

# HISTORIC VIRGINIA HALL

DESIGN ♦ CONSTRUCTION ♦ RENOVATION

## A Healthful Environment



*Student dorm room in 1920s. Note large windows for natural light and ventilation, as well as small supplemental electrical lights on walls. UMW Special Collections*

In the early 20th century, electric lights were still supplemental to natural light in buildings. When architect Charles M. Robinson designed Virginia Hall, he carefully chose an elevated site and oriented the building with the long sides facing east and west. This allowed for large windows in all the rooms to provide ample natural light. Robinson was also innovative in his use of what architects call “borrowed light,” where closets and hallways were illuminated with framed glass panels set in walls and above doorways to allow light from exterior windows to penetrate into the interior of the building, minimizing the use of electricity.

The building’s orientation also allowed for east-west breezes to cool the interior. Tall, double-hung windows promoted air circulation within bedrooms, while operable transoms above bedroom doors allowed cross-breezes to cool the rooms and corridors, crucial to creating comfortable living space before the invention of modern air conditioning.



*Using a metal crank on the bedroom side, this transom or window above the door could be opened for ventilation and provided light to the hallway from the windows on the outside walls.*

*Image: Sam Biggers '16,  
Kjellstrom + Lee Construction*



Scan for accessible PDF

