

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Robert E. Lee Monument is located within what is historically known as Lee Circle, a circular plot of city-owned land on the upriver edge of the New Orleans business district. The monument proper rises from a raised earth berm on a stepped granite base, out of which rises a marble Doric column that supports the bronze statue of Robert E. Lee. It was dedicated February 23, 1884.

Lee Circle is the name, which since its naming by the New Orleans City Council in 1877, has applied to the circular plot of land encircled by St. Charles Avenue in its 900 and 1000 blocks. The circle is approximately 250 feet in diameter from curb to curb. The outer edge of the circle is defined by two concentric circular sidewalks, separated by a series of planter beds. Within the inner sidewalk, the level of the ground within the circle rises to a height of approximately 12 feet by means of a round earthen berm. Four sets of staircases, aligned with the major compass points, ascend to the top of the base of the Robert E. Lee Monument. The monument base is built of slabs of granite, and rises in four steps to support the monument's principal focus, a 60 foot tall marble Doric column which is topped by a 16 foot tall bronze statue of Robert E. Lee dressed in military uniform. The column is fluted and is capped by a marble drum on which the statue rests. On the four corners of the square base of the monument are large classical urns which contain ornamental shrubbery. These urns are executed in cast-iron and are held by tall tripod supports.

Significant dates	1884-1940
Architect/Builder	John Roy (column) Alexander Doyle (statue)

Criterion A

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Lee Monument is of regional significance in the cultural history of the South because it is a tangible symbol of the views of the majority of southerners during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In general, the monument represents what is known as the Cult of the Lost Cause. More particularly, it stands for a central aspect of the cult -- the deification of General Robert E. Lee.

The Cult of the Lost Cause has its roots in the Southern search for justification and the need to find a substitute for victory in the Civil War. In attempting to deal with defeat, Southerners created an image of the war as a great heroic epic. A major theme in the Cult of the Lost Cause was the clash of two civilizations, one inferior to the other. The North, "invigorated" by constant struggle with nature, had become materialistic, grasping for wealth and power. The South had a "more generous climate" which had led to a finer society based upon "veracity and honor in man, chastity and fidelity in women." Like tragic heroes, Southerners had waged a noble but doomed struggle to preserve their superior civilization. There was an element of chivalry in the way the South had fought, achieving noteworthy victories against staggering odds. This was the "Lost Cause" as the late nineteenth century saw it, and a whole generation of Southerners set about glorifying and celebrating it. Glorification took many forms, including speeches, organizations such as the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy, reunions, publications, holidays such as Lee's birthday, and innumerable memorials. The Cult of the Lost Cause continued to dominate Southern cultural history in the early twentieth century, and it is indeed still alive and well today.

In many ways Robert E. Lee was the centerpiece of the cult. He was arguably the most venerated Civil War figure in the South, and by the twentieth century had become a national hero. Indeed, he assumed an almost Christ-like stature. Monuments to Lee embody the highest aspirations of the Lost Cause cult. They, along with monuments to other southern Civil War figures, are the most tangible reminders of this extremely important and pervasive phenomenon. The monument at Lee Circle is significant because it is one of four major monuments to Lee in the South. (The others are Valentine's recumbent figure at Lee's tomb in Lexington, the Lee Monument in Richmond, and the Stone Mountain Memorial in Georgia which honors the Lost Cause "trinity"--Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis.)

New Orleans' effort to commemorate Lee can be traced back to a meeting on November 16, 1870, barely a month after his death, of a group of citizens who wished to erect a monument to the General's memory. The group was named the Robert E. Lee Monumental Association of New Orleans. Its expressed intentions were to raise funds for the erection of a monument, something which apparently took much longer than was anticipated. The Association met on February 18, 1876 to renew its efforts, with the head of the group at that time being none other than General P. G. T. Beauregard. He was succeeded by Judge Charles E. Fenner, and by May of 1877, it was reported that more than \$10,000 had been raised for the erection of a monument. In an ordinance passed by the New Orleans City Council on July 17, 1877, the circular piece of land which was then known as Tivoli Circle was re-named Lee Place and was dedicated as the site of the proposed monument. On December 18, 1877, the association signed a contract with local builder/architect John Roy for the erection of the monument, which was to include a stepped base of Georgia granite and a column of Tennessee marble, all raised atop an earthen berm, for a total cost of \$26,474.39.

John Roy could not be considered an architect in the current sense of the word. His obituary noted his achievements as a superintendent of stonework on such significant New Orleans structures as the U. S. Custom House and Gallier Hall. In a manuscript letter to the Monumental Association, Roy provided a fascinating account of how he came to design the monument. He chose the concept of a mound of earth because it "is an American monument as well as a military defense," and the pyramidal base because of the fact that the pyramids of Egypt "stood the test of ages as Historical Monuments." His choice of a Doric column was based upon his belief that it was "unsurpassed in sublime majesty, righteous in all its proportions, strength and beauty combined in an appropriate memorial of great and good men."

For reasons which are not clear, the statue which was to stand atop Roy's column was not contracted for until May of 1882, when the Monumental Association agreed to pay the New York sculptor Alexander Doyle \$10,000 for a bronze statue of General Lee. The completed monument, with Doyle's bronze statue of Lee, was officially dedicated on February 23, 1884 before a large crowd with General Lee's daughter as the guest of honor.

#### Note Regarding Period of Significance:

The fifty year cutoff was used to end the period of significance. The Lee Monument continued to have the symbolic value described above well past the fifty year cutoff. In fact, the deification of Lee has continued to the present.

#### Major Bibliographical References

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