



WEST OF THE BOULEVARD NEWS

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MENU



The Boulevard Historic District

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INTRODUCTION

The Boulevard Historic District is a linear district extending the length of thirteen city blocks in the city of Richmond. Comprised of the buildings that face the 19-800 blocks of North Boulevard and the 10-300 blocks of South Boulevard, the district contains 144 contributing building, 64 contributing structures (mostly garages), and 1 historical object – an equestrian statue of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson located at the intersection of North Boulevard and Monument Avenue.





Stonewall Jackson Monument (1965)

Developed almost entirely between 1910 and 1935, the Boulevard is lined with distinguished town houses, apartment buildings, impressive churches, and three monumental public buildings of exceptional local architectural significance – Battle Abbey (Virginia Historical Society), the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and the National Headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

A fashionable address for early 20th-century middle and upper income residents, the dwellings along the Boulevard display a variety of popular architectural styles of the period including the Colonial Revival, Spanish Eclectic, and Tudor Revival styles. The picturesque quality of the Boulevard's cohesive and compact building fabric is further enhanced by the handsome trees and street lamps that line the street and the grassy median which divides the flow of traffic.

Serving as a gateway to Byrd Park to the south, the Boulevard is also a distinctive major north-south thoroughfare in a city that is primarily oriented east to west.



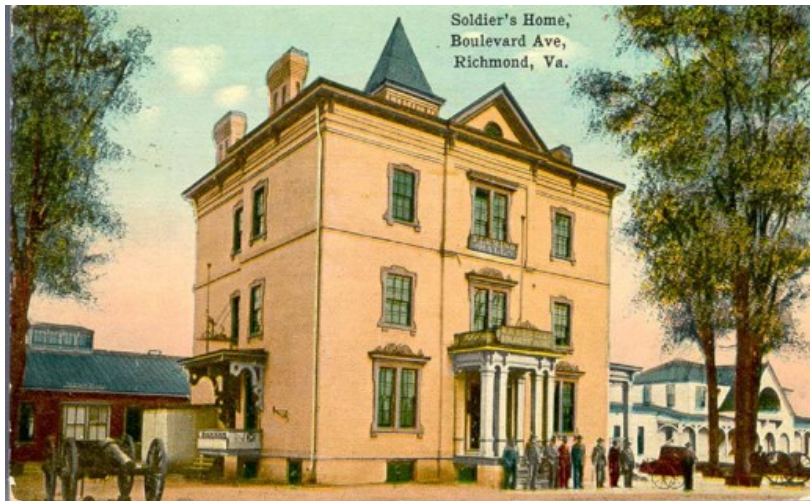
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (2012)

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CLOVER STREET TO BYRD PARK

The street now known as The Boulevard was laid out by Jacquelin Harvie in 1817 as part of his plan for the town of Sydney. In Harvie's plan, the road was originally called Clover Street and ran north and south.

The Boulevard is divided into North Boulevard, north of Main Street and South Boulevard, south of Main Street. Originally laid out as Clover Street in the plan for the town of Sydney, the street was renamed Boulevard by 1890 and served as a direct access from the Main Street trolley line to Reservoir Park (now Byrd Park) to the south.



Channing M. Robinson House

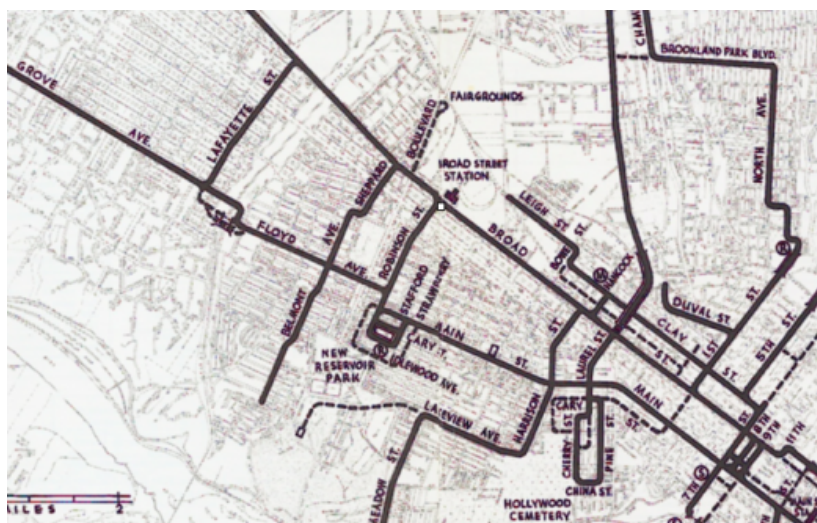
Among the first residents of the street was Channing M. Robinson. Between 1867 and 1879 Robinson acquired a thirty-six-acre tract bounded by present-day Grove, Mulberry, Sheppard and Kensington streets through which ran Clover Street. On what was then Henrico County land, Robinson and his wife Judith owned an imposing two-story Italianate mansion erected in ca. 1860 (ABOVE). That the house faced south toward Grove rather than east toward Clover indicates something of the early character of the street in the settlement period of the district.



Byrd Park

Clover Street remained a mere country road until 1875 when the City of Richmond constructed a reservoir at the entrance of what is now Byrd Park. Plans for the reservoir included development of a park designed by City Engineer Wilfred E. Cutshaw and the eventual widening of Clover Street.

By 1890 Clover Street had become Boulevard and gave direct access to Reservoir Park from the Main Street car line of the Richmond Passenger and Power Company. The park itself became in the early 20th century a west end resort of the street car companies, with horse shows, racetrack, summer theatre, and a swimming pool.



Trolley map detail (1930)

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ROBERT E. LEE CAMP NO.1 (BATTLE ABBEY, VMFA, UNITED DAUGHTERS OF THE CONFEDERACY)

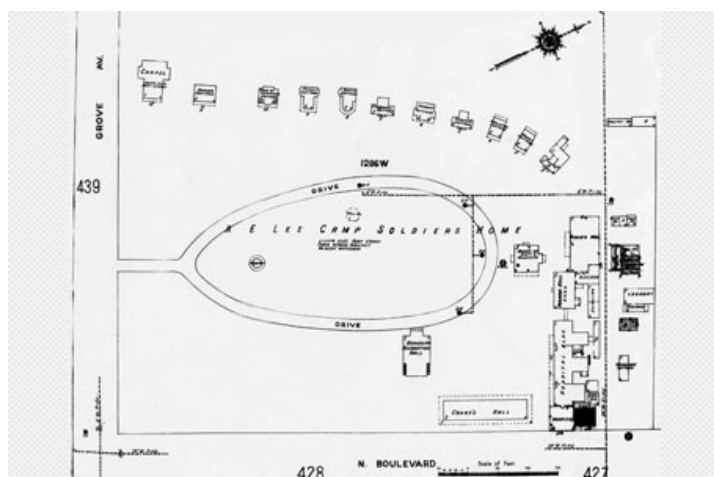
Besides its proximity to the new park, the Boulevard also traces its origins to the efforts of Confederate veterans in the early 1880s to establish a home for disabled Confederate soldiers on the Robinson tract.



Soldiers' home

Chartered by the General Assembly to minister to the needs of permanently disabled Confederate veterans, the Robert E. Lee Camp No. 1 acquired the Robinson property for \$14,000 in 1884, built an interdenominational memorial chapel on the grounds in 1887, and held the property intact until April, 1889 when a nine-acre tract on the east side of the Boulevard was subdivided into sixty-five house lots and sold at public auction. The proceeds of the sale supported the camp, which at

its peak in the years between 1890 and 1915, operated as one of the largest soldiers' homes in the south, serving nearly three hundred pensioners.



Sanborn Company fire insurance map of camp grounds (1925)

In physical layout the camp consisted of an oval drive entered from Grove Avenue flanked by ten cottages, a hospital, a chapel, and a meeting hall. The Robinson House became a museum called Randolph Hall. Only one building, the Cook Building (no longer standing), faced directly on the Boulevard.



Soldiers' Home

Originally intended to be a self-supporting institution, the Soldiers' Home by 1892 began to look to the Commonwealth for financial support. In response to the veterans' needs, an act of the General Assembly guaranteed an annual appropriation to the beleaguered veterans in return for transferral of property rights to the Commonwealth. The Act of 1892 was amended several times to allow for various organizations to obtain small tracts of land from the main twenty-five-acre camp thus acquired by the Commonwealth.

In subsequent years the original tract comprising the Robert E. Lee Camp No. 1 was divided into several parcels on which were built the Confederate Memorial Institute or Battle Abbey (now the Virginia Historical Society) in 1912-1921, the Home for Needy Confederate Women in 1932, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in 1936, and the National Headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in 1955-57.



Confederate Memorial Institute (Battle Abbey)

The first monumental building erected on North Boulevard was the Confederate Memorial Institute, or Battle Abbey, now the home of the Virginia Historical Society. Designed by Bissell and Sinkler, a noted Philadelphia architectural firm, Battle Abbey was built as a memorial and repository for records of the Confederate cause, hence its vault-like character. Although construction began in 1912, the edifice was not completed until 1921.

Battle Abbey remained the home of the Confederate Memorial Institute until 1946 when it became the property of the Virginia Historical Society. This change occurred through the efforts of Douglas Southall Freeman, then president of the Confederate Memorial Association. Freeman initiated a merger between the two organizations that resulted in the Virginia Historical Society acquiring not only the building but also the endowment of the Confederate Memorial Association.

The Home for Needy Confederate Women, located within the district but fronting on Sheppard Street, was erected in 1932 after the plans of Merrill Lee on land acquired from the Commonwealth by the Home in 1926.



Home for Needy Confederate Women



Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (1939)

The next major public building erected on the Boulevard was the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Occupying a large area of the former Robert E. Lee Camp No. 1, the museum is an excellent example of Classical Revival architecture. The museum's original portion of 1936 was designed in the English Renaissance style by two architectural firms — Eggers and Higgins of New York and Peebles and Ferguson of Norfolk. Later additions include wings built in the 1970s and 1985 as well as an impressive series of steps flanked by fountains leading to a central entrance.



National Headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy

In 1935, the camp deeded a small portion of its land to the United Daughters of the Confederacy but it was not until 1950 that the General Assembly approved the establishment of a national headquarters for the organization on the Boulevard.

The third and last monumental building constructed on the site of Robert E. Lee Camp No. 1 was the National Headquarters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. Built in 1955-57, on land deeded to the

organization by the Camp in 1935, the building was designed by the Richmond firm of Ballou and Justice and reflects the modernism of the 1950s with its detachment from classicism and rejection of historic architectural styles.



Confederate Memorial Chapel

With the death of the Lee Camp's last pensioner in 1941, fifteen of the buildings in the Soldiers' Home complex were destroyed, and the chapel and its garden were transferred to the state for perpetual maintenance as a memorial park.

All that remains now of the Lee Camp are the Robinson House (Randolph Hall) and the Confederate Memorial Chapel.

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CHURCHES, APARTMENTS BUILDINGS, AND HOUSES

The popularity of the Colonial Revival and Neo-classical styles during the early 20th century influenced the designs of two churches and a funeral home on North Boulevard. Built by 1925, the L. T. Christian Funeral Home at the corner of North Boulevard and Patterson Avenue, reflects the unknown architect's free adaptation of classical principles. The tree-story building's unusual shape conforms to its triangular site.



L.T.Christian Funeral Home (1925)

The monumental and classical quality of Battle Abbey influenced the design of several church buildings on the Boulevard. Designed by Richmond architect Albert L. West, Boulevard United Methodist Church at 321 North Boulevard was originally built as Grace Methodist Church in 1919.



Boulevard United Methodist Church (Grace Methodist Church 1919)

The Beth Israel Synagogue was consecrated as Grace Baptist Church in 1923. Sited at the corner of North Boulevard and Grove Avenue, the Gothic Revival-style building features pointed-arched stained-glass windows, rose windows, and ramped parapet. A star of David outlined in the tracery of one of the rose windows proclaims the building's later use as a synagogue.



Beth Israel Synagogue (Grace Baptist Church 1923)

On the west side of the Boulevard stands St. Mark's Episcopal Church, erected in 1925 after the designs of the Richmond firm of Baskervill and Son. The building is a notable early example in Richmond of the Georgian Revival style.



St. Mark's Episcopal Church (1925)

As early as 1889, the Confederate veterans of the Soldiers' Home sold at auction part of their original tract east of the Boulevard. The land was subdivided into sixty-five lots; however, few of those lots were developed before 1910. In fact, according to city directories of the period, only four buildings stood along North Boulevard in 1910 and none at all existed along South Boulevard in that year. Five years later seventeen town houses stood along North Boulevard and four town houses along South Boulevard. Town house and apartment house construction continued along the Boulevard into the late 1910s and 1920s.



Tuscan Villas (1928-1929)

The most notable apartment building on the Boulevard is a large stucco complex of projecting ellis and recessed courtyards that comprises the entire east side of the 500 block of North Boulevard. Known as the Tuscan Villas, the extensive building was designed by Bascom Joseph Rowlett and built in 1928-29 with each of its wings separately named: the Lucra, Siena, Leghorn, Florence, and Pisa. One of Richmond's most well known apartment buildings, Tuscan Villas is perhaps the paramount expression of Mediterranean influenced architecture in Richmond. Tuscan Villas was converted to luxury condominiums in the early 1980s.



118 South Boulevard

Since 1930 very few buildings have been erected on the Boulevard and fewer have been demolished. Only six noncontributing buildings, mostly small apartment buildings constructed in the 1960s/1970s, break the cohesive and compact streetscape of the Boulevard but their impact is softened by the district's lovely trees and shrubbery.



301 South Boulevard

Besides this interesting collection of major public buildings, the Boulevard is marked by a preponderance of early 20th century apartment buildings on both the east and west sides of the street. The majority of these date from the period 1915 to 1930 and represent the work of various Richmond architectural firms. During this fifteen year period the apartment building had come into widespread use throughout Richmond, providing housing for all classes of people.



110 North Boulevard (The Belmont)

The Davis Brothers were among the most prolific builders of apartments and houses on the Boulevard. The firm was founded by T. Wiley Davis after the Civil War and became one of the largest building contractors in the city of Richmond. Building permits list the firm as the architects, builders, and owners of two of the earliest and largest apartments on the Boulevard, the Belmont (1916) at 110 North Boulevard and Bollingbrook Apartments (1917) at 10 South Boulevard. The permits for each of the buildings record a pre-construction value of \$40,000, a considerable sum when compared to the cost of the average apartment building of the period, between \$20,000 and \$30,000.



10 South Boulevard (Bollingbrook Apartments)

Other architect-designed apartment houses on the Boulevard include the twin buildings, Lakeview Apartments (102 South Boulevard) and the William Byrd Apartments (100 South Boulevard), both built after the designs of C.G. Morris between 1917-1918.



102 and 100 South Boulevard (Lakeview Apartments & the William Byrd Apartments)

Carl Ruehrmund designed the Chatsworth Apartments at 120 South Boulevard in 1918. Built at a cost of \$20,000, the building is distinguished by its well-executed Georgian doorway that serves as the main entrance. The original plans for the building survive.



120 South Boulevard (Chatsworth Apartments 1918)

In addition to institutional buildings and apartment houses, the Boulevard has an abundance of private residences. Of the architect-designed dwellings, the structures at 101 to 117 North Boulevard were erected between 1915-1916 by the firm of Davis Brothers. Covering almost an entire block, the houses represent a variety of architectural styles popular during the early 20th century including Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival and Bungalow.



103-117 North Boulevard

In an advertisement found in the Richmond City Directory for 1916, the firm noted: "Every year we build and sell from 75 to 100 homes. The Boulevard Residences are a sample of our work. We can finance and build you a home or investment property, and are prepared to handle with dispatch larger contracts: apartment houses, schools, or other public buildings." From this notice it is apparent that the firm's Boulevard residences were speculative houses, built for no particular client and that the firm was capable of handling all components of building from design through sales.

The sale price of private residences on the Boulevard tended to be within the \$5,000 to \$7,000 price range. Research in city directories indicate that the houses were, for the most part, owned by middle-class families. Architecturally, they are similar to many dwellings found in the Fan Area Historic District.

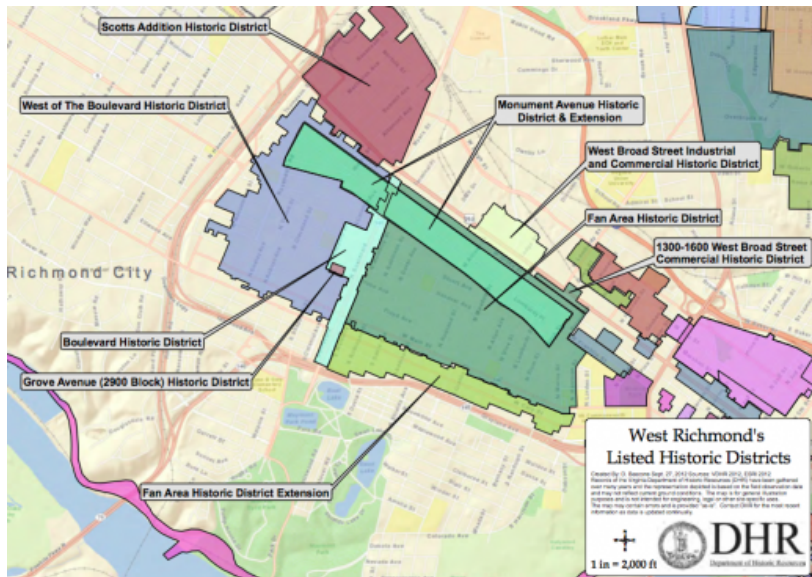


310 South Boulevard (1910)

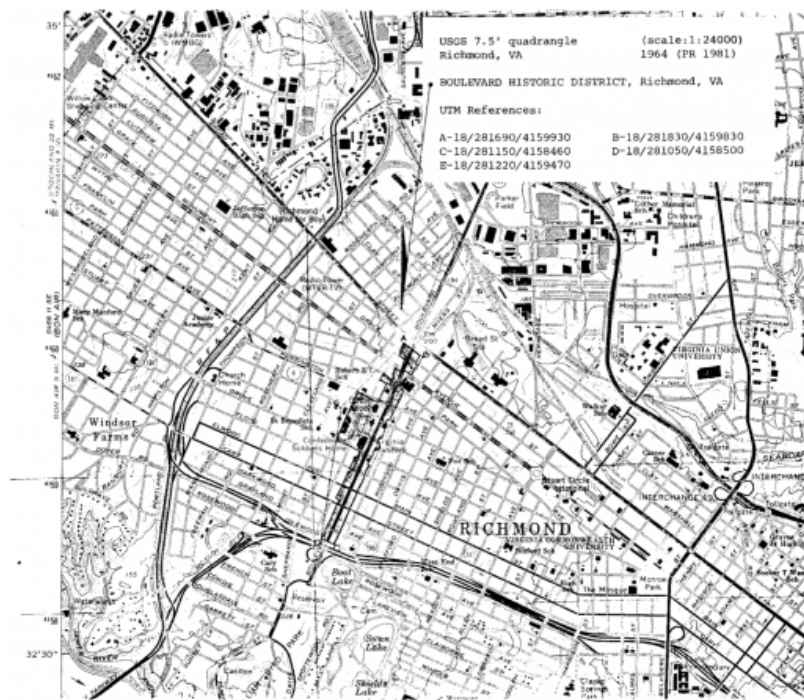
A notable exception to the typical Boulevard residence, however, is 310 South Boulevard, built by Henry E. Baskervill as his own residence. The Mediterranean-style dwelling was constructed in ca. 1910 and ranks among the finest examples of the style in Richmond. Henry Baskervill, who founded the firm of Baskervill and Son, was a native of Richmond and prolific city architect.

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BOUNDARIES AND MAPS OF THE BOULEVARD HISTORIC DISTRICT



West Richmond's Listed Historic Districts



Boulevard Historic District

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CREDITS AND SOURCES

The text above is almost entirely sourced from the the registration form from the Boulevard Historic District application to the National Register of Historic Places (PDF). That text, dated 1986, includes much more more than is shown here. Check out the original form to learn more about the Boulevard Historic District, or read up on any of the other sites in Richmond that are listed on the National Register. I have made some edits to the text, formatted it to HTML, and added the embedded media.

Most of the photos are by John Murden unless otherwise noted. The black&white photos are from the Virginia DHR, except for the Stonewall Jackson Monument photo which is from the Richmond Esthetic Survey. The old postcards are from VCU's Rarely Seen Richmond. The trolley map is from Carlton McKenney's *Rails in Richmond*.

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December 25, 2012 at 12:45 pm By john m

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