Uncovering the Story of the Rotunda’s Roof
Summer “Probes” Provide New Information as U.Va. Mobilizes for Start of Major Restoration

RESTORING AN architectural masterpiece such as the Rotunda takes patience, persistence and painstaking attention to detail. It also takes plain old hard work.

As temperatures soared to the upper 90s and beyond in July and August, University Facilities Management crews undertook an important early step in the Rotunda’s much-anticipated restoration by addressing years of water seepage in the outer layers of the roof.

Braving the intense heat, workers scaled the 80-foot scaffolding erected on both the building’s north and south sides and used a system of pulleys to hoist up jackhammers, drills and other tools to perform what David Neuman, architect for the University, termed “probes” of the Rotunda’s roof. The purpose of using the probes was to cut through the layers on the dome’s roof and conduct visual inspections and nondestructive testing of the materials under the surface sheet metal.

By cutting into the roof’s inner layers — seen from the outside as steps — workers uncovered layers of mixed materials, including brick, tile and concrete blocks, which sit atop two layers of the Guastavino clay tile structural system installed in the 1898 reconstruction. This fireproof, patented system of terra-cotta tile is well suited for supporting the dome’s shape and weight.

The probes also confirmed what a 2007 Historic Structure Report commissioned by the Office of the Architect had first outlined — that the metal outer covering of the roof has reached the end of its useful life. While assessments in 2010 suggested the need for a complete replacement of the entire roofing structure and steps, the new findings from the probes indicate that while a new outer cover is, indeed, needed, the leakage and related damage to the underlying roof structure and the 1970s-installed steps can be fully rectified by repairs.

Neuman added that the probes represent the level of serious historical and technical research necessary for the University’s stewardship of the Rotunda and its other historic structures and landscapes. He and others involved in the project believe that there is compelling reason to initiate the roof restoration as early as possible in 2012. President Teresa Sullivan agreed, emphasizing that the University wants to work efficiently as it undertakes the preservation and restoration of one of Thomas Jefferson’s — and U.Va.’s — most enduring symbols.

What’s Next for the Rotunda Roof

- Drawings will be completed during winter 2011–12, with work to begin in March 2012 and conclude in the spring of 2013.
- The overall projected cost of the roof repair is $4.69 million, of which the Commonwealth will provide $2.69 million. Previous gifts to the University for the Rotunda will constitute the remaining $2 million.
- In addition to the substantial roof repairs, other pressing issues remain: the building’s two porticos require extensive work, including replacement of the column capitals and guttering system.
- The projected cost of the required initial work for the column capitals and guttering system is $12.5 million; the University envisions that half of that amount will come from private support and the other half from state funding.

For more information about the ongoing Rotunda renovation, please contact Alison Trush, associate vice president for development, at 434-243-3248 or actu@virginia.edu.
Inspired by History and Cultural Landscapes:
Shaun Duncan Speaks about Her Commitment to Historic Preservation at U.Va. and Beyond

Shaun S. Duncan is the co-chair of the Jefferson’s Circle with her husband, R. Foster Duncan. Shaun recently spoke with us about her involvement in historic preservation and why she remains a devoted supporter of preservation and conservation efforts, both at U.Va. and in broader contexts.

Q: How did you initially become interested in the preservation of historic structures and landscapes?

I was raised in New Orleans, and my appreciation for preservation grew partly from that experience. Living in a place with a distinctive historic identity gives you an awareness of and sensitivity to place and culture. Over time this sensitivity becomes an innate part of you. Another influence was the summers spent staying at a lake in northern Ontario in an area with its own identity, history, distinct topography and cultural values. Both places — New Orleans and Canada — gave me a deep appreciation of beauty, place and culture, which has become a core part of who I am.

I am a lawyer by training, not a preservation professional, but I have a “second career” in the preservation field, and I feel both inspired and energized by it. Through this work, I’ve become interested in cultural landscapes and how education is essential to our efforts to protect and learn from these landscapes. Recently I learned that I was chosen to be an honorary member of the American Association of Landscape Architects. I was floored by that recognition.

Q: Outside the University of Virginia, what projects or organizations have you been involved with over the years?

For some time I have been involved with River Fields, a conservation group based in Louisville, Kentucky, that works to protect the scenic, historic and cultural values of the land and water around the Ohio River. Through River Fields, I’ve gained a greater understanding of the crucial importance of protecting land and natural resources by means of easements and planned conservation.

I’m also involved with the Cultural Landscape Foundation,* a group that emphasizes landscapes rather than buildings and promotes stewardship through education. Working with the foundation led to my awakening about the interplay of the natural, the scenic and man’s work on the land. This interplay is an expression of our cultural values and a part of our national heritage. On the foundation website, we have a section called What’s Out There. It’s a database of information gathered by historians and researchers that’s designed to raise public awareness of the rich diversity and interconnectedness of our shared designed landscape heritage. We also have held What’s Out There weekends in D.C., Chicago and San Francisco, offering free guided tours of the unique landscape legacy of those cities.

Q: Are there any specific approaches or trends in the field of historic preservation that interest you?

I’m interested in the variety of opportunities we have to view buildings and landscapes as part of a systems-based approach to preservation and conservation. By that, I mean the interplay of the natural and the cultural in the structures and spaces that express our history and heritage. With any preservation project, I emphasize the need for informed decision making, and that comes from taking a research-based approach.

Q: Why do you feel that supporting the University’s preservation of its historic buildings and landscapes is of such great importance?

I would begin by saying that the Academical Village is a UNESCO World Heritage site, the only campus in America to have that designation. It’s an international masterpiece. I believe taking care of this icon that we have in both a privilege and a responsibility. We are so fortunate to have this legacy. Also, it’s important that we endow young people with that value and help them understand the importance of stewardship.

Peter Onuf, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Professor of History

“The Kenan Award provides students with a unique opportunity to study the Academical Village and then to share their findings with the public,” said Lucy Russell, executive director of the Center for Undergraduate Excellence, which administers the Kenan Awards. “This year’s projects promised to shed light on some very interesting aspects of the University that haven’t been explored before.”

Speaking of the importance of Kenan-funded research, Onuf said, “The opportunity to do cutting-edge research — for us, in the archives — significantly extends and enriches undergraduate education at the University.”

The students’ respective projects will conclude later this fall. Kenan made his fortune by founding the company that became Union Carbide and was a partner in the Plague System Companies. In his later years, he became a philanthropist focused on education. U.Va. has benefited from his generosity through fellowships, professorships and grants.

*Editor’s note: For more information about River Fields, please visit www.riverfields.org. For more information about the Cultural Landscape Foundation, see www.cln.org.

Kenan Research Award Winners Focus on U.Va.’s Lawn

OU R UNIVERSITY students spent the summer on the Lawn, conducting three separate research projects focusing on the Academical Village.

Their research was funded by the William R. Kenan Jr. Endowment Fund of the Academical Village, which awards summer grants to support students who conduct research projects that increase public understanding of the original precinct of the University designed by Thomas Jefferson. Each Kenan Scholar receives up to $4,000 toward his or her research, with an additional $1,000 for the faculty advisor.

The 2011 Kenan Award recipients include Anna Merrick Bonewitz of Grapevine, Texas, a second-year doctoral student in art and architectural history in the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences; and Owen Gallogly, also of Richmond, a rising third-year history major in the College of Arts & Sciences, and Owen Gallogly, also of Richmond, a rising third-year government and history double major in the College. Their project entailed writing a history of the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society, the oldest student organization at the University and the second-oldest Greek letter organization in North America. They are working with Nicholas Genau of Buffalo, N.Y., a doctoral student in art and architectural history in the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences, who explored early perceptions of the Academical Village, including written and visual descriptions by the public, historians, artists and architects from 1826 to 1867. Wilson is also his adviser. The final two Kenan Award recipients are Thomas Howard of Richmond, Va., a rising third-year...
The Spirit of Poe Resides Evermore

ONE OF THE University’s earliest students has remained one of its most famous. This past summer, efforts began to keep his memory alive.

Renovations on the West Range rooms in July included the sprucing up of No. 13, purportedly the room in which Edgar Allan Poe slept. Crews upgraded the electrical system and lights, refinished the floor and recorded a new message on the purpose and description of the room.

The Raven Society maintains No. 13 as a shrine to Poe, a student at U.Va. from February to December of 1826. A glass door allows visitors to see it furnished as a student room would have been in the early 19th century, and they can press a button to hear a recording about Poe’s time at U.Va. The furniture, provided by the Raven Society, is authentic to the period, but does not have any direct connection to Poe.

University historian Alexander “Sandy” Gilliam said many student records, including Poe’s room assignments, were lost in the Rotunda fire of 1895, but he noted that University oral tradition places Poe in the room.

“As far as anybody knows, Poe lived on the Lawn and then moved to the range,” Gilliam said. “When the Raven Society was formed in 1904, there were still some alive who remembered.”

In a short piece in 1991 on Poe’s time at the University, English professor Irby B. Cauthen Jr. wrote that there is a choice of rooms by which to commemorate Poe.

According to Cauthen, Poe first lived on the West Lawn, but later moved to a single room on the West Range in a section known as “Rowdy Row.” As a student, Poe was plagued with financial woes, which he blamed on the parsimony of John Allan, who had taken him into his household after Poe’s parents had died, but never adopted him. Allan apparently sent Poe to the University without enough money to cover his student expenses.

Allan withdrew Poe from the University following examinations in December 1826 and brought him back to Richmond, leaving his debts in Charlottesville unsettled. Poe was later about his time at the University, feeling his poverty had made him an outcast.

The Poe presence at U.Va. lay dormant for more than 40 years after his death, but English professor Charles W. Kent led a revival in the late 1890s.

A mass meeting of students at Jefferson Hall on April 13, 1897, resulted in the formation of the Poe Memorial Association. The group raised money and commissioned sculptor George Julian Rolph to produce a bust of Poe, which now resides in the main hall of Alderman Library.

Capitalizing on the unique relationship between Poe and the University, the Raven Society was formed in 1904 as the U.Va. version of Phi Beta Kappa (which was itself established at U.Va. in 1908). The University gave the society 13 West Range in 1906 for a Poe museum. The room was in place, with reproduction furniture, for the centenary of Poe’s birth in 1909.

“Students in Poe’s day would have had to rent or buy their own furniture,” Gilliam said. “None of what was in the museum room was original. In his last weeks at the University, Poe broke up his furniture and used it for firewood to stay warm.”

In the late 1930s, Professor Edmund S. Campbell, head of the School of Architecture, led efforts to refurbish 13 West Range to make it look more like the student rooms of 1826. In the 1950s, the room was again renovated to link it even more closely with its alleged former occupant, removing the mantel and closets that had been added after 1826. Additionally, an alumnus named A. Churchill Young donated Poe’s bed from the Allan house in Richmond. That bed was later moved back to Richmond to the Poe Museum.
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C. S. Brent Winn, Jr.

T HIS LAST SUMMER, David J. Neuman, architect for the University, made a presentation to the Neighborhoods Advisory Group on the status of historic preservation projects in the Academic Village. Below are photos of the Pavilion VII roof and railing system restoration.

Return to Jefferson’s Design

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Furthermore, the Rotunda Restoration Fund

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