

PAVILION IX

HISTORY

JEFFERSON'S PLAN FOR THE UNIVERSITY AND THE PAVILIONS

Thomas Jefferson's concepts—both educational and architectural—about a public university for Virginia date to at least 1779, when as governor, he had proposed a public educational system that would begin with primary schools and extend up through a university. A quarter century later, as the Virginia General Assembly debated the feasibility of such an institution, Jefferson set forth his ideas not only about its purpose, location, funding, and faculty but also about its architectural design and construction. In 1805, as delegates to the General Assembly were drafting a bill to create a university, Jefferson wrote that “the greatest danger will be their over-building themselves by attempting a large house in the beginning, sufficient to contain the whole institution.” “Large houses are always ugly; inconvenient, exposed to the accident of fire, and bad in cases of infection,” he continued. “A plain small house for the school & lodging of each professor is best. These connected by covered ways out of which the rooms of the students should open would be best. These may then be built only as they shall be wanting. In fact an University should not be an house but a village. This will much lessen their first expences.”¹

Over the next five years Jefferson remained convinced of the benefits of his plan, and in 1810 he advised the trustees of a new college in Tennessee that rather than having “one large & expensive building,” it would be “infinitely better to erect a small and separate lodge for each separate professorship, with only a hall below for his class, and two chambers above for himself; joining these lodges by barracks for a certain portion of the students opening into a covered way to give a dry communication between all the schools, the whole of these arranged around an open square of grass & trees would make it, that it should be in fact, an academical village, instead of a large & common den of noise, of filth, & of fetid air.” Such a plan, he proposed, “would afford that quiet retirement so friendly to study, and lessen the dangers of fire, infection & tumult.” “Every professor,” Jefferson continued, “would be the