

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

VLR - 9/13/00
NRHP - 2/2/01

**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 The Tuckahoe Apartments

other names/site number DHR File No. 127-5820

2. Location

street & number 5621 Cary Street Road not for publication N/A

city or town Richmond vicinity N/A

state Virginia code VA county _____ code 760 zip code 23226

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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

meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant

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

M. Cath. Sloan 12/12/00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain) _____	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
1	0	sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic (Multiple dwelling)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic (Multiple Dwelling)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Georgian Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

LIMESTONE

roof OTHER

other CONCRETE

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)

- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1929

Significant Dates

1929

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

W. Duncan Lee, Architect

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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 :
Virginia Dept. Of Historic Resources

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The Tuckahoe Apartments
Richmond, Virginia

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Tuckahoe Apartments are housed in a massive, six-story, red brick, Georgian Revival building fronting on Cary Street Road at the southern terminus of Three Chopt Road, in Richmond's Westhampton neighborhood. Constructed in 1928 as a luxury "apartment-hotel", the Tuckahoe's shared amenities still include the original brick-walled entry court, parlors, galleries, solarium, and roof terraces. The building's architecture echoes the stylistic themes of Tidewater Virginia's Colonial plantations, with jack arches, pediments, quoins, and traditional moldings. Its symmetrical footprint, conceived as two conjoined crosses, affords multiple exposures from a majority of the apartments. Octagonal stair and elevator lobbies at the center of each "cross" provide access to the apartment units on seven levels. The golf course of the Country Club of Virginia spreads in a green apron across from the Tuckahoe's facade. Neighboring the property are the exclusive homes lining Cary Street Road and its side streets, which fall to the James River less than a half mile south. The Tuckahoe was designed by architect W. Duncan Lee, one of a select group of architects favored by Richmond society in the first decades of the 20th century. The historic property includes two contributing resources: the apartment building and a site, the entry court.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Setting

The property for which Duncan Lee designed The Tuckahoe Apartments consisted of two unimproved lots in an irregular parcel of 1.75 acres on the south side of Cary Street Road in Henrico County. The land was bordered on the west by Hampton Hills Lane and on the east by Rio Vista Lane. Perched on the edge of an escarpment formed by a meander bend of the James River, the site for The Tuckahoe Apartments needed a lot of preparation. To level a downhill slope to the west, the eastern area was deeply excavated and shored up with a brick retaining wall ending in a steep ramp for motor car access by way of Rio Vista Lane to the building's rear entrances. At the front and center of the property a large hollow centered by a boulder took the excavated dirt as fill. Neighborhood boys fancied this hollow an old Indian campfire site and mourned its passing.¹

Duncan Lee's plans called for a six-story structure enclosing 98,700 square feet. The newly graded site barely contained the 244 foot length. The depth, 138 feet, was no problem; nonetheless, Lee sited the building as far forward as possible, pressing the circular drive at its front entrance against the recently paved Cary Street Road. A grassy playground at the rear provided play space for children. On nearby Maple Avenue, Lee designed a one-story heated garage in brick and stucco to shelter 125 motor cars; the monthly fee of \$8.00 included valet parking. A period document indicates that the garage incorporated an "eighteen-hole golf course;"² no doubt one of the new miniature golf courses that had joined auction bridge and

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mahjong as American pastimes. Today the garage houses maintenance operations for St. Catherine's School.

Lee's design brought the Tuckahoe's visitors from Cary Street Road through a brick and cast iron fence and into a circular courtyard paved with slate. The fence recalls the elegant *clairvoyée* that stretches across the "land front," or north elevation, of Westover Plantation (NHL 1960, VLR 1969). Echoing Westover's details, the brick piers of the Tuckahoe's fence have molded stone caps with elaborate finials including spheres, pineapples, and vases. The piers are spanned with brick knee-walls surmounted by an open, wrought iron fence. The courtyard, framed by the Tuckahoe's projecting wings, is reminiscent of the circular forecourt at Mount Airy (NHL 1960, VLR 1969). As with this famous Richmond County landmark, the visitor ascends stairs from the entry court, crosses a raised terrace and arrives at the centered entry. Again, similar to Mount Airy, the entry bay projects slightly, and is marked at the roofline with a pediment, at the base with rusticated stone, and at its sides with stone quoins.

Exterior

The imposing facade presents a formal, five-part, Palladian composition, the centerpiece of which is a domed cupola. The cupola's open arches and balustrade recall the Bell Tower in Richmond's Capitol Square. The building's base is fully articulated at the center, with rusticated limestone framing the entry, and parging on the exterior walls of the public gallery. The attic, which encloses the penthouse apartments and shared solarium, extends between the two elevator towers, and repeats the arched windows and parging of the base. Its solid balustrade, atop the attic's molded entablature, contrasts with the open cast stone balustrade enclosing the terrace and edging the roofline of the north-facing wings.

The building's red brick walls are all laid up in English bond. The windows' gauged brick jack arches are accented with cast stone keystones and molded sills. The keystones of the first floor gallery's arched windows are scrolls. The sheer mass of the building is skillfully broken up, not only by the projecting wings, which are delineated as flanking pavilions, but also by a decorative program of cream-colored classical ornament, including molded string courses, a denticulated cornice, and stone quoins. Even the elevator penthouses are dressed up as handsome roof garden "outbuildings" with slated hipped roofs, bulls eye windows, and brick quoins.

The Tuckahoe's rear elevation, and the east and west side elevations, are carefully considered but clearly secondary, as indicated by the reduced detail. Twin, pedimented rear entry porches supported by paired piers shelter owners arriving from the parking area. The pediments' arched openings frame the fanlights and transoms over French doors entering into the shared "Lounge Room" on the east end and into the "Card Room" on the west. Today these rooms are known as the East and West Parlors. The seven original fire escapes are recessed unobtrusively at inside corners and side walls. These open steel stairs wrap around electrified dumbwaiters that convey parcels from the ground level to the kitchen doors.

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Interior

None of Lee's architectural drawings for The Tuckahoe Apartments survive, but floor plans in an early promotional brochure illustrate sixty-four apartments varying in size from one to seven rooms (comprising a total of 306 rooms). Most of the larger apartments included maid's rooms, and additional maid's rooms with communal baths were built into the basement. Thanks to the building's wings, most apartments had multiple outside exposures; the larger apartments received light and air from three directions, a rare amenity in an apartment house. The floor plans include 110 bathrooms which featured ceramic tile in "stylish art deco colors" (lavender, rose, green) or classic black and white. In their kitchens tenants enjoyed "the last word" in appliance design, and washing machines were available gratis in the basement laundry rooms. At the top of the building, across from the penthouse entrance doors, Lee created sunrooms where tenants and their guests could exclaim over the views and, on the adjacent rooftops, gather for dancing to the music of records played on a Victrola. Each end of the building is served by a generous octagonal lobby with an elevator and an open cast-iron stair with marble (first floor) or terrazzo treads.

Additional services were offered Tuckahoe tenants by commercial enterprises that took space in the building. In 1930, Ligon's Pharmacy rented a large basement space with patio entrance on the east side of the building. It was supplanted in 1933 by Ella Binford's Tea Room, which attracted patrons from all over town and flourished under various names until 1958. For a while there was a beauty shop in the basement of the west side. The Hampton Gift Shop occupied a neighboring location, and the English Sports Shop (known familiarly as the "Bermuda Shop") did a lively business in women's wear from 1936-1950.³

Barely mentioned in The Tuckahoe Apartment's early promotional brochure are the spaces many consider The Tuckahoe Apartments' finest features: the reception lobby and long galleries whose arched openings give onto the two spacious parlors that occupy most of the first floor's central section. Beneath twelve foot high ceilings Duncan Lee deployed a progression of arcaded walls and ranks of French doors with arching overdoors. Crystal chandeliers and brass wall sconces gleam above the gallery's black and white terrazzo floors and the parlors' golden oak parquet. Deep dentils distinguish the cornice moldings and a carved chair rail tops the paneled wainscot. Richly detailed carving surrounds the East Parlor's fireplace, whose mantel and eared over-mantel derive from similar treatments at Westover Plantation. The ambiance is that of a great hall in a proud Virginia plantation house; three-quarters of a century after construction these public spaces still comprise one of Richmond's most striking interiors. Some elements, such as the oak parquet floors, molded cornices, and French doors, Lee carried over as signature elements of the apartments.

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The Building Today

Though the building retains a high level of integrity, this is not to say The Tuckahoe hasn't changed over the years. The original sixty-four apartments grew to sixty-eight in the 1950s when four garden apartments were created at ground level, then were reduced by apartment mergers to a total of fifty-nine, the current number. The maid's rooms have long since been converted to other usage. A majority of the original windows remain though the anodized aluminum frames of 20-year-old storm windows do the architecture a disservice. The playground at the rear of the building has long since been transformed into parking spaces, and in front, Cary Street Road is now a paved raceway for motorists hurrying to or from the vast sprawl of suburbs to the west.

The Tuckahoe Apartments will be 75 years old in 2004. Constructed in the days when "built to last" amounted to an American creed, the great building conveys to the passerby no sign of deterioration. True, here and there molded window sills have crumbled or eroded, but The Tuckahoe façade in sum still replicates Duncan Lee's 1928 presentation portrait. And on the inside, the thick gypsum block walls and plaster moldings steadfastly resist alteration, the solid wood doors continue to close true, and age enhances the golden oak parquetry.

Endnotes

¹Oral communication with Thomas W. Purcell, Jr., 1999.

²Manuscripts/letters of J. Alexander McCrone, Treasurer, Monroe Terrace Corporation, 1922-1937. Archives of the Virginia Historical Society.

³Hill's Richmond City Directories, Vols. 1930-1960.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Tuckahoe Apartments were built in 1929 to provide elegant dwellings for those seeking year-round, suburban, apartment life or for owners of country estates who needed a *pied-à-terre* in the Metropolitan area. Officers of the Rosewood Construction Company, the Tuckahoe's original developer, chose Duncan Lee as their architect. The monumental, Georgian Revival apartment building is significant at the local level under *National Register Criterion C*, for the quality of its architecture. Built during the architect's prime, the Tuckahoe is the largest building Lee is known to have designed. The building handsomely exemplifies the architect's ongoing romance with Virginia's history, as expressed in his unabashed appropriation and reinterpretation of architectural features from the Commonwealth's venerated Colonial plantations. This affinity, shared among traditionalists, first took hold at the 1907 Jamestown Exposition in Norfolk, and it continues to dominate the state's residential buildings. W. Duncan Lee, a master architect in early 20th century Richmond, was one of Virginia's most capable proponents of the Colonial Revival style. The Tuckahoe Apartments, which retains an excellent level of integrity on the interior and exterior, is among his most prominent commissions.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Beginnings

As the stock market soared in the spring of 1928, ground was broken at 5621 Cary Street Road in Henrico County, Virginia for The Tuckahoe Apartments. It would be "Richmond's first suburban apartment hotel,"¹ the builders announced, located near the Country Club of Virginia in the rapidly growing streetcar suburb of Westhampton, seven miles west of the central city. Eventually, the builders prophesied, the city would expand to include it, "as in the case of the Wardman Park in Washington, D.C."² Its estimated cost was one million dollars. The appointed architect: Virginia-born Duncan Lee, whose presentation drawing was reproduced with the newspaper announcement. It depicted a monumental central section six stories high plus cupola, with great wings extending outward, all this of red brick in the Georgian Revival style, with balustrades, keystones, quoins, cornices and other traditional embellishments laid on royally.

Richmonders John B. Swartwout, Esq. and bank president William B. Habliston, had purchased the lots in 1910 at a cost of \$2,175 (in 1999 the land was appraised at \$1,032,500). When Habliston died in 1926, he willed his half-ownership to Swartwout; the deed of conveyance was signed by Swartwout and his wife Rosa "operating as principals of the Rosewood Construction Company."³ Touting both the advantages of modern appliances and an exclusive address, the Tuckahoe's 1929 marketing brochure laid claim to:

...the best social atmosphere and environment in or around the City, and unsurpassed educational and religious advantages, and one finds an ideal

