

Bowdoin College, Massachusetts Hall
Bowdoin College Campus, Bath Street
Brunswick
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-109

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

BOWDOIN COLLEGE, MASSACHUSETTS HALL

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Address: Bath Street, Bowdoin College Campus, Brunswick,
Cumberland County, Maine.

Present Owner: Bowdoin College.

Present Occupant
and Present Use: Administrative offices.

Statement of
Significance: Construction of Massachusetts Hall was begun in 1798 under the direction of Samuel and Aaron Melcher and possibly others. It was completed in 1803. When Bowdoin opened in 1802 this building was occupied by the new students and by President Joseph McKeen and his family. The structure was extensively remodeled in 1873 to house the collections of Parker Cleaveland. In 1936 extensive changes of both the interior and exterior occurred under the direction of Felix A. Burton, architect, of Boston.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Note: Historical data has been prepared by two well-qualified historians. Both accounts are included in this report.

- A. Original and Subsequent Owners: Owned by Bowdoin College continuously.
- B. Architect: Samuel Melcher III.
- C. Alterations and Additions: The interior has been completely altered, with the possible exception of the interior window jambs and some supporting walls in the basement. There was a complete remodeling in 1873, when the records state that the roof was raised two or three feet. (It is not possible to determine whether the entire roof was raised.) At this time a second floor was also added to the ell, in order to accommodate an entrance to the second and third floors, which had been thrown together as a museum (the second story being turned into a gallery). There was another complete remodeling in 1936.
- D. Important Old Views: Painting of the building and of others on the campus, c. 1822, by John G. Brown, in possession of Harold Leo Berry, Falmouth Foreside, Maine; lithographed by Pendleton (Boston) after 1825 and entitled "South West View of Bowdoin College." Lithograph by Pendleton about 1836-39 by Esteria Butler. These are interesting in that they show the building much as it is now (externally) except for the handsome cupola removed sometime after August 31, 1830, and which appears in the earlier painting and lithograph.

- E. Sources of Information: Records of Bowdoin College, unpublished article by Professor William Shipman; and "The Earliest Painting of the Bowdoin College Campus" by Gerard J. Brault, Old Time New England, Vol. LI, No. 4, Spring 1961.

Prepared by Samuel M. Green
Wesleyan University
June 1962

- F. Date of Erection: 1798-1803. Shell of building finished, in general, by winter of 1799 (Trustee's Records, May 1798 and May 1799; General Catalogue of Bowdoin College and Medical School of Maine 1794-1894, Historical Sketch by George T. Little, Brunswick: 1894, p. xviii). Interior work completed 1801-03 (Records, May and November 1801, May and September 1802, May 1803; Leonard Woods, Address on the Opening of the New Hall of the Medical School of Maine, Brunswick: 1862, pp. 5-12).
- G. Architect: Not known for certain, but Samuel Melcher III, Aaron Melcher, and probably Samuel Melcher II, all local housewrights and shipwrights, were employed in its construction (Records, May 1803; Woods, p. 5; George A. and Henry W. Wheeler, History of Brunswick, Topsham and Harpswell, Maine, Boston: 1878, p. 580). Captain John Dunlap was the building agent appointed by the Governing Boards (Records, May 1798 and May 1801), and the Melchers are known to have worked for Dunlap during this period (references to John Dunlap in Ledger of Samuel Melcher III, Bowdoin Library). Masonry done by Thomas Pool (Wheeler, p. 582).
- H. Original Description and Use: Eastern half of two lower floors used by President McKeen and family, "with chambers above, and with a parlor in the southeast corner below, a kitchen in the northeast corner, and a pantry in the projection; - the western portion, with the two rooms below thrown into one for a chapel and hall, and two rooms in the second story for the occupation of students" (Woods, pp. 7-8; also Nehemiah Cleaveland and Alpheus S. Packard, History of Bowdoin College, Boston: 1882, pp. 95-96). Additional students' rooms in third floor finished in 1803 (Woods, p. 12). A cupola was added "after the building was completed" but removed in 1830 (Report of Visiting Committee, September 1829, and Trustee's Records, August 1830). Original "projection" was one story only (Cleaveland and Packard, p. 102), and there probably was a central hall running north and south with entrances at both ends.
- I. Subsequent History:
1. 1803 - Family quarters of the president were converted to lecture room and laboratory (used by Parker Cleaveland

until 1858) downstairs, and to additional students' rooms upstairs (Woods, p. 12).

2. 1811 - Western half of second floor fitted out to take Bowdoin Art Gallery. (Cleaveland and Packard, p. 95).
 3. 1820 - Medical School was given the use of the third floor and parts of the second. Lecture and laboratory room on first floor enlarged by combining two rooms in eastern half into one. (Woods, p. 14).
 4. 1828 - Lecture and laboratory room again enlarged by "taking in the entries" (Woods, p. 15).
 5. 1862 - Medical School facilities removed to Adams Hall.
 6. 1872-73 - Complete renovation of upper floors, combined second and third stories into one large hall, with gallery, for use as a museum (the Cleaveland Cabinet). Plans drawn by A. C. Martin of Boston; work carried out under direction of R. T. D. Melcher, son of Samuel Melcher III, cost of project underwritten by Peleg W. Chandler. (Plans are in Bowdoin Library Archives).
 7. 1936-37 - Complete renovation of all three floors to their present condition. Felix Burton was the architect.
- J. Old Views: Earliest painting, c. 1822, shows building with cupola and one-story ell. This and other early (1825-60) views are located at various places on campus. Earliest photographs (1860's) are in Bowdoin Archives.

Prepared by William D. Shipman
Bowdoin College
July 1962.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This structure is a good example of early collegiate architecture in the United States, derived from the tradition of Massachusetts Hall (1718-20) and Hollis Hall (1763), Harvard University. The building has been extensively remodeled.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Over-all dimensions: Main rectangular block 50'-5" (five-bay front) x 40'-5". This is a large three-storied brick building, rectangular with a two-and-a-half story ell, hip roof, white window and door trim. The building faces south.
2. Foundations: Exterior foundation is of dressed ashlar above grade, stone rubble below. Miscellaneous brick piers. One fireplace foundation remains.
3. Wall construction: 16" brick bearing wall with alternate header and stretcher; painted red. Traces of 1873 entrance in east wall of ell.
4. Stoops: Stone stoop and steps at both entrances. North stoop has iron railings. South stoop has boot scrapers.
5. Chimneys: Three false "brick" chimneys (sheet metal "brick" painted red); one exposed brick chimney corbeled brick courses, original.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: South (front) doorway: Simple cornice and entablature, wood jambs, 18-light fan, six-paneled wooden door.
North doorway: Round arch opening. Wooden frame, 13-light fan, metal "sun"; soffit and reveal reeded, six-paneled wooden door.
 - b. Windows: First and second floor windows are double hung, six-over-six light; third floor, double hung, six-over-three light. One double hung, one-over-one light, two double hung, two-over-two light set into single frame in second floor of ell.
7. Roof and eaves: Hip roof on ell, modified hip on main building. Composition shingles (green), wooden cornice, boxed eaves.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:
 - a. Basement: Full basement under main structure. Work space and small storage-file rooms including vault, secretary lounge. No basement under ell. Brick pier, miscellaneous floor joists, steam pipes and steam tunnel, "L"-shaped stair to first floor in entry.

- b. First floor: Entry, stair to second and third floors opposite, numerous offices reached by corridors each side of stair entry. Office, rest room and stair to second and third floors in ell, president's office north side of main building.
 - c. Second floor: Stair hall, corridors to various offices, closets, rest rooms. Stair, office, and lounges in ell.
 - d. Third floor: Stair hall, small offices and faculty room, stair and closet in ell.
2. Stairways:
- a. Stair in ell: "U"-shaped, two landings. Turned newels, square balusters, two per tread, molded rail.
 - b. Front stair, second to third floors: "U"-shaped, two landings, turned newels, two, round balusters per tread, molded rail.
 - c. Front stair, first to second floors: Spiral stair with winders, two, round balusters per tread, turned newels, volute in molded railing at bottom newel, terminates on bottom tread.
3. Flooring: Linoleum, plastic tile, wood boards of various widths pegged, marble tiles in entry, wood strips painted black in president's office.
4. Walls and ceiling: Plaster walls, wainscot in major rooms. Paneled fireplace wall in faculty room. Plaster ceilings (beamed in faculty room and may be decorative only). Some glazed openings in partitions.
5. Doorways and doors: Simple wooden trim, six-paneled doors, 15-paneled glazed doors.
6. Windows have paneled inside shutters and seats, wooden reveal.
7. Hardware: Modern. Brass thumb latch and pull at front door. Modern sprinkler system for fire protection.
8. Lighting: Modern electric, fluorescent.

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9. Heating: Steam heat from central-heat plant. Three, working fireplaces (northeast corner rooms). Fireplace in president's office has oven with iron door, crane, and irons, etc. Iron lintels.
- D. Site: Faces south at north end of campus, surrounded by walks, large trees and nearby campus buildings.

Prepared by F. Blair Reeves, Architect
National Park Service
August 1962