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The UMB Pulse Podcast

Davidge Hall: The Oldest Medical Education Building in the Americas

July 01, 2022 University of Maryland, Baltimore Season 2 Episode 6



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Jul 01, 2022 Season 2 Episode 6

University of Maryland, Baltimore

The UMB Pulse is taking a look at campus and neighborhood landmarks for the summer with our first stop at Davidge Hall, which is the oldest building used for medical education in the Western Hemisphere. Larry Pitrof, executive director of the Medical Alumni Association of the University of Maryland, shares stories of the beginnings of the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) and Davidge Hall (1:59), what you'll find inside (12:02) including the world famous Burns Collection of medical mummies (29:16). Learn how to take a tour Davidge Hall (18:54) as well! For more information about Davidge Hall, visit medicalalumni.org.

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Jena Frick: 0:04

You're listening to the heartbeat of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, the UMB pulse.

Charles Schelle: 0:17

Welcome to the UMB pulse. I'm Charles Schelle.

Jena Frick: 0:19

I'm Jena Frick.

Dana Rampolla: 0:20

And I'm Dana Rampolla. We are taking a summer break from our recent season of changemakers to do a little walking tour of some historical landmarks and museums at UMB. If you've been involved with anything UMB you know, our branding trademark is a small white, yellow and red emblem of sorts, those three vertical lines, and that triangle on top represents a historic building on UMB's campus. Davidge Hall, formerly known as the College of Medicine of Maryland, opened in Baltimore in November of 1812. And it survives as the oldest building not only in the United States, but the Western Hemisphere that is continuously used for medical education.

Jena Frick: 0:57

And here to share the story behind this interesting and unique building is Larry Pitrof. So Larry, tell us about who you are and how you're connected to Davidge Hall.

Larry Pitrof: 1:07

Well, I started at the University of Maryland, Baltimore in 1994, as the executive director of the Medical Alumni Association, and that's the association that presides over all the MD graduates of the medical school. It's an organization that was founded in 1875. So while we're on campus, we're really not of campus. We're a private, not for profit corporation that supports the medical school.

Jena Frick: 1:35

Oh, that's interesting. I didn't realize that. And you're also involved with the Medical Alumni Association. Can you tell us a little bit about what that is? Exactly?

Larry Pitrof: 1:44

Yeah, they're about 8300 living graduates of the medical school. And this independent organization oversees that, and we organize activities, fundraise for the school. And what we're here to talk about today is Davidge Hall. There's a nice story about about the building and, and its founding that Dana referred to a minute ago. The school, as you know, was founded in 1807. And it was founded at a time when practicing medicine was quite unpopular at the time, physicians were competing with barber surgeons and street corner apothecaries, and to an extent the clergy in competing for patients and understand that, at that time, medical diagnosis was really in its infancy. The treatments of the day, were purging and cupping, and bleeding and treatments with mercury and it was a difficult thing to win over the populace that these medical doctors were pursuing. And what was what made it particularly different difficult for them was, you know, these crazy doctors were dissecting cadavers, dissecting bodies, to teach their students. And so it was it was quite unpopular at that at the time. And when the school was founded in 1807. It actually was about a month after one of our founders, John Davidge, had his own anatomical theater on his property on Liberty near Saratoga Street. And he was dissecting a cadaver with two students. And they looked up at the skylight and saw a couple of teenage kids looking down at them. The kids thought that they identified the cadaver thought it was robbed from a local grave. And within an hour, there was an angry mob outside the building, it literally destroyed his amphitheater, right, the cadaver around the block, and left it at his doorstep. Davidge and his students were lucky to escape with their lives. And so that was really the event that galvanized the school, the medical community to establish the school. And it was chartered in about a month later in December of 1807. But it was done so without any funding. You know, these Doc's had their medical college, the College of Medicine of Maryland, but the legislature wasn't going to provide any funding for it. So for the next five years, they continued teaching out of their homes. And it wasn't until a failed lottery, and some other initiatives to try to get support from the city that the Docs recognize the only way they were going to get their medical building is if they funded it with their own resources, which they did. They broke ground in early 1812. And by November of 1812, they had the first floor lecture hall Chemical Hall opened up for instruction. So that's the genesis of the building. And it was, it's an intriguing story, and it was the Medical Alumni Association that has really been responsible for preserving the history of the institution. And since the 1950s we've had our offices in Davidge Hall. And that's a whole nother story because by the 1950s, the building had fallen into a terrible state of disrepair. And the legislature through the Board of Regents was planning to raise the building and construct a more modern facility and it was the alumni who stepped forward and said, Look, this is a precious resource. It's one of a kind. It's the oldest in the Country, and it would really make sense for us to preserve it rather than raise it. And the Board of Regents conducted a feasibility study. This is early 1950s, they came back to the Alumni Association and said, Look, here's the price tag \$1.5 million. If you want to refurbish it, it's up to you. So we moved into the building in 1956. And we've been serving as the caretaker for the building ever since then.

Jena Frick: 5:24

Wow. I'm really glad that you were able to keep the the structural integrity of like how historic it is, because for those of you who haven't been inside Davidge Hall, definitely take a trip out there to go see it, because it's a really, really cool building. And historic and such. So can you tell us a little bit about how the building was named and what it was originally used for?

Larry Pitrof: 5:49

Yeah, well, it's its original use was for medicine. Although when the university was rechartered in 1812, changing the name from the College of Medicine of Maryland, to the University of Maryland, it was charged, the regents were charged to annex to themselves, programs of divinity, arts and science and law. And so we actually have a couple of other disciplines that were teaching out of Davidge Hall in the early days. It was always referred to as the medical building and later on as the older medical building. And across the street, there was this old Presbyterian hospital, this Presbyterian church, I should say, that had been converted into a library purchased by the university, and they named that library Davidge Hall. And in 18 --1958, when that library was taken down, and a more modern one was being constructed, they transferred the name from the library to the old medical building. And that's where that's when Davidge Hall had actually was a proclamation that was approved by the Board of Regents and it became known as Davidge Hall. 1958.

Charles Schelle: 6:58

So, so not the original Davidge Hall.

Larry Pitrof: 7:01

No, and that's interesting. Yeah, it was not. The library was the original Davidge Hall. But Dr. Davidge had a integral part in the founding of the school. And it just made sense, because the library was really becoming more of a university building were other schools, law, pharmacy, dentistry, social workers were all utilizing it that the name had more relevance on the medical building. And that's why they changed it.

Charles Schelle: 7:28

Davidge Hall is listed on the National Register of Historic Buildings, as you probably could guess, between the the preservation, can you share a little bit about how the building was constructed, if you even want to go into the architecture of it. And what's housed in the building, and actually more more importantly, why did they choose that location?

Larry Pitrof: 7:48

Yeah. All good questions. Do you have an hour and a half to talk about?

Charles Schelle: 7:50

Yes, absolutely.

Larry Pitrof: 7:52

Location had a lot to do with it being far enough out of the downtown, where it could be constructed and trouble could be kept from it. And there was a at the time the building was constructed. There was a 15 foot high brick wall that was constructed, there was a gate, the janitor actually lived in the building, he served as gatekeeper for the people who who came and went. You know, there was grave robbing that was going on there. That's a part of our history that were not particularly proud of. But it was necessary at there at the time, because people just were not donating their bodies to science back then. As far as construction of the buildings concerned, anatomical theaters have a history of primarily based in Europe. And it was Benjamin Latrobe, who was a friend of Thomas Jefferson, who actually traveled a lot through Europe and visited a lot of the anatomical theaters, the one in Padua. And there were a number of others that date back, you know, six 700 years. So, Latrobe was asked to design the first anatomical theatre at the University of Pennsylvania in 1806, which he did. And so in 1812, when Maryland was considering constructing its own building, one of our founders, John Crawford had a son in law by the name of Maximilian Godefroid, a Frenchman. He's the designer of the Unitarian church here in Baltimore, and was asked to design this anatomical theater. He didn't know what to do. So he contacted the Latrobe and Latrobe sent them a handwritten diagram that said, Well, here's what I've done at the University of Pennsylvania. And this is what you should design in addition to the anatomical theatre, it should it should have this handsome portico on the front with eight stone columns to validate to help validate the statue of medicine. So that was really the genesis and and Godefroid took the design from there and move forward. The actual primary engineer was Robert Carey long senior who was a master builder at the time and he constructed the building we really lost the trail of whether the Latrobe stayed involved and and of whether Maximilian Godefroid remained the actual architect, but it was Robert Carey Long Sr. who actually constructed the building. But they look very similar to the anatomical Theatre in Pennsylvania and all of the ones in in Europe. So we suspect that, that he had a lot to do it. That the Latrobe model was followed.

Charles Schelle: 10:20

Before I dive deeper into what's in the building. I wanted to talk a little bit about the history at the time, because I always found it fascinating that here's a building in 1812 going up, and so you have the War of 1812 going on. And then, in 1814, is when that big flag went up at Fort McHenry, we had the Star Spangled Banner written, what was going on maybe around the time as far as the the medical college trying to, I guess, operate during that time of war?

Unknown: 10:56

Yeah, you know, there isn't a lot written about the War of 1812. Other than, obviously, some of our physicians participated in it, I can tell you that there's an old tall tale story of the apartment of Fort McHenry in 1814, that some of our founders and students were able to watch from the portico of Davidge Hall. And that would have been theoretically possible because there was very little that existed between Davidge Hall and the, you know, the rolling landscape going down to the Inner Harbor at the time. So it's entirely possible that that did occur. You know, medicine always tries to stay clear of conflict. They, they provide the medical care for the soldiers that went on during the Civil Wars as well, you know, we tried to remain neutral, but we were, we were treating Union soldiers in our in our hospital, from 1861 to 1865.

Charles Schelle: 12:02

So let's then talk about what you'll find inside Davidge Hall. Tell us a little bit about what's inside the hall. And then we'll get to talk about some of the collections as well.

Unknown: 12:15

The building has two lecture halls. And I guess maybe I should step back a minute and talk a little bit about their idea when they when they actually constructed it. Because to put this in perspective makes it even more intriguing, I think, you know, we, we graduated our first class of five students in 1810, first medical school graduation. And two years later, we constructed a building that the first floor lecture hall had more than 200 seats that they could accommodate. That was one of two lecture halls, Anatomical Hall is on the second, the second floor, the third floor, actually. So you can see the vision that these founders had, I think they they knew that that organized medicine would actually went out, as public sentiment began favoring physicians, because as time plotted along, you know, with, with this medical institution, and other schools popping up all around, medicine became more validated. The average life expectancy was 36 years in 1807, when you figured in a 33% infant mortality rate, and you know, 100 years later, it was, it was 56. And here we are in, you know, 2000 - 21st century and our average life expectancies now is in this in its upper 70s. So, so these physicians knew what they were doing when they constructed the building. There, there are two lecture halls: Chemical Hall on the on the first floor and directly above it as Anatomical Hall on the third floor, that can that can hold an additional 200 people. That's the dome part, the upstairs, you know, when you look at Davidge from the outside to see the dome, and you can imagine how valuable that dome would have been before electricity and lighting, when you had a school day that could actually run eight hours without really getting dark inside. And that upstairs Anatomical Theater was primarily used for anatomical instruction. And before the library was constructed, it was actually used as a as a surgical suite as well. So you can imagine were circulating air, you know, dissecting bodies and surgery, the stench that must have been in the building, not to mention the, you know, the lack of heating or, or air conditioning during the summer. So there's two lecture halls. And then there was a library on the first floor and a small classroom on the first floor and then on the second floor, that's where the dissecting lab was located. Again, that was up the stairs away from the main entrance where it could be conducted in pretty much secrecy for the dissections that went on and that that area, there is the dissecting laboratories where we currently have the Alumni Office for the medical school.

Charles Schelle: 14:56

One feature that Davidge Hall is known for is the Akiko Kobayashi Bowers Museum of Medical Artifacts, and it's a mouthful. What will you find that -- right. What do you find in this collection when you visit and how did it get started?

Unknown: 15:12

The collection was actually coming along pretty nicely when I started in 1994. But Akiko Bowers was the widow of one of our very prestigious alumni John Bowers. He was the medical school dean at three, three schools around the country. He investigated the radiation fallout on on the two cities in Japan that were hit by atomic bombs. And so very highly regarded scholar and, and Mrs. Bowers saw parts of that collection, she donated a lot of his artifacts to us, and then seeded the money to create this endowment fund. So in return for that generous gift, we named the collection in in her memory. And what we what we tried to present in the building, recognizing that Davidge Hall is the shell, it's it's the primary artifact coming into the building and, and seeing the structure as it function 200 years ago, is just a just such a wonderful thing to be able to offer the community. So what we decided to do was inside the building, we would have medical artifacts that related to early medical education in Maryland, what were the instruments, what were the teaching tools that were used when when medicine first began being taught at the University of Maryland, so you're gonna find, you know, surgical kits, microscopes, stethoscopes, antique ones. And then you're going to find a host of busts and portraits of our early Dean's throughout the building, and with each of those artifacts, there's a story that can be told, and we've got a, we've got an audio guide, that you can give yourself a self tour when you're coming through the building. And so it's, again, this is a work in progress. And I don't know if we're going to talk a little bit about the upcoming renovation work that's that's about to begin. But we really are going to be planning for a reopening of the building in a couple of years. And we're rethinking everything we're doing right now with that entire collection.

Charles Schelle: 17:17

So just to kind of recap a little bit about some of the historical significance, in 1970 Davidge Hall was designated as official historical site by the Maryland Historical Trust, and then entered on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1997, named a National Historic Landmark by the Department of Interior. It seems like it should definitely be a place to visit How can you tour? And can you host an event there? Or do you have any events?

Unknown: 17:46

Well, you guys, you've done your homework, haven't you? Yeah, it's actually Davidge Hall is actually recognized by the Department of the Interior for two things. Its, its historical integrity, because of the early medical education that went on, but also as an architectural gem. So it's really recognized on two accounts, which we're very proud of. We do have ongoing classrooms, lectures, symposia, that go on in the building, that's what maintains us as the oldest functioning, medical building in the United States. Most of that is one hour activities, though, because the building, if you've ever been inside and had a chance to sit in one of the old lecture chairs, they're nice, they're not very comfortable. It's a, it's a historic place to take in a lecture. But if it's any longer than about 90 minutes, you get a little edgy in your chair. So we have we have a classroom instruction that usually runs about an hour. There are grand rounds that go on in the building, there are interviews that we bring in for would be residents who are considering training at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, and that sort of thing. But we do have other campus events that go on. The dental school does their white coat ceremony there every year. And so we really make it available to the campus. And there's a registration process that you can go through on our website to make the reservation request and we're happy to accommodate anyone during regular business hours.

Charles Schelle: 19:13

Is there a website or some place people can go to see what your hours are what you know, when they can stop by?

Unknown: 19:19

Our URL, is medicalalumni.org. We actually got it on the front end of that. We're org, com, and net. Medicalalumni.org is what we go by, but everything transfers there. And you can see for if you're interested in reserving Davidge Hall for an event, you can see the availability and make a request right online. The buildings open from eight until five with any UMB employee that has an ID card. And so you're welcome to come in and walk around the building. I know there was some restriction put on it during COVID. But most of those now are being lifted. So between the hours of eight and five people can come by and if your ID doesn't flash you in you can just ring the alumni buzzer and someone will let you in the building. and let you walk around there are areas right now that are that are off limits because of the construction that's going on. But the first floor is, is primarily all accessible. And you can see a lot of the the artifacts, right right there on the first floor.

Charles Schelle: 20:13

What about for just general members of the public?

Unknown: 20:16

That's by appointment only right now. And as you might expect, we've, we've had some security issues in and around the building. And so we're really trying to put a game plan together, you know, we had an option of bringing a security guard into the building, but that would involve putting a, you know, a desk right in the entrance to Davidge Hall, and it doesn't do much for the historical integrity of the building. So we're trying to work through that right now. But we do take visitors from from outside, if they can make a request ahead of time, we're happy to accommodate everyone.

Dana Rampolla: 20:49

And Larry, isn't there a large meeting space or a space that can be converted to a meeting area, when you when you enter in the front of the building?

Unknown: 21:00

There's a there's a very large foyer. Yeah, there's there's a large foyer and you know, there's there's the front part of Chemical Hall to once you enter the building, where if you know someone's serving a lunch or something, we can accommodate that as well. But the group size is, you know, if it isn't a lecture, you're gonna have a lecture 200 people in there, but if you're doing something that involves food, then you got to you got to keep a handle on the number of people you're going to bring in limited to about 50 or 60. Because otherwise, it just gets too unwieldy.

Dana Rampolla: 21:31

Okay, okay. Let's circle back for a couple of minutes. I actually was a biology major and a former life. So I've dissected cadavers and the thought of dissecting a cadaver, and with no electricity or, you know, minimal lighting, and just no air conditioning especially sounds terrible. Can you elaborate a little bit more on what the time was like back then?

Unknown: 21:55

Yeah and also Dana, keep in mind that there were no embalming practices. So basically, you were, you were, you know, obtaining a cadaver, either by grave robbing or, you know, the only other means that that we had of legally legally obtaining cadavers was in the legal system, you know, felonies who were put to death. You were condemned to death and dismemberment, and the dismemberment just meant, we're going to turn you over to those crazy doctors.

Jena Frick: 22:23

Oh, gosh. I mean, you said, Larry, you said earlier, like it was looked down upon to be like a doctor or a medical professional at that point in time, it was controversial. And now I'm understanding why.

Unknown: 22:35

And also, got to also understand that, you know, hospitals back then they were a place to die, they weren't a place to get your health back like they are today. Now, we, when we go to the hospital, it's like checking into a hotel, you know, and you know, you're going to, there's going to be life on the other end of it for you. So yeah, it's it's, it's interesting. But getting back to Dana, you know, without embalming bodies, a grave robbed body. You can imagine how difficult and and you really had to be a little nutty to dissect a cadaver back then. It was so gruesome. And of course, you know,

Dana Rampolla: 23:11

And not faint of heart.

Larry Pitrof: 23:12

Yeah, after a couple of days, you know, when the body broke down, it had to be incinerated, there was no, there was no maintaining it.

Dana Rampolla: 23:19

How much did it actually cost the doctors who aggregated their money to undertake this building?

Unknown: 23:27

Yeah, the cost of the Davidge Hall, the medical building was about \$40,000. And again, this was all provided by the resources of the faculty. And there's another interesting story here that we can we can talk about. You know, they, they constructed that building, and then they constructed the hospital in 1823. That was another \$16,000 for the, for the hospital and the furnishings, and, and they were actually, you know, collecting tuition and reimbursing themselves for the expenses that they had. And this turned out to be quite a controversy because the state legislature didn't like the fact that they what they perceived the faculty doing, and that was hoarding the resources. And so in 1826, the legislature actually took control of the medical school and for 13 years, it was operated by the by the governor, and a Board of Regents that he had appointed. It was an illegal act. And in 1839, the Maryland Court of Appeals actually turned the ownership back to the back to the founding regents of the school itself. It was it was controversial, you know, understand that when the when the building first opened up, there were only a handful of students. But once that building opened, you know, by the by the 1820s, there were 300 students that they had enrolled and it was a thriving medical school at that time, and I think that's where the controversy really started. The doctors were just looking to get their money back and the legislature felt that we were a proprietary medical school, you know, in business for a profit. So it was quite controversial at the time.

Dana Rampolla: 25:07

And it's interesting, you said that you know how much it costs back then. But you mentioned a little bit ago that you're beginning to look forward to some future renovations and modernizations.

Unknown: 25:19

Yeah you know, you know what it cost to go to medical school back then? About 100 bucks. About 100 bucks. You pay your faculty, 20 bucks each for five classes, you could get a MD degree in two years. You could get a a Bachelor of Medicine in one year at that time. The second year was primarily just redoing the first two years. You're the first year that you took, anyway. Yeah, Dana to answer your question, the building is going to be undergoing some considerable restoration work over the next couple of years. The most noticeable will be the mechanical systems. We're going to be overhauling the the HVAC and the electrical system. It's terribly uncomfortable in there during the summers. Right now we've got a horribly antiquated heating and air conditioning system, it's a steam system. And we're going to be spending about a million and a half dollars converting that system to a heat pump, which will allow us to heat one room and cool another should we need that, you can imagine how warm the anatomical theater up on the third floor must get during the summer, when that heat is just

that sun is just bearing down on the building. But there are other areas of the building that you know don't need that type of cooling. And so we're going to have the option of zone heating and zone cooling, which will really help out and then we're going to be undergoing a roof restoration project. And that's going to cost probably a little over \$5 million. Now that's going to take a little bit longer. While the mechanical system should be overhauled in about six months once it once it begins later this year. The replacement of the roof, the restoration of the roof is probably going to be a two year project. But I can tell you that once that building is watertight, and the heating and air conditioning system is working as it should, I think to have a child is just going to be a highly desirable venue to host events. And we're really excited about it.

Dana Rampolla: 27:12

That sounds fabulous.

Jena Frick: 27:14

Yeah, and you you kind of mentioned a couple of different rooms and areas inside of Davidge Hall, Chemical Hall, anatomical Hall, the dissection labs. Can you talk a little bit more about the different areas inside Davidge Hall?

Unknown: 27:29

Yeah, there isn't much to it. When you really, when you really look at it, there's basically those five rooms. The library, which is right off the entrance, on the right side is a an artifact room that hosts a number of medical instruments. And there's small group meetings that can go on and there there's a conference table. And so actually, you know prior to Dr. Jarrell's arrival, and Dr. Perman's arrival, when David Ramsey was the president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore, he actually had his office in Davidge Hall on the first floor. And that now has been converted back to we're converting that back to a classroom. So the areas of space are sort of being I don't want to say repurposed, but they're, they're being retired to their original use. And so that that library on the right side will be an area where students can come in, if they want set up their laptop, you know, get some quiet time and some quiet space. The classroom on the left side, it's called the Frankel classroom. And we're going to be hopefully reactivating that and make that available to the medical school. I believe that the, you know, the two main lecture halls, the Chemical Hall and the Anatomical Theater will probably remain special use. I mean, this is back is just a few years ago, there were weddings that we hosted in there, there was such a highly desirable venue. I would imagine that they'll continue, you know, for one hour lectures, symposia, conferences, that sort of thing. And then the dissecting lab, we're really going to make that special that will continue to function as the alumni office. But we're going to we're going to get some wax figures in there to actually portray what an early dissection looked like. And we've got this wonderful collection that I haven't told you about yet. Allan Burns was a 19th century anatomist, early 19th century anatomist in Scotland, and he was the guy who figured out how to preserve anatomical specimens. He did it through a curing solution involving salt and sugar. And he bequeath part of that collection in 1806, to one of our early faculty members by the name of Granville Patterson, who brought that collection to the University of Maryland, we still have about 100 pieces. But now, you can imagine how valuable these anatomical specimens would be, given that they last forever, you know, they're still intact and they could be used as teaching aids, as opposed to what we talked about a moment ago with Dana and you know, an actual body part that would break down and you could use it for a couple of days for teaching, but then it basically had to be buried or incinerated. So this collection, the Burns Collection. Parts of it, is 11 pieces are right now traveling in the mummies exhibit, mummies world exhibits around the country. And it's actually stopped in two different European cities. But it's Mummies of the World. And we're getting a nice income from it. We expected in about three years that, that those pieces will be returned. And so we'll be, we'll be presenting those in the dissecting lab on the second floor. So it's really going to make for a wonderful tour for anyone interested in coming by to really get an idea of what it was like to practice medicine in the early days of organized medicine in America.

Jena Frick: 30:44

So I have to ask, because this is such an old and historic building with a really interesting past. Have you had or heard of any paranormal or ghostly encounters in Davidge Hall?

Larry Pitrof: 30:57

Jenna, we are a science based organization here.

Jena Frick: 31:01

Hey, paranormal is a science.

Unknown: 31:06

But let me tell you, this is really kind of funny, because I'm glad you asked that question. About seven or eight years ago, we had this group of folks that wanted to come by paranormal paranormal investigators. Yeah whatever you want to call it. I'm fine with that

Jena Frick: 31:24

I watch a lot of those ghost hunter shows. So like I'm very up on the lingo.

Unknown: 31:28

Well, let me tell you, they were wonderful. We had a great -- we gave him a tour of the building and, and walked around and they all had these gauges, you know, and they were, they were telling me there's something right over here and something right over there. And they were all asking me, you know, you've been here a while if you have ever had anything. Honestly, you guys, I've been here for 28 years, I go into that building every day. I have not seen, heard nothing.

Jena Frick: 31:53

You know what the ghosts don't appear to the non believers and you sound like a non believer.

Unknown: 31:59

That would be that would be Larry. Yeah. We're happy to accommodate anybody interested in in coming in, whatever whatever your interest might be. It's a tremendous amount of rich history. And who knows, maybe I'll walk in tomorrow and be surprised by John Davidg'e ghost.

Dana Rampolla: 32:14

Papers flying through the air.

Jena Frick: 32:16

Yeah I was gonna say it's Davidge Hall is very close to Westminster Hall, which is where you know, the Edgar Allan Poe like burying grounds and catacombs are so you know, around Halloween time, it might be fun to make an appointment to hit both of those places and do a little ghost hunt.

Unknown: 32:33

You know why Westminster has a tall wall around it, don't you?

Charles Schelle: 32:37

No.

Larry Pitrof: 32:38

Well, that isn't to keep the dead people in, that's to keep the grave robbers out. You can identify an old cemetery. That was you know, being robbed by grave robbers by because that was the precaution they took they they built a wall and the very wealthy people could bring a garden and post them at the at the plot for the first week or so until the body broke down. And then there was no interest in by the medical community.

Dana Rampolla: 33:01

Well, especially in your case, where you're right next door, and you've got these, you know, cadaver instrument wielding doctors on staff looking for bodies.

Unknown: 33:11

Yeah, they weren't that we weren't. We were raving robbing graves, primarily from the potter's fields around Baltimore. And, again, I don't take great pride in this, but we developed a real niche for it. And and, you know, they were, they were robbing graves and then placing the bodies in barrels and filling the barrels with whiskey. And we were that was the preservative back then. And we were shipping them up the East Coast for for a profit at that time. That the laws were very lenient in Maryland and Baltimore for grave robbing, there was just a fine. While other states had, you know, severe punishments with things and lashings and imprisonments and things like that. But Maryland laws were fairly lax back then.

Charles Schelle: 33:50

And it wasn't something unique to just us, right?

Unknown: 33:52

Oh, not at all. Listen to medicine, medicine struggled everywhere. And it was struggling in Europe, too. As a matter of fact, Granville Patterson, who brought that that collection of the Burns Collection with him, he was actually indicted on grave robbing back in Scotland. Before he came to America. It was a, it was a universal problem.

Dana Rampolla: 34:14

So interesting. We're glad we've advanced from that time.

Jena Frick: 34:18

Definitely.

Larry Pitrof: 34:20

Yeah, now we have a program where it's so popular, the body body donation program is so popular that you know, we're only accepting bodies now from Maryland. We don't we're not even interested in anyone who may have one, maybe die and you know, an alum who dies in Florida and says I'm gonna donate my body to Maryland when I when I pass. We really aren't interested anymore. And it's it's again, it's because medicine actually won out and people are believers in science now and it's wonderful to see. Look, you guys, I'll just say this. It's my opinion that this Davidge Hall should be a part of everyone's orientation. It's the reason why we're here. That building is the genesis of the university System of Maryland and let alone the University of Maryland Baltimore. I don't think anybody should be hired here without knowing the history of this great place. It's a, it's such a rich, rich history that we have here. And we just need to be promoting it more.

Charles Schelle: 35:13

if anyone hasn't been inside of Davidge Hall. And wants to get at least a sense of what it looks like there's a video on the UMB website. That's about six and a half minutes long. We'll link to in our episode description, so you get a sense or feel of it. But, Larry, I understand there's a book as well, you can learn more about Davidge Hall.

Larry Pitrof: 35:36

Yeah, we published a book for the bicentennial in 2007, that covered the 200 year history of not just a medical school, but the entire university with focus on the medical school. And it's a very nice timeline chronology, which highlights pivotal moments in the life of the institution, some of the great things that our alumni have gone on to do in their lives. And if anyone's just looking for a sense for the rich history of this institution, you can you can get a copy in the alumni office.

Dana Rampolla: 36:05

We appreciate you sharing all of the wealth of knowledge that you have with us today. Because even having been like you said in some arts council discussions and whatnot, and having been in the building, I didn't know a lot of what you shared. So I hope our listeners enjoy the education and have the opportunity to stop by.

Larry Pitrof: 36:24

Thanks, guys. It's been a joy. Thank you for having me.

Jena Frick: 36:27

Thank you, Larry.

Dana Rampolla: 36:31

Well, that was a lot of fun. So UMB has a handful of interesting museums operated by the university that would make for an interesting summer track if you're looking for an afternoon activity and the cool indoors. All of them offer educational experiences from 1000s of artifacts curated by the world's oldest dental college to a blue glass museum that rests above the local living artists studios in a historic clocktower. So three of our museums on campus include the School of Nursing Living History Museum, the National Museum of Dentistry and Westminster Hall and Burial Grounds. And right next door to UMB we have the Babe Ruth Birthplace and Museum, the B&O Railroad Museum and the Bromo Seltzer Arts Tower Museum. For more information just check the episode description for a link each museum on this list as well worth a visit. Our August episode will feature the school of dentistry dental museum with curator Scott Swank. We hope to share some interesting facts about other campus hotspots on future episodes of The UMB Pulse as well. Stay tuned. Our next season of Changemakers will kick back off in September.

Charles Schelle: 37:35

We will see you in August and thanks for listening to the UMB Pulse.

Jena Frick: 37:44

The UMB pulse with Charles Schelle, Dana Rampolla and Jena Frick is a UMB Office of Communications and Public Affairs production. Edited by Charles Schelle, sound engineering by Jena Frick, marketing by Dana Rampolla. Music by No vibe. Recorded in the University of Maryland Baltimore Community Engagement Center.

[0:00](#)

Show Open

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Summer Break for Changemakers

[1:07](#)

Larry Pitrof

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Genesis of Davidge Hall

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Naming of Davidge Hall

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Location, Location, Location

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War of 1812

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What's Inside

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On The Next UMB Pulse

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