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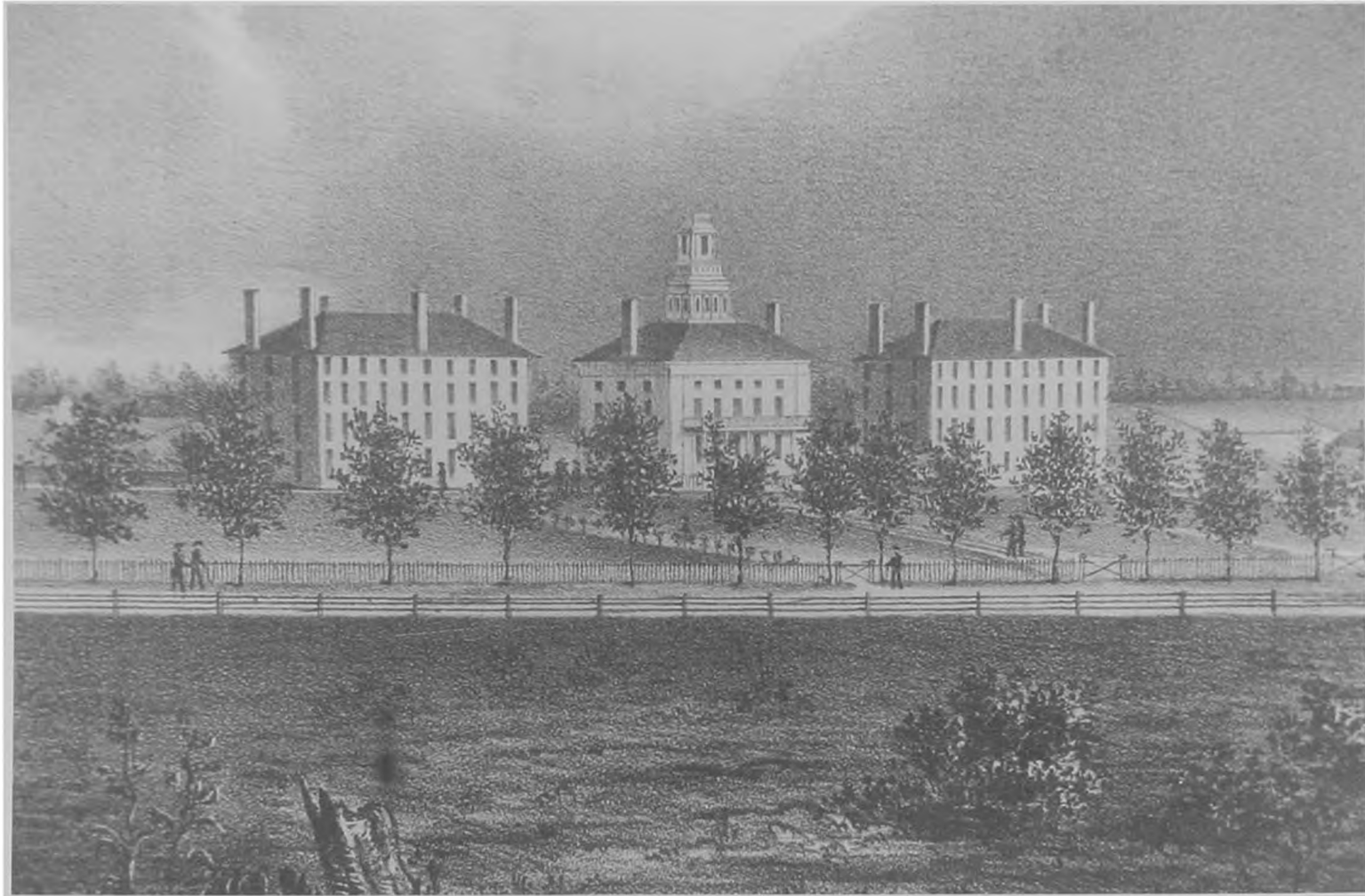


Fig. 1. "The Bricks," a detail from "Northwest View of Colby College," Waterville, Maine. Lithograph after Esteria Butler, oil painting, Colby College Art Museum, c. 1836, by Thomas Moore, Boston. From left to right: North College (1822); Recitation Hall (1836); South College (1821). *Courtesy of the Colby College Archives, Miller Library.*

“THE BRICKS” AT COLBY (WATERVILLE) COLLEGE: THE ORIGINS OF A LOST CAMPUS

BY BRYANT F. TOLLES, JR.

Popularly known as “The Bricks,” the former three-building row at Colby (Waterville) College was one of New England’s most notable nineteenth-century higher educational building groups. Located at the center of Colby’s first campus (abandoned in the 1950s), “The Bricks” consisted of a central main building, Recitation (Champlin) Hall (1836-1837), and two nearly identical, multi-purpose flanking structures, South (1821) and North (1822) colleges. The Colby row incorporated and integrated all components, formal as well as informal, of the college educational experience, thereby reflecting the predominant American higher educational philosophy of the pre-Civil War era. Bryant F. Tolles, Jr. is Professor of History and Art History and Director of the Museum Studies Program at the University of Delaware. He is the author of Summer Cottages in the White Mountains (2000), The Grand Resort Hotels of the White Mountains (1998), New Hampshire Architecture (1979), and several articles on New England college architecture and campus planning.

For well over a century, the former three-building row at Colby (Waterville) College, locally known as “The Bricks,” was one of New England’s most handsome and imposing higher educational complexes.¹ Situated near downtown Waterville in central Maine, on the west side of and parallel to the Kennebec River, this “simple trinity” of structures once dominated the rolling valley terrain adjacent to its pleasant, wooded campus site. Over time, however, this once-unspoiled rural environment underwent dramatic change, and today these fine early specimens of collegiate architecture no longer stand. Circumscribed by the river, the growing industrial town, a new highway, and the Maine Central Railroad tracks, the small, elongated, fifteen-acre campus was replaced in the 1950s by a new, expansive Jens Fredrick Larson-planned complex on rural Mayflower Hill, a mile west of Waterville.² For many people, especially the alumni of the college, the decision to demolish the

original buildings and relocate the campus met feelings of regret and nostalgia. At the same time, they realized that the college could progress and achieve its historic mission only by finding a more suitable setting.

In the developing “The Bricks,” the college’s early planners articulated the prevailing higher educational philosophy of early nineteenth-century America. In the full building group, as well as the individual structures themselves, all of the components of the undergraduate educational experience—academic, religious, social, cultural, recreational, dining, and residential—were combined, rather than segregated into separate campuses or buildings, as they ultimately were at most institutions after the Civil War. This philosophy, which encouraged the integration of formal as well as informal learning, was directly reflected in campus schemes and building interior plans at the pre-1860 New England colleges. Thus the entire academic, as well as the living environment of “The Bricks” was conditioned by a broadly embraced educational credo and the architecture it inspired and generated.

Fortunately, for those who wish to study the first Colby campus, sufficient source materials exist. In addition to detailed references in published works, several valuable manuscript citations survive, as do a number of nineteenth-century printed views and photographs of the campus and its buildings. One may gain an accurate impression of how the row appeared in its park-like surroundings in a detail (Fig. 1) from Esteria Butler’s c. 1836 lithograph of the young college.³ Commanding foremost attention in the middle of the view is Recitation (Champlin) Hall (1836-1837), with its tall, imposing chapel tower a fitting symbol of the college’s chartered role as a training school for Baptist clergymen. This monumental edifice was the last of “The Bricks” group to be constructed, fulfilling the original trustee plan for an English-derived, symmetrical, three-building row on the model of Yale (Fig. 2) and other New England colleges.⁴ In the Butler view, two earlier, virtually identical structures, South (1821) and North (1822) colleges, occupy flanking positions in the scheme, equidistant from Recitation. A highly functional and aesthetically pleasing arrangement, Colby’s row made a powerful, unified architectural statement without compromising the virtues and qualities of its separate components.

Conceived primarily as dormitories, South and North colleges possessed the same simple and direct qualities of their New England predecessors. Ideas circulated freely among college institutions in the region; although it is undocumented, it is probable that the design concepts for these buildings originated with older, similar residential structures at

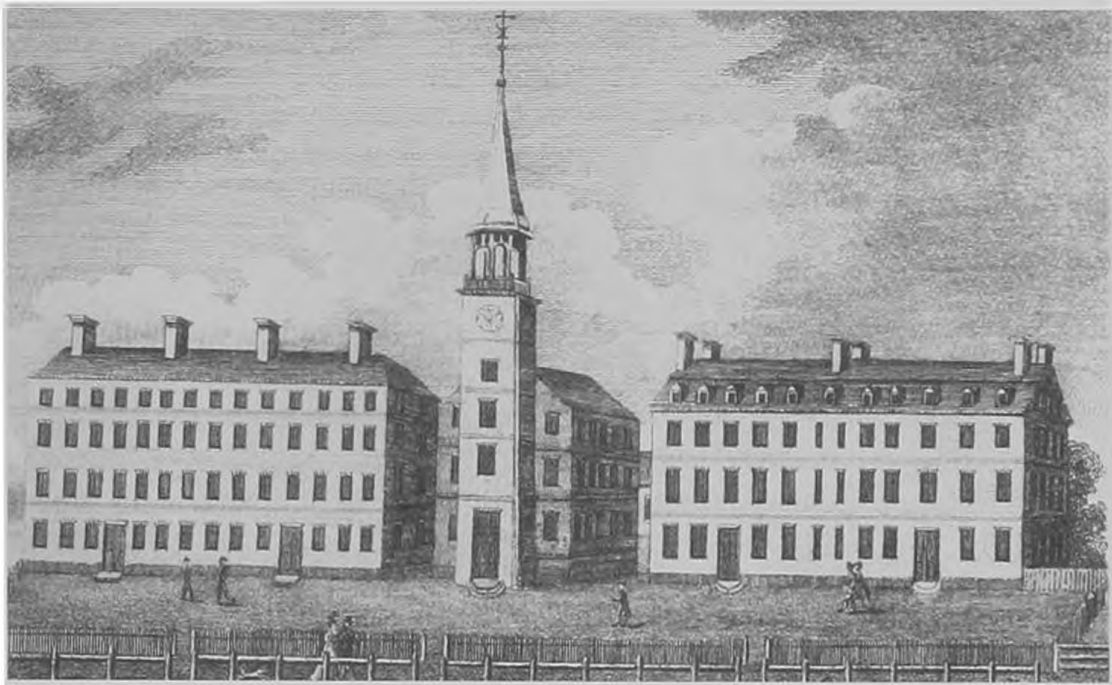


Fig. 2. "View of Yale-College, New Haven," engraving by John Scoles, from *The Lady and Gentleman's Pocket Magazine* (August-November 1796). From left to right: South College (1793-94); First Chapel (Athenaeum; 1761-63); South Middle College (Connecticut Hall; 1750-53). *Courtesy of the Yale University Archives.*



Fig. 3. Maine Hall (1807-1808, etc.), by Samuel Melcher III, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME. *Photograph by the author.*

Yale, Andover Theological Seminary, Harvard, and Bowdoin. Given its proximity, Maine Hall (1807-1808, etc.) (Fig.3) at Bowdoin appears to have had the most direct and pronounced influence. Large, unadorned rectangular blocks, South and North were strikingly similar in size, scale, and most stylistic features. This is hardly surprising in that they were both designed and erected by the local master-builders Peter Getchell and Lemuel Dunbar. A rare 1857 daguerreotype (Fig. 4) of the row shows the two buildings on either side of Recitation Hall nearly a century before they were lost to the Mayflower Hill campus development.

Planning for South and North colleges began in 1819 when a Waterville College trustee resolution called for the construction of a wood-frame house for the president and a larger brick building.⁵ The latter structure, later to be known as South College, was delayed until 1821 due to the lack of funding, a common problem among educational institutions of the era. Construction awaited until the trustees persuaded

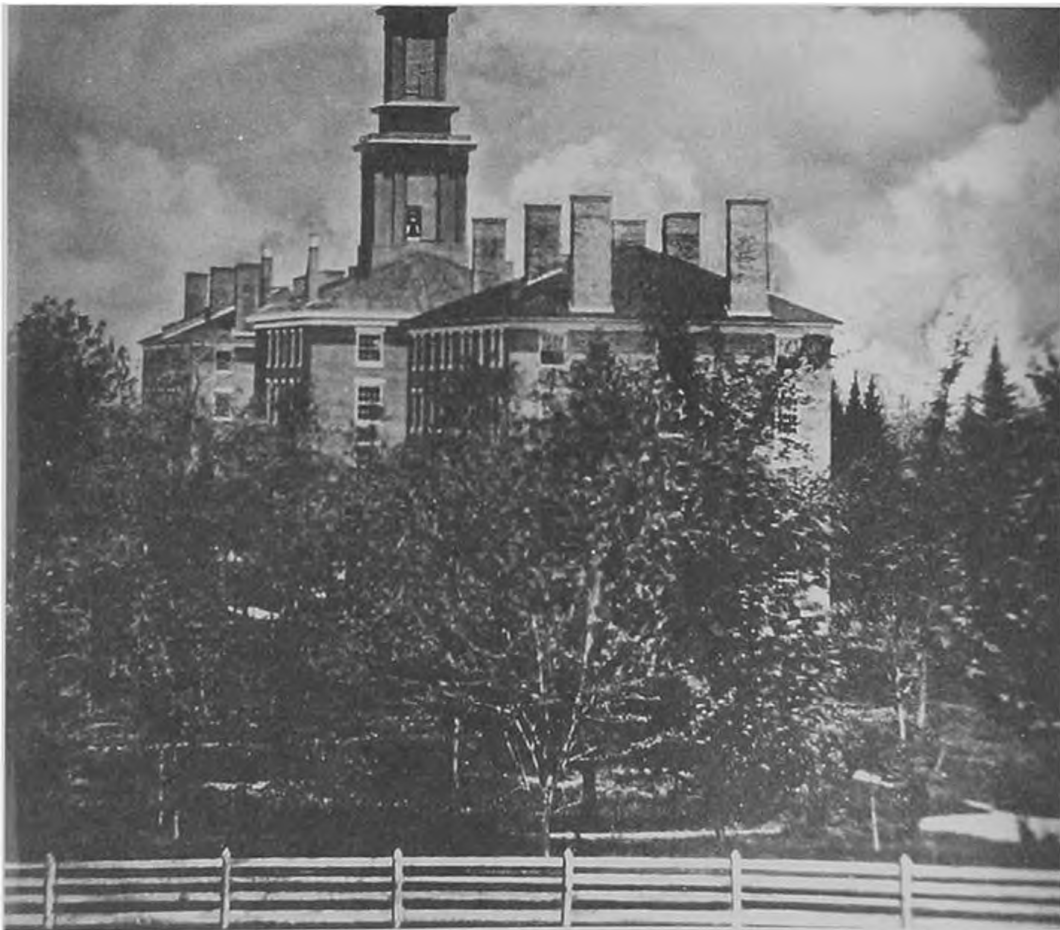


Fig. 4. "The Bricks." Daguerreotype, 1856. From left to right: North College; Recitation Hall; South College. *Courtesy of the Colby College Archives, Miller Library.*

sufficient subscribers to commit their support to the building effort.⁶ An 1822 publicity leaflet offers descriptive information and critical commentary about the new structure:

The Trustees . . . during the present year (1821) . . . have erected a brick edifice 80 by 40, and four stories high, for the use of Students. This . . . building is calculated to contain thirty-two rooms, and, when completed, will accommodate sixty-four students. It is considered by good judges a fine building, and does honour alike to the workmen employed upon it, and to the gentlemen who superintended the erection of it. A Hall intended to answer the purposes of a temporary Chapel, and eighteen rooms for Students are already finished.⁷

A double entryway plan accommodated a variety of educational facilities—recitation rooms, a mineral exhibit, a philosophic society, and a library (until 1836) in interior spaces not utilized for residential quarters.⁸ With credits due Getchell for his masonry work and Dunbar for his carpentry,⁹ the new building was dedicated in an impressive ceremony at which college officials placed candles behind each of the thirty-two panes of glass in every window on the west facade and south end. Superimposed against the trees and darkness behind, the scene must have been memorable.¹⁰

The Colby College Archives possess only a few visual materials depicting the nineteenth-century South College. A photograph (Fig. 5) from about 1880 shows the college in a state quite altered from the earlier daguerreotype view, the results of a sweeping 1873 renovation. A small wooden cupola containing the college bell (cast at the Paul Revere Foundry in Massachusetts in 1824) sits astride the ridgepole of its low, hipped roof. An unflattering but functional wooden porch was attached to the south end. Wooden Italianate support brackets were positioned under the eaves along the cornice line. Inside, student accommodations were enlarged to suites of two rooms to create bedroom/study combinations like other New England college dormitories of the period.¹¹ In other respects South College remained unaltered. The crisply delineated outlines of its roof and walls, and the sharp accents of its chimneys and white stone window lintels continued to reflect the precision, economy and provinciality that went into its making.

North College, younger than its twin by one year, conveyed a similar visual impression and is of equal architectural and historical significance. Another early photo (Fig. 6) from the archives shows the building prior to its 1872 renovation. Evident are paired double-sash windows and arched entry doorways with semi-circular fanlights, an obvious ves-

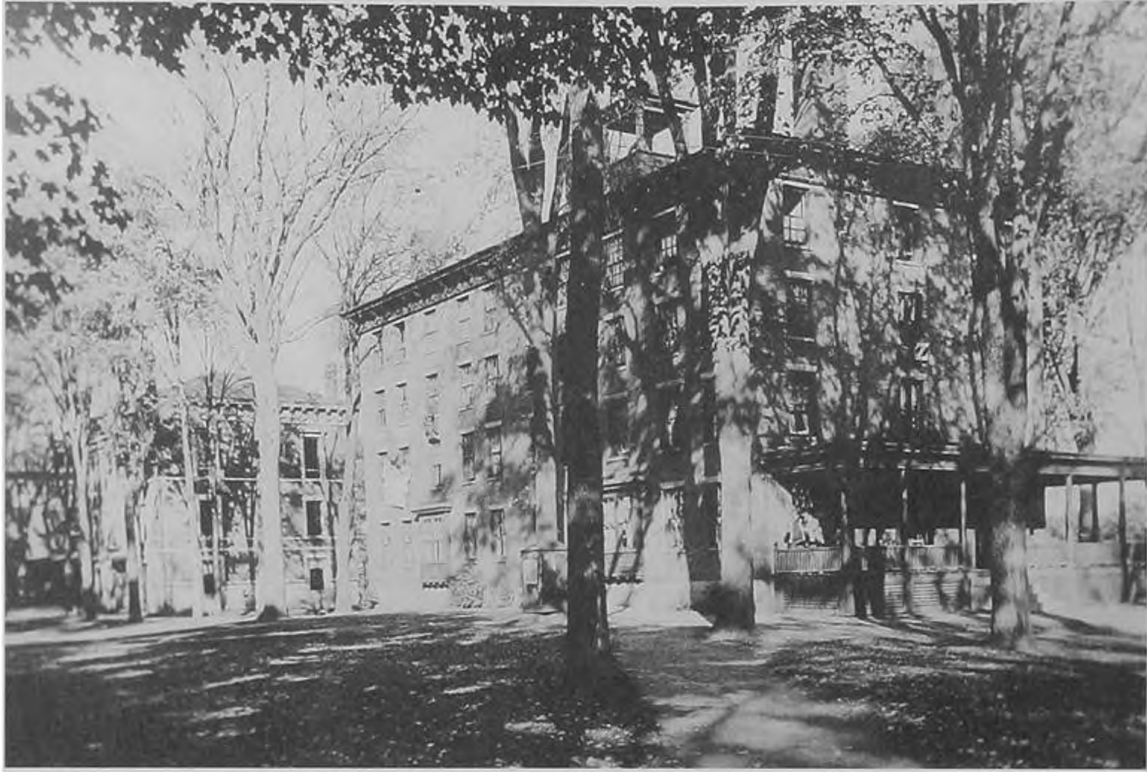


Fig. 5. “Colby College—South College and Row,” photograph, 1880. *Courtesy of the Colby College Archives, Miller Library.*

tige of the Federal style. In dimensions and virtually every architectural detail it was identical to South College. The building originated with a trustee Prudential Committee resolution in May 1822:

Voted—That the Prudential Committee be authorized to erect another college building this present season . . . Voted—That the Prudential Committee be instructed & authorized to complete the contract they have informally entered into with Peter Getchell for a new brick College building eighty by forty, four stories high for the sum of three thousand dollars, the building to be erected. . . . similar in style to the College Edifice already built . . . Lemuel Dunbar . . . doing the carpentry work of the outside of the building.¹²

Typical of its era, the structure combined several educational functions, initially containing thirty-two rooms for student living, a cellar which accommodated a chapel until 1836, and a spacious dining and commons hall for large college functions.¹³ To commemorate the 1872 renovation, the trustees renamed the building “Chaplin Hall” after the college’s first president, Rev. Jeremiah Chaplin.

Experiencing almost as harrowing an existence as Bowdoin’s Maine



Fig. 6. “North College (Chaplin Hall),” photograph, c. 1870. *Courtesy of the Colby College Archives, Miller Library.*

Hall (which suffered major fires in 1822 and 1836), North College burned on three separate occasions, each time to be rebuilt and put back into service, virtually unchanged. After the initial fire in 1902, a special \$15,000 grant from the Maine legislature funded the necessary repairs, along with suite-type rooming arrangements. In 1911, after another serious blaze, \$25,000 was required to rebuild the entire interior, as well as the roof of the south entry.¹⁴ Yet the greatest tragedy for the college lay ahead. On December 4, 1922 fire broke out in the north entry, killing four students and ruining all four floors.¹⁵ For an additional sum of \$15,000, the old dormitory was restored for the final time. Thirty years later it would be subjected to the terminal poundings of the wrecking ball. In retrospect, it seems unfortunate that the money repeatedly expended to rebuild North College could not have made possible its survival and continued use.

Nearly fifteen years after the completion of South and North colleges, Recitation Hall assumed its place as the dominant center structure in Colby College’s trio of row buildings. A block-shaped, multi-purpose edifice, it embodied the same educational philosophy and possessed many of the same traditional Federal features as its predecessors. On the

brick-walled exterior certain innovative Greek Revival elements were also introduced, principally in the panel brick treatment and in the lofty triple-stage tower which rose high over the building mass, endowing it with monumental scale. Due to the tower, it became local legend that Recitation was the tallest building in the State of Maine. Throughout its existence it took on different visual personalities, evidence of which can be seen in printed views and photographs.

Recitation Hall, the dream of President Rufus Babcock, was authorized in 1835 when the College Trustees designated a sizable portion of an anticipated \$25,000 fund “to erect a building for general classroom purposes, in which a large and well equipped chapel should be arranged.”¹⁶ Determined that their Baptist college have a respectable chapel facility, the trustees, with the aid of Dr. Babcock, developed an innovative means to raise the needed money by issuing scholarship certificates to contributors. The wording of these certificates reflects the trustees’ and financial acumen:

This certifies that _____ has paid into the treasurer of Waterville College \$600 towards erecting a chapel. Thereby he and his assigns forever are entitled to enter and have one student in the college, free of all bills for room, rent, tuition, lectures, and library; but no assignment shall be recognized by the College as valid unless the same shall be made by the donor to some incorporated body in the trust or otherwise. Provided that, if the College shall at anytime hereafter pay the donor, his trustees or assigns, the sum of \$600, the scholarship shall cease.¹⁷

Restricting the number of scholarships to twenty-five to prevent over-subscription, the trustees next approved the preparation of lumber and masonry materials for the building project, a task carried out in large part by students of the college.¹⁸ During the summer of 1836 the college commenced construction on what was to be an \$8,000 structure, the entire funding provided by the ingenious scholarship scheme.¹⁹ In early 1837 Recitation Hall was completed. Sixty-five by forty feet at its stone foundations, it was originally just two stories high, and was covered by a hipped roof. Positioned atop the roof was the tall wooden tower which gave the appearance of graduated, stacked shoe boxes (see Fig. 7), causing some to question its aesthetic merit. Greek-inspired pilasters were present on the sides of the tower sections (the lower of which contained the college bell), and at the corner intersections of the four main brick walls. Otherwise, Recitation was quite stark and plain

like North and South colleges, and consequently blended effectively with the two older buildings.

The interior of Recitation Hall was also multi-purpose, being devoted to academic as well as ecclesiastical functions. The main story was raised several feet above ground level, creating a basement story with a substantial number of windows for the admission of natural light. Located here were four recitation rooms. While these were much needed by the college, they were received with little enthusiasm, as they were regarded as damp, dreary, and generally unappealing by faculty and students.²⁰ Situated above in the main story was the new college chapel (relocated from North College), high above ground level and hence accessible only by an exterior flight of stairs. Above the chapel on the north side of the second story was the library (transferred from South College), and on the south side a philosophical (physical science) apparatus room and classroom for natural philosophy (natural science).²¹ Some time before the mid-1850s a third story was added for recitation rooms, a modification that improved the building both aesthetically and

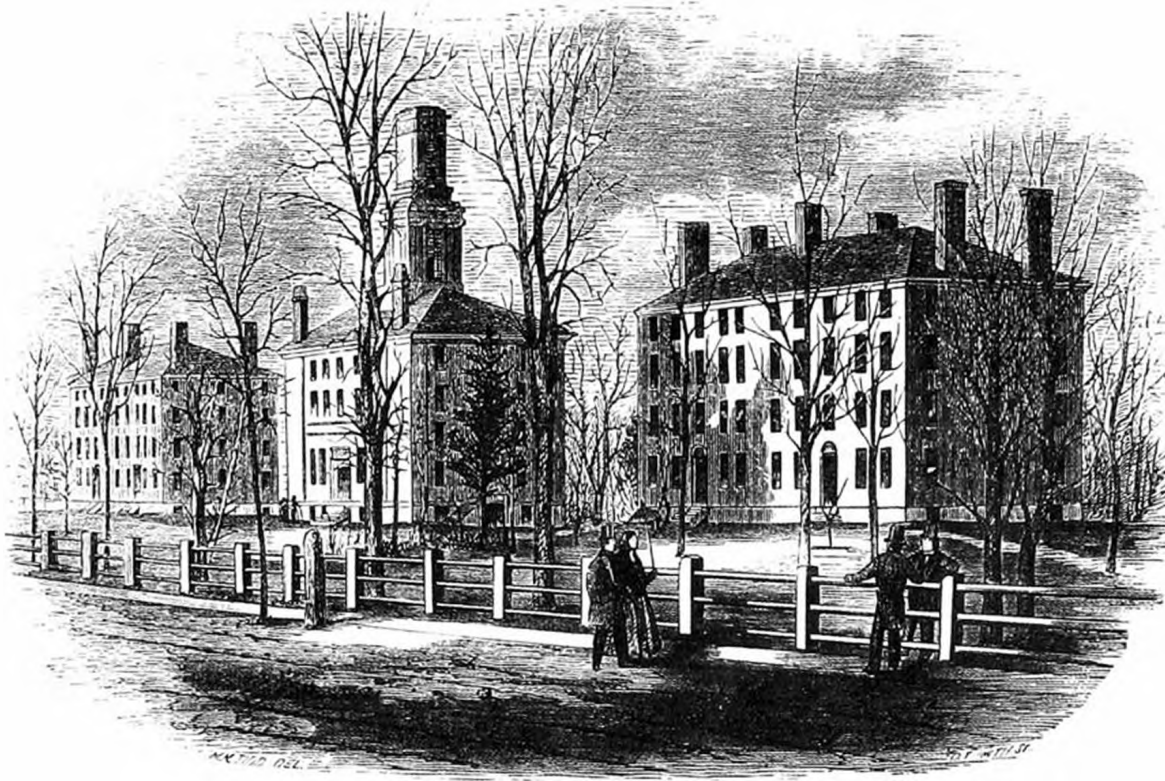


Fig. 7. “Waterville College,” engraving from Austin J. Coolidge and J.B. Mansfield, *A History and Description of New England* (1859), p. 345. Courtesy of the Colby College Archives, Miller Library.

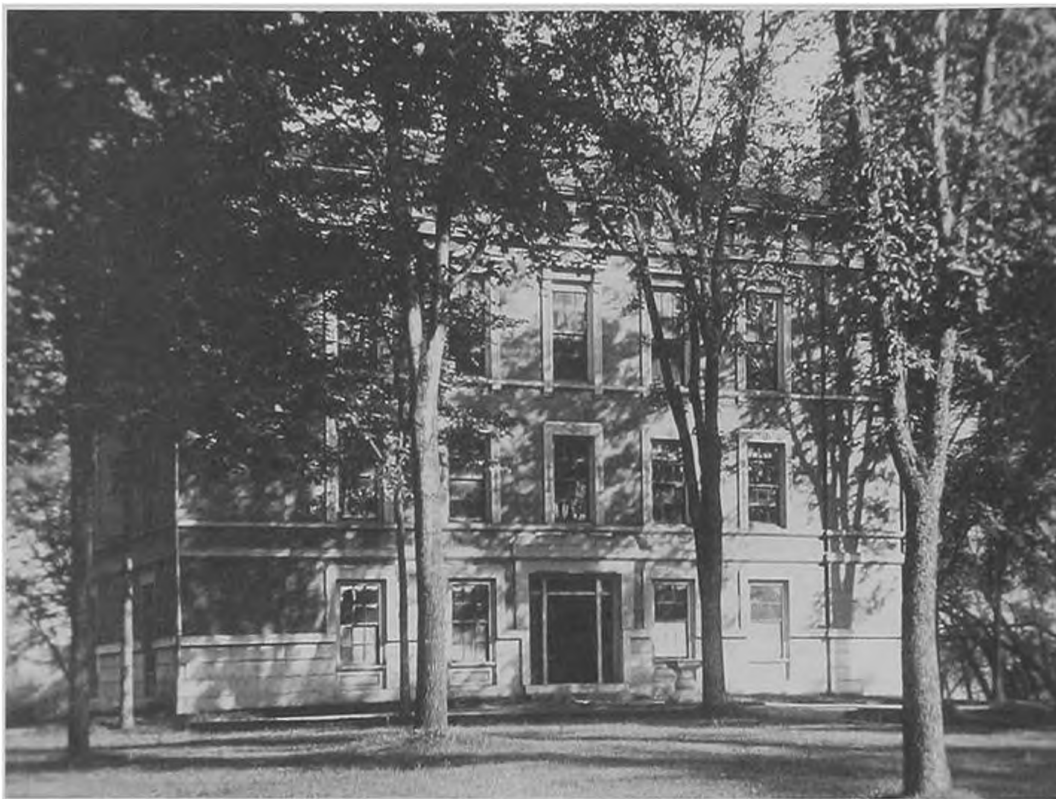


Fig. 8. "Champlin Hall—Recitation," photograph, c. 1880. *Courtesy of the Colby College Archives, Miller Library.*

functionally. Like the center main structures of other New England college row groupings, Recitation was the hub of the Colby academic community, serving a myriad of needs for faculty and students.

The identification of the architect of Recitation Hall has long eluded scholars. Curiously, in official college correspondence and records where one might expect to find references there is no mention of a name. Until recently there was only one solid lead. In his *History of Higher Education in Maine*, Edward Winslow Hall, the librarian of Colby College in the 1890s, attributed the design to Philadelphia's Thomas Ustick Walter (1807-1887), one of this country's most esteemed pre-Civil War architects. Walter was an avid exponent of the Greek Revival style and the designer of the national Capitol dome and its extensions (1851-1865).²² Furthermore, he is possibly the only American architect of his era to travel to Europe specifically to study higher educational architectural design.²³ Presumably Hall, who had easy access to college archival materials, based his attribution on documents which have been misplaced or no longer survive. Of this, however, we cannot be certain. It stands to reason, though, that Walter, who had strong Baptist convictions, would

have drawn the attention of the college trustees as they sought a designer for the new main building of their fledgling Baptist institution. In the early history of American higher education there are many instances of colleges selecting an architect in part for religious reasons.

One can speculate further about a possible Walter attribution. Although the standard published materials treating Walter's early career fail to cite any associations with the college during the 1830s (the first years of his practice), it is conceivable, based on architectural style alone, that Recitation Hall was a Walter design. In several obvious respects it resembled some of his well-documented commissions of the time. It is known that he worked throughout the northeastern United States, particularly in Pennsylvania, where he produced some landmark educational complexes. The most widely recognized of these were the Girard College for Orphans (1833-1847) in Philadelphia, and a portion of the University of Lewisburg (later Bucknell University) complex (1848-1859).

Fortunately, we now have reliable confirmation of the Hall attribution. In the late 1970s, in conjunction with a Walters papers publication project, one of the editors carefully inspected a manuscript journal covering the years 1834-1836. Contained in the journal is an entry dated January 9, 1836, indicating that Walter had indeed "made (the) design for Waterville College, Me." This valuable document was initially discovered in a large collection of Walter materials owned by his descendants in Colorado. The collection was subsequently acquired by The Athenaeum of Philadelphia and is now available to researchers.²⁴ Thus, we may be assured that, while it stood, the first Colby College possessed one of the few pre-Civil War higher educational buildings in New England to be designed by a major American architect.

In summer 1872, after several decades of hard use, Recitation Hall was totally remodeled under the direction of Boston architect Alexander R. Esty (1826-1881), the designer of Memorial Hall (1869) at Colby, as well as buildings at other New England universities and colleges. At an expense of \$6,000, donated by benefactor and college namesake Gardner Colby of Boston, the old chapel was removed and the resulting space converted to new classrooms and a lecture hall. From that time until its destruction, the building was employed exclusively for academic and extracurricular activities.²⁵ At the same time, the exterior of Recitation was also transformed (see Fig. 8). Since the outer walls were in danger of collapsing from the weight of the central tower, college officials reluctantly decided to have the tower removed.²⁶ Concurrently, the building as-



Fig. 9. “Colby University, Waterville, Me.,” engraving from Rodney H. Howard and Henry C. Crocker, *A History of New England* (1880), vol. 1, p. 71. *Courtesy of the Colby College Archives, Miller Library.*

sumed an Italianate look with the addition of heavy decorative window and door moldings, limestone horizontal belt courses and a series of wooden brackets along the broad cornice under the roof eaves. In its size and proportions, as well as specific ornamental features, the revised version of Recitation resembled Gridley J.F. Bryant’s Ballou Hall (1852-1854) at Tufts College near Boston. Esty may well have been familiar with the Tufts building as he served as a draftsman in Bryant’s office early in his career.²⁷

In its altered but improved state, Recitation Hall was retitled “Champlin Hall” in honor of James T. Champlin, the president of the college from 1857 to 1873.²⁸ An engraving (Fig. 9) from Howard and Crocker’s *History of New England* (1880) shows this pivotal structure at the center of “The Bricks,” which itself is flanked by later nineteenth-century buildings.²⁹ This pleasant composition, though supplemented by additional, more modern architecture in this century, remained little changed until the destruction of the first Colby campus in the 1950s.

By the elimination of its original buildings, Colby joined a group of several other New England colleges and universities whose early row schemes were victims of change and advancement in higher education—Yale, Trinity, the University of Vermont, and the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy (later Norwich University) in Nor-

wich, Vermont. To gain a critical appreciation of early row plans, however, one may still view extant examples, one in each of the six New England states: Amherst in Massachusetts, Brown in Rhode Island, Wesleyan in Connecticut, Dartmouth in New Hampshire, Middlebury in Vermont, and Bowdoin in Maine. Like “The Bricks,” these early core building groups perform diverse but integrated educational functions, expressing current educational philosophy while reinforcing architectural legacies and perpetuating historical memories.³⁰

NOTES

1. Colby College was chartered in 1813 for the education of Baptist ministers as the Maine Literary and Theological Institution. From 1821 to 1867 it operated under the name of Waterville College. In 1867 it was re-titled Colby University in recognition of a \$50,000 gift by Gardner Colby, a wealthy Baptist philanthropist from Boston. Upon Dr. Nathaniel Butler’s assumption to the presidency in 1899, the institution received its present name.

2. In September 1952, the first Waterville campus was formally abandoned. The presence of a large, noisy, pollution-producing paper pulp mill across the river was another factor influencing the decision to shift sites.

3. The artist Esteria (Butler) Farnam (1814-91) was a miniaturist and landscape painter from Winthrop, Maine. Her works were known for their precise detail and balanced composition. Thomas Moore of Boston published her view of Bowdoin College at about the same time as the Colby scene.

4. Clarence H. White, “Linking the Old and the New Colby,” *The Colby College Alumnus* 31 (1941):5. For references to other New England college row plans, see Paul Venable Turner, *Campus: An American Planning Tradition* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1984), chapters 1, 2.

5. The president’s house, the first building at Colby (Waterville) College, was forty by twenty-five feet and two stories tall, and was later enlarged by the addition of a twenty-two foot ell. Completed in 1819, it was intended as a home for Professor of Divinity Jeremiah Chaplin, his family, and theological students. It was subsequently removed from the campus to make way for Memorial Hall (1869). See Ernest C. Marriner, *History of Colby College* (Waterville: Colby College Press, 1963), p. 37; Records of the Trustees of Waterville College, Meeting of May 19, 1819, Colby College Archives, Miller Library, Waterville (hereafter, CCA).

6. The final cost was \$2,700. See Edwin Whittemore, *History of Colby College, 1820-1925: An Account of Its Beginnings, Progress, and Services* (Waterville: Trustees of Colby College, 1927), p. 32.

7. Waterville College, *Origin, Progress and Present State of the College* (Portland: Argus Office, 1822), p.1.

8. Marriner, *The History of Colby College*, p. 49.
9. Edwin C. Whittemore, *The Centennial History of Waterville, Kennebec County, Maine* (Waterville: Centennial Committee, 1902) p. 299; Edward W. Hall, *History of Higher Education in Maine* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1903), p. 106.
10. Albert W. Paine to Warren Foss, 1895, CCA.
11. *A Brief Description of Colby College and Its Equipment* (Waterville: Colby College, 1907), p. 22.
12. Records of the Trustees of Waterville College, Meeting of May 1, 1822.
13. Whittemore, *History of Colby College*, p. 36.
14. *Waterville Morning Sentinel*, March 13, 1911; Marriner, *History of Colby College*, p. 298.
15. Whittemore, *History of Colby College*, p. 188.
16. Marriner, *History of Colby College*, p. 85; James T. Champlin, *A Historical Discourse Delivered at the Fiftieth Anniversary of Colby University, August 2nd, 1870* (Waterville: The Trustees, 1870), p. 11.
17. Records of the Trustees of Waterville College, Minutes of the Annual Meeting, 1835.
18. Hall, *History of Higher Education in Maine*, p. 106.
19. Marriner, *History of Colby College*, p. 85.
20. *Ibid.*; Hall, *History of Higher Education in Maine*, p. 111.
21. Whittemore, *Centennial History of Waterville*, p. 300; N. Orwin Rush, *History of Maine College Libraries*, (Worcester, Massachusetts: Clark University Library, 1946), p. 28.
22. Hall, *History of Higher Education in Maine*, p. 111. See William S. Rusk, "Thomas U. Walter and his Works, *Americana* 33 (1938): 151-79; Robert B. Ennis, "Thomas U. Walter," in *Macmillan Encyclopedia of American Architects*, ed. by Adolf K. Placzek (New York: Free Press, 1982) 4: 365-370; Ennis, "Walter, Thomas U(stick)," in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. by Jane Turner, vol. 32 (New York: Grove Dictionaries, 1996), pp. 827-828. The attribution was subsequently repeated in other printed works pertaining to Colby College and Maine history.
23. See "The Girard College Architectural Competition," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 16 (no. 2, 1957): 20-27; George L. Hersey, "Thomas U. Walter and the University of Lewisburg," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 16 (no. 1, 1957): 20-24.
24. Thomas U. Walter journal (1834-36), January 9, 1836, Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; conversations with Roger W. Moss, Jr., Director, Athenaeum of Philadelphia, and Marilyn C. Solvay, Curator, William A. Farnsworth Library and Art Museum, Rockland, Maine (former Walter project

assistant), September 30, 1987. The entry is noted in Roger W. Moss, Jr., and Sandra L. Tatman, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1985), p. 824.

25. Hall, *History of Higher Education in Maine*, p. 116; Mariner, *History of Colby College*, p. 174.

26. Hall, *History of Higher Education in Maine*, p. 111.

27. See Bryant F. Tolles, Jr., “Gridley J.F. Bryant and the First Building at Tufts College,” *Old-Time New England* 63 (no. 4, 1973): 89-99.

28. *A Brief Description of Colby College and Its Equipment*, p. 21.

29. Rodney H. Howard and Henry C. Crocker, *A History of New England*. 2 vols. (Boston: Henry C. Crocker, 1880). Four other plain, functional wooden buildings supplemented the row structures on Colby College’s first campus. Between 1827 and 1833, the one and two-story mechanics workshops were erected. These were used until 1842, and were soon after removed. In 1832 college administrators authorized the construction of a boarding house at the north end of the campus on the spot later occupied by Coburn Hall (1871-72). This building was used as a student commons facility until the early 1870s when the trustees, disenchanted with mass dining, voted to sell it. Despite this action it was retained by the college and used for other purposes. See Whittemore, *History of Colby College*, pp. 45-46; Mariner, *History of Colby College*, pp. 70, 178; Whittemore, *Centennial History of Waterville*, p. 300.

30. This article is based on research undertaken for my Ph.D. dissertation (“College Architecture in Northern New England Before 1860: A Social and Cultural History,” Boston University, 1970), and additional research completed since 1985. I am indebted to the staff of the CCA for research assistance, and to the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Science, University of Delaware, for financial support.