

ROTUNDA: NORTH PORTICO

The McKim Mead & White portico on the north elevation is similar to the south elevation, but only one bay deep; as explained by Professor William Thornton, the portico was “much less in depth, in order to not detract from the dignity of the southern front.”

Stairs descend from the north portico between stepped marble cheek walls to a concrete landing. The marble steps, reconstructed in 1939, have 6-1/2" high risers and 1'-1" deep bullnosed treads.

ROTUNDA: NORTH ELEVATION

The north elevation generally duplicates the conditions of the south elevation. To the east of the doorway, three vertically-placed bronze plaques mounted to the brick wall memorialize soldiers from the University who died in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam.

There are no known Jefferson-era drawings that document the appearance of the north face of the Rotunda. The Jefferson and Neilson plans indicate that a central door flanked by window openings were the significant features at the main floor level. Neilson shows a platform with flanking steps in front of the doorway. In 1824, 160 square feet of marble tiles were ordered for the “Platform of the back steps.” The November 1821 Neilson plan includes a representation of the back steps. The porch platform extends to the outer (east and west) edges of the windows flanking the doorway. Short flights of steps then ascend to the ground. The reality of the ground level on the north side of the building make this scheme impossible; the steps would be much too steep, much like those that ascend a Mayan pyramid. Either the flat form was much shorter (its depth is unknown), or the steps would have to extend well beyond the outer edges of the facade. This situation is discussed in a letter from Brockenbrough to Jefferson dated July 14, 1824. Regardless of their form, the platform and steps likely included some sort of iron railing.

At some date during or after the original construction, three window openings were placed in the wall surface above the doorway. Neither Jefferson’s nor Neilson’s floor plans show window openings in this location. The brick surface behind the copper pediments above the door and windows need to be probed to determine the age of the previous wood pediments destroyed in the 1895 fire. Post-fire photographs show that the existing elements are attached to the brick surface at each opening by three evenly spaced vertical wood nailing strips, the same condition seen on the other facade and on the Mills Annex.

The entablature that originally encircled the building continued across this facade, and evidence for this feature is preserved in the north pediment attic (401A). There is no