Heralding a New Era in Historic Preservation

Architect for the University Explains the Jeffersonian Grounds Initiative

What is the Jeffersonian Grounds Initiative? What needs and priorities does it address?

The vision for the Jeffersonian Grounds Initiative, or JGI, is to reinvigorate the original Thomas Jefferson concept for the Academical Village, its buildings and surrounding landscape. In its design and operation, the Academical Village was central to Jefferson’s educational philosophy and his belief in accessibility, collaboration and freedom of information. A devotee of the Enlightenment, he saw the Academical Village as an environment for expanding humankind’s knowledge.

The goal of JGI is to repair, renovate and restore buildings, landscapes and interior spaces to their most functional condition. We also want to ensure the Academical Village remains true to the University’s original, central purpose: to engage, connect and inspire students and faculty, learners and scholars. We want to look to the future as well as to the past.

The initiative covers many projects, addressing a wide range of needs and priorities. For example, we focus on bringing buildings up to contemporary standards by installing adequate fire protection, humidity control and audiovisual capabilities, as well as heating and air conditioning.

The University does not intend to restore every historic building or landscape to its original condition. Our mandate is to maintain, renovate, repair and/or restore different aspects of different buildings and landscapes based on our 200-year-old historic heritage.

Here are several projects covered by JGI. The ranges and hotels were altered significantly almost immediately after they were first occupied. Through research, we’ve determined that their period of significance is pre-Civil War, and that is guiding our work on them. Where the pavilion gardens are concerned, records show that they contained various utility structures from 1826 up to the 1950s, when the Garden Club of Virginia began the restoration of all 10 gardens. So we are now using 1950-65 as the determining period of significance.

The Rotunda has its own story. Original construction was finished in 1826. It burned in 1885 and was changed significantly by Stanford White in the 1898 reconstruction. It changed yet again with the 1975-76 renovation project. We will use this last period of significant change as our guide in the current $50 million renovation and repair effort.

What makes the Jeffersonian Grounds distinctive, and how does the site help define the U.Va. experience?

Founded and designed by Thomas Jefferson, the University is, as a result, only one of four function-
Fires Burn On, Thanks to Challenge

A $1 million challenge grant from the Alumni Association helped raise $1.7 million in gifts from 350 supporters to repair chimneys and fireplaces in the Lawn rooms and install a modern fire suppression system.

Clay S. Palazzo (College ‘80, Architecture ‘87) AIA, LEED AP, led the preparation of the 2008 HSR for the Rotunda and now serves as principal-in-charge for JGWA’s design services related to the current renovation.

The dismantling of the scaffolding erected for roof repairs marked the completion of the first stage of work. “During the summer the stone and brick water table at the Rotunda’s base will be relaid to correct construction deficiencies,” Palazzo said, “and over the course of the next year a different scaffolding configuration will be erected for the next stage of work.”

This next stage will involve restoring the Rotunda’s porticos, column capitals and bases, copper sheet metal cornices and the brick masonry of the terraces.

If These Walls Could Talk

Among U.Va.’s 552 buildings, the Rotunda holds the distinction of being the most talked about. Work has been done to repair chimneys and fireplaces in the Lawn rooms.

The Alumni Association was critical to the success of the campaign. A $1 million in gifts matched $2 million from the University. A $1 million challenge grant from the Alumni Association was critical to the success of the campaign.

The funding paid for essential renovations to 103 of the 106 Lawn and range rooms, home to select fourth-year and graduate students. Workers completed the project within an ambitious five-month schedule that began after graduation in May 2012 and finished in October. More than 200 tradepeople from U.Va.’s Facilities Management coordinated efforts with outside contractors to repair cracks and openings in the fireplaces and chimneys and install a fire suppression system that comprised more than 1.5 miles of pipe and 650 sprinkler heads.

“During that first visit,” his artist mother, Cink DeVeas, of Severna Park, Md., recalled, “Chas turned to me and said, ‘Mom, you have to draw this building!’”

She never forgot her son’s comment, and last year she sketched the Rotunda — adding to a more than 25-year collection of pen-and-ink drawings of historic buildings and venues commissioned by individuals and organizations, most notably the U.S. Naval Academy. She presented the original to her son as a graduation gift and had prints made for his closest friends, several of whom framed theirs with their diplomas. Each of their names can be found in the grass — albeit so surreptitiously that they are practically invisible — a practice she borrowed from American artist Al Wirsbach.

The moment Chas DeVeas (Engineering ‘12) stepped foot onto the Lawn during a prospective-student visit, he knew he would attend the University of Virginia. He also knew something else.

“One of the things that I always knew was — you have to draw buildings,” he said.

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Encouraged by the feedback she received about the drawing, which shows the office-renovated building from a unique angle, DeVeas is now offering prints for sale online, with a portion of the profits going to the Rotunda renovation.

“Having him do that this historic building that no one can do anything about. It is the heart of U.Va. — is literally crumbling,” said DeVeas. “We want to do anything we can, even if it’s a tiny bit, to help.”

Customers can add framing and customized hand calligraphy to their orders. Notecards bearing the sketch are also available.

For more information or to order, visit http://cinkartonline.com/rotunda.

Noted Architectural Firm Partners with U.Va. on Rotunda Renovation

Despite the unexpected complications typical of any construction project and a heavy snowfall in early March, the first stage of work in the Rotunda renovation is nearing successful completion. Workers have replaced the roof and skylight and completed significant work on the masonry, windows and cornices of the drum of the building.

Partnering with the University on this renovation effort — the most significant in U.Va.’s history — is John G. Waite Associates, Architects, a leader in the field of historic preservation architecture. The firm’s past projects have included restoration and renovation of George Washington’s Mount Vernon, the Statue of Liberty National Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum and the Harry S. Truman Library and Museum.

JGWA is no stranger to the study and preservation of U.Va.’s historic properties. Indeed, for 25 years the firm has provided services for many University projects, including the preservation of a comprehensive historic structures report (HSR) for the Jeffersonian Precinct, HSRS for five of the 10 pavilions, an HSR for Varsity Hall, and HSRS for Cocke and Rouss halls, the McKim, Mead & White-designed classroom buildings at the Lawn’s south end.

Sales of Parent’s Sketch to Benefit Rotunda

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Since its founding, the University of Virginia’s Academical Village — both buildings and landscape — has changed, yet Jefferson’s original design remains legible to this day. Due out in December 2013, the University’s first comprehensive cultural landscape report (CLR) will document this evolution, drawing on two centuries of known, obscure and new sources.

The CLR will inform future decisions about preservation and alterations, if necessary, for updates like utility or accessibility improvements.

“A best practice in historic preservation, a CLR is an essential tool for managing historically significant landscapes. As a UNESCO World Heritage Site, U.Va.’s historic precinct, by definition, possesses “outstanding universal value” transcending national borders. U.Va. is among only 21 U.S. sites — and the only American college campus — endowed with this global heritage. “It is not as it would be unthinkable to undertake construction on the Rotunda without a historic structure report [an HSR is the CLR parallel for buildings],” we don’t want to make modifications to the Jeffersonian Grounds without knowing what aspects are authentic to each period of University history,” explained Hughes.

To compile the CLR, the University has contracted with a top firm in the field — Vermont-based Heritage Landscapes LLC — whose work is specialized in historic construction on the Rotunda without a historic structure report [an HSR is the CLR parallel for buildings], gathering sources about the Academical Village’s continuity and change over time. The team has enlisted the expertise of Charlottesville-based Rivanna Archaeological Services LLC, which has conducted investigations at U.Va. for a decade.

“Fortunately, our University Library has been zealous in collecting material, so we have a huge repository of information,” Hughes said. The team is consulting all document types, published and unpublished, including maps, surveys (for example, tree inventories), photographs, sketches, records and correspondence.

Once completed, the CLR will contain a detailed chronology based on more than 2,500 sources, an illustrated narrative, period plans depicting the Academical Village at seven time points (pre-1817 to 2013) and analysis of the landscape’s integrity.

Historic Garden Week 2013

Sponsored by the Garden Club of Virginia, the 80th Historic Garden Week was celebrated at more than 250 sites around Virginia, including at U.Va., April 20–27, 2013. During the week, Patricia O’Donnell of Heritage Landscapes LLC — the firm compiling the Academical Village cultural landscape report — spoke at the University’s Harrison Institute/Small Special Collections Library on the CLR’s progress.

Peeling Back the Layers of Landscape History

The University’s first comprehensive cultural landscape report (CLR), due out in December 2013, will document the evolution of the landscape and buildings of the Academical Village and help guide future decisions about preservation and alterations.

A couple of years ago, University of Virginia mason Wayne R. Mays Jr, noticed a white haze developing on the bricks that make up the east-facing portico of Hotel F, one of the Jefferson-era dining halls. Mays, senior supervisor for masons, plasterers and drywallers, has spent most of his life working on historic buildings, learning the properties of materials used over the centuries and how they differ from modern materials. So he knew there was a problem at Hotel F.

“Using modern materials together with some of the traditional building materials can actually cause further damage,” Mays said. Applying cement, a harder modern mortar, over the original lime mortars often found in historic buildings traps moisture, which causes soluble salts to form within the historic brick and mortar and breaks them down.

Mays’ team of half a dozen historic tradespeople uses period materials, but that hasn’t always been the case. Several years before Mays joined the University, Hotel F’s brickwork was repaired with modern materials. Now that work has had to be removed and the damage remediated, a long and costly process.

“Facilities Management has done a lot to build an in-house talent pool of skilled tradespeople who like working on old buildings,” said Brian Hogg, senior supervisor for masons and plasterers. “We’ve been cultivating these masons and plasterers and carpenters who understand the nature of historic buildings and are very thoughtful and careful as they work. I think it makes us outstanding stewards of these properties.”

Walter Harris heads the University’s team of carpenters, about a dozen of whom specialize in historic construction. With U.Va.’s historic preservationists, they work to understand the Jeffersonian structures and restore the Lawn to its original appearance. To this end, workers recently completed renovations of Pavilions IX and X and restored Jefferson’s flat roof over the student rooms between Pavilions VII and IX.

“It’s nice to see the way workers did things back then,” said Harris. “When we went into Pavilion X, we could see the skeleton [of the structure] and the trademarks of the original way that Jefferson had it built. You can respect the way things were made back then — they cut everything by hand — and it’s nice for us to get in there and work on something that Jefferson built using these techniques too.”

Mays is also fond of the history in the structures he works on and interested in the tradespeople who built them. “Those were people along the lines of Walter and me today,” he said. “The techniques they used then were common practice, and now we’re going back and figuring out what they did and trying to replicate it.”

Preserving the Trades That Built Jefferson’s Legacy

Wayne Mays, senior supervisor for masons and plasterers, right, and his son, Zack Mays, plasterer apprentice, above, are two of the many skilled tradespeople who work on historic buildings.

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The Jeffersonian Grounds Initiative seeks to repair and restore the University’s historic buildings and landscapes as it preserves U.Va’s remarkable living legacy. These projects address immediate needs and reflect new approaches to expanding the public’s understanding of the University’s significance in the 21st century.

**ROTUNDA CAPITAL CONSERVATION** — A number of Jefferson’s original column capitals were removed after the 1895 fire and now are displayed in various pavilion gardens as ornamental pieces. These capitals are among the last artifacts surviving from the original Rotunda. The University seeks to stabilize erosion and preserve them for future generations.

**VISITORS’ INTERPRETIVE AREA** — We seek support to build a dynamic, interactive visitors’ area for the Rotunda and the Academical Village. This center will engage, educate and inform visitors of the cultural and architectural significance of the Jeffersonian Grounds and founding of the University.

**DOCUMENTARY** — Creation of a feature-length documentary video about Thomas Jefferson’s legacy would present recent archaeological findings that shed new light on his aspirations for social organization as interpreted through architecture and land use.

**THE ROTUNDA** — Gifts and pledges of all sizes will fund the renovation of this landmark building. Cash gifts of $1,000 or more in support of the renovation qualify for recognition each year in Jefferson’s Circle.

**HOTEL A** — Given the building’s access limitations, deterioration of the interior finishes and the absence of utilities, the lower level is currently not used. A full renovation will allow U.Va. to reclaim space for active use within the Academical Village.

**TAKING THE LEED: SUSTAINABLE HISTORIC BUILDINGS**

The Board of Visitors has mandated that all new U.Va. construction and substantial building renovations meet certification standards set by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. A nationwide certification program, LEED documents sustainable building practices. When it comes to renovations of the University’s historic buildings, however, LEED certification poses some challenges.

“From a historic preservation standpoint, many of the ways in which you reduce energy consumption conflict with ways that you preserve the historic fabric,” said senior preservation planner Brian Hogg, LEED AP, left. Architect for the University David Neuman, FAIA, LEED BD+C, is loath, for example, to replace still functional windows in historic buildings with more energy-efficient insulated glass. And thick brick walls leave no room for adding insulation. Still, changes may be made to adhere to LEED guidelines. Weather stripping may be applied to windows, attics insulated, qualified paints used and efficient heating, air conditioning and appliances installed.

As a result, recent renovations to Garrett Hall have earned LEED gold certification. Pavilion IX is among the oldest buildings in the country to have achieved LEED certification. And Pavilion X is expected to earn certification. “Saving an old building is one of the greenest things you can do,” says Hogg.

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— BRIAN HOGG, Senior Preservation Planner

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**How to Make a Gift**

Support for JGI may be made in the form of cash, certificates of deposit, stocks and bonds, mutual funds, real estate and bequests. To make a gift or explore ongoing projects, please visit www.campaign.virginia.edu/jgi.

If you have questions, please contact Amy Yancey, executive director for development, Jeffersonian Grounds Initiative, at (434) 924-7750 or ayancey@virginia.edu.