

P.O. Box 67
Lexington, VA 24450
25 January 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Visitors,

I write, as have many others, to ask you please to do your best to minimize the damage to the stately and historic entrance to the Institute that is Letcher Avenue as you proceed to approve and implement the plan for the new all-purpose building.

I will not waste your time chronicling my utter dismay at the esthetics that this huge monolithic building will destroy; you've heard all that. And you know that both the Archer House and the Blair House are historic in their own right.

I would like to point out that the Archer family's history is much entwined with that of the Institute; the family was related, at least by marriage, to Scott Shipp. We could delve into the archives to fill in that story, but I feel sure it would not deter the Institute from proceeding with the plan for a building that, because it will include classroom space, will be largely underwritten by the state of Virginia. Of course that's an important consideration.

What I do ask is whether the Institute could possibly preserve the Archer House by moving it to another location, as was done with the Pendleton-Coles house. I think the Blair House is a more unwieldy and less important structure; the Archer House has the architectural coherence and style of its period that would make its loss a real tragedy.

I speak respectfully as a child of VMI. My grandfather graduated in the Class of 1894 under Scott Shipp as superintendent and went on to become superintendent himself during World War II. A year of my infancy was spent in the Supe's quarters, and like hundreds if not thousands of alumni, current cadets, current and retired faculty and staff, and VMI families, I deeply cherish the ethos of Letcher Avenue as the portal to the post. I am sure both Shipp and Kilbourne are currently uneasy in their graves as they contemplate the loss of history and character that that stretch of the avenue, which thousands of visitors annually admire and along which thousands of incoming cadets have traveled as they arrived full of hope and anxiety for the four years that lay ahead of them.

Surely you all were among those thousands. Can you really bear to see the past history and the enduring beauty of the avenue destroyed?

Yours, watching in distress from my home in the county,

Elizabeth Kilbourne Tracy

