An Inimitable Record of Philanthropy

Brown Family Gifts Galvanize Rotunda Project

From the earliest stages of planning for the current Rotunda renovation, the University of Virginia envisioned the project as a private-public venture.

Recognizing that the Rotunda work — the first major project of its kind in nearly 40 years — signals a unique moment in the University’s history, alumni, friends, parents, faculty and staff are showing strong support for the project. Among those deeply committed to securing the future of the University’s most treasured landmark is the W.L. Lyons Brown Jr. family.

Spanning five generations of close association with the University, the Brown family has long provided generous support to various programs and initiatives across the Grounds, including the University’s Jeffersonian Grounds Initiative, the most comprehensive effort to date to restore, renovate and repair the buildings and landscapes in the Academic Village. Indeed, they have shown great focus and generosity in helping the University pursue the projects — among them, the Rotunda renovation — under the JGI umbrella. But the family’s support for historic preservation at U.Va. actually predates JGI by more than 20 years.

In 1987 the Browns established the Sara Shallenberger Brown Endowed Preservation Fund for use in preserving the buildings and landscapes that constitute the Academic Village. In recent years this endowment fund has contributed income toward the endowment to support such projects as the West Range restoration and exterior repair and restoration of several pavilions. Named in honor of their mother and grandmother, Sara “Sally” Shallenberger Brown, who passed away in April 2011, the Brown endowment operates as a testament to Mrs. Brown’s inimitable record of philanthropy and civic engagement. Before the first phase of work on the Rotunda began in May 2012 — that is, before scaffolding was erected around the building’s base and work crews tackled the arduous tasks of replacing the leaking roof and oculus and repairing the masonry drum, windows and ornamental sheet metal — the Brown Endowed Preservation Fund contributed $1.1 million in income to help launch this historic effort.

Leadership Giving in Action:

As the first phase of work on the Rotunda came to a close in May, the Browns stepped forward again to support the project. In June 2013 family members made another gift, this time pledging $1 million through the W.L. Lyons Brown Jr. Fund, led by W.L. “Lee” Lyons Brown Jr. (Col ’58). After graduating from U.Va. with a bachelor’s degree in history, Lee Brown joined Brown-Forman, his family’s Louisville-based spirits and wine company and alma mater of his great-grandfather, Marty Brown, and great-great-grandfather, W.L. Lyons Brown Sr., the University’s 20th president. Lee served as chief executive officer from 1975 to 1993. He later served on the President’s Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations under Presidents Reagan, Bush and Clinton. Then from 1993 to 1999, when he was US ambassador to Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece. In 1992 he earned a bachelor’s degree in English from Sweet Briar College in Virginia. And, in 1995, married W.L. Lyons Brown, settling in his hometown of Louisville, Ky.

“With the Browns raised four children — sons William Lee Lyons Jr., Martin, and Owsley and daughter Ina. After her husband’s death in 1973, Mrs. Brown devoted herself to various civic, educational and environmental ventures. Her philanthropic approach was holistic: not content simply to donate money in support of different causes, she gave generously of her time and energy as well, exemplifying thoughtful, purposeful philanthropy on the local, national and global scene. Among Mrs. Brown’s many contributions, she was a founder of the Riverfeld, a Louisville-based organization dedicated to preserving the integrity of the Ohio River region, and served on the boards of the Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy and World Wildlife Fund and as a delegate to four different United Nations conferences on nature, world population and conservation. She received the Conservation Award from the Garden Club of America. Mrs. Brown also left her mark on the University and surrounding community by serving as a member of the Jefferson Scholars Selection Committee and the Monticello Cabinet at Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello. Intelligent, indefatigable and devoted to making tangible changes for the betterment of humankind and the environment, Sara Shallenberger Brown was, in the words of someone who knew her well, a true ‘force of nature’.”

Sara “Sally” Shallenberger Brown:
“A Force of Nature”

Born in Valdez, AK, in 1911, Mrs. Brown grew up in a military family, moving to bases throughout the United States and then abroad, where her father, a brigadier general in the US Army, served as military attaché to Austria, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Greece. In 1932 she earned a bachelor’s degree in English from Sweet Briar College and, in 1935, married W.L. Lyons Brown, settling in his hometown of Louisville, Ky.

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Just as the family’s first gift, generated by income from the Brown Endowed Preservation Fund, proved invaluable in helping the University secure $2.7 million in first-phase funding from the Virginia General Assembly for replacing the Rotunda roof and Dorne Room ceilings, the second gift will be hugely beneficial not only for the Rotunda project itself but also for U.Va.’s broader effort to preserve its historic buildings and landscapes. Made in direct response to the state’s recent match of $24 million earmarked for the second phase of Rotunda renovations and repairs, the gift will also benefit the repair and restoration of the roof and railings on the Lawn’s west side, slated to begin in summer 2014.

In addition to providing tangible help for specific projects, the Browns hope their giving will have additional benefits, namely to encourage other U.Va. alumni and friends to offer their own leadership support for historic preservation.

The Browns in the garden of the ambassador’s residence in Vienna, 2004. Family members associated with the recent Rotunda gift: Back row: Cary Brown-Epstein (second from left); Ambassador Lee Brown (third from left) and wife, Alice Cary, on his immediate right; Lyons Brown III (Fourth from right); Susanna Brown (third from right). Front row: Renee Brown (First from left); Keeling Brown (second from right).

“IT is our hope that our gifts will inspire others to give to this tremendous effort. We invite others to join us in helping the University achieve its goal of preserving the Academical Village,” Lee Brown said.
**The Case of the Lost Parapet**

Sometimes preservationists are like detectives – very patient detectives, picking up clues, notch by notch, nail by nail. A case in point was the recent roofing project on the West Range, where new discoveries support existing evidence of what had once been a parapet, or low railing, along the eaves of the Ranges. Although the parapet did show up in some early renderings, most notably in the famous Bohn print on display in the Rotunda, the University’s preservation team wanted more proof – specifically, physical evidence – of its existence.

They initially found proof in the summer of 2012, when chimney work on both the East and West Ranges uncovered notches in the roof sheathing. The notches indicate that brackets had once been installed as support posts for a railing. The preservation team also unearthed a segment of a metal bracket with a nail attached. According to University architectural conservator Mark Kutney, these findings would play a role in this year’s West Range roofing project, which entailed replacing all of the slate for the first time since the 1830s.

“Some of the cut-outs still had screws remaining,” Kutney said. “We were able to figure out the precise locations of the posts and take measurements.”

So, now, the evidence is in. Will it affect plans for the ranges? Not immediately, Kutney said. The first reason is, the West Range’s brand new roof was just completed in August and does not need additional work at this point. Moreover, he noted, the question of whether or not to restore the parapet needs further investigation and scholarly discussion.

For preservationists, this case is not yet closed.

**A Fresh Look at the Rotunda’s Marble Capitals**

Across University Avenue from the Rotunda, where the University’s ambitious renovation and repair effort began in May 2012, another related project was recently completed. On the terrace of the Fralin Museum of Art, remaining fragments of two marble capitals, originally part of Jefferson’s Rotunda, recently received a careful cleaning. Carved between 1818 and 1826, the capital pieces were removed from the Rotunda after the catastrophic 1895 fire that gutted the structure. These remnants consist now of five pieces: a single section of capital, a column base, capital and two capital fragments.

Before the conservation treatment, the capital pieces exhibited signs of biological growth and cracking – effects of time and the elements. Treated on site by workers who carried in equipment and scaffolding, the capital fragments were cleaned with gently pressurized water and a mild, non-ionic detergent before being thoroughly rinsed. Afterwards the workers reset the larger of the two capitals on the base below it. For the two large fragments, the workers used nylon and ratchet straps and pulleys to ensure that the pieces remained secure during the removal and cleaning.

In our next newsletter, we will feature a story about the University’s work on the original Rotunda’s marble capitals and their role in the current repair process.
Meet Me at the Rotunda

The renovation of the Rotunda isn’t just a structural matter. It also addresses the life and intellectual discovery that Thomas Jefferson envisioned for the building. When he originally designed the Rotunda as the University’s library, it was meant to be a place for students to study and gather with faculty for intellectual discussion.

This year the University has taken steps to encourage those uses once again by implementing new policies and schedules for classes and student-centered events. Yet even with the expansion of academic uses in the Rotunda, the building that anchors the Academical Village will continue to be a starting point for the roughly 100,000 visitors who tour the Grounds each year.

Developed by the Rotunda Programming Advisory Committee, the new schedule features extended study hours in the Dome Room, North Oval Room, Lower West Oval Room and Lower East Oval Room. Students can use their identification cards to access the building after public hours, which run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Under the new schedule, students can access the building until 10 p.m. Sunday through Tuesday. The hours will be extended to midnight during exams.

In addition to offering expanded study hours, the new schedule features the resumption of first-year Dome Room dinners, a popular Wednesday-evening tradition that brings dorm residents together with faculty for dining and discussion.

Finally, the new schedule features an expansion of the number of classes being taught in the historic building, welcome news to both students and professors.

“I can think of no better place to hold class,” said art history professor and vice provost for academic affairs Maurie McInnis, who teaches Discovering Jefferson’s Academical Village in the Rotunda’s Lower West Oval Room. “My class is entirely first-year, and they are all so excited to be in the building that is at the heart of what we are studying.”

This year the University launched pilot programming changes in the Rotunda to extend study hours, hold more classes and host dinners for first-years.

A recent change welcomed by students and visitors is the opening of the second-floor doors from the south portico, facing the Lawn.

A Fresh Look at the Rotunda’s Marble Capitals

The Rotunda originally housed the University’s library. To encourage students to use it again as a place for study, the University has opened the Rotunda, including the Dome Room, from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday through Tuesday.
On Nov. 22, San Francisco-area University alumni held a Rotunda Ball to benefit the current Rotunda project. Organized by the UVaClub of San Francisco, the event brought guests together for dining, dancing and celebration in the historic City Club of San Francisco. Event organizers had set a fundraising goal of $15,000 but easily topped that amount by raising $22,355.

Organizers chose the event venue thoughtfully: just as the City Club embraces San Francisco's past and present with its grand spaces and Art Deco detailing, the Rotunda embodies the genius of Jefferson's 18th-century architectural design and his bold vision for American higher education. Following the event's rousing success, organizers hope it will become an annual black-tie event.

Inspiration for the San Francisco ball came when Breanna DiGiammarino (Col ‘05) received a message about the annual Rotunda Ball held on the Grounds. She immediately thought a similar event benefiting the Rotunda would be well received by alumni living on the West Coast.

DiGiammarino also saw the event’s potential as a vehicle for “crowdfunding,” or the pooling of money from individuals to support an outside effort. She organized the development of an online platform for buying event tickets and making donations, which alumni who could not attend the ball could use to show their support for the Rotunda project. She believed that by combining their support and energies in this way, West Coast alumni could have a significant impact on the once-in-a-generation Rotunda renovation.

“I was interested in learning about what we might be able to do to raise money for U.Va. using this platform,” DiGiammarino said. She called Jay Diamonon (Col ‘85), president of the UVaClub of San Francisco, and volunteered for the planning committee.

San Francisco’s Rotunda Ball was modeled after the annual Rotunda Restoration Ball, sponsored by the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society, the University Guide Service and other organizations, and held annually at the University of Virginia since 1963. Last April’s event on the Grounds, the 50th annual Restoration Ball, raised more than $50,000 for the Rotunda project.