Washington-Lee: Arlington's First High School

"This school, in which you will receive your education, has a nationwide reputation for excellence resulting from the past achievements of its students. You have a right to be proud of this reputation, but with this pride goes a responsibility for measuring up to the high standards of citizenship and scholarship." — *Washington-Lee High School Student Handbook, circa 1970*

Initially, Arlington high school students attended public schools in nearby Washington, DC or in what is now the City of Alexandria. In 1922, Arlington County citizens voted for school bonds to cover the cost of a new centrally located high school; it was the first time bonds were used to finance school construction in Virginia. **The investment became a reality when Washington-Lee High School opened for students on October 6, 1925 at this location.** Named for two distinguished Virginians with local roots, George Washington and Robert E. Lee, the school took its name from Washington & Lee University. The original three-story Beaux Arts style school building faced an open athletic field, today's Arlington War Memorial Stadium.

W-L grew in size as did Arlington County, requiring an expansion in just five years. The school soon became known for its academic and athletic accomplishments. The W-L Cadet Corps, the first JROTC in Northern Virginia, included a significant number of students. W-L's crew team was formed in 1949 as the region's second oldest scholastic rowing program. A rivalry with Alexandria's George Washington High School was reflected in the annual football game for the Old Oaken Bucket, a Thanksgiving Day tradition for over three decades.

Academically, W-L was one of the first area high schools to offer advanced, college-level classes. When national high school rankings grew in popularity, W-L was rated as the "No. 2" high school in the country in the 1960s and also was named the state's "grooviest high school." In 1985, W-L was honored for its academic achievements by the U.S. Department of Education.

Many graduates have achieved success in the arts, science, business, the military, government, athletics, and more. In entertainment alone W-L boasts Oscar, Emmy, and Tony winners; other alumni have won Nobel, Pulitzer, Olympic, World Series, and Super Bowl awards.

1924 Classes begin in makeshift classrooms. A cornerstone is placed and construction begins.

1925 The school building opens for students as Washington-Lee High School.

1926 W-L graduates its first student, the only member of the class of '26.

1929 The class of '29 is the first to wear caps and gowns and hold a senior prom; the football team wins its first state championship.

1945 At the close of WWII, the student council of '44-'45 presents a plaque to W-L that lists the names of those students who died in the service of their country.

1957 Arlington War Memorial Stadium is dedicated.

1959 Following the integration of Stratford Junior High School, the first four black students enroll at W-L that September.

1966 The boys varsity basketball team is the first integrated team in Virginia to win the state championship. It symbolizes the school's spirit of unity during a turbulent era.

1976 Original 1925 building is demolished and replaced.

1996 International Baccalaureate (IB) program is offered to students.

2008 W-L moves into a new facility constructed on the site of the original 1925 building.

2018-19 School Board votes to change school's name to Washngton-Liberty.

A member of the class of '31 shinnies up the flagpole.

A 1949 yearbook spread is dedicated to the school's students from Latin America, Asia, and Europe.
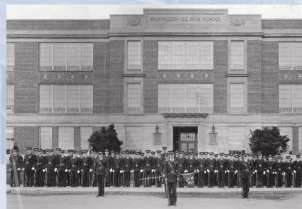
Students from all over the WORLD feel at home at W-L

The class of 2016 celebrates both a varsity football win over archrival Yorktown High School and a district championship.

Circa 1950

The Social Action for Equality mixer is featured in the 1964 yearbook.

The W-L Cadet Corps, the first JROTC in Northern Virginia, pose in front of the original three-story building in 1932.

The 1972 cheerleaders pose in front of the new library addition.

ARLINGTON VIRGINIA

Arlington Public Schools