



The Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington

Mount Vernon, Virginia
Institutional Architecture

“I have not houses to build, except one, which I must erect for the accommodation and security of my military, civil, and private papers, which are voluminous and may be interesting.”

— Letter from George Washington to his friend
James McHenry, April 3, 1797

As conveyed in a letter to a friend, George Washington had intended to build a library on his estate for his papers, but that plan was never realized – until now. The National Library for the Study of George Washington is the national archive for knowledge about our first president’s legacy. The 45,000 square-foot library, sited on 15 acres within walking distance of Washington’s home, Mount Vernon, serves as a national archive for his books and letters and as a center for education and scholarly retreat.

The design of the Library references Washington’s Mount Vernon estate by incorporating qualities that

are familiar and appropriate, but without literal form or material reference. Well-proportioned architecture of stone, stucco, metal, and glass complements the Mount Vernon estate while representing the strength, order, and dignity of Washington’s leadership. Narrow, 30-foot-wide floor plates connect users to the bucolic landscape.

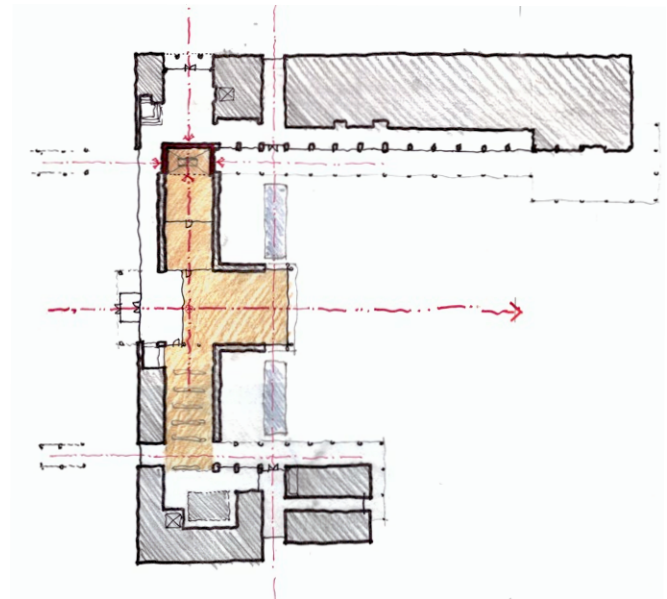
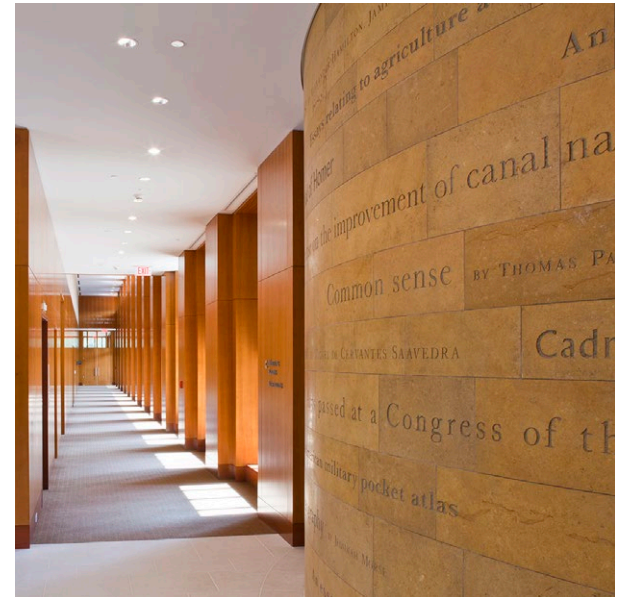
The goal was to create a timeless place that is elegant, ordered, and principled – qualities that allow the Library and grounds to be, in subtle ways, both reflective of the man and connected to the place.



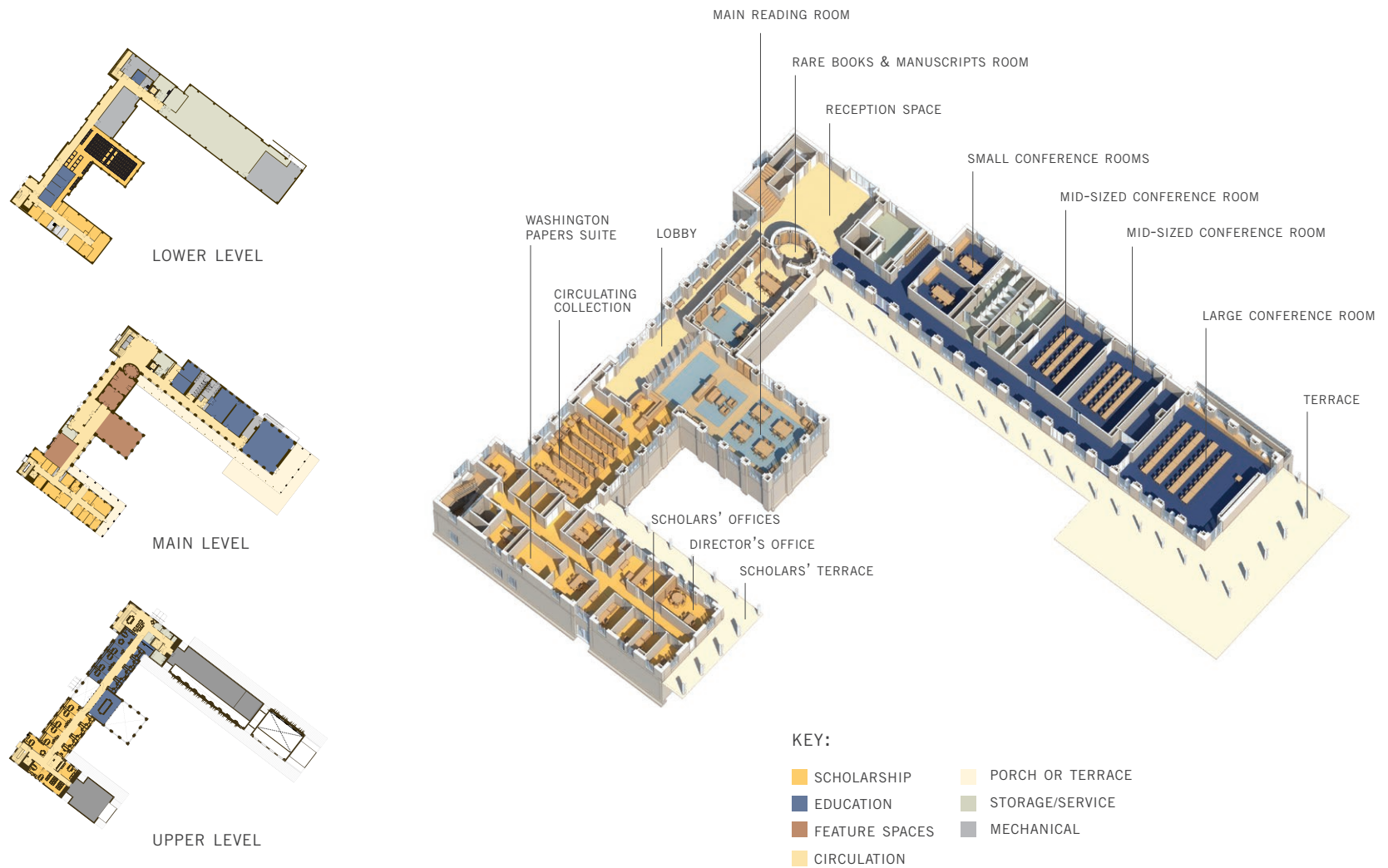
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| 1 Main Entrance | 4 National Library |
| 2 Stone Bridge | 5 Garden Terrace |
| 3 Scholars' Residence | 6 Walkway to Estate |

A gently winding drive leads guests through a pastoral woodland to the library's entrance. The plan geometry is inspired by the gardens of Mount Vernon, George Washington's home to the southeast, and is defined by low stone walls. The library faces the estate's cupola.





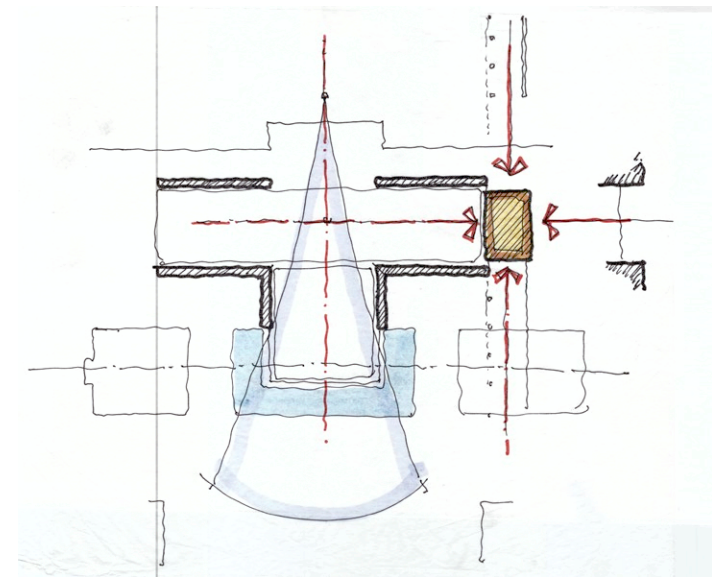
The design is ordered, elegant, and principled to reflect George Washington's character.



The U-shaped building creates a sunny, south facing courtyard defined on the east by an education wing that provides spaces for seminars, lectures, and training programs on George Washington's life, times, and leadership. On the west side, a wing of two floors of office space for visiting scholars and staff complete the composition.



The culmination of the building is the reading room, which is situated at the center of the building axis. The light-filled, two-story room is clad in American Sycamore, a tree that grows at Mount Vernon. Clarity and restraint in the choice and articulation of materials result in a setting of high visual impact.



Visibility and connectivity to the land are key design priorities. Floor-to-ceiling windows on three sides of the reading room engage scholars with the landscape.



The Washingtons' collection of books are protected in the rare books and manuscripts room, a sequence of three increasingly secure spaces that culminate in a central oval vault.



Materials express permanence and dignity. The central portion of the building is clad in sandstone and limestone and the wings are finished in stucco. Slate roofs are accented with zinc-clad eaves, soffits and porches. Windows and doors are made of mahogany. Porches and terraces are paved in sandstone.



Details of Library and Scholars' Residence



The Library is LEED certified to the Gold level. The project earned credits for exemplary water efficiency and strategies for managing landscape pests and erosion. Open space and tree preservation contribute to a sustainable site and reflect the arboricultural efforts of George Washington - the landowner and farmer.

35%

ENERGY USE REDUCTION

41%

WATER USE REDUCTION

80%

CONSTRUCTION WASTE DIVERTED

21%

REGIONAL MATERIALS USED

80%

SPACES WITH ACCESS TO DAYLIGHT

91%

SPACES WITH ACCESS TO VIEWS

