

Episode 5 Field Recording

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Guest: James Zehmer, Historic Preservation Project Manager, University of Virginia

Meggan Cashwell 00:01

We're here today in Thomas Jefferson's Academical Village with James Zehmer, Historic Preservation Project Manager at UVA. He and his team, about a decade ago, restored Pavilion X, and they are now working to restore the adjacent Lawn rooms. Pavilion X was the home of Virginia law professors for over a century, from 1833 to 1936. And we are right now standing on the second-floor balcony of the pavilion, which faces out towards the Lawn. And this is the location of the photograph we described in our interview with Professor Laura Edwards, who is exploring the legal lives of the women who resided here in the 19th century. There are three unidentified women in this photograph, and from their attire, it would appear that the photo was taken in the late 1800s when John Barbee Minor and his family were residing in this space, although we don't know for sure. So welcome, James. What do you notice, architecturally, when you look at this photo? How does it contrast to the balcony of today?

James Zehmer 01:04

Looking at this photo from an architectural standpoint, not much has really changed compared to what we have today. The shadow lines on the photo show that it was taken in the late afternoon, but the pattern, you can see the pattern of the railing on the balcony floor. And that railing is a Chippendale pattern railing that Jefferson designed and is still in situ today. The view from this balcony looking out on the Lawn you would be— your view would be framed by these monumental columns in the Doric order from the Theater of Marcellus. And you'd look directly across to Pavilion IX. When Minor was here, the Lawn would have looked quite different in the, in that the southern end of the Lawn would have been an open vista to the southwest mountains as Cabell, Rouse, and Cocke Hall were not built until the late 1890s.

Meggan Cashwell 02:04

And so why is there a balcony here? What purpose would it have served for law professors, their families, and the Black domestic laborers who worked here?

James Zehmer 02:14

So, the balconies were, in a sense, the most restricted area on the Lawn. Architecturally, Jefferson segregated the spaces on the Lawn in a three-tiered system. The lowest tier, which was the basement level, was out of sight, and was intended for use by the enslaved laborers of the University. The ground

floor tier was the most public space, which included the student dormitory rooms. And then on the first floor of the pavilions housed the classrooms for educational instruction. And then on the second floor, the professors' private residences, private parlors were located here. And each pavilion has two front doors. Again, the first floor is the public entrance. And the second floor, which would have— opens onto this balcony, would have been the private entrance, allowing professors to go from pavilion to pavilion on the second-tier level without having to go downstairs and mix with the students below.

Meggan Cashwell 03:18

And can you talk a little bit about how the house and balcony are used today?

James Zehmer 03:23

Sure. So, the houses, or the pavilions on the Lawn, many of them house deans in the various schools here at UVA. Currently Ian Solomon is the Dean of the Batten School for Public Policy is the resident of Pavilion X. And the families use the balconies, I think, much as they would have historically. There's some lawn or patio furniture out on the balcony. They use it to get some fresh air, you know, little bit of private space, but also really enjoy the wonderful setting that is the Academical Village.

Meggan Cashwell 04:00

And this is a really stunning view. Thank you, James, for being with us.

James Zehmer 04:03

My pleasure. Thank you all.