jack arches and stone sills. There are small circular windows in the center of each brick gable of each of these wings. The entire façade of this section is brick construction with quoins and classical detailing on a low stone (rubble) base below the dressed stone window sills and is surmounted by a 10:12 pitched slate roof.

The central (1926) block of the building is two stories tall on the south elevation and 192 feet long with the entry on the second floor. It is symmetrically laid out with a central ornate entrance and roof pediment flanked by expanses of windows in brick walls. The walls are laid in Flemish garden wall bond with quoins and a stone first floor faced with stone (rubble) revealed at the extreme western end as the grade falls away. There is a small offset in the façade on either side of the main entrance. Within this central block the second-floor windows are pairs of six-over-six, double-hung, wood sash with jack arches and stone keystones and the third-floor windows are pairs of four-over-four with four square transoms immediately under the cornice. Beyond the minor offset in the wall, second- and third-floor windows are large nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash with jack arches (no keystones) on the second floor only and individual stone sills. Windows in the revealed basement area are four six-over-six. The roof is slate and the large cupola is very prominent on this elevation.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 3

East and west elevations of this central portion that were not covered by subsequent additions are three stories tall with brick walls laid in Flemish garden wall bond with a stone (rubble) base and large nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash windows sitting on stone sills. The same stone water table course separating the first and second floors runs the length of these two facades.

Wing addition to the west

The 1954 addition to the west of the original building is two stories tall on the north side and one story tall on the south side. The north elevation of the west addition is separated from the original structure by a large rusticated stone arch near the plane of the façade of the addition with a recessed entry beyond. The arch is two stories tall and ten feet wide. The majority of the wall is brick laid in Flemish stretcher bond (three running bond courses between Flemish-bond courses) with a stone (rubble) base from grade up to the continuous dressed stone window sill. There is a dressed stone band above the first-floor windows and the entire façade is surmounted by a plain Art Deco stone cornice that rests on the heads of the second-floor windows. Windows on this elevation are large nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash except for the three at the far western end which are nine-over-six, double-hung, wood sash on the first floor. Second-floor windows rest on a continuous stone sill.

The south elevation replicates the second floor of the north elevation except that the stone band that is dressed on this elevation is rusticated where it meets grade. There is a triple door entry near the west end of this façade covered by a modern (Art Deco) thin concrete slab.

The west elevation of this addition struggles to combine public and service elements from two different levels. The wall is mostly brick laid in Flemish stretcher bond with the low rubble base and dressed stone band separating the first from the second floors at the first-floor window heads. No windows, however, sit on this stone base and major first-floor windows are nine-over-six. There are two doors on the first floor level protected by a thin concrete slab projecting from the stone band at window head height. The stone band stops here. The second floor has the same cornice but the windows are smaller six-over-six, double-hung, wood sash and the small dressed stone band that served as the sill for the larger windows on the north façade continues across this façade some 24 inches below the windows. The southern end of this façade is a mélange of changing grade, rubble-faced stoop, thin concrete slab cover over two service doors at the second floor, and a pair of small four-over-four windows.

Wing addition to the east

The 1954 addition to the east of the original building is three stories tall on the north elevation (basement, 1st, and 2nd) and two stories tall on the south elevation. The north elevation of the addition is only two stories tall on its westernmost end due to change in grade, and it is separated from the original structure by a large rusticated stone arch at the first-floor level. This arch mirrors the one on the other wing and is near the plane of the façade of the addition with a recessed entry beyond. The arch is two stories tall and ten feet wide. The majority of the wall is brick laid in Flemish stretcher bond with a stone (rubble) base from grade up to the continuous dressed stone cap at basement floor level. The grade falls from west to east to reveal approximately five feet at the corner. There is a thin dressed stone

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 4

band serving as sills for the windows on all three floors, and a larger (12 inches) continuous dressed stone band crosses the heads of the windows on the basement and first floor. The entire façade is surmounted by a plain Art Deco stone cornice that rests on the heads of the second floor windows. As a result of the stonework, the façade reads as heavily banded. Windows on this elevation are large nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash (47 on this façade alone) except there is a service entrance near a retaining wall at the westernmost end of the addition. Much of the basement level is not visible from Churchville Avenue because of the raised drive between the addition and the street but the basement level is tall.

The south elevation replicates the first and second floors of the north elevation except that the stone band that is dressed on the north façade is rusticated on this façade where it meets grade. The windows on the first floor are still nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash but are smaller and the sill is higher, although it is still a continuous band. Second-floor windows match the main building and are large nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash with a continuous stone sill. The difference in the two bands is made up on the east elevation. There is a four-door entry near the west end of this elevation covered by a modern (Art Deco) thin concrete slab that is in disrepair and is supported by two later columns. This entry is the public entry to the gymnasium and formerly had the words "LEE HI GYM" in free-standing letters on the edge of the protecting slab. There are a pair of smaller windows flanking the entry.

Like its sister to the west, the east elevation of this addition struggles to address public and service elements and a steeply sloping grade. The wall is mostly brick laid in Flemish stretcher bond with the no base for most of its length. The rubble base and dressed stone banding at the window sills and window heads on the north and south facades turn the corners and continue down this façade for some twenty feet before dying into a small brick offset; however, the cornice continues uninterrupted across the entire facade. No windows exist in this banded area. The remainder of the façade takes on a significantly different character than the rest of the building, revealing the large spaces behind this central 125-foot-long section.

At each end of the central section on the east wall are obvious vertical circulation elements with recessed double doors at the basement level and two nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash windows breaking the floor planes above. Stair windows have individual stone sills and jack arches with articulated stone keys. The lower windows in each vertical element are set into the door ornament. There is a small bas-relief sculpture set into the brick wall just under the cornice above the stair windows emphasizing the vertical nature of these elements. The central section is articulated by six bays of steel windows that replaced the original wood windows in the early 1970s. The lower-level windows are triple eight-light windows, start approximately three feet from the floor, and are eleven feet tall. One bay has had two doors added into it which were subsequently punctuated for air conditioning units. The window heads are jack arches with stone skewback units and articulated stone keystones while the sills are individual stone sills. The upper windows have stone sills approximately eight feet above the floor and are the same width as the lower windows but are seventeen feet tall. These circa 1970 steel windows are divided 6w x 5h with several operating sections. The large area between the lower and upper windows (over ten feet) is blank and unadorned.

The west wall of the east addition is two stories tall and very similar to the south wall. The wall is mostly brick laid in Flemish stretcher bond with no base for most of its length. First-floor windows are smaller six-over-six lights with

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 5

individual stone sills and jack arches with stone keys. Approximately 30 inches separates the heads of these windows from the stone band above. Second-floor windows are similar to the original building and are nine-over-nine, double-hung, wood sash with a continuous stone sill. Banding is similar to the south façade of this addition. The access road and main building entry at the second-floor level causes this elevation to be depressed with steep grades running down to it.

Other Exterior Elements

The cupola is a prominent element adorning the center of the original 1926 building. The original louvers in the structure have been removed and the ventilation opening covered by a large gravity ventilator in poor condition. The chimney, located on the east end of the original building was made taller in the 1954 addition. The top of the chimney, which was articulated with brick pilasters, was almost totally destroyed in a lightning strike in 2007.

On the north and south elevations of the building there are metal grilles filling openings below some of the windows. These openings served the unit ventilators in the classrooms.

There are two areaways into the basement and several railings around the building of different types. All are modern.

Roofs of the wings and above the main space on the north elevation are flat.

INTERIOR

The majority of the interior has original lighting fixtures, chalkboards, and wood doors. Original hardwood floors remain in the 1926 section. The original chemistry lab contains the original experiment tables. All other fixtures and furniture have been removed with the exception of some banks of hallway lockers.

Central 1926 section

First floor

The plan consists of corridors from two symmetrical entrances flanking the auditorium connecting with a horizontal (in plan) corridor at the rear of the auditorium. On the side of the corridor opposite the auditorium are classroom spaces and service areas. Although spaces, such as the shop area and the cafeteria, have been adapted to a new use with partitions dividing the spaces, the historic features of the area have not changed. A portion of the first floor adjacent to the horizontal corridor is unexcavated.

The Auditorium

The central section of the original building originally contained a hybrid space that included auditorium seating and a stage large enough to contain a basketball court. This space was primarily for physical education. The 1954 renovation included the conversion of the hybrid space into a very large single-use sloped-floor auditorium and stage. The walls are exposed and painted cinder block, the floor linoleum and concrete, and the current ceiling is acoustical

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 6

tile glued to the original plaster substrate. Remarkable features in this space include very large windows with pivoting sashes (still operational), thin plaster cornice, and pressed tin beam face on the public side only, balcony, and deep window recesses. Seats are upholstered but in relatively poor condition. The stage and proscenium arch remain intact.

Flanking the auditorium on the east and west are halls with classrooms and toilet rooms on the opposite side and an entrance to each hall from the exterior. The hallway behind the auditorium is against earth for over half its length and otherwise contains one classroom and several service areas. The hallways are simplistic in adornment but appear to retain their original historic character. Former locker recesses have been filled in in many areas. Some banks of lockers remain. Walls and ceilings are smooth plaster.

Classrooms

Classrooms throughout the building are large and contain either three or four very large wood double-hung windows. Windows operate and most chains and sash weights appear to be in place. Sashes are painted and frames are typically stained. No trim exists beyond the frames and the windows are set within the wall with the wall plaster returning to the frame. Sills are glazed brick.

Central 1926 section

Floors are either linoleum or VAT with plain wood or rubber base. Walls are unadorned except for picture mold and original chalkboards in most classrooms. Ceilings are all asbestos-containing plaster with a few having asbestos acoustical tiles glued to the plaster substrate. The ceiling intersects the top frame of the window. Miscellaneous mechanical devices occur in each classroom and include unit heaters and ventilators on the exterior walls. Some original pendant lights remain.

Second floor –

The main, ceremonial entrance to the school is on this level in the center of the building. While the entry is ornate, the detail beyond the vestibule is simplistic in adornment. Offices occupied the spaces on either side of the entry hall and the main corridor at the end of the entry hall is entirely blank opposite the entry because it is the second-floor level of the auditorium.

The hallways are unadorned, without molding, chair rail, or articulation except for plain door trim. Former locker recesses have been filled in. Walls are smooth plaster, floors are VAT, and ceilings are smooth plaster. East and west wing corridors are single loaded in that there are only classrooms on one side. The west wall of the east corridor is entirely blank as it backs up to the stage loft and the east wall of the west corridor has two doors into the auditorium balcony. Both hallways end in unusually large classrooms.

Classrooms flank the offices on the south side of the corridor. A few of these classrooms have exposed hardwood floors while the others are as described on the first floor.

Stairways – there are two stairways in this section, one each at the intersection of the corridors. Stairs are poured in place concrete that has had a number of surfaces over its lifetime. Railings are steel pipe.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 7

Third floor

The same "U" corridor configuration exists on this floor as the floors below. All three corridors are single-loaded with the façade opposite the classrooms extensively fenestrated with windows opening onto the auditorium roof. Corridors are similar to the other floors; however, asbestos acoustical tile has been attached to the ceilings and long low radiators are installed on the exterior walls. These corridors are exceptionally bright and airy. A sprinkler system has been installed on this floor. Classrooms are as on the floors below.

Attic

Unfinished with large wooden trusses and rafters. Access by hatch.

West 1954 Wing

Basement

The basement level of this wing contains a majority of utilitarian uses with the significant exposed concrete structure visible in most spaces. Spaces include: boiler room, electrical room, storage, uniform storage, team locker room, shower rooms, and industrial arts spaces. Most spaces are very tall with ceilings at thirteen feet and exposed utilities. There is a mezzanine in the industrial arts suite that has six-foot clearance under the structure and was likely used for storage. Locker and shower room finishes have been removed except for glazed wall tile. Large steel windows on the east wall bathe the industrial arts suite with light. Wood windows are across the north wall. The south and east areas are underground or un-excavated.

East 1954 Wing

First Floor

A U-shaped corridor wraps around a central, two-story, large gymnasium. The wall separating the gym from the corridor is blank except for four doors into the gym while the opposite wall opens into team rooms, locker rooms, "Correctional Gym", and home economics suite. The north leg of the "U" has lockers recessed into both walls. These corridors have glazed brick (tile) wainscoting.

The gymnasium is a straightforward box with the east wall punctuated by six very large steel windows positioned between large steel roof trusses. There are no bleachers and the wood floor is in a serious state of disrepair, having been patched extensively with plywood. The space is majestic although plain with a glazed block wainscot up to a height of six to eight feet.

Team rooms and locker rooms have been stripped of finishes and fixtures except for ceramic tile. Windows into these spaces are large double-hung wood windows with obscure glass.

Significant on this level is the main entry to this wing from the parking area; this was the community entrance to this building and the only entry used by many people. Inside the entry is a large lobby with public toilets. The finishes are hard ceramic tile and the space is unusually noisy.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 8

Second Floor

A U-shaped corridor wraps around a central, two-story, large gymnasium. A wall separating the gym from the corridor is blank while an opposite wall opens into classrooms. The north and south legs of the "U" have lockers recessed into both walls. These corridors have glazed brick (tile) wainscoting.

Classrooms are large and contain either four or five very large wood double-hung windows. Windows operate and most chains and sash weights appear to be in place. Sashes are painted and frames are typically stained. Glazing is single pane and unremarkable. No trim exists beyond the frames and the windows are set within the wall with the wall plaster returning to the frame. Sills are glazed brick. Some classrooms have tile wainscot.

West 1954 Wing

First Floor

The first floor has a double loaded corridor configuration although the south side of the corridor is mostly against earth with a few storage spaces at the west end. The wall separating rooms from the corridor are blank except for doors with transoms and built-in locker areas that have been closed in. These corridors have glazed brick (tile) wainscoting.

Classroom spaces to the north of the corridor are similar to the rooms on the east wing except for the westernmost room which has a stepped floor for music and higher window sills.

Second Floor

The second floor has an open cafeteria space with exposed columns, tile wainscot, and large double-hung windows. The end of this wing contains the kitchen, pantry, and dish washing area. The first structural bay has been subdivided into classrooms.

Administrative Building

An administrative building lies on the northern side of the parcel. It is a two-story building that was added in 1961. It served as administrative offices and contains meeting space for school board meetings. It is designed in the International style and constructed of steel-reinforced concrete. The building interior layout is fairly open and it does not appear to have been significantly altered since its construction.

Athletic Field Bleachers

A set of permanent poured concrete bleachers line the school side of the athletic field. The bleachers are approximately 120 feet long, 30 feet wide and 25 feet tall. Steps of approximately 1 ½ feet by 1 ½ feet form the seating with poured concrete stairs creating a walkable / climbable transition from each seating level. The bleachers are lined on all sides by painted iron railing. A set of very steep stairs lies on either side of the beachers. The entire structure is painted.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 9

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Situated on a hill overlooking the City of Staunton, Robert E. Lee High School is one of the most impressive Colonial Revival schools in the Shenandoah Valley and was the City of Staunton's first separate school for secondary education. Designed by the local firm of T. J. Collins and Sons in association with the legendary William Butts Ittner, the school was built in 1926 as an enduring testament to the importance of education in Staunton. The noble detailing, careful proportioning, and prominent siting of the building combine to edify and inspire both students and passersby. Noteworthy is the fact that the exterior of the building and much of the interior have remained unaltered for over eighty years; a silent testimony to the enduring elegance of the structure. Even the five-acre site, located at an important crossroads in the city, speaks to the prominence of the ideal embodied in the school. The school's period of significance begins in 1926, the date of the school's construction, and ends in 1954, with the addition of the flanking wings. Robert E. Lee School is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its architectural significance. The influence of the Colonial Revival style can be seen in its elegant entrances and windows treatments, and the overall integrity of the property has been maintained. Most of the City of Staunton's population has passed through its doors, and although the school has been closed for public education since 1983, returning students would recognize the historic character of the building and grounds.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historical Background

The Robert E. Lee High School was constructed in 1926 as the City of Staunton's first separate school for secondary education. During the period of significance it was the only high school in the city. As a result of its singular position in the community, nearly every person who grew to adulthood in the city walked the halls of this edifice. Its commanding presence on a hill across from the very popular historic Gypsy Hill Park contributed to the school's daily influence on the community. As the residential areas around the high school have built up, the sports field located between the school and Churchville Avenue has remained open, enhancing the presence of the school and impressing upon the community the importance of education. Notable among R.E. Lee High School graduates are the country music legends, the Statler Brothers.

The original structure of the R.E. Lee High School was completed in January of 1927 at a cost of \$193,000. At that time, it opened its doors to 262 students: 88 freshmen, 61 sophomores, 67 juniors, and 46 seniors.¹ In August of 1926, the *Staunton News Leader* reported that, "The new school on Churchville Avenue will not be ready for occupancy before November 30, at which time the construction contract calls for its completion." Given that November 30th was in the middle of the Fall term, it was decided that the disruption of moving the school mid term would be too much of an inconvenience and that the school would officially open in January 1927.²

According to the 1926-1927 yearbook, the Staunton Rotary hosted a luncheon for the senior class in the gymnasium on January 18, 1927. The following day, formal dedication exercises for the new building were held. This was also noted

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 10

to be the 121st birthday of Robert E. Lee. Speakers included a University of Virginia Law professor, Superintendent of Public Instruction for Virginia, and Colonel S. Brown Allen, commander of the Stonewall Jackson Camp of Confederate Veterans. After the exercises, the pupils of the school showed, with a great deal of pleasure, the school which had just been dedicated.³

Minutes from the Staunton School Board on February 9, 1927, within a month of the school first opening, indicated the desire on behalf of the new building's students to hold a dance: "Representatives of the senior class made a request through the principal for the privilege of holding a dance in the high school gymnasium. On motion of Mr. Timberlake, the privilege was granted." These dances were not to occur twice during a six week period and six tickets were to be supplied to the principal for him to distribute to chaperones. The minutes go on to say: "Such dancing was to be under the supervision of the principal and it was understood that at any time it seemed wise, all privileges of this type were to be revoked." This was the beginning of a varied and lively set of social events hosted by the school.

In 1954, two wings were added at a cost of \$1,075,000 and the original building's auditorium was renovated to accommodate a population of 800 students through the new addition. Prior to the 1954 additions, the building did not have a cafeteria and all gym activities took place on the stage of the auditorium.⁴

The grade levels taught at Lee from its beginning until 1958 were grades 9 through 12. In 1958, grade 9 was transferred to Shelbourne Junior High School. In 1966 all schools were racially integrated. As this created overcrowded conditions, the ninth grade was absorbed by two junior highs. In 1982-83, as the student population decreased, ninth grade returned to Lee High. In 1983-1984, a new Lee High School was built on North Coalter Street, so the original school closed at that time.⁵

Prior to the school closing, there was much debate and controversy surrounding the City of Staunton's plans for the school. Years of memories and the community's familiarity with the building led to a push to continue using the building. The school board looked at proposals to expand the building by adding an additional story to each of the 1954 wings. A feasibility study from 1982 examined the expansion and concluded that it would cost \$4 million dollars to renovate. Though this plan was supported by the school board, it was rejected by the City Council. However, the City Council quickly reversed that decision due to public response. After a review of the standard state requirements for educational facilities, the sloping terrain, and the lack of space for expansion, Robert E. Lee High School was closed after the Class of 1983 graduated in June of that year.⁶

In the late 1980s the school was bought by the Goicolea family of Spain. For nearly a decade, the school housed a summer school for school-aged Spanish nationals to learn English. In 2001, the building was purchased by the Dioceses of Richmond and a religious school was formed and operated in the building until the end of the school year in 2007. At that time, the student body was too small to maintain the school program. While a parochial school, the building interior was altered in limited ways including installation of a sprinkler system in a portion of the building and accommodations for student residents.⁷ Octagon Partners bought the school from the Dioceses of Richmond in June of 2008.⁸

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia

Section 8 Page 11

Octagon Partners plans to renovate the school to provide sixty independent living apartments for seniors with congregate dining, activities, transportation, various amenities and programs. The building is adjacent to Gypsy Hill Park, one of the finest city parks of its kind. The park contains a children's railroad, swimming pool, golf course, and active bandstand in addition to fixtures common to parks such as playgrounds and reflective areas. The park is also the home of Staunton's baseball team, the Braves and contains playing fields for high school football, baseball and other sports.

To augment the offerings within the building and build on the fellowship characteristic of high school, Octagon Partners is also locating two non-profit community outreach groups in the school. The auditorium will be the new home of ShenanArts, a local community theater group that works with the youth and adults. They will perform a show every two months that will run two weeks. Residents will be encouraged to participate through set design, costumes, ushering, or just sitting in on practices. The balcony of the auditorium will be reserved at all times (during shows or a random weeknight) so that residents can watch the progression of each play or musical from the first practice to the dress rehearsal and final show. The former industrial arts space will be the new home of the Staunton Senior Center. This center provides meals, activities, outings and other activities. Also, the Staunton office of the Valley Program for Aging Services will be located in the same area. This office provides advice and guidance on Medicare, healthcare, and medical equipment, among others. Octagon plans a vibrant mix of activities for the entire building with an emphasis on recreating the vitality and activity characteristics of one's high school years.

T. J. Collins & Son, Architects

The high school was designed in 1925 by the prominent local architecture firm of T.J. Collins & Son in association with William Butts Ittner, FAIA of St. Louis. It is very likely that Samuel Collins, the son of T.J. Collins, is the person who actually oversaw the drafting of the plans for the building while the conceptual design was performed by Ittner's firm.

William Butts Ittner, an architectural graduate from Cornell University worked with the celebrated firm of Eames & Young in St Louis. His family's ownership of brick yards was no doubt influential in William's selection of brickwork, plain and fancy, for many of his school buildings. Ittner became president of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects from 1893-95; in 1897, he was elected to the new office of Commissioner of School Buildings for the Board of Education and served in that position until his resignation in 1910 after which he continued as "consulting architect" to the Board until October of 1914. . Ittner was invited by President Herbert Hoover to a White House Conference in 1926, the same year that he was elected vice president of the St. Louis Plaza Commission." Ittner died in 1936 and his name is perpetuated by the architectural firm of the same name which is still in practice today.

During his lifetime Ittner became a notable authority on the designing and planning of schools. By 1917 he had become Chairman of the American Institute of Architects Committee on School Building. Ittner's work was reviewed in several issues of the respected and influential *The Architectural Record* and *The Western Architect*. In one article author Guy Study makes it clear that Ittner was regarded as the American authority on school architecture when he wrote, "In this development of the modern school no architect has played a more prominent part than William B. Ittner.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 12

And so general has his judgment been accepted as authoritative that the Ittner plan has become the accepted standard throughout the country.”

Much of Ittner’s work was modeled on the Jacobean, Renaissance, or Classical styles of Europe and England and these styles together with Tudor, Baroque, and American Colonial were collectively thought to be the most appropriate styles for high school design. Ittner himself planned 430 buildings in twenty-eight states and by 1911 his reputation had made his consulting services as least as profitable as the work he did associating with local architects such as T. J. Collins & Son.⁹

Perhaps no single person influenced Staunton’s physical appearance more than T. J. Collins. From 1891 to 1911, Collins designed and remodeled over 200 buildings in Staunton and many other cities and counties in Virginia, including Harrisonburg, Lexington, Waynesboro, and Orange County. T. J.’s son Samuel joined the practice in 1906 and continued the family firm after his father’s stroke and subsequent retirement in 1911. Sam retired in the 1950s, after designing or remodeling hundreds of local commercial and residential buildings himself. He was well known for his excellent execution of the Colonial Revival style and Gothic Revival churches throughout the state; but like his father, Sam enjoyed experimenting with a variety of popular styles including the Spanish Colonial and Prairie styles. Many, if not most, of the Collins designed structures remain as reminders of an important architectural legacy in Staunton and as a reflection of architectural design from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. Joseph Johnson, grandson of T. J., currently runs the family firm and in 1997 donated the Collins’ drawings and historic support materials to Historic Staunton Foundation.¹⁰

Robert E. Lee High School stands as a monument to the Colonial Revival-style of architecture designed by T. J. Collins and Son in the City of Staunton. Built in 1926, it survives as an impressive example of school architecture of this period. The integrity of the architecture of the building including features such as the cut stone cornices, bas-relief panels, elegant entrance surrounds, quions, pilasters, nine-over-nine wooden windows, and arches enable it to stand out as one of the exceptional schools in the Shenandoah Valley.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section: 9, 10 Page 13

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Architectural Record, "The work of William B Ittner, FAIA," Volume 57:97-124, February 1925.

Brannock, D. *The History & Influence of T. J. Collins & Son Architectural Firm in Staunton, Virginia.*
Staunton Historical Society, June 2005.

History of Robert E. Lee School Since Decommissioning as a Public School.

LaRoue, Jimmy. *Waynesboro News Virginian*, "Old R. E. Lee H.S. Sold." June 20, 2008.

R.E. Lee High School Library. *Lee Way*, 1926-27; undated newspaper articles.

Staunton News Leader, Tuesday August 24, 1927; Volume 197, 37th year; Sunday June 12, 1983; Volume 24, 1994.

Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Preliminary Information Form, DHR File No. 132:0037, Richmond,
Virginia.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the Robert E. Lee High School are indicated on the attached map entitled R. E. Lee High School Site Map. They are generally Churchville Avenue to the south, DuPont Avenue to the east, and Albemarle Avenue to the west.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries include all of the property historically associated with the Robert E. Lee High School.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section: PHOTOGRAPHS Page 14

All photographs are common to:

PROPERTY: Robert E. Lee School

LOCATION: City of Staunton, Virginia

PHOTOGRAPHER: Sean Dougherty

DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH: May 2008

LOCATION OF DIGITAL IMAGES: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, VA

1. VIEW: Front Façade looking west from south end of playing field
2. VIEW: Front Façade looking west from north end of playing field
3. VIEW: Front Façade detail looking west
4. VIEW: Front façade with lantern and concrete detail looking west
5. VIEW: Front façade looking northwest
6. VIEW: Rear façade and entry detail looking east
7. VIEW: Cafeteria interior
8. VIEW: Gym entry interior
9. VIEW: Auditorium Interior from balcony
10. VIEW: Interior stair detail
11. VIEW: Typical 1926 Classroom and exterior arch detail (through window)
12. VIEW: Administration building completed in 1961

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Robert E. Lee High School
City of Staunton, Virginia**

Section: Endnotes for Section 8 Page 15

ENDNOTES

- ¹ An undated newspaper article from the R. E. Lee High School Library, Staunton, Virginia
- ² *Staunton News Leader*, Tuesday August 24, 1927; Volume 197, 37th year.
- ³ R.E. Lee High School Yearbook, Lee Way, 1926-27.
- ⁴ R.E. Lee High School Library undated news article.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Staunton News Leader*, Sunday, June 12, 1983; Volume 24, 1994.
- ⁷ From verbal accounts of City of Staunton Planning Staff.
- ⁸ "Old R.E. Lee H.S. Sold", *Waynesboro News Virginian*, Jimmy LaRoue, June 20, 2008.
- ⁹ "The Work of William KB. Ittner, FAIA," *Architectural Record* 57 (February 1925): 97-124.
- ¹⁰ D. Brannock, "The History and Influence of T. J. Collins & Son Architectural Firm in Staunton, Virginia," *Staunton Historical Society*, June 2005.