Early American College Principles and their Effects on College Architecture

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By the turn of the nineteenth century, higher education had established a strong foothold in North America. Many of the colleges attempted to equip their students with a higher level of education. However, several colleges aimed at providing their supporting churches with educated ministry. Three active colleges at the turn of the nineteenth century were Harvard College, The College of New Jersey and Washington College, formerly Liberty Hall Academy. These three schools exemplify the two types of colleges existing in North America during the eighteenth century; Harvard was educationally oriented while Princeton and Liberty Hall were religiously oriented.

It is interesting to look at these schools as examples of eighteenth century educational institutions from an archaeological viewpoint, as is expressed in the following quotation: "Education to survive must be given form and substance". A great deal of these schools' ideals and values are exemplified in their campuses and buildings. Simply by examining the structures, and the ways in which they were used, we can gain a good understanding of the way in which the school was run, and the goals its administration tried to achieve. In this paper, I will attempt to show how the structure of Liberty Hall and The College of New Jersey exemplified the Presbyterian ideals upon which they were founded. I will use Harvard College as a contrasting element to show how strictly educational institutions developed and used their structures in contrast to religiously oriented colleges.

Harvard College was established in 1636 through the generosity of John Harvard, "an obscure preacher of Charlestown, Mass." Reverend Harvard donated his library and half of his inheritance towards
the establishment of a college. As a result of this generous gift, Harvard College was established. Harvard was established to provide the rapidly increasing colonists with a source of higher education on this side of the Atlantic Ocean. The founding fathers expressed the goal of Harvard in the phrase, "to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity."³

Harvard College had been operational for 110 years when the College of New Jersey was founded in 1746. While both schools offered an opportunity at obtaining a higher education, the founding fathers of the College of New Jersey concerned themselves with furnishing "the church, and more especially their own branch of it (Presbyterian), with a pious and learned ministry."⁴ In fact, the establishment of the college is significantly due to the Presbyterian Church. The Synod of New York left the establishing efforts to the ministry and laymen of the region, instead of establishing a seminary themselves. However, the Synod's interest in the College grew when the College received its charter from Governor Hamilton on October 22, 1746.

The charter obtained, the trustees set out to find a location for their college. Two New Jersey towns competed for the school; they were Princeton and New Brunswick. The trustees had established a set of criteria that the towns had to fulfill in order to obtain the college. These requirements were as follows: a combination of £1000 New Jersey money, ten acres of land for the campus and two hundred acres of woodland to provide fuel.⁵ The location of the school in one of the towns meant additional commercial business and increased real estate value,
as a result, the towns competed strongly. At first, it appeared as though New Brunswick would win the competition, however it fell short, and Princeton became the site of the school.

For the next several decades The College of New Jersey was the only college that aspiring ministers could attend in order to qualify or educate themselves for the ministry. However, the Synod of New York and the founders of the College had no way of foreseeing the shift of the Presbyterian focus to the Southwest, otherwise they would have established the school farther to the Southwest. This shift occurred as the result of Scotch-Irish immigration to Pennsylvania, western Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina. As a result of this shift aspiring ministers in the aforementioned areas had great difficulty attending a school that could fulfill their requirements. This problem sets the stage for the creation of a college that would meet the needs of the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in the Shenandoah Valley.

As a result of the increasing Presbyterian population in Virginia, the demand for a "seminary of liberal education, to be conducted on Presbyterian principals" grew. A new college would have to be formed since "William and Mary, the only college in Virginia, was connected with the Established Church, and Princeton College, the nearest Presbyterian institution of high rank, was too distant to supply the want of a seminary in Virginia". This problem came to light in the early 1770's.

In 1774 the Presbytery of Hanover chose to patronize the school located at Mt. Pleasant. This school was under the leadership of
of the new name demonstrated courage on the part of committee members, since the British Union Jack still flew over the Virginia capitol.¹²

Both the College of New Jersey and the Liberty Hall Academy bore heavy losses as a result of the Revolutionary War. Nassau Hall, the College's only academic structure (which will be dealt with in great detail later on) was occupied by both British Regulars and Washington's troops. The constant occupation of Nassau Hall occurred since Princeton is strategically located between Philadelphia and New York. Princeton's location also places it in the proximity of Trenton, a militarily active town during the Revolution. Liberty Hall's wartime troubles resulted from the economic effects of the war. Inflation and the lack of students, probably due to army enlistment, caused the school to close its doors in 1780.¹³

Due to the dedication of William Graham and John Witherspoon the closings of Liberty Hall and The College of New Jersey were not permanent, Witherspoon had traveled through the colonies and preached about the need for, and the influence of, the College of New Jersey during times of peace. Many people felt since Witherspoon had recently arrived from Scotland that he would frown upon the Revolution. He lead the Somerset County Committee of Correspondence in the overthrow of loyal government and the imprisonment of Gov. William Franklin.¹⁴ Several weeks later, Witherspoon spoke in favor, in he pleaded for the passage of, the Declaration of Independence.¹⁵ Witherspoon did not allow the war to prevent the resumption of classes in the fall of 1777. Since Nassau Hall was occupied, the students received room and board from village residents. Witherspoon conducted classes, when possible,
in his own home. Witherspoon's dedication to country and school can be noted in his repetitious jogging between Philadelphia and Princeton so that he could be active in the development of the new country and still continue his lectures in Princeton.16

William Graham refused to allow the war to fully disrupt the academic efforts of the Academy. In the fashion of John Witherspoon, William Graham conducted classes and lodged the students in his home. Fortunately for the academy, the school was not occupied, or as heavily affected by the war as was the College of New Jersey. In fact, Graham did not have to personally take on the full operation of the school until 1780, and then he did this only until 1782.

Since Harvard College was located in Boston, it too suffered physically from the War. The students occupying Hollis Hall were forced to vacate their rooms after the Provincial Congress took possession of the college. Another building, Harvard Hall, suffered extensive damage to its roof when the lead in it was removed, probably melted down and molded into bullets.17 The College itself continued to operate in Concord, thus allowing the use of the school in Boston by the Provincial Army. While the school was not religiously oriented, many of the first presidents were ministers; the president at the time of the Revolution served as a chaplain to the troops.18

At the opening of the war the three schools were at different stages of their building or campus development. Harvard, being well established at this time, 140 years old, had a fairly extensive campus compared to the College of New Jersey which had been operational
for thirty years. Liberty Hall's campus was almost non-existent when compared to the College of New Jersey or more especially to Harvard College.

At the time of the Revolution, the Harvard College campus was comprised of six major structures. The oldest of these structures was Massachusetts Hall, erected in 1718. Named after the province in which it stood, the 100 ft. by 50 ft. three story red brick building was used as a dormitory. This hall was one of the buildings that was vacated for the Provincial Army. Another building that was occupied by the Provincial Army was Harvard Hall. This was the second building of that name on the campus. The original, Harvard's first building, burned along with the library in it, in 1764. Rebuilt in 1765, this two story red brick building had a strong foundation of Braintree stone upon which dressed red sandstone was placed. A belt of the same sandstone lay between each story. It was the roof of this building from which 1000 pounds of lead was removed to be melted down and molded into bullets. The building contained everything from a library, to a chapel, to a commons, throughout its history as an active campus structure.

One of the first residential buildings on the campus was the Old President's House. This two story old fashioned house was one of the first buildings to be made out of wood since the frail wooden structures of the Old College were abandoned after thirty years of use, due to frailty, in the late 1600's. The house was finished in 1726, and stands as Harvard's seconds oldest building. It was built at a cost of 1800 Massachusetts currency, with £1000 appropriated by the
The main dormitory used during the period was Hollis Hall. Hollis Hall, named for Thomas Hollis, (a generous Harvard benefactor) is the fourth oldest in Harvard Yard. Completed in 1763, this four story brick dormitory was erected at a cost of £3000. The funds, like those used for the Old President's House, were appropriated by the General Court of Massachusetts. This building, along with Harvard Hall, was occupied by members of the Provincial Army during the Revolutionary War. The only remaining structure on the campus regularly used by the College was Holden Chapel. This building, which served as a Chapel for only twenty years after its completion in 1774, has been admired for its perfect proportions. In the words of one admirer, Samuel F. Batchelder, it is "a little gem of a building, simple yet elegant ... pure and beautiful Georgian." These structures comprised the comparatively vast campus of Harvard College in the late 1700's. I emphasize comparatively vast, since it was far more expansive than either The College of New Jersey or Liberty Hall Academy.

The college location secured, the trustees acted swiftly to construct the college building. This building, would not, however, be the college's first building, or even its first campus. Just as Liberty Hall had several predecessors, so the College of New Jersey had a predecessor. In 1726 a local pastor, William Tennent, had established a school or college in Neshmamy, Pennsylvania. Tennent's college was located about twenty miles outside of Philadelphia, and was highly praised by the Great Awakening figurehead George Whitefield. Tennent,
Harvard Yard as it appeared in 1791

Structures:
1. Holden Chapel
2. Hollis Hall
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Note: Diagram not drawn to scale
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the honor, but asked if he could name the building. Granting the governor's request, the trustees accepted the name proposed by Governor Belcher. Governor Belcher requested that the building be dedicated "...to the immortal memory of the glorious King William III, who was a branch of the illustrious house of Nassau." As a result of Belcher's dedication, the building came to be known as Nassau Hall.

Nassau Hall served as the catch all building for the College. In the Hall both students and tutors ate and slept, all classes and recitations were conducted and services were attended. The largest room (32 by 46 ft.) which was directly accessible from the main front entrance, was the room in which daily services were held. The service room was one of the rooms more severely damaged through its occupation by both British and American troops. Much of the wood paneling throughout the Hall was used as fuel to heat the building during the cold winters. The Hall even served as a hospital for Washington's troops during the War. The costs of rebuilding the Hall after the war were upwards of $13,000. In addition to Nassau Hall, the only other building on the campus was the President's House, designed by Robert Smith.

The construction of the final Liberty Hall campus was not started until a decade after the Revolutionary War. As of the late eighteenth century, the state of Virginia was still without a seminary. In 1791, it was decided by the Synod of Virginia that a seminary should be established in Virginia. The Synod seemed to favor Liberty Hall, due to its location. The Board of Trustees of the Academy decided to launch a building campaign so that they could be prepared to serve as the Vir-
In 1793 an architect by the name of William Cravens was hired by the Board to design and build the main academy building. The building, like Nassau Hall (with a few exceptions), was to be a catch all building. The building designed by Cravens was considerably smaller than Nassau Hall, although there were some similarities. The three story building had dimensions of approximately 20 by 40 ft. The building was to have a "four square" roof topped with a belfry. Along with the main stone building, the Board also assigned Cravens to build a steward's house; in this house the students would take their meals. Both of these buildings were completed and accepted by the Board in 1793. In addition to these two structures, four other buildings were constructed; these buildings included both a tutor's and a rector's house furnished in 1794 and 1799 respectively, and a smoke house completed in 1793 and a spring house. Just as the students at the College of New Jersey had their activities limited to one building, so the students at Liberty Hall were limited to one building, excluding their taking of meals.

When one compares student life at the three schools it becomes rather obvious that the church run schools were considerably tougher concerning what could and could not be done. At both Princeton (C. of N.J.) and Liberty Hall the rules on activities were strict and limiting. For example, at Liberty Hall the rules did not permit the playing of musical instrument of marbles. This is not to say these activities were not practiced, on the contrary, artifacts found at the Liberty Hall site, such as yew, harps and marbles, indicates that the rules were occasionally disobeyed or ignored. Life at the College of New Jersey was
just as rigorous. Students were up at five a.m. every morning for
worship services in Nassau Hall. Worship services and prayers opened
and closed each day at Liberty Hall as well. This contrasts heavily
to the student life at Harvard. At Harvard, students were permitted
to have alcoholic beverages out in the open in their rooms. Had a
student been caught with wine or whiskey at Liberty Hall or the Col­
lege of New Jersey he would most probably have been expelled. So,
the premises upon which schools were founded greatly affected the act­
ivities engaged in at the school.

The affects of the schools' founding premises were as influ­
encial on their structural and campus policies as they were on their
activities' policies. Harvard's founding fathers concerned themselves
over "perpetrating learning into posterity." As a result they wanted
to construct a campus that would efficiently serve the student through
his career at Harvard. As a result of this educational drive, Har­
vard was not reluctant to spend the necessary funds to develop the
sizeable campus they needed to fulfill their educational desires.
While Harvard College's campus was not sizeable compared to today's
college campuses, it was sizeable when compared to other college's such
as the College of New Jersey and Liberty Hall.

The Presbyterian ministers who established the College of New
Jersey and Liberty Hall concerned themselves with the educations of
young men through Presbyterians' principles. Their main goal was to
provide the colonies, and later on the newly independant states, with
an educated clergy. Since these men were all staunch Presbyterians,
some of them even fanatical, they were overly concerned with simplic-
ity. Ornamentation and luxuries represented the moral corruption brought about by people who did not concern themselves primarily with serving God.

As a result of this fanatical simplicity drive, both the College of New Jersey and Liberty Hall limited the ornamentation of their structures to a minimum. The exteriors of both Nassau Hall and Liberty Hall were void of any ornamentation. As was previously mentioned, President Burr was a vehement opponent to ornamentation. Concerning the design of Nassau Hall Burr said, "We do everything in the plainest ... manner ... having no superfluous ornaments." Since both campuses were single structured, it was fairly easy for the faculty to maintain tight control over students. Tight control was necessary to ensure that the Presbyterian doctrine was being fully complied with by the students. Finally, the singleness of the campuses allowed the students to be surrounded by singleness and simplicity. The more accustomed the students could become to living the simplicity doctrine of the Presbyterian Church, the more effectively they could preach the same doctrine when they became ministers.

The doctrine upon which a college was founded did not merely influence life at the college; it dictated it. The doctrine of the school, whether it be religious, educational or both, entered into every facet of the school's operations. The College of New Jersey saw the most important aspect of its curriculum to be religion; as a result, the largest room in Nassau Hall was the service room, directly accessible from the main entry way. Obviously, the Trustees of the College of New Jersey wanted services and religion to be easily
accessible. The structures of the individual College are very indicative of the ideals upon which the schools were founded and operated.
Harvard Yard as it appeared in 1791

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Note: Diagram not drawn to scale
Princeton as it appeared in 1764. Nassau Hall is on the left and the President's House is on the right. The fence in front of Nassau Hall can never be seen.
Notes

2. Ibid., p. 7
3. Ibid., p. 7
6. Ibid., p. 37.
8. Ibid., p. 13.
10. Ibid., p. 2.
11. Ruffner, p. 23
12. Ibid., p. 23.
13. The Staff of the Liberty Hall Academy Project, p. 2.
15. Ibid., p. 58.
16. Ibid., p. 62.
18 Ibid., p. 12.
19 Ibid., p. 21.
20 Ibid., p. 33.
22 Wertenbaker, p. 11.
23 Ibid., p. 37.
24 Ibid., p. 37.
25 Ibid., p. 38.
26 Ibid., p. 38.
27 Ibid., p. 38.
28 Ibid., p. 39.
29 The Staff of the Liberty Hall Academy Archaeological Excavations, p. 3.
30 *Education, Bricks and Mortar*, p. 7.
31 Wertenbaker, p. 37.
Bibliography


*Education, Bricks and Mortar*. Cambridge. Published at the University, 1949.


On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unacknowledged aid on this paper.

Robert Walton, Jr.