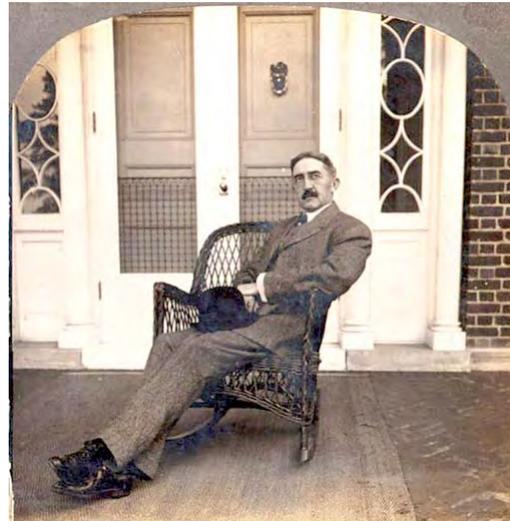


HISTORY

The Role of Stanford White as Architect

The President's House was one of the last commissions secured by Stanford White, a principal in the firm of McKim, Mead & White and a figure of national prominence prior to his death in 1906. White was murdered¹ on 25 June 1906 in a tragic turn of events that drew national attention and led to a highly publicized, sensational trial. While the design of the house was still taking shape, White's death, though only indirectly linked, appears to have changed the relationship between the architects and the Alderman family. The Aldermans were engaged in a heated dialogue with White at the time of his death and, in fact, Mrs. Alderman may have been the last client to meet with White. According to a letter Dr. Alderman sent to Stanford White on 16 June 1906 stating, rather bluntly, his objections to McKim, Mead & White's two most recent design schemes, Mrs. Alderman was planning to be in New York City on Friday, 22 June, if he could have revised plans ready by that date. White wrote back² saying that the Aldermans may have read too much into the drawings he had submitted and that he was eager to meet with Mrs. Alderman. While the documents do not indicate whether they actually met that Friday, White was murdered on the following Monday, and the final design was thus subsequently worked out by other members of the firm. Some of the design features that the Aldermans had requested but that White had disliked were apparently re-inserted in the process.

Stanford White's involvement at the University of Virginia was, in part, the outcome of a different well-known story, that of the loss of the original Rotunda dome and interior to fire in October 1895. The events that followed the fire drew both White and Dr. Alderman to the university. The Rotunda fire destroyed the university's original library space, a facility of iconic importance to generations of the university's alumni and faculty who had spent considerable time reading and studying there. Stanford White was chosen to oversee the Rotunda's reconstruction because of his preeminent reputation. A few years before the Rotunda reconstruction, and in the decade that followed, White increasingly rose to prominence as the leading American architect of his day. His work at the Rotunda involved redesigning the building's interior as well as restoration of its exterior, setting the stage for an era of expansion as the university's student



President Alderman seated on the spacious porch of the finished house, in 1917. Among President Alderman's complaints about the two schemes submitted by McKim, Mead & White in June 1906 was a concern that "The house[as then proposed] is practically without porch room. The front porch is too narrow. Should be 16 feet wide. I would rather sacrifice some colonial style for comfort. In this climate lots of porch room almost necessary."