

PAVILION IX

“Now what we wish is that these pavilions as they will show themselves above the dormitories, should be models of taste & good architecture, & of a variety of appearance, no two alike, so as to serve as specimens for the Architectural Lectures,” Jefferson continued. He then asked Thornton, “will you set your imagination to work & sketch some designs for us, no matter how loosely with the pen without the trouble of referring to scale or rule; for we want nothing but the outline of the architecture, as the internal must be arranged according to local convenience. a few sketches, such as need not take you a moment, will greatly oblige us.” The Visitors, Jefferson explained, have “to struggle against two important wants, money, and men for professors capable of fulfilling our views.” Jefferson saw the physical plant of the university as an asset for recruiting the faculty, and he wanted Thornton to “help us provide snug and handsome Lodges for them.”⁹

Thornton soon replied, pointing out practical as well as aesthetic considerations. First, he wrote, it was “necessary to consider the extent of the learning intended to be inculcated by this Institution.” If it were to be a university, then having only two rooms on the upper floors of the pavilions would likely prove inadequate for “the masters, or Professors of the Sciences, & the high grades of learning”; “Great & learned men,” he wrote, “would necessarily be considered as Gentlemen of high Character & Consideration, & would expect to be provided for accordingly,” especially those needing more space for their families. Additionally, if university-level courses were being offered, then the professors would also need “Accommodations for the Apparatus, chymical, philosophical, Mechanical &c.” He noted that the first-floor “Halls would require to be large, if intended for lecturing.” If so, then the greater height of the first story would mean that the upper stories “would be in better proportion as to height.”¹⁰

As part of his comments on Jefferson’s overall plan, Thornton inserted a revised partial site plan in the body of his letter, drawing “a Pavilion for the Centre, with Corinthian Columns & a Pediment” and creating pavilions with L-shaped plans at the north corners; in Thornton’s scheme, the central structure would be the only building with a pediment. Thornton was lukewarm about Jefferson’s idea of having the pavilions serve as models of the various orders of architecture: “I would advise only the *three* orders,” he wrote, “for I consider the Composite as only a mixture of the Corinthian & Ionic; & the Tuscan as only a very clumsy Doric.” Rather than having square pillars in the colonnades in front of the dormitory rooms, Thornton recommended using columns, for they “are not only handsomer but cheaper, being also more easily built, and less subject to accidental as well as willful injury.” He advised against using plinths under the columns, since “they not only tend to shorten the Columns but increase the expense, interrupt the walk, and add not much to the beauty.” The columns, he assured Jefferson, could very successfully “be built of Brick in