

Michael Witmore “The First Folio and the Creation of the Folger Shakespeare Library”

Opening in 1932 and designed by the French architect Paul Cret, the Folger Shakespeare Library was a significant addition to the cultural landscape of Washington, DC. In both architecture and ornamental detail, the library deliberately mimics the features of a book. That book — the First Folio of 1623 – along with the library itself, live on as memorials to William Shakespeare. Why did Emily and Henry Folger choose to honor an English playwright alongside the founders of the United States in a living memorial on Capitol Hill? Witmore will explore the way in which the Folger Shakespeare Library expresses the perceived role of Shakespeare in American democracy, linking that role to the rising cultural ambitions of Washington DC in the early twentieth century and today.