First Professional Drawing Found on ‘Shoe’

The first known professional drawing by America’s first professionally trained native architect has been discovered at the University of South Carolina.

The drawing, by the renowned 19th-century architect Robert Mills, entered in an 1802 competition for the first building to be built at the then newly founded South Carolina College, was discovered recently during a restoration project of the Horsehoe.

Mills’ drawing had been referred to many times in books and articles, but was not thought to be extant. However, it was found in the private collection of a USC staff member, Col. Harvey Anderson, USAF (Ret.), along with another entry, that of Hugh Smith, a lesser known Charleston architect of that period. A discussion of the find appears in the 1973 “SCATA Review of Architecture,” edited by USC Architect John Califf and published this month.

Califf has worked on the restoration project with historic preservation consultant Russell Wright; landscape consultant Richard Weibel; and Stanley South, archaeologist at the University’s Institute of Archeology and Anthropology. The participation of Wright and Weibel has been funded by a grant from the U.S. National Register of Historic Places made through the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.

The Mills’ drawing was the winner out of six entries, and it was assumed it was the basis for the design of the first building on the campus. However, when it was compared to a painting of the campus of the period, it did not correspond to the depicted structure.

The drawing reflects a strong Jeffersonian influence, and it is true the young Mills was a protege of Thomas Jefferson and allowed his use Mills’ talents as a draftsman on many of Jefferson’s own projects including Jefferson’s home, Monticello.

Mills’ only documented contribution to the campus is the Maclay Monument. However, it is believed that he had some connection with the South Caroliniana Library, which is often referred to as Millsian character of its original façade, and that this facade matches in proportion that of the Mills-designed Fireproof Building in Charleston. The reading room of that library, long thought to have been influenced by the original library of Congress by Charles Bulfinch, has been shown to be almost its exact duplicate.

A valuable drawing by America’s first professionally-trained native architect, Robert Mills, was discovered during the recent restoration project of the Horsehoe.

The drawing by Mills, a native of South Carolina, was the winner in an 1802 competition for the first building to be built at the newly founded South Carolina College.