

Application for a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark Marker for the

**ROBERT E. LEE HIGH SCHOOL
BAYTOWN, TEXAS**

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Architectural Description Contributed by Jan Lammers, AIA
and presented to the Harris County Historical Commission

I. CONTEXT

Long before Robert E. Lee High School (REL) was built on the north bank of Goose Creek,¹ in what would later become the City of Baytown, the residents realized the importance of providing educational opportunities for their children.² Although the agricultural communities of nearby Cedar Bayou and Wooster had built schools for their children in the 1800s,³ the area later known as Goose Creek was slower to establish formal public schools until the population began to increase after the discovery of oil nearby in 1908.⁴ Nine years later, the big gusher *Sweet #11* in 1917 created a boomtown near Tabbs Bay and the mouth of Goose Creek after which wildcatters and oilfield workers poured into the area.⁵

As chaos settled into a more orderly society, temporary schools emerged.⁶ By 1919, many residents realized more permanent facilities were needed, and the Goose Creek Independent School District was formed, although it did not receive its formal charter until 1920.⁷ The new district encompassed the communities of Goose Creek, Pelly, and Baytown that were often at odds with each other because of social, cultural, economic, and political differences, as well as territorial issues.⁸ The year after Goose Creek Independent School District was formed, the trustees added upper grades and opened the first high school in the old YMCA building.⁹

From the beginning, the trustees were determined to provide a quality education through high standards and first-class facilities to insure that students were well prepared for college or entering the work force. In 1921, citizens approved a bond issue to build five permanent schools, including Goose Creek High School (GCHS).¹⁰ Mrs. Virgie King, a former Goose Creek student who moved with her family to Baytown in 1921, recalled, “In the spring of 1923, we moved into the new Goose Creek High School We carried our chairs down Jones Street, across the railroad tracks to the new school.”¹¹ In 1924, the State Board of Education recognized it as a “high school of the First Class,” and, in 1925, GCHS was included in the list of “All Southern”

affiliated schools. These affiliations enabled Goose Creek graduates to enroll without examination in the University of Texas and most universities in the South.¹²

The student enrollment grew as the stable population of the communities expanded¹³ due mostly to Humble Oil and Refining Company's continuing growth.¹⁴ Within five years after the new GCHS opened, it was apparent that a much larger facility was needed.¹⁵ Mrs. Virgie King recalled, "I have seen our school system grow from a barn, a shack in Pelly, and the YMCA to the superior system it is today."¹⁶ In the few short years between the district's first school—a warehouse converted into a ten-room schoolhouse, "The Barn,"¹⁷-- and the opening of Robert E. Lee High School in the fall of 1928, the district had undergone phenomenal growth and change.

II. OVERVIEW

When the Goose Creek board (B.C. Morgan, President, N.D. Stiles, W.Y. Harvey, Dr. F.L. Robbins, and W.B. Dumas)¹⁸ met in the office of Superintendent J.C. Ingram on January 26, 1927, the stated purpose of the meeting was to discuss plans for a new building program for the district. Two of the attendees at the meeting were Mr. Jack Dies, attorney for Humble Oil and Refining Company, and Mr. R.E. Powell, superintendent of the Baytown Refinery. Mr. Dies expressed "the hearty approval of the Humble Oil and Refining Company for the proposed improvement of the schools."¹⁹ He also stated that the Humble Oil Company wanted the ". . . Goose Creek and Baytown schools to be the best in the country; and he suggested that the Board build not only for the present but also for the future."²⁰ Directed by the trustees, the superintendent hired Dr. T.H. Shelby and his staff from the Extension Department of the University of Texas for a \$2,000 fee to survey facilities, determine the needs of the district, and submit their final report in no longer than six months.²¹ At the May 13, 1927, board meeting, the survey committee gave its preliminary report:

On an adequate site of land not less than twenty acres between Goose Creek and Baytown, we recommend the erection of a senior high school building for the entire district. This building to be erected [should] provide for an up-to-date senior high school program to serve as a center of all community activities and for full provision for part-time and adult educational programs.²²

Following this recommendation, things moved quickly. In June, the board called for a bond election to address the needs of the district, including purchasing a site between Goose Creek and Baytown and building and equipping a new high school.²³ The board voted to hire Harry D.

Payne, a Houston architect, to draw up sketches for the proposed new buildings.²⁴ On July 2, 1927, district patrons passed a \$450,000 bond issue, with \$200,000 designated for the new high school.²⁵ In October, the board approved the new high school plans and directed the architect to proceed with the school design. Additionally, two board members, Dr. Robbins and Mr. Stiles were authorized to purchase a site for the new high school.²⁶ At the meeting of November 21, 1927, the board voted to name the new high school *Robert E. Lee Senior High School*²⁷ because of the Confederate general's popularity in the area. In December, the board discussed the possible purchase of land on the north bank of Goose Creek stream. The site for the new Robert E. Lee High School was located between the Goose Creek-Baytown Highway (later renamed Market Street) on the north and the Dayton-Goose Creek Railroad (later Southern Pacific) on the south. The site was a central location for the tri-cities of Goose Creek, Baytown, and Pelly.²⁸ Later that month, the board voted to pay \$20,000 for approximately fourteen acres to heirs of the Wiggins estate.²⁹ At the board meeting of March 6, 1928, the trustees opened the bids for construction of Lee and awarded the construction contracts to the following Houston firms: M.C. Parker for general construction, Lee Rogerson for plumbing, Walker Heating and Plumbing for heating, and Eugene Ash Electric Company for electrical work.³⁰ On March 20, 1928, the board held a special session to determine where the Lee site was actually located—Goose Creek or Pelly. Mr. Riggs had a contract to sell water to Pelly and wanted to sell water to the school as well. Upon reviewing maps provided by Mr. Lawler, an attorney for the school district, the trustees decided the site was in Goose Creek and, therefore, voted to run water lines from Goose Creek as originally planned.³¹

Construction was begun on Robert E. Lee in March of 1928 and continued throughout the spring and summer months. School was slated to begin on September 24 with plans to open the 1928-1929 year in the new building.³² Some students from the first classes at Lee recalled carrying desks down the Southern Pacific railroad tracks to the new building.³³ Along with their desks, the students carried their school traditions—academic and athletic excellence, the school colors of maroon and white, the Gander mascot, and the title of their yearbook *The Gander*.³⁴ The opening of Robert E. Lee High School was a starting point for uniting the citizens in the rival communities. According to Margaret Henson, author of *The History of Baytown*, “Two threads connected them [Goose Creek, Pelly, and Baytown], however: The community high school, Robert E. Lee, which opened in 1928, and their economic dependence on Humble Oil

and Refining Company.”³⁵ The evolution of Robert E. Lee into the heart and soul of the Tri-Cities had begun.

In accordance with a stated purpose that Robert E. Lee become a center of all community activities, in November of 1928, the trustees voted to allow charitable organizations and churches in the Tri-Cities to use school auditoriums at any time as long as they did not interfere with school functions with the provision they pay for lights, gas, and janitorial services. Because the Lee auditorium was a large, modern, well-designed and equipped facility,³⁶ it became a popular venue for civic activities. In February of 1929, the trustees even approved the purchase of a grand piano costing \$1,300 for the Lee auditorium.³⁷

In addition to providing the most up-to-date facilities for Robert E Lee, the trustees strived to provide excellence in all aspects of education at Lee. The practice of hiring highly-qualified teachers from prestigious colleges and universities, many with master’s degrees, began with the creation of Goose Creek High School and continued at Robert E. Lee.³⁸ This quest for excellence prompted the board to contract with Star Engraving Company of Houston to supply the diplomas for the 1929 graduating seniors. The diplomas had leather bindings with the name and seal of the school in gold letters stamped on the cover that was maroon and white, the school colors. The cost of each diploma was approximately three dollars,³⁹ a great sum of money at that time. In December of 1928, the trustees voted to hold all future board meetings in the superintendent’s office at Lee High School and ordered that the board minutes be placed there.⁴⁰ Thus, just as Lee was to be the center for community activities, it also became the educational center of the school district.

After completing the first year at Robert E. Lee High School, the staff of *The Gander*, the school’s yearbook, expressed their feelings about their new school:

In the beautiful Robert E. Lee High the students have a school of which they may be justly proud. The high knoll crowned by the majestic building, surrounded by moss-draped oaks, is a picture which can hardly be duplicated anywhere. The students can hardly appreciate how fortunate they are in having such a well situated school. The building, in itself a fitting tribute to the great Southern general, surrounded by clustering trees and overlooking the stream from which the city derives its name is a sight which is never forgotten once it is seen. The interior of the building is well planned with the utmost attention to detail, and has practical utility and conveniences without detracting from the school’s beauty Surely, with the atmosphere of high ideals created by our school, we cannot fail to go forth better people and better citizens.⁴¹

Although students were attending high school in the new Robert E. Lee building, the football games were still played at the old high school campus. In March of 1930, trustees voted to build a new football facility on the Lee campus. After discussing several possibilities, they decided to construct the facility in the area between the back of the school and the Southern Pacific railroad track.⁴² The facility opened in the fall of 1930 at a cost of \$28,000. District officials petitioned to showcase the new stadium by hosting the Harris County Interscholastic Athletic Meet.⁴³ The field was later named Elms Field in honor of Roy D. Elms, the first paid Gander football coach who later became the district's first athletic director.⁴⁴ Elms Field was later replaced by Memorial Stadium in 1947.⁴⁵

In 1931, R.B. Sparks became principal of Robert E. Lee High School and served as principal until his death in 1959. Because of his outstanding leadership and dedication to the school and its students, Mr. Sparks earned the respect and affection of the staff, students, and community.⁴⁶ As Lee's longest-serving principal, he led the school through much growth and many changes.

Another of the original stated purposes of Robert E. Lee High School was to serve as a facility "for part-time and adult education programs."⁴⁷ In 1934, the school board voted to establish a junior college. The plans were to hold college classes at night on the REL campus. Voters overwhelmingly approved the plans, and classes for the new "first-class junior college" began in September of 1934 with 177 students.⁴⁸ This arrangement continued until 1951 when Lee Junior College moved into its new facilities.⁴⁹ The principal of REL also served as dean of the college. After the United States became involved in World War II, the college curriculum changed to meet wartime needs and continued to change to meet the need to prepare students for employment in industry.⁵⁰ Thus, Lee High School became the center of higher education in Baytown.

Due to the addition of the twelfth grade in 1937,⁵¹ and increased high school enrollment, the school board voted to expand Lee's facilities. In January of 1936, architect Mr. L.L. Huie was hired to design additions to the main building. The board instructed him to draw plans that would add a wing that would extend south to the football field on each side of the original building. The wings were planned for the rear elevation extending east and west] of the original building and designed in the same architectural style so as not to detract from the original façade. The trustees called a bond election for May 1, 1936.⁵² Voters of the district approved the bond

issue.⁵³ A year later, the district added a new, detached gymnasium on the northeast side of the main building.⁵⁴

After World War II ended, because of increased population and popularity of football, voters approved construction of a new football stadium for the Ganders. Trustees voted to name the new stadium Memorial Stadium in memory of Robert E. Lee High School students killed during World War II. A bronze plaque bearing their names was placed on the base of the flagpole near the entrance to the stadium and later moved to a place of honor inside the commons area of the school. The stadium was located on the far northeast side of the campus.⁵⁵

The higher student numbers and popularity and growth of vocational education and extracurricular activities at Lee created a need for another expansion of facilities. In 1949, the district applied for a permit to construct a new detached cafeteria and vocational building behind the main building on land formerly part of Elms Field.⁵⁶ On July 20, 1953, trustees approved plans by Baytown architect Lowell Lammers for a freestanding fine arts building to house the Lee Band, choir, and Brigadiers. This facility was built on the north side of the gymnasium. In August of 1953, the board approved plans by Lowell Lammers for a new shop building to house both woodworking and metal trades shops and a new homemaking building with areas for both clothing and cooking instruction. All homemaking classes were housed on the first floor. The two-story facility provided additional classrooms on the second floor. These facilities were built on the east side of Lee near the cafeteria.⁵⁷ All of these additions were ready for occupancy in 1954. Just as this building program was completed, the trustees voted to add a swimming pool to the gymnasium and to expand the bleachers on the home side of Memorial Stadium.⁵⁸ Due to increased student enrollment, the old auditorium was no longer adequate for the needs of the school and community, and additional classroom space was needed. In 1958, a new detached auditorium was constructed at the end of the northeast wing between the main building and the gymnasium. The new auditorium designed by Lowell Lammers was large enough to seat the entire student body at one time and was the only air-conditioned facility on the campus for several years. In 1959, the high quality of the auditorium was recognized with an award of national honors for its outstanding design.⁵⁹ The space previously occupied by the original auditorium was converted into additional classrooms and administrative offices. By 1964, once again the Lee student population was outgrowing the facilities, and the campus was in need of expansion, renovation, and modernization. The commons, a large enclosed, multipurpose area,

was added to connect the cafeteria and vocational buildings to the back of the main building. The boys got a new gymnasium adjacent to the old gymnasium, and the old gym became the girls' gym.⁶⁰ In 1979, a much larger and more modern agriculture building was added to replace a much older and smaller one. Following these changes, the campus at Lee remained relatively unchanged for many years. In the fall of 1966, Ross S. Sterling High School (RSS) opened on the north side of Baytown to accommodate the town's rapidly growing population⁶¹ and to relieve the overcrowded conditions at Lee, making further Lee expansion unnecessary for several years. At this time, the Goose Creek schools were fully integrated, and George Washington Carver High School, the school for African Americans, was closed as a high school. Now all high school students in Baytown attended either Robert E. Lee or Ross S. Sterling.

Then disaster struck. In the early morning hours of April 29, 1987, a massive fire engulfed the original main building of Robert E. Lee High School. Despite valiant efforts of the Baytown Fire Department, by dawn the entire section had burned and collapsed except for the exterior walls that remained intact. In spite of all the damage, the name Robert E. Lee could still be seen emblazoned above the front entrance as if to say I am still here. At first, the fire was believed to have been caused by an electrical problem⁶²; however, further investigation determined it to be the work of arsonists.⁶³ As word of the fire spread through the community in the early morning hours, hundreds of Baytonians gathered at the site, watching in horror and disbelief the devastation wreaked on this community landmark. Members of the school board met in emergency session to plan for moving students to another site to complete the school term.⁶⁴ Rumors began to spread that the school board was contemplating abandoning the old campus and relocating the entire school to a new facility to be built on a different site. Fearing that such a move would mean the end of Robert E. Lee High School, two Lee alumnae, Baytown dentists Dr. John Hurr and Dr. Donald Brunson, began a petition drive to save the site, façade, and name of the school. Several thousand Baytonians united behind this group and pressured the trustees to restore the building to its original appearance.⁶⁵

For the remainder of the 1987 school year, Lee students were moved onto the Ross S. Sterling High School campus in a split school day schedule. In the morning, the Sterling campus was Sterling High School, but in the afternoon, it became Robert E. Lee High School. Sterling was manned by Sterling faculty and staff; Lee was manned by Lee faculty and staff.⁶⁶ Despite the heavy damage to the main building, the outlying Lee facilities were undamaged, and as soon

as power was restored to them, the fine arts, athletic, and vocational programs continued on the Lee campus. The Lee auditorium was also usable and ready for Lee's May 1987 graduation.⁶⁷

Due to intense pressure from the community, the trustees finally announced their plans to completely restore the Lee campus.⁶⁸ Things moved quickly after that. Necessary contracts and purchases were all handled on an emergency basis without bids.⁶⁹ Estimated replacement and cost of the main building was over ten million dollars plus additional costs to restore adjacent areas having suffered less damage.⁷⁰ Construction was begun, and on January 19 (ironically General Robert E. Lee's birthday), 1988, Lee students and staff thankfully moved back into an uncompleted facility.⁷¹ Fortunately, the wings had sustained only minor interior and exterior damage, which made the early return possible. The reconfiguration of the interior and restoration of the main building continued for several more months. No original walls on the main building or the wings were replaced. Restorations were necessary for portions of the interior of the central section of the main building. Like the Phoenix of old, Lee had risen from the ashes.

Once again, Lee had reunited the community. Merchants donated money to the Lee building fund;⁷² fundraisers were held to help defray costs of restoration.⁷³ Shane Goodman, a Lee graduate and member of the Cadillac Cowboys, a country-western group, wrote "Loss of a Legend," to honor Robert E. Lee High School.⁷⁴ The band recorded the song and donated the proceeds from the sale to the Lee building fund.⁷⁵ The rededication ceremony for Lee was held on October 9, 1988, at which time Henry Armstrong, REL principal at the time of the fire, and Congressman Jack Fields, a U.S. Representative for Baytown, spoke at the rededication ceremony.⁷⁶

In the years following the restoration, several changes have been made to the campus in order to keep it current with modern educational needs. The community has demanded that Lee be just as modern and desirable as the new facilities being built in the district. These have included the following: a new homemaking building to replace the one built in 1953, a new state-of-the-art football field house, a new cafeteria, vocational facilities, additional classrooms, and a two-story science building with modern laboratories. In addition, in 2010 the district dedicated the recently completed Memorial Sports Complex. The complex includes Gary N. Herrington Field (named for a long-time Gander baseball coach); Pete Sultis Stadium that was formerly named Memorial Stadium and renamed to honor a former Gander football coach, athletic

director, and school board member; the Lady Ganders Softball Field; and a state-of-the-art football field house.⁷⁷

From the very beginning, the communities showed strong support for all things having to do with Robert E. Lee High School. “Pellyites,” “Baytonians,” and “Goose Creekians” all developed an intense pride in and fierce loyalty to their new school. Evidence of this support manifested itself in numerous ways. Goose Creek named a street “Robert E. Lee Drive,” today known as “Lee Drive.” Local service clubs sponsored clubs on the Lee campus. The new radio station on Decker Drive bore the call letters KREL.⁷⁸ For many years, until the opening of the district’s second high school, the main water tower at the west entrance to Baytown was emblazoned with “Home of the Fighting Robert E. Lee Ganders.” During football season, downtown merchants allowed Lee students to paint spirit signs on their store windows and for important games closed early so that their employees could attend the games.⁷⁹ Gander fans camped out overnight in long lines to buy season tickets as well as tickets to playoff games and games with bitter rivals.⁸⁰ It was not unusual for fans to keep their season tickets for twenty-five years or more.⁸¹ In the earlier years, when many did not own cars and travel by automobile was not always practical, Lee fans chartered trains and buses to out-of-town games.⁸² Later, long lines of fans in automobiles followed the Ganders in caravan style.⁸³ The community supported Lee organizations by raising or donating money for special causes. For example, when the Lee band, because of its outstanding reputation, was invited to perform for the International Lions Club at its convention in Chicago in 1950, the community went to work to purchase new uniforms and to provide money for travel expenses.⁸⁴ Also, the residents of Baytown should have been well read because of the highly successful magazine sales conducted yearly by the Lee Band and Brigadiers.⁸⁵ During the years Rascal McCaskill was disk jockey for “Night Train,” a program immensely popular with Lee students, he allowed students to dance inside the studio, and he still returns from his home in Victoria, Texas, to take in part in the class reunions for the Class of 1957.⁸⁶

In addition to the community’s support for Lee’s programs and projects, Lee students also supported community projects. For example, the Key Club, a school service club sponsored by the local Kiwanis organization, has for many years helped sell and deliver apples for the Kiwanis annual fundraiser. It has participated in the state’s “Adopt a Highway” program to pick up litter along a section Decker Drive.⁸⁷ In 1957, the REL Key Club secured a historic railroad

engine to be placed in Roseland Park where it remains today.⁸⁸ The band and Brigadiers marched in many parades, and the choral groups performed at nursing homes and organization meetings in a show of support for the community and its activities. From the beginning, Lee students have contributed their time and labor for the betterment of the community, participating in such service projects as visiting nursing homes, helping with Special Olympics, assisting at the Cerebral Palsy Center, collecting items for food drives, conducting toy drives for underprivileged children, working at the church-sponsored thrift shop, holding parties for childcare centers, participating in get-out-the-vote drives, and preparing and delivering food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas.⁸⁹ Even today, Lee students participate in community projects such as working during “Trash Bash,” picking up litter along the waterways of the area.⁹⁰ Obviously, the community has been greatly enriched by the contributions made by thousands of Lee students.

One of the Board’s stated purposes for building Robert E. Lee was to have it serve as a center for community activities. Once REL was completed, the community took advantage of the opportunity to use the school’s facilities. On November 30, 1928, shortly after the school opened, a “Jubilee” program was held in the new building.⁹¹ In 1931 the regional district P.T.A. group held its district meeting in the Lee auditorium.⁹² In 1934, the Goodfellows held “an indoor baseball game” at Elms Field.⁹³ In 1935, the International Association of Oilfield, Gas Well, and Refinery Workers, Local 333, held a “speaking and barbecue” on the Lee grounds.⁹⁴ In 1934, the Board voted to allow Humble Company to use rooms not in use for vocational instruction.⁹⁵ In 1936, the district allowed *The Daily Sun* to use the benches from Elms Field for a political rally and permitted the band to perform.⁹⁶ In 1953, the Veterans of Foreign Wars held a “Homecoming Fete” for Baytown’s Korean Prisoners of War.⁹⁷ For many years, Easter Sunrise Services were held at Memorial Stadium.⁹⁸ In 1953, the Rotary Club moved its meetings from Grace Methodist Church to the Robert E. Lee cafeteria.⁹⁹ The auditorium was frequently used by local organizations for a wide variety of programs. For example, many dance and piano recitals have been held there through the years. Additionally, groups have held fundraising concerts and performances in the Lee auditorium. One in the early 50s spotlighted Curly Fox and Texas Ruby, two very popular Grand Ole Opry stars who had their own television show on Houston’s KPRC-TV.¹⁰⁰

Robert E. Lee High School has gained recognition throughout the state and nation for the excellence of its athletic programs. From its inception, Gander teams have excelled in virtually

all sports. The football teams have been powerhouses and have gone to state playoffs numerous times, including state finals two consecutive years in 1951 and 1952.¹⁰¹ George Walmsley (Class of 1944) was one of the greatest Gander football players in the school's history. He was named to the All-State High School Team in 1941, 1942, and 1943 and to the High School All American Team in 1943. As a freshman at Rice University, he was named College All American in 1944.¹⁰² George Walmsley wore Number 44, the only Lee jersey number ever retired.¹⁰³ Several other Gander football players have won distinction as High School All Americans and college All-Americans, including David "Kosse" Johnson (Class of 1950), Herbert Gray (Class of 1952), and Tom "Swede" Stolhanske (Class of 1949). Large portraits of these three Ganders, along with one of head football coach Dan Stallworth, hung for years in the lobby of Citizens National Bank before the bank donated the portraits to Lee.¹⁰⁴ One of the many traditions of the Gander football team started by Coach Stallworth was to take a container of dirt from the Lee stadium to spread on the field at out-of-town games. By throwing "Gander dirt" on an opponent's field to take away home field advantage, it was said that Ganders never played on foreign soil.¹⁰⁵ Throughout the years, Gander players have received much fame and won many prestigious individual awards. From Lee's earliest beginning until the present time, Gander football teams have brought glory and renown to Robert E. Lee High School and the town by winning countless district, bi-district, regional, and state-level titles. Many of these outstanding athletes have gone on to excel on college and professional teams.

With the opening of Ross S. Sterling High School, the district in 1967 decided to build a new stadium to be named Stallworth Stadium to serve all district high schools.¹⁰⁶ Though the new Memorial Sports Complex at Robert E. Lee includes multi-use Pete Sultis Stadium, REL varsity football games have been played at Stallworth Stadium since 1969.¹⁰⁷ Lee football teams had been so highly rated through the years that President Gerald Ford chose to attend one of the Lee games in 1976.¹⁰⁸

In addition, Lee has fielded outstanding baseball teams that have gone to state playoffs, including the 1961 Gander team that won the state championship under head coach Don Truehardt. Numerous loyal supporters and the Lee Band trekked to the finals in Austin to cheer the Ganders on to victory.¹⁰⁹ More than a thousand fans met the team at Memorial Stadium when the players arrived home from Austin late at night.¹¹⁰ Several Gander players went on to play on college and professional teams. Gary Herrington (Class of 1955) for whom the Lee baseball field

is named played on the Texas A&M Southwest Conference Championship team and later was drafted by the Los Angeles Angels.¹¹¹ John Byington (Class of 1986) and Andy Duke (Class of 1985) of Texas A&M were named honored players to the All Southwest Conference Baseball Team in 1989.¹¹² John Byington later played Triple A ball for the Milwaukee Brewers. Under Coach Herrington, “. . . Ganders won more than 500 varsity games. They made the playoffs ten years in a row at one time, and, in 1999, reached the Region III-5A finals, coming within one win of the state tournament.”¹¹³

Lee basketball teams have also brought recognition through their participation in state playoff competition. The Lee track teams under Coach Beverly Rockhold won fifteen district championships, eleven regional titles, two state championships, and finished second in state four times. Originally the Lee Relays, later renamed Rockhold Relays, has for decades been recognized as one of the premier track meets in Texas.¹¹⁴ Additionally, REL teams have brought home trophies in tennis, softball, golf, volleyball, and water sports.

The Robert E. Lee Band, officially created in September of 1935, has brought state and national recognition to the school and Baytown. When REL opened, a volunteer band was organized and conducted by A.A. Davis who eventually convinced the Board of Trustees to include a band program at the high school and to provide a site on the Lee campus for the band to meet and practice.¹¹⁵ From that time forward, the band has been a source of pride for the community. Throughout its long history, the band has won accolades far and wide for its outstanding quality. In 1936, the band was invited to perform at the Texas Centennial in Dallas.¹¹⁶ In 1939, the band featured the school’s new “The Lee Alma Mater” written by two Lee graduates. Audrey Nell Smith (Class of 1939) wrote the words for the song, and T.F. Seale, a Lee band director, composed the music.¹¹⁷ The popularity of the band skyrocketed after the 1940 acquisition of authentic Confederate Army style uniforms like the one worn by General Robert E. Lee during the Civil War. The community raised and donated money to repay the district for the cost of the new uniforms.¹¹⁸ In 1950, the band performed in Chicago at the national Lions Club convention.¹¹⁹ In 1952, the band performed for the Sons of Confederate Veterans at their national convention in Jackson, Mississippi. Major Horace H. Shelton, Commander of the Texas Division of the Sons of the Confederate Veterans, was instrumental in having the Lee Band named the official band of the organization.¹²⁰ The Lee Band has marched in numerous local and distant parades and events such as the Cotton Bowl, Disney World in

Florida, and the opening of the Astrodome, just to name a few.¹²¹ Charles Forque, a former Lee student who became Lee band director in 1957 when J.C. Burkett retired, took the band to new heights. In the 1960s and 1970s, Doc Severinsen, leader of the *Tonight Show Band* and a famous trumpeted player, performed and recorded with the Lee Band on many occasions. Under Forque's leadership, the band won numerous first-division ratings in UIL competition.¹²² The Lee Band's tradition of excellence continues today, and the organization remains a vital part of the school and community it serves.

The Robert E. Lee Brigadiers, an all-girls drum and bugle corps, enriched Robert E. Lee High School and the community for seventy years. It was organized in 1930 as a pep squad by Margaret Elms, wife of the first Lee football coach and a physical education teacher. It was not until the second year that they began to acquire instruments and march. In 1935, the group adopted the name "The Maroon Brigadiers." In 1940, the group, under the direction of Mrs. A.A. Davis, officially changed its name to the Robert E. Lee Brigadiers.¹²³ That same year they got new uniforms made out of the same material as the band uniforms with Confederate-style jackets, short, pleated skirts, and cavalry-style boots.¹²⁴ In Lee tradition, the Brigadiers have brought honor and renown to their school. The group has performed in numerous parades and events such as the Cotton Bowl, the Orange Bowl, and Disney World.¹²⁵ Additionally, they received national recognition when they were featured in a Life magazine article on Texas football. The article included a full-page, color photograph of the REL Brigadiers.¹²⁶ In addition to promoting school pride and spirit with their performances, the Brig helped with Special Olympics, "Shots Across Texas," presentation of colors for community events, food drives, and many other service projects. By the 1990s, the Brigadiers were the last all-girl drum and bugle corps in Texas, and their numbers swelled to more than 300.¹²⁷ By the end of the decade, however, student interest had diminished, and in 2001 the group was discontinued and replaced by a dance group named the Lee Celebrities.¹²⁸

From its beginning, Lee students have won honors and broad acclaim for themselves and for Robert E. Lee High School. These include recognition as Advanced Placement Scholars and National Merit Scholars. Academic teams have brought home top awards in debate, UIL writing, decathlon, poetry, typing, accounting, math, science, yearbook, newspaper, and countless others. Junior Classical League Latin students have won state honors numerous times. Career technology students have brought home their share of awards in agriculture, cosmetology,

auto mechanics, metal trades, and others. Fine arts students have also garnered awards and honors in many competitions. The REL Choir has won top honors in UIL competitions and made many contributions to both school and community. The members of the Marine Corps Junior ROTC have been recognized for outstanding performance and have won numerous awards. Students in Lee's art department have produced paintings that have been auctioned for thousands of dollars at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. For example, Nick Dodson's (Class of 1999) painting "A Living Legend" sold for \$20,000 at auction.¹²⁹ Additionally, Lee students have been honored by having their paintings exhibited in the capitol in Austin. The Lee choir has brought its share of awards back to Lee in recognition of their outstanding performances. The Lee orchestra has won both group and individual awards in state competitions.

Robert E. Lee High School, in its eighty-one years, has produced countless athletes who have achieved success in their chosen fields following graduation. Many of these have returned to live and work in Baytown while others have gained their success in other places throughout the state, nation, and world. Former Gander athletes have excelled in colleges and universities around the nation, and many have played professionally. Clint Stoerner (Class of 1996) played for the Dallas Cowboys. Kirk Botkin (Class of 1989) played for the Pittsburg Steelers and later returned to Lee to coach. Jimmy Hearndon played for the University of Houston and later the Houston Texans. Robert Carr, a former Lee running back, set the single-game running record at Yale University. Quinton Coryatt (Class of 1988) played for the Indianapolis Colts and Dallas Cowboys. Fred Marti (Class of 1959) became a professional golfer and later returned as the golf pro at a Baytown golf course.

Numerous Lee graduates entered the medical profession, and many have returned to Baytown to practice. These include T.T. Peck (Class of 1941), Philip Eichelberger (Class of 1947), George Walmsley (Class of 1944), James Walmsley (Class of 1952), and Thomas N. Holsomback (Class of 1960), to name a few. Dr. Bob E. Stout (Class of 1951) served on the staff of the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston.¹³⁰

Other graduates have achieved success in a myriad of fields. Bill Broyles (Class of 1962) became a highly successful award-winning author, screenwriter, and a former editor of *Newsweek* magazine.¹³¹ Dr. Beth Burnside (Class of 1961) became Vice Chancellor for Research at the University of California at Berkley.¹³² Robert W. Lawless served as president of Texas Tech University.¹³³ Tom Meier (Class of 1958) served as president of Castleton State College in

Vermont.¹³⁴ Gwenn D. Casey, DVM, (Class of 1963) received his degree in veterinary medicine, and returned to Baytown to practice. Joe West, a Lee graduate, was issued more than twelve patents in microelectronics.¹³⁵ Ralph A. Wooster (Class of 1946), author of numerous books on Civil War history, served as head of the History Department at Lamar University and retired as Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History.¹³⁶ Another famous Lee graduate, Robert “Bob” Lanier (Class of 1951), grew up in Pelly, made his fortune in real estate, and in 1991 was elected mayor of Houston.¹³⁷ Roscoe R. Zierlein, Jr., (Class of 1937) became a lawyer, served as a Justice of the Peace, and practiced law in Baytown until his retirement.¹³⁸ Rear Admiral William Retz was in charge of naval operations in the Persian Gulf.¹³⁹ Chester Burchett (Class of 1953) played football for the Ganders and the Naval Academy.¹⁴⁰ Because of his many years of service to Spring ISD, the district named an elementary school in his honor. Allen Rice (Class of 1953) became an award-winning, Harvard-educated architect. After his retirement, he wrote *Ganders*, which focuses on the Lee teams’ accomplishment during some of the school’s glory years of 1950-1953.¹⁴¹ Wanda Orton (Class of 1952), a retired managing editor of *The Baytown Sun*, is a prolific author of articles on Baytown history and student life at Robert E. Lee.¹⁴² Countless other graduates have become leaders in their chosen communities, successful employees in their chosen fields, and contributing members of society.

Architectural Description by Jan Lammers, AIA The Robert E. Lee High School old main building, built in 1928, with later classroom additions, is architecturally significant as a type of educational structure widely used in Texas during the 1920s and 1930s. The original structure was designed by Houston architect Harry D. Payne, 1891-1987, in the Art Deco style. Payne, an architectural consultant to school districts in the Houston Metropolitan area during the 1920s through the 1940s, was also responsible for numerous other structures, including River Oaks Elementary (1927), Wheatley High School (1927), Baytown Junior School (1928; destroyed by fire in the 1980s), Deer Park High School (1931), and Lamar High School (1937 with John Staub and Kenneth Franzheim).

The building incorporates several elements of the Art Deco style, including glazed terra cotta tile embellishment at the main entry and at the roof cornice as well as decorative iron entry handrails and lanterns. The predominant exterior material is textured buff-colored stucco. The concrete-framed stucco-veneered building sits on a painted concrete foundation and has a terra

cotta tile roof, a definite regional influence. Brick trimmed niches with urn on pedestal type motif decorate each side of the entry façades. A classical finial adorns each building corner. The school name is rendered in glazed terra cotta tile set high over the front entry, just under the eave.

In 1987, an arsonist's fire gutted portions of the entire original section of the main building. In the reconstruction, the exterior façade was maintained (All portions of the original facade are still there. They were saved—not replicated.). The roof was replicated using original materials. The original supplier of the original glazed terra cotta tile supplied replacement tiles for those damaged in the fire. Rededicated in 1988, the Robert E. Lee main building and additions (approximately 90,000 square feet) are still functioning as a viable landmark in the Baytown community.¹⁴³

III. SIGNIFICANCE

From its beginning in the fall of 1928, Robert E. Lee High School in Baytown has fulfilled and even surpassed every goal and expectation set forth by the citizens and Board of Trustees of Goose Creek Independent School District. The 1927-1928 members of the school board and Superintendent J.C. Ingram realized the need for a quality high school and took the actions necessary to the creation of Robert E. Lee. Their intentions were to build a high school for not only their time, but also for the future. From inception to completion took only eighteen months. First, Lee established a tradition of excellence in every aspect of a high school student's education. The students were provided first-class facilities in which to learn. They were provided a highly-qualified teaching staff and a rigorous curriculum that enabled them to enter the best colleges and universities in the nation, many without exam. Students were provided programs outside just the academic fields--in athletics, in fine and practical arts, and in career technology. Over the years, even to today, the facilities have been expanded and modernized as has the curriculum to keep pace with changing times and needs so that Lee could remain a first-class high school. Second, Lee was built to serve all the Anglo and Hispanic students within the school district—those of Goose Creek, Pelly, and Baytown. Some forward-looking citizens saw this as a chance to unite the residents of these communities and to eventually consolidate them into one town. As the students grew to know each other and as the parents worked together in support of the school, this process began to become a reality. Within twenty years, consolidation took place.

Last, one of the stated goals was that Robert E. Lee High School would become the center of and for community activities. The community was not only allowed, but also encouraged, to use the Lee campus facilities for varied meetings, programs, concerts, and other activities. It served as an emergency shelter, polling place, school administration building, and meeting place for civic organizations. Within a few short years, Lee truly became more than just an educational facility. It was the heart and soul of the communities within the district. Community life revolved around Lee. It was the common denominator for people from different economic, social, geographical, and cultural backgrounds. Lee students served the residents of the communities through countless hours in service projects as well as in the many performances by the band, Brigadiers, and choirs. In return, the community gave Lee its wholehearted support and loyalty. Graduates of Robert E. Lee High School have demonstrated that they were prepared to succeed in whatever they chose to do in life. Wherever the graduates of Robert E. Lee have gone, they have carried the name of Baytown and the fame of the Ganders with them. Robert E. Lee has and continues to fulfill its destiny.

IV. DOCUMENTATION

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- ²⁴ Goose Creek ISD Minutes of Board Meeting, June 28, 1927, Vol. I, p. 315.
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- ³² Goose Creek ISD Minutes of Board Meeting, March 6, 1928, Vol. II, pp. 212-213.
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