

## CAMPUS PLANNING HISTORY: 1961

In October, 1961, the Skidmore Trustees voted to build a new campus. Much has been written of this rebirth, which need not be retold here. Instead, in this report, we will look at some of the lessons to be learned from this initial and another more recent plan for the campus.

The Trustees selected O'Neil Ford from San Antonio to be the architect and he chose Samuel B. Zisman to be his campus planning consultant.

Although we found no direct evidence, we believe Zisman based his Skidmore plan on Thomas Jefferson's plan for the University of Virginia. Jefferson's campus was well known among planning professionals as one of the most innovative in the new nation. Jefferson flanked his magnificent library with two parallel rows of five pavilions, each housing students and teachers in a single academic discipline. The Library looked down the long, grassed mall framed by these pavilions and their connecting colonnades, and out to the mountains in the distance.

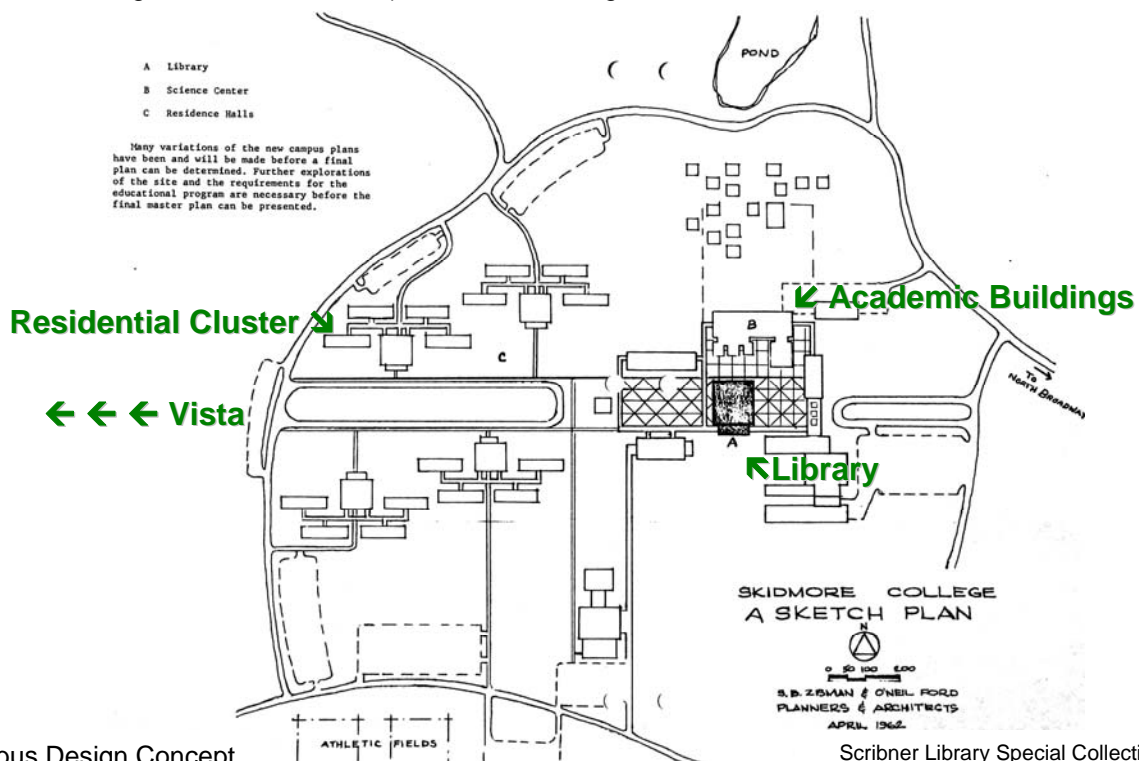
This early Zisman sketch for the Skidmore campus is very similar to Jefferson's layout: a library flanked by two parallel rows of student residences, with an open vista. In this proposal, Skidmore's dining facilities were decentralized with four dining halls each serving four small residences. Only later was a single dining hall introduced, closing the vista. (The same thing happened to Jefferson's campus, with the vista lost to a dining hall, built much later).

Zisman's pedestrian circulation was similar to Jefferson's. In professional jargon it is called a racetrack: two parallel walkways with open space between and dominated by an important building at one or both ends.

Whether our speculation about Jefferson is true or not, one thing is certain. Like Jefferson's plan, Zisman's plan for Skidmore's core was based on humanistic values and was well suited to serve the mission of the college.

Zisman, of course, went beyond Jefferson. He had to deal with what he called "the to-do of automobiles." As a leader of his generation of liberal urban planners, Zisman was well aware of the desire for close-in parking and the destructive impact of large parking lots. He designed a curving Loop Road to slow traffic and bring cars near important buildings, and insisted on smaller parking lots with islands of trees to soften their impact. We call Zisman's double loop system the Saratoga Race Track for pedestrians and the Limerock Race Track for vehicles.

The lesson of the Ford and Zisman campus plan is clear. When the circulation systems of a campus are well articulated, when the open spaces are generous, varied and beautifully landscaped, when structures are in human scale, built with familiar and long lasting materials, a campus will be an appropriate, even excellent place for the work of the college.



Early Campus Design Concept

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