

Elastic Boundaries: Landscape & Architecture at the University of Virginia
Session for Tuesday March 31, 2004 — Warren Byrd & Bill Sherman

A 1.5–2 hour (3 mile) walking tour of the University (ideally taken in the early to mid-morning or mid to late afternoon in small groups of 2 to 4 to promote discussion)

This tour, with its attendant questions, can be made before or after our presentation. To promote discussion we would suggest that you make the walk prior to Tuesday's session.

① Start at the Rotunda making a note of orientation — note the distinction between the north side of the Rotunda (facing University Avenue) and the south side facing the Lawn. Imagine the open-ended view to the wilderness that Jefferson intended, now bounded and contained by Cabell Hall.

As you walk toward Cabell Hall along the colonnade make a note of how Jefferson mediated (accommodated) climate by the combination of covered passages (the cryptoportici), the colonnades, and the two rows of ash and maple trees.

Before reaching Cabell make sure you deviate to the east and west to note the topographic difference between east facing gardens (toward the hospital) — i.e. more dramatically terraced — and the west-facing gardens (flatter).

Walk through or around Cabell noting the massive articulated stone retaining wall that forms the auditorium space (rather hidden between New and Old Cabell Hall).

② On the south side of New Cabell, standing in the vicinity of JPA, note the following:

a) How much topographic change there is between the original "Lawn" above and the elevation of the parking lot below.

b) Imagine at least 2 qualities and conditions that are now mostly erased or buried south of JPA:

1) The original hydrology of this site ... it was replete with springs and small streams.

2) The original "Canada" neighborhood and the Kitty Foster home-site and burial ground. This area south of JPA was once a vibrant community of people, many of whom worked in service to the University in its first 80 to 100 years (as seamstress, carpenters, launderers, etc.)

3) Try to imagine how — in expanding the arts and sciences precinct across JPA — to negotiate this topography, the traffic (JPA) and these past natural and cultural histories.

③ Walk west through Dawson's Row, past Monroe Hall and up McCormick Road until you see construction fencing between the Chemistry building and the Engineering building. This is the site of the new Materials Sciences and Nanotechnology building and landscape.

Imagine fitting a 3 to 4 story building in this seam while still providing pathways through from north to south. Peer into the void to make a note of how much excavation is necessary to accommo-

date the infrastructure and program of such a building, and how much of this will disappear from view. Think about how this new building complex can serve as a new threshold and boundary to the larger context.

④ Continuing around Chemistry and walking south beside Gilmer Hall, make a note of the “stormwater retention basin” that was installed some years ago wiping out an established forest and naturalized planting that existed in the ravine between the Aquatic Center and Gilmer — a reminder of the dwindling patches of natural topography and plant communities in an ever expanding University.

⑤ Walk to Hereford or New College via Gooch-Dillard dorm. Note the multiple paths up through the forested foreground of Gooch-Dillard and the anticlimactic resolution as you try to walk uphill through the center of Gooch-Dillard to New College. As you arrive at Hereford College, note the way the buildings engage the topography and the common’s “Lawn-like” terraced ground on the east side. Also note the contrast of planting strategies between Gooch-Dillard and Hereford.

⑥ Walk uphill to Observatory Hill and back down again. Note the forested plant community and realize that this entire wooded environment is second growth forest ... i.e. the entire mountain was logged (possibly several times in its history). The forest is now perhaps 80–100 years old. Try to imagine that the entirety of Piedmont, Virginia was forested prior to 1700 (with occasional burned clearings by Native American tribes). All things are in some state of succession.

Important note about Observatory Hill — this is the western edge of much of the local watershed. The origin, or headwaters, of Meadow Creek begins here. The creek runs (intermittently piped) through the University and on into the Rivanna River (and ultimately to the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean)

⑦ By the time you’ve reached this point (at Alderman Road and the western edge of the Dell) you should note that Meadow Creek has already begun to be compromised — i.e. piped and paved over, buried in part under a parking lot.

Proceed eastward through the Dell, avoiding construction equipment. Note the project underway — an attempt to re-surface a section of the stream (which had for the past 40 +/- years been buried in pipes up to Emmet Street and beyond). This is one of many current efforts to treat stormwater in a more positive, visible, and ecological way rather than to strictly engineer it away underground. Note the challenge of designing for the new/old waterway while still accommodating tennis courts, basketball courts, and parking.

⑧ As you cross Emmet Street, look back to the pond and stream restoration. It is pretty raw now, but imagine it in a few years as a healthy aquatic environment with a natural botanic garden of Virginia plants enriching its borders.

⑨. At Newcomb Hall, make a note of the spaces in this area — both inside and outside. A major effort will get underway in the near future to re-imagine both interior and exterior programs for a variety of student uses — a new University Commons. Try to imagine what these new places might be and where in this precinct these new programs might go.

⑩. Walk from Newcomb Hall past Clemons and Alderman crossing University Avenue at Carr's Hill using the route shown on the map. Walk up Rugby Road to the Architecture School.

As you pass Mem Gym and Nameless Field below, imagine 50–100 years ago when Meadow Creek was evident and several ponds occupied the site. Should more buildings occupy this site, or should the creek and pond be resurrected? Or can both coexist?

As you walk up to Clemons terrace and past Alderman make a note of the various past and current efforts to embed University buildings in the ground (or underground — as in the case of the Rare Books Library).

Note that Alderman Library occupies what was once a wooded ravine and spring site — an area Jefferson originally envisioned as a botanic garden.

As you walk past Fayerweather Hall and the Bayly Art Museum on Rugby Road — note how the Architecture School is unacknowledged and invisible. How might it and the Fine Arts Library have more of a presence on Rugby Road? As you come to Campbell Hall (the Architecture School), look closely at how circulation works and how you enter. Imagine how additions to this school — both to the east and on the south side might be considered as part of an expression of the school's intentions and mission.

As a parting note, look north from the second, third, or fourth floor levels of Campbell Hall and imagine the further expansion of the Fine Arts Precinct (as a studio art building, a music building, a new University museum get created). Look further north across the RR tracks beyond Lambeth and make a note of the rapidly rising Arena and the ever-expanding North Grounds. Think about how that world might best be connected to Central Grounds.

Final thoughts and questions:

- As you walk and ponder the past, present, and future histories of the University, how would you accommodate expansion?
- Where and how should additional student and faculty housing occur?
- How would you diminish the presence of the car and parking in favor of alternative means of transportation?
- How would you protect, enhance, acknowledge and/or recover the various vanished or buried traces of natural and cultural histories throughout the University domain?
- What values do we express in the designs of these various built indoor and outdoor places as the University expands and contracts?
- As we move ahead, how can the principles of Jefferson's design vision be honored without merely copying styles?