

## Amphitheatre

**Date Constructed (major alterations):**  
1913 (1922-23, 1934, 1937-38, 1953)

**Original (primary) Function:**  
Theatre Productions and  
Commencement

**Current (primary) Function:**  
Not Formally Used

**Architect(s):**  
Faculty & Students (1913), Mr. L. J.  
Houston (1922-23), J. Binford Walford  
(1934, 1937-38, 1953)

**Period of Significance:**  
1913-1958

**Grade Level (1 highest – 4 lowest):**  
Grade

Sometime in 1913 the first amphitheater at the college was built, consisting of “a cheap wooden structure” as well as wooden benches.<sup>200</sup> The location, in the “grove” was considered ideal due to the natural topography as well as the beauty of the site described by the local paper as “the prettiest spot in all Virginia for such as open air theatre.”<sup>201</sup> The temporary structure was frequently used for events such as “class day” as Ruth Carter Vellines ’15 remembers.<sup>202</sup> However, by the early 1920s President Chandler was requesting \$3,000 to restore the open-air theatre claiming that,

*“We have a beautiful grove and in a portion of this grove naturally graded for the purpose, we constructed, about eight years ago, a temporary open-air theater. The stage, a cheap wooden structure, has rotted down several years ago and the benches which were used at the time are no longer serviceable.”<sup>203</sup>*



Figure 21: Image of the UMW Amphitheatre in 2012. (Spencer, 2012)

The proposed “restoration” was to include building a new structure using steel and concrete as well as installing permanent concrete benches.<sup>204</sup>

While Chandler did not receive the \$3,000 requested he was appropriated \$2,500 for “restoration of [the] amphitheater” by the State Legislature in January 1922.<sup>205</sup> The State Normal School for Woman at Fredericksburg executive committee approved the project in the spring of 1922 with an April Bullet article confirming this, stating that “a steel and concrete amphitheater will be erected in the grove”.<sup>206</sup> By July of that same year construction of an “open air theatre” was commencing. While normally such a structure would have been designed by the campus architect, at the time Charles M. Robinson’s firm, it appears as though this avenue was not pursued. Rather, President Chandler secured the services of Mr. L. J. Houston, City Manager of Fredericksburg, to design and supervise construction.<sup>207</sup>

Construction of the new, open air theatre finished in April and was dedicated on May 11, 1923.<sup>208</sup> Delivering the keynote address for the dedication before a crowd of approximately 1,000 people was Governor Trinkle. Superintendent Harris

Hart and Senator C. O'Connor Goolrick also addressed the crowd. The dedication exercises were followed in the evening by the play "Hansel and Gretel" performed by the students of the dramatic club.<sup>209</sup>

About a month later commencement was held in the open air theatre for the first time. An article from June 3, 1933 describes the commencement procession in the open air theatre that year,

*"Through the lovely grove came a double line of students. The Sophomores bearing the daisy chain, the Freshmen who had made the chain, accompanying them. At the entrance to the Open Air Theatre they stopped, and through this line the members of the graduating class in cap and gowns passed, taking their places on the platform. The Sophomores who carried the daisy chain wore white and made a very effective picture as they passed in and out between the rows of seats in the Open Air Theatre. They occupied the front rows since many of the sophomores will receive their normal professional certificate and will not continue their work next year."*<sup>210</sup>

The tradition of holding commencement in the open air theatre would continue until 1958. In 1959, exercises were moved indoors to Dodd Auditorium due to rain and remained there until 1968.<sup>211</sup>

Continuing use of the amphitheater combined with increased enrollment at the school throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s necessitated that the amphitheater be expanded. Work began on this expansion around 1934 and consisted of enlarging the stage to the east and west, as well as south, towards the audience. When completed the stage resembled a crescent moon in footprint

and is essentially the shape seen today, 2014.

Shortly thereafter in 1937-38, the two small, 1923 structures, which flanked the original rectangular stage were removed and wood railings put in place to prevent unexpected departures off the rear. Steps with similar railings were constructed on both sides of the stage providing additional access. During this time it is also likely that access under the stage area was created for storage and in some instances to serve as a dressing area. Further audience seating was also added with similar concrete and metal benches bringing the total capacity to 1,600.<sup>212</sup> Later in 1952-53 the cast stone, Greek Doric colonnades with wooden pergolas and the cast stone balustrades were added.<sup>213</sup> Flagstones were also put in place and the stage was raised a few feet. Because of the stage being raised, new steps were necessary. These new steps used a more elaborate serpentine design terminating on both ends with raised, cast stone plinths.<sup>214</sup>

While lighting devices around the amphitheater were installed for nighttime performances and updated accordingly through the subsequent decades, the structure remained relatively intact following the 1952-53 interventions until 1978-79 when the wooden pergolas on the colonnades were removed. During the 1980s many of the concrete benches also disappeared. Over the next two decades the amphitheater columns would also be damaged by vandals and in 2011, the collapse of one column and the subsequent injuries sustained by a guest on campus resulted in the removal and storage of two of the columns.

## 4 Building Histories

Despite the loss of the columns the amphitheater still retains much of its material and design integrity from the 1952-53 renovations. Perhaps more importantly the structure has retained its integrity of site and feeling despite commencement having long since ceased, and plays no longer performed. These aspects of integrity as well as the significant role the structure played in student life and town-gown relations all contribute to its overall significance and importance to the University of Mary Washington.

### Integrity and Significance:

- Significance
  - Performing arts in higher education (early-20<sup>th</sup> century)
  - Town/gown relationship with the city of Fredericksburg.
  - Association with important local events such as graduation, May Day celebrations, and Devil Goat Day.
- Integrity
  - High degree of material and design integrity from the 1953 expansion.
  - Setting and feeling are both well conveyed

### Character Defining Features:

- Amphitheatre's Form
- Exterior Features
  - Reinforced Concrete construction
  - Cast stone columns and balustrade
  - Seating
  - Plantings (trees)

### Timeline:

- 1913
  - The first temporary theatre is built in the "grove" of "cheap" wood.
- Jan. 1922
  - \$2,500 allocated to the renovation of the Open Air Theatre
- July 1922
  - Construction of the steel and concrete theatre was commencing. The work was being overseen by Fredericksburg City Manager, Mr. L. J. Houston.
- May 1923
  - The open air theatre is dedicated by Governor Trinkle. Later in the evening the drama club performs "Hansel and Gretel".
- May 1923
  - Commencement is held for the first time at the Open Air Theatre.
- 1934
  - Expansion of the open air theatre begins with the enlargement of the stage and seating area.
- 1937-38
  - The two structures on stage are removed and the audience seating is enlarged to approx. 1,600.
- 1953
  - The cast stone balustrade and Greek Doric columns with pergola are added.
- 1958
  - Last commencement ceremony held in the amphitheater.
- 1978-79
  - Pergolas are removed
- 1980s
  - The concrete seating is removed

2011

Fallen cast stone columns removed and stored to prevent further injury and property damage.

2012

A summer “derecho” causes extensive damage to the amphitheater including to the two trees encapsulated by the stage.



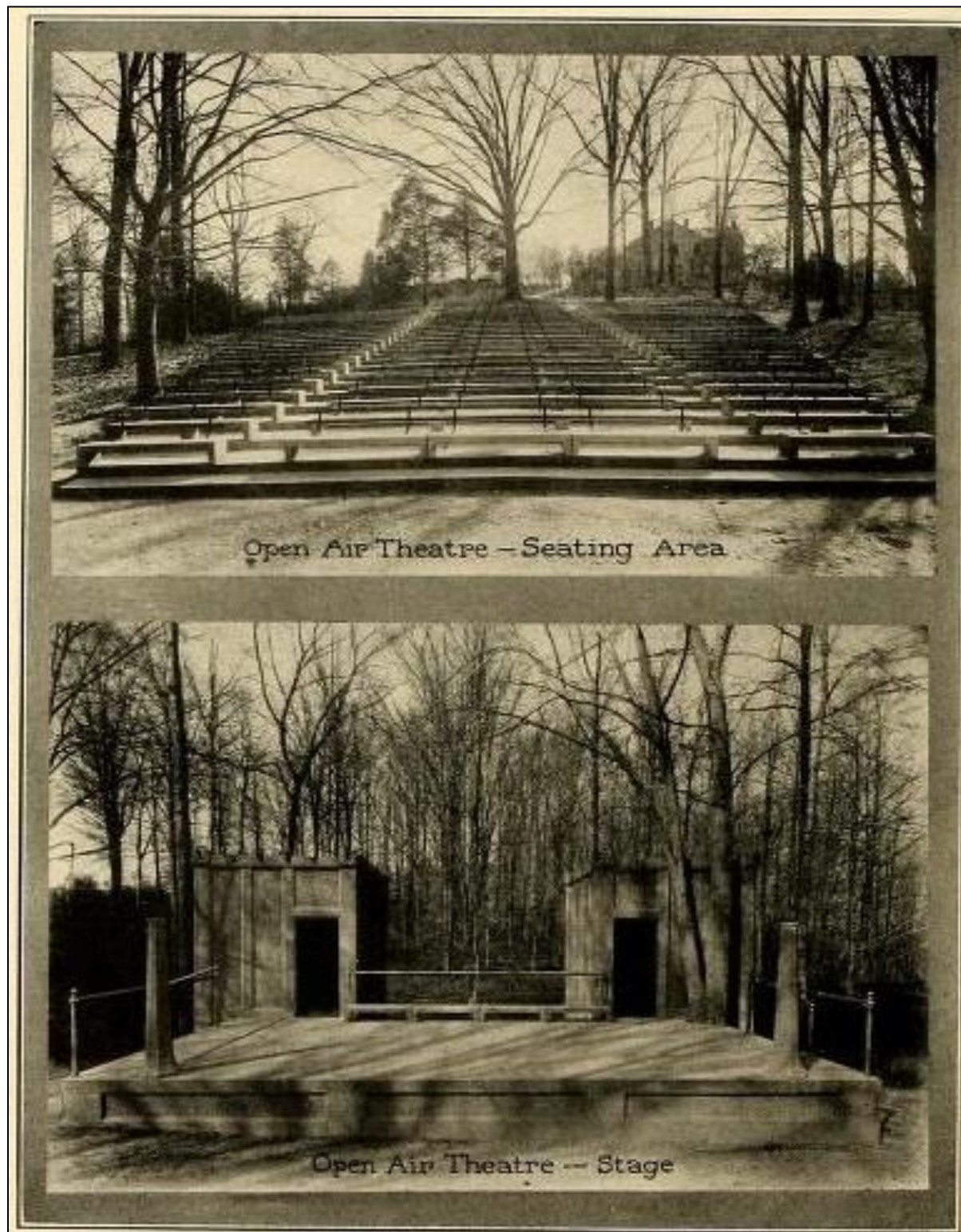


Figure 22: Image showing the second UMW Amphitheatre shortly after completion in 1923. Note the raised rectangular stage with the two structures on either side. Lampposts can also be seen in the foreground. The split tree to the right of the right structure existed until 2012 when it was felled by a severe storm. (Battlefield, 1923, pg. 24)





Figure 23: Image showing the UMW Amphitheatre in 1934. Note that the 1923 structures are still present on the stage which has been expanded significantly. (Battlefield, 1934, pg. 102)



Figure 24: Image showing the amphitheater in 1938 with the stage structures now gone. The audience seating has been expanded on the sides and towards the rear. Upon close inspection the original, 1923 stage can still be seen as a lighter color. (Battlefield, 1938, pg. 33)



Figure 25: Image, likely from the late 1950s, showing the completed cast stone balustrade as well as Doric columns and wood pergolas. Note that the stage has been raised necessitating that the large branch of the Beech tree encapsulated on the right side of the stage, as seen in the previous image, be cut off. The steps now follow a serpentine pattern. (UMW Special Collections, undated)



Figure 26: Devil Goat Day celebrations in the amphitheater, note the presence of the pergola as late as 1971 when the image was taken. (UMW Special Collections)



<sup>182</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, May 13, 2006, pg. 1 col. 1

<sup>183</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, May 13, 2006, pg. 1 col. 1

<sup>184</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, July 18, 2004, pg A62 col.

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## Chapter 3

<sup>185</sup> Quinquennial, English system of re-evaluating and inspecting churches based on anticipated changes and economy.

<sup>186</sup> National Register Bulletin, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation", U.S. Department of the Interior.

<sup>187</sup> National Register Bulletin, How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation", U.S. Department of the Interior.

## Chapter 4

<sup>188</sup> Spotsylvania County, Virginia, Clerk's Office, Deed book 104 pg 232 (1929)

<sup>189</sup> Fredericksburg, Virginia, Clerk's Office, Deed book 80 pg 461 (1945)

<sup>190</sup> 1930 Federal Population Census, Schedule 1, Fredericksburg, Virginia

<sup>191</sup> 1940 Fredericksburg Land Tax Records, <http://resources.umwhisp.org/Fredericksburg/landtax/fburg1940lt.htm>

<sup>192</sup> 1940 Federal Population Census, Schedule 1, Fredericksburg, Virginia, Upper Ward, S.D. No. 1, E.D. No. 107-02.

<sup>193</sup> 1940 Fredericksburg Tax Records, (<http://resources.umwhisp.org/fredburg.htm>)

<sup>194</sup> WWII Draft Registration Card, Frederick W. Walker, April 27, 1942, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

<sup>195</sup> Fredericksburg, Virginia, Clerk's Office, Deed book 80 pg 461 (1945)

<sup>196</sup> Fredericksburg, Virginia, Clerk's Office, Will book 34 pg 806 (1999)

<sup>197</sup> Fredericksburg, Virginia, Clerk's Office, Deed book 336 pg 121 (2000)

<sup>198</sup> This oven was still intact as late as 2009.

<sup>199</sup> Walker House (Alvey House), Architectural Drawings (1929-1930), 4 sheets, UMW Facilities Services

<sup>200</sup> Chandler, Report to Budget Committee of the State Legislature, 1921 (UMW Special Collections, F.10 Chandler)

<sup>201</sup> Daily Star, May 8, 1922

<sup>202</sup> "On The Hill", MWC Publication, pg 4

<sup>203</sup> Chandler, Report to Budget Committee of the State Legislature, 1921 (UMW Special Collections, F.10 Chandler)

<sup>204</sup> Chandler, Report to Budget Committee of the State Legislature, 1921 (UMW Special Collections, F.10 Chandler)

<sup>205</sup> Davis, Westmoreland. *Communication from the Governor Submitting the Budget Bill*. House Document No. 4, Jan, 1922.

<sup>206</sup> Bullet, vol. I no. 6, April 1922

<sup>207</sup> Chandler. *Report on the work of the State Normal School for Women at Fredericksburg, VA, for the year ending July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1922*. July 21, 1922, pg 2

<sup>208</sup> Daily Star, May 10, 1923, pg 1.

<sup>209</sup> Reports of the work of the State Normal School for Women at Fredericksburg, VA for the year ending July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1923. August 15, 1923.

<sup>210</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, June 3, 1933, pg 1 col. 1

<sup>211</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, June 1, 1959, pg 1

<sup>212</sup> Alvey, *History of Mary Washington*, pg 111-112

<sup>213</sup> Alumnae News, Fall 1953

<sup>214</sup> Alumnae News, Fall 1953

<sup>215</sup> Alvey, *History of Mary Washington*, pg 194.

<sup>216</sup> Alvey, *History of Mary Washington*, pg 194; *Free Lance-Star*, April 9, 1934, pg 1; *Free Lance-Star*, April 9, 1935, pg 1 col. 3.

<sup>217</sup> Unknown. *Traveling Expenses in Connection with P.W.A. PROJECTS*. CA. 1934 (UMW Special Collections)

<sup>218</sup> J. Binford Walford, Drawings of "Dormitory No. 3", Feb. 1934 (UMW Facilities Services); *Free Lance-Star*, April 9, 1934, pg 1

<sup>219</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, April 9, 1934, pg 1; J.

Binford Walford, Drawings of "Dormitory No. 3", Feb. 1934 (UMW Facilities Services)

<sup>220</sup> J. Binford Walford, Drawings of "Dormitory No. 3", Feb. 1934 (UMW Facilities Services)

<sup>221</sup> J. Binford Walford, Drawings of "Dormitory No. 3", Feb. 1934 (UMW Facilities Services)

<sup>222</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, April 9, 1934, pg 1

<sup>223</sup> Unknown. *Traveling Expenses in Connection with P.W.A. PROJECTS*. CA. 1934 (UMW Special Collections)

<sup>224</sup> *Free Lance-Star*, April 6, 1934, pg 1 col. 4; the contract is noted as \$263,471 in this