Early College Buildings in America (1697-1809)  
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This paper will survey some of the more architecturally significant and better known college buildings of the early college campuses.

The worth of such an exercise for reasons of comparison with Liberty Hall and its campus buildings is two-fold. The first and most obvious basis for comparison will be the more objective observations, such as the size of the buildings, the type of the materials used, the positioning of the building in relation to the rest of the campus, etc. These observations will lead to more material comparisons and conclusions about Liberty Hall's physical make up.

The second basis for comparison will lead towards an understanding of the people who built the buildings and those who occupied them. Most all institutional buildings, and especially college edifices represent more than just structures. The amount of money spent on the building, the type of architecture, and the intended use, all go a long way in telling something about the culture of those who built them.
The structures at a college set the tone for the activity which takes place in and around them. Since the main purpose of the Liberty Hall project is to reach an understanding of the culture of those who built and inhabited it, the second basis for comparison is perhaps the more useful. However, no comparisons and conclusions in the second area can be drawn until the more tangible observations have been made.

The earliest college building still standing today is part of William and Mary University. The Christopher Wren Building was completed in 1697 as a dormitory. Designed by the Englishman Christopher Wren this two-story brick building shows the English architectural influence. The front is marked by a single great entrance which is made up of arcs. The appearance is monumental yet simple; with the bell tower in the center it provides an example of what is to come later at other colleges.

The chapel wing was completed in 1732. Fires occurred in 1705, 1859, and 1862, the last of which left only the walls standing. The college re-built the structure shortly after each fire which shows the indispensability of the edifice.

Nassau Hall, The College of New Jersey

The ground was broken for Nassau Hall on July 29, 1754. The cornerstone was laid on September 17, 1754, and the building was completed and occupied in the fall of 1756.

The name was derived from Glorious King William the III, who was a branch of the Illustrious House of Nassau.

The original plans, drawn up by Dr. Shippen and Robert Smith of Philadelphia, called for a three story building with
no cellar. However, when the structure was finally completed in 1756 there were sixty rooms, fourteen of which were located in the basement. The building was built with stones from a local quarry and housed student rooms, recitation rooms, a refectory, a kitchen, and a library.

According to the Reverend Ezra Stiles' diary, the Hall was "one hundred and seventy feet long, fifty-two and two thirds feet in width, with a rear extension fifteen feet long and thirty-six feet wide, and a front extension of three or four feet." There were three symmetrically placed entrances to the hall. Construction costs amounted to £2900.
This building is one of the most famous college edifices. It served as the meeting place of the government for a time. The basic style is similar to many early college buildings including Liberty Hall. This structure was one of, if not the, largest building of its kind at the time it was built. Yet, it provided another type of influence upon other early college structures. The building is large, even monumental (as witnessed by it being used as a meeting place for the government), but it is so without being ostentatious. The hall is simple, plain, and well proportioned. This is a rule followed by nearly every college of the time; the buildings should be impressive enough to signify the standing of the school, yet simple enough to be both inexpensive and conducive to an academic atmosphere of straightforwardness and wholesomeness.
Massachusetts Hall, Harvard

This brick edifice was completed in 1718. The building was paid for with a £3500 grant from the Province of Massachusetts, hence the name of the structure. Originally built as a dormitory, the hall has thirty-two chambers, each with two smaller studies. The building measured one hundred feet in length and fifty feet in width.

The architecture of Massachusetts Hall is plain colonial. Yet, there is nothing plain about the structure, with its chimneys, Gambrel roof, and dormers all of which lend favorably towards the character of the Hall. At the west end of the structure there is a clock and a college bell, both of which further distinguish the building. The Hall served as a barrack for the Continental troops during the siege of Boston in 1775.
Connecticut Hall, Yale

Connecticut Hall was conceived in 1748 after the directors raised 5400 pounds in bills of old Tenor. The directors decided to build a new college building of brick, one hundred and five feet long, forty feet wide, three stories high, and with a complete cellar.

The Hall had thirty-two chambers, sixty-four studies, one hundred and twenty-four windows, and four great doors. The building was supposedly completed in 1752, but perhaps 1757 is a more accurate date when the final rendering of accounts showed a total cost of 6725 pounds. Connecticut Hall (or South Middle as it is sometimes called) was enlarged in 1796 when the Gambrel roof was removed and another story was added. This dormitory was constructed when Yale was fifty years old and during the term of President Clap.
University Hall, originally known as the College Edifice, was completed in full by 1788. "It was modeled after Nassau Hall at the College of New Jersey, although smaller and plain-er." The building is described as "an elegant brick building, four stories high, one hundred and fifty by forty-six feet and a projection on each side of thirty-three feet by ten feet." The cornerstone was laid on March 27, 1770. Mr John Brown, the President of the college, as the legend has it, served liquid encouragement to the workers for every subsequent story completed along with the roof. This seems to be documented in the records which listed the expenditures involved in the building, some of which was allotted towards the afore-mentioned cause. Not surprisingly, the interior took considerably longer to complete. The exterior was finished and the lower stories occupied in 1771, the upper stories were not occupied until 1788.
University Hall had its detractors. No sooner was the building finished than people were saying that it was too big for the amount of students the school had then or ever would have. This fact probably had something to do with the slow completion of the building. Once again the rule about not being too ambitious or elaborate with a college building, while at the same time building a structure that the school can be proud of is shown, but this time there is an imbalance between the two axioms.

There are no doubt many more significant early college buildings. I have tried to present those which were significant not only as structures but those which set trends and served as models for other schools of the time.

These buildings are not only significant in terms of the period in which they were constructed, but for all college buildings they serve as an example of practicality, simplicity, and beauty, as well as the time in which they were built.

The college building is a sacred symbol in the minds of all who have lived in them for a very important time of their lives. The buildings remain even after the students leave.

How is all of this relevant to Liberty Hall? As was stated in the introduction, there are two levels which can be used for comparison of these structures to Liberty Hall and its surrounding buildings. The first level, leading to tangible comparisons was explored through research into the histories of the schools. The second level was completed by inferring, from the first level, characteristics which seemed realistically founded.
It seems that, although the early colleges were no doubt different from each other; they all seemed to have similar motives when building college edifices. The colleges all wanted to build structures which would be impressive, yet not gaudy, monumental, yet simple, inexpensive, yet well-built, and sobering, yet not stifiling. Perhaps the feelings of those who built these institutions were summed up best by Mr. Burr of Princeton, who, when speaking of the building of Nassau Hall said; "Everything was done in the plainest and cheapest way as far as was consistent with decency and convenience and having no superfluous ornaments."
Footnotes

1. The History of Brown University (1764-1904), W.C. Bronson

2. Ibid.
Bibliography


Camp, Walter and Welch, L.S. *Yale, Her Campus, Classrooms, and Athletics*, Page and Company (Boston: 1900).


