

THE ROTUNDA

RECOMMENDATIONS

APPROACH TO PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION

As a cultural property of great national and international significance, the Rotunda requires thoughtful consideration in the development of philosophical guidelines and a practical approach to preservation and restoration. The 1973-1976 renovation was largely based on academic research and not the examination of physical evidence. This has resulted in considerable controversy, particularly regarding the purging of the McKim, Mead & White interior and the compromises made to the original Thomas Jefferson design in the renovations of the interior. The fact that work was carried out by an architectural firm more experienced with new construction than historic preservation resulted in an overreaction to perceived functional and administrative requirements.

As the previous sections of this report document, the Rotunda has undergone four separate periods of construction, each of which resulted in a distinct form for the building. These periods are the following:

1. Thomas Jefferson's original Rotunda (1824-1827).
2. Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda with Robert Mills' annex (1854).
3. McKim, Mead & White's rebuilding of the Rotunda after the 1895 fire (1898).
4. Ballou and Justice's renovation of the Rotunda retaining the McKim, Mead & White exterior and recreating a version of the original interior (1973-1976).

From these four periods of construction, there are three basic options for the preservation and restoration of the Rotunda, as outlined below. We strongly recommend that the University consider the adoption of Option 3 as the most historically sensitive, accurate, politically defensible, and cost effective approach to the preservation and restoration of the Rotunda.

Option 1. Restore Thomas Jefferson's Rotunda on the interior and exterior.

This option would remove all of the McKim, Mead & White building fabric, as well as the 1970s work designed by Ballou and Justice. This approach would result in a building that is similar in plan to the existing, but would be more accurate to the original design.

One problem with this approach is that the exteriors of all of the pavilions have been altered from their original Jefferson design; many now have significant, later additions which were constructed to accommodate specific functional requirements. Philosophically, in their present form, the pavilions would not be consistent with a pristinely restored Rotunda. Also, the restored Rotunda would, in effect, ignore significant events in the history of the university, such as the 1895 fire and subsequent McKim, Mead & White design work. This option would include the following construction:

- a. Remove the north portico.
- b. Reconstruct the exterior north stair.
- c. Remove the north wings, and restore the south wings.
- d. Reconstruct the dome and skylight.
- e. Replace all exterior moldings with more accurate replications of Jefferson's work.
- f. Replace doors and windows. Replicate the curved sash.
- g. Remove the McKim, Mead & White masonry lining on the interior of the Rotunda drum; this lining was introduced to support the c.1898 Guastavino tile dome.
- h. Replace the stone capitals at the porticos.
- i. Reconstruct the cornice under the south portico.
- j. Remove the balustrades on the terraces.
- k. Introduce serrated roofing on the south wings, and eliminate the ability to walk on the terrace.

Advantages of Option 1

- a. Stripping the building will expose any remaining evidence of Jefferson's construction.
- b. The complete reconstruction and restoration of Jefferson's Rotunda will create a model that more clearly communicates the architect's original design intent.
- c. By restoring and reconstructing Jefferson's Rotunda, the design integrity between the interior and exterior will be re-established.
- d. This approach allows the University to more accurately interpret Jefferson's interior. The 1970s project had significant budget constraints, and relied heavily on an art-historical approach. This can now be tempered by a more thorough understanding of early nineteenth century building technology.

Disadvantages of Option 1

- a. This approach will require the demolition of the McKim, Mead & White north portico (the elevation of the Rotunda that has become the *front* of the building for generations of students and alumni).
- b. This approach will require the demolition of the north, east, and west terrace construction surrounding the Rotunda (including balustrades) introduced by McKim, Mead & White.
- c. This approach will require a conjectural roof design for the south terrace construction.
- d. This approach will require demolition of the McKim, Mead & White tile dome and skylight opening and replacement with conjectural wood-framed construction. The non-historic replacement materials will present a greater fire hazard.
- e. The exterior restoration will be expensive.
- f. This approach will require the loss of an important surviving McKim, Mead & White exterior, and will ignore more than a century of the University's history, including the 1895 fire.
- g. The re-creation of Jefferson's Rotunda must co-exist with the remaining buildings on the Lawn, buildings that have undergone nearly 200 years of change and modification. This would be an incongruent presentation.
- h. Carrying this approach into the landscape would require that all of the existing landscape features to the north of the Rotunda be removed and replaced with conjectural elements. Jefferson intended that a fence be constructed to the north of the Rotunda to limit or control access to the building. The landscape was utilitarian; it was used for vegetable gardens.

Option 2. Reconstruct the McKim, Mead & White interior and restore the surviving McKim, Mead & White exterior.

This option would remove all of the 1970s Ballou and Justice interior and recreate the McKim, Mead & White interior. The existing McKim, Mead & White exterior would be restored. From a historic preservation standpoint, this option would be the most radical and controversial. There would also be programming problems because the interior would be essentially a two-story library space that might be difficult to use for other functions. This option would include the following construction:

- a. Repair and restore exterior architectural elements.
- b. Repair and restore the north and south porticos.

- c. Repair and restore the north and south wings, and reopen the exterior passages flanking the north portico.
- d. Restore the existing windows.
- e. Reconstruct the McKim, Mead & White double-height library interior.
- f. Restore the McKim, Mead & White roof and skylight.
- g. Retain the c.1930s marble balustrade at the terraces.

Advantages of Option 2

- a. The McKim, Mead & White exterior remains essentially intact and can be accurately restored.
- b. The preservation of the exterior and the reconstruction of the interior would serve to educate students and the public about early twentieth century preservation philosophy.
- c. Reasonably accurate documentation survives in the form of drawings, specifications, and photographs for both the interior and exterior work of McKim, Mead & White.

Disadvantages of Option 2

- a. Would celebrate the work of McKim, Mead & White and suggest that it is more important than Jefferson's work.
- b. The double-height domed interior space would limit the practical use of the building.
- c. The interior restoration will be expensive.

Option 3. Revise and upgrade the 1970s reconstruction of the original Thomas Jefferson interior to make it more accurate, and restore the surviving McKim, Mead & White exterior.

This approach would retain and restore the McKim, Mead & White exterior and would selectively alter the 1970s interior to make it a more accurate reconstruction of Thomas Jefferson's original interior. However, because of the additional brick added to the interior of the original exterior walls by McKim, Mead & White, it will not be possible to exactly restore the original room dimensions. Of the three options, this is the most conservative and arguably the most defensible from the standpoint of modern historic preservation philosophy. This option would include the following work:

- a. Repair and restore the exterior architectural elements.
- b. Repair and restore the north and south porticos.

- c. Repair and restore the north and south wings, and reopen the exterior passages flanking the north portico.
- d. Restore the existing windows, and determine if the dome room windows on the north and south elevations were cut in following the original construction of the building.
- e. Retain much of the c.1975 reconstruction of Jefferson's interior, upgrading and replacing building systems, refining architectural details and improving the interpretation of archival and physical evidence. Proposed changes to the interior include:
 - 1. Replacing the cast column capitals in the dome room with carved wood capitals to recapture the character of Jefferson's interior.
 - 2. Replacing the column bases in the dome room with accurate period bases.
 - 3. Replacing the turned balusters at the upper gallery with accurately profiled balusters.
 - 3. Removing the acoustical paneling from the interior of the dome and reconstructing a plastered finish.
 - 4. Reconstructing the stairs to reflect a more accurate interpretation of Jefferson's stairs. The existing risers are too deep because the wood finishes have been applied to a steel stair. Also, the stairs to the ground floor level were probably enclosed beneath the upper stairs, using longer single runs against the east and west walls of the central hall. There would not have been grand stairs to the basement. This modification would be made in conjunction with the re-establishment of the first floor entrance at the south portico. The existing glass door would be eliminated, and views would once again be possible from the windows flanking the doorway; the windows would no longer be inaccessible behind the stairwells.
 - 5. Studying and reinterpreting the molding profiles used throughout the Rotunda to ensure that they conform to the known builders' profiles. The molding profiles should be matched to the work of the men known to have constructed the Rotunda. Examples of their work are available in the Pavilions.
 - 6. Modifying the width of door openings to reflect the detailed scaled plans of Jefferson.
 - 7. Removing passages, blind doors, and modifications introduced to accommodate the University president's office in the 1970s.
 - 8. Returning the statue of Jefferson to its nineteenth century location in the dome room, and reconstructing its stone pedestal.
 - 9. Reconstructing bookcases in the galleries, along with stairs to the galleries.

10. Re-establish Jefferson's natural history museum in the lower north oval.

Certain existing interior elements should be retained:

1. The antique English rim locks introduced in the 1970s are appropriate and should be maintained, except for the Carpenter-type rim lock on the door to Room 205.
2. The northeast and northwest corner stairs should be kept as fire exits.
3. The dome room bookcases appear to be accurately detailed.
4. The window reveals appear to be accurate reconstructions.

Advantages of Option 3

- a. The McKim, Mead & White exterior will remain intact and can be accurately restored. This approach places an emphasis on the authenticity of existing construction, as opposed to the re-creation of missing construction.
- b. The existing form of the building, including the terrace construction can be retained; and the complete history of the building can be interpreted.
- c. From political and building conservation perspectives this approach represents the most conservative response to preservation and restoration needs. It requires the least intervention in the existing building fabric.
- d. This approach represents the most cost effective solution to preservation and restoration.
- e. This approach allows the University to more accurately interpret Jefferson's interior. The 1970s project had significant budget constraints, and relied heavily on an art-historical approach. This can now be tempered by a more thorough understanding of early nineteenth century building technology.
- f. This approach acknowledges the past 100 years of the University's history, and the school's need to evolve. It is in keeping with the development of the Lawn over time, especially considering the closure of the south end of the Lawn.

Disadvantages of Option 3

- a. Retention of the tile dome will require that the brick lining added by McKim, Mead & White to the inner surface of the exterior walls must be retained to support the dome. This will prevent an exact recreation of Jefferson's oval rooms and the Dome Room.
- b. The cost-conscious selection of materials by McKim, Mead & White will require ongoing maintenance, repair, and replacement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for the Rotunda's exterior, interior, building systems, landscape, maintenance, and programming assume the adoption of preservation and restoration Option 3:

EXTERIOR RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Replace the rusted terne and painted copper sheet metal roofing on the dome and portico roofs with copper sheet metal roofing to replicate the McKim, Mead & White copper tile roofing. Use flat-lock seam copper roofing on the flat areas surrounding the base of the dome and on the steps of the dome.
2. Replace the modern aluminum-framed skylight at the oculus of the dome with a vented skylight replicating the framing and appearance of the sixteen foot diameter circa 1826 skylight.
3. Provide more comprehensive lightning protection for the Rotunda dome and porticos.
4. Chemically clean the exterior brick and marble masonry to remove dirt, stains, lime run, and algae; and repoint the masonry using lime-rich mortar and grout to replicate the original appearance of narrow head joints and wider bed joints in the brickwork. Develop a monitoring program to observe areas cleaned of lime run; this program will determine if previous terrace repairs have been successful, or if water continues to percolate through the terrace construction.
5. Repair areas of broken or missing brick, and restore parged coatings (stucco) on columns and brickwork.
6. Re-lay the inward sloping stone water table course at the base of the Rotunda, establishing positive drainage away from the building and making dutchman repairs as necessary to restore the stonework.
7. Develop a program for cleaning and repairing the stone capitals and bases of the portico columns and pilasters. A conservative schedule of traditional stone dutchman repairs and replacement should be utilized to ensure a sound, long-term approach to preservation.
8. Chemically strip the built-up paint from the copper sheet metal architraves and pediments at the windows and doors, and the copper sheet metal cornice moldings. Once stripped of paint, the sheet metal ornamentation should be surveyed; and a repair program should be developed to restore and paint the copper moldings.

9. Restore the c.1898 windows (replacing cracked glass and all window glazing putty) and doors. An effort is currently being made to maintain windows and doors on an ad-hoc basis with paint and additive repairs; however, a comprehensive program is required to establish sound base conditions.
10. Replace existing window and door flashings.
11. Remove, conserve, and re-install the bronze plaques on the north and south elevations of the Rotunda.
12. Re-lay the terrace paving, replacing the constantly eroding setting bed that clogs the terrace drains with sand. Alternatively, consider reconfiguring the drains so that they are not susceptible to the infiltrating sand.
13. Conserve the marble balustrade at the perimeter of the terrace to eradicate the bright orange biological growth in the pores of the stone. Repoint the balustrade to maintain weatherproof joints.
14. Develop a program of building probes to evaluate the structure of the north portico stair and the terrace at the base of the stair. Restore the stair, terrace paving, and underlying structure as required, eliminating the temporary shoring in the mechanical room beneath the stair.
15. Restore the south portico stair, and replace the existing iron-and-bronze railings with iron railings of a more historically appropriate character.
16. Replace the modern floating plaster ceilings and halogen down-lighting in the cryptoporticus and adjacent arcades with more traditional plaster ceilings and prismatic Halophane lighting that is sympathetic to the existing fixtures along the Lawn colonnades.

INTERIOR RECOMMENDATIONS

If the recommendations of Option 3 of the choices for preservation and restoration are selected, additional recommendations for the interior include the following:

1. Replicate historic furnishings in the restored rooms.
2. Eliminate the down-light fixtures in the primary spaces of the Rotunda.
3. Remove the oversized chandeliers from the oval rooms of the Rotunda.
4. Install a historically appropriate chandelier in the dome room of the Rotunda.
5. Develop a program of building probes to more carefully evaluate plaster cracking in the ceiling construction and column cracking in the dome room.
6. Survey the interior dome construction following the removal of the acoustical paneling.

7. Repoint exposed brick masonry as required, especially in the spaces beneath the north portico stair.
8. More latitude should be allowed for the interior finishes of the wings. The McKim, Mead & White windows and doors should be retained, and new doors should reflect the design and construction of the existing MM&W doors. The new finishes should be compatible with the turn-of-the-century construction of the wings.

BUILDING SYSTEMS RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Provide new electrical wiring and devices throughout the building to replace the existing thirty year old wiring and equipment.
2. Provide new piping and plumbing fixtures throughout the building to replace the existing equipment.
3. Provide a new fire detection, notification, and suppression system for the building, replacing the existing sprinkler system.
4. Provide new mechanical equipment throughout the building to replace the existing thirty year old equipment. The new equipment should not depend on the ability of the centrally supplied chilled water system to remove humidity by cooling. At delivery, this water may have become warm enough that it can not effectively remove humidity. The existing system may be contributing to mold growth in the building.
5. Replace mechanical air distribution systems to provide air supply and return grilles that are less visually obtrusive. The air distribution systems must also be replaced so that the duct lining can be removed. These linings may be contributing to mold growth within the building. New mechanical and utility space beneath the drum of the Rotunda will make new air distribution systems more accessible.
6. Currently, the mechanical system for the dome room utilizes an overhead air supply, and low level air returns. This should be reversed, supplying air low and returning it high, to make the most effective use of natural air currents (venting through a re-designed skylight), and thereby improving control of humidity.

LANDSCAPE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A cultural landscape report should be completed for the entire *Academical Village* so that informed decisions can be made with regard to landscape changes over time and to the development of adjacent landscapes. There appears to be no

mapping or cataloging of trees, understory and shrubbery. This would be very useful to tracking the change and evolution of the spatial frame and visual landscape setting of the Rotunda, and integral to understanding the significance of both landscape and building and their relationship to emerging Charlottesville. This inventory and analysis could/would lend credence to and contribute to the discussion of periods of significance. This kind of analysis would greatly inform historical understanding and future restoration/design work in the landscape to the north of the Rotunda.

Based on the research for this historic structure report, there does not appear to be enough in the record to justify the identification of a period of significance for the landscape. The process of change has in fact been the characteristic most consistent about the northern landscape. If the cultural landscape report concurs with these findings, then a set of recommendations should be developed that adjust the landscape setting to a minor degree, that re-create/restore lost conditions because they are more workable solutions now, and make improvements to circulation, to maintenance, or to the unity of the Rotunda and its setting.

2. Initially, the landscape to the north of the Rotunda was utilitarian; vegetable gardens were located there until the mid-nineteenth century. And, it was not until that time that an office of superintendent of buildings and grounds was established. Thomas Jefferson preferred seeding grass in the lot north of the Rotunda because trees would mask the building and view (November 1, 1825 letter to Brockenbrough). In keeping with Jefferson's vision or intent, it would be appropriate to allow the planted areas surrounding the Rotunda to naturally open over time. As trees die, they should not necessarily be replaced, especially evergreens which mask the view of the Rotunda year round.
3. Until recent years there does not appear to have been formal landscaping in the courtyards flanking the Rotunda. The only two periods of correlation between the landscaping in the courtyards and the Rotunda appears to have been at the turn-of-the-century, following reconstruction of the Rotunda, and again in the 1970s with the restoration of the Rotunda. Stanford White provided half-hearted designs to fill voids on his drawings, but the courtyards and landscaping were scaled back as a cost saving measure. The current designs have no historical precedence. With no period of significance to which the courtyards should be restored, sufficient freedom exists to meet the functional needs of the building. With the re-establishment of ground-level passages flanking the north portico, paved paths should be provided between the north and south wings. These paths could be sloped to serve as accessible routes between the wings. Paving should be prioritized over landscape. The existing fountain in the east courtyard should

be removed or relocated. It detracts from the historic character of the space, and it requires significant ongoing maintenance. Similarly, the mechanical units and exposed electrical conduit and junction boxes should be removed from the courtyards.

4. The Magnolia trees should be removed from the courtyards. Apparently, they were introduced in the early twentieth century; c.1918 photographs show them in place. The tree roots may have an adverse impact on the building construction, and the debris from the trees contributes significantly to building maintenance requirements. Currently, the overgrown Magnolias obscure the Rotunda from view.

MAINTENANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

While it is obvious that ongoing building and equipment maintenance and regular housekeeping services are adequately provided for the Rotunda at the present time, a more sophisticated approach will be required in the future. The Rotunda should clearly be set apart from standard University maintenance procedures. As a National Historic Landmark, and as an integral part of an UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Rotunda demands special care and consideration.

1. A curatorial approach should be taken, treating the building as an artifact; and building conservation issues should be addressed from a scientific and technical perspective.
2. Maintenance routines and procedures should be standardized and scheduled regularly, and all work thoroughly documented.
3. A maintenance manual that outlines procedures and schedules repetitive surveys should be prepared specifically for the Rotunda.
4. Only highly trained and skilled tradesmen and craftsmen, who have a clear understanding of the building's importance, and who are thoroughly knowledgeable of the building's material history, should be allowed to work on the structure.

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

As the heart of the Academical Village and icon of the university, the restored Rotunda should once again play a central and essential role in the life of the institution. A wide range of students, faculty, and administrators should actively use the Rotunda on an

everyday basis. The new uses should be related to the original functions of the building. Recommendations include the following:

1. A new program of circulation should be developed so that the principal south entrance of the Rotunda becomes the main public entrance of the building.
2. The ground-level wings of the Rotunda should be adapted for seminar teaching spaces. Administrative functions should be relocated, so that students and faculty have the opportunity to use the Rotunda on a regular basis, restoring the function of the building to its original use at the center of student life.
3. The ground floor north-south passages flanking the north portico should be re-established for circulation. These passages may be used to accommodate the grade change for disability access to the north wings.
4. Restore dome room to an intimate reader's library, similar to the one recently established in Alderman Library, and discontinue its use for catered dining functions. This will encourage student use of the building and re-establish the original library function of the Rotunda.
5. Have smaller dining functions and lectures in the large oval rooms at the ground floor or main floor levels. Remove the oversized tables from the upper north oval room and the upper east oval room.
6. Relocate the Rotunda Administrator's desk and office from the lower north oval room to one of the spaces flanking the ground floor south entrance (these spaces are currently used for a toilet room and mechanical room). The lower north oval should be used for circulation and to re-establish Jefferson's natural history museum.
7. Relocate the toilet rooms that are currently adjacent to the ground floor south entrance to one of the flanking south wings.
8. Locate a new stair and lift in one of the flanking south wings, opposing the location of the new toilet rooms, so that public access is provided to the terrace and main south entrance of the Rotunda.
9. Develop underground mechanical and catering space beneath the ground floor of the Rotunda and/or beneath the courtyards so that adequate space is provided for equipment, storage, and service.
10. Install a new custom cab elevator in the same location as the current elevator (southeast corner of the Rotunda). Consider enlarging the shaft so that a larger cab can be accommodated.