

A Guide to the Alexander Jackson Davis Architectural Drawings, 1859-1870

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Descriptive Summary

Collection number

mss 00276

Language

English

Physical Characteristics

The collection consists of 27 items.

Repository

Archives, Preston Library, Virginia Military Institute

Administrative Information

Access

There are no restrictions.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

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Alternative Form

The Alexander Jackson Davis Drawings can be viewed online on the VMI Archives website at:

<http://www.vmi.edu/archives/manuscripts/ms276.html>

Biographical/Historical Information

_____ Alexander Jackson Davis (1803-1892), a notable 19th century American architect, designed the Virginia Military Institute Barracks, professors' residences and other Institute buildings during the 1850's-1860's. Born in New York, Davis studied at the American Academy of Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design. He helped to popularize the Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and Italianate styles, and his many important projects included private residences as well as public buildings. Davis has long been recognized by historians as the most significant American practitioner of the "secular gothic," and VMI was the first American college planned entirely in the Gothic Revival style. This style incorporates towers, turrets, and other design elements first used in medieval castles and cathedrals. The VMI Barracks was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966, and the VMI Post was named a National Historic District in 1974.

Davis's association with VMI came about as a result of his design work for Philip St. George Cocke, a wealthy Virginia planter and member of the VMI Board of Visitors. Cocke, an impassioned advocate of the Gothic style, employed Davis to design "Belmead" the Cocke residence in Powhatan County, Virginia. Cocke became Davis's patron in the state, and when VMI began its building program in the late 1840's, it turned to Davis to create a comprehensive plan for the Institute. During the period 1850-1861, a significant portion of the Barracks, a Porter's Lodge, Mess Hall, the Superintendent's residence, and several faculty residences were constructed using Davis's designs. Davis's dream of completing the Barracks quadrangle was interrupted by the Civil War and VMI's post-war financial problems, and his work for the Institute ended in the 1870's. It was not until the early 20th century that his vision for the Parade Ground facade of Barracks was realized, based on a Davis-inspired design by another noted architect, Bertram Goodhue.

Scope and Content Information

The Alexander Jackson Davis collection consists of 27 architectural drawings executed for the Virginia Military Institute (Lexington, Virginia) between 1859 and 1870. Included are designs for the VMI Barracks, the Superintendent's residence, and faculty residences. The bulk of the drawings are ink and wash plans.

Contents List

Superintendent's Residence, Virginia Military Institute, 1860

Extent 9 items

"Executive Mansion, Va. Military Inst., Lexington, Va. 1860." Front Elevation.

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 18 3/4 x 13 1/2 inches.

"Plan No. 2, Principal Floor, adopted for the Executive Mansion, Va. Military Institute, Lexington, Va. 1860."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 18 3/4 x 12 inches.

"Dwelling House and Offices for the Superintendent at Va. Milit. Institute. Oct 1859. A. J. Davis, Archit." Plan & front elevation.

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 16 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches.

Unexecuted first floor plan, front and rear elevations; detail of parlor window.

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash plan and detail, 18 3/4 x 12 inches.

First floor plan, drawing "A."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 18 3/4 x 12 inches.

First floor plan, drawing "B." Front & back elevations.

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 18 3/4 x 12 inches.

Front Elevation

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

pencil, Ink & wash drawing, 18 1/2 x 12 inches.

Second Floor plan; section; front elevation.

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash plan; section and elevation
in pencil; 18 1/2 x 12 inches.

"Plan No. 3. Chamber Floor, Adopted for the Executive Mansion, VMI, 1860."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash plan; ink section; 18 1/2 x
12 inches.

Faculty Residences, VMI Parade Ground, 1850's

Extent 8 items

Plan and elevation, "River Front."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 24 x 19
inches.

"First Study, A, for Professor's house, Va. Mil. Inst."

Links [Elevation A3, South Front, Plan A1, Principal Story No. 2.](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 14 x 17
inches

Elevation (C4) & Plan (C1)

Links [View Elevation](#) [View Plan](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, rendered elevation,
11 x 14 inches

Elevation, "Entrance front 5A;" & Plan, "Second story No. 3 - A2."

Links [View Elevation](#) [View Plan](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing with pencil, 14 x 17
inches

Elevation (B4) and "Plan of Second story 3" (B3).

Links [View Elevation](#) [View Plan](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 14 x 17
inches

Elevation (B5) and Plan (B2). "First A and second study B for the V.M.I; principal floor enlarged."

Links [View Elevation](#) [View Plan](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 14 x 17
inches

Elevation (B6), "West End," & Plan (B1), "Basement No. 1."

Links [View Elevation](#) [View Plan](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 14 x 17
inches

Elevation (C5) and Plan (C2), "Upper Story."

Links [View Elevation](#) [View Plan](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, rendered elevation,
11 x 14 inches

Barracks, 1870

Extent 10 items

Scope and Content

These post-Civil War designs for "Claytor Hall" -- intended to complete the Barracks project begun in the 1850s -- were never executed. VMI was struggling to recover from the destruction of Institute buildings by Union General David Hunter, and would not be able to continue with Davis's ambitious design. The parade ground facade of Barracks, as originally envisioned by Davis, was completed in the early 20th century.

"Claytor Hall - Va. Milit. Inst. Gen. Fr. H. Smith Supn'dt - Lexington, Virginia. - A. J. Davis, Arc't."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, mounted; 13 1/2 x 9
1/4 inches.

"Claytor Hall, No. 5. Cross section; and Center, south front. 1870."

Links [View Front](#) [View Cross Section](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, mounted; 13 1/2 x 9
1/4 inches.

Plan, "Barracks of the Virginia Military Institute;" with overlay, "Plan on the Floor of Museums, No. 3."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing; plan 23 1/2 x 19
1/2; overlay 11 x 5 inches.

Detail working drawing of octagonal auditorium.

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 23 1/2 x 18
inches

"Study for No. 3, Memorial Chapel."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 11 x 9
inches

"Basement No. 1. By A. J. Davis architect, 1870."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 35 x 12
inches

"No. 2, Principal or Entrance Floor."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash plan with architect's notes,
35 x 12 inches

"No. 3 Chapel and Museum Floor."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash plan with architect's notes,
35 x 12 inches

"Attic and Ceilings, Va. Mil. Inst., No. 4."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink plan, stairway overlay, 35 x 10
inches

"No. 5, Long Section, Claytor Hall."

Links [View drawing](#)

Extent

Ink & wash drawing, 35 x 12
inches