

SOUTH PORCH, BALLOU HALL (1852-1854) BY GRIDLEY J. F. BRYANT.
TUFTS UNIVERSITY, MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS
Photograph by the Author.

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Gridley J. F. Bryant and the First Building at Tufts College

By BRYANT FRANKLIN TOLLES, JR.*

CROWNING tree-bedecked "College (Walnut) Hill" at the center of Tufts University's Medford-Somerville, Massachusetts campus is a structure of considerable architectural merit and historic importance. Named in honor of Hosea Ballou 2d, first president of Tufts,¹ Ballou Hall (1852-1854) has served as the physical and academic heart of the university ever since its establishment in 1852 as the first institution of higher learning founded by the Universalist denomination in the United States.² Beyond this distinction, the building has received praise as one of the most expertly designed and best-preserved examples of nineteenth-century Italian Renaissance Revival architecture surviving in New England. Curiously, despite its attributes, Ballou Hall has re-

mained virtually unknown to architectural historians, and, until recently, has not been associated with the work of any specific architect. Now, by virtue of newly found substantiating documentation, it is possible to add this structure to the *oeuvre* of Boston's celebrated mid-Victorian civic and commercial designer, Gridley James Fox Bryant (1816-1899). As a Bryant building, Ballou Hall thus acquires additional significance, and even greater justification for public recognition.

Tufts College's first structure, initially referred to as the "College Building" or "College Hall,"³ was conceived by the institution's founders during the late 1840's. It was not until the summer of 1852, however, that sufficient funds were raised and land located so that formal action could be taken to initiate the construction project. At a July 21 meeting, the newly constituted Board of Trustees voted to create a building committee and instructed this body "to devise a plan for College buildings with all con-

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sistent dispatch, and . . . to report, to call a meeting of the Board to hear the report, and act on the same."⁴ Two months later a verbal report was presented to the trustees, and votes were taken to enlarge the building committee, to "proceed immediately to erect a Building for the use of the College," to complete the foundation the ensuing fall, and "to expend a sum, not exceeding \$20,000."⁵ The figure budgeted proved all too modest, but additional subscriptions were raised. Ultimately, plans went forward to the extent that \$38,000 was expended on the erection of the facility.⁶

Under the direction of a trustee, the Reverend Otis Skinner, construction commenced in November of 1852, only to be interrupted by the harsh weather of the winter months.⁷ Work was energetically resumed the following spring on the then barren eminence which comprised the original twenty-acre tract of land granted the college by Somerville farmer Charles Tufts. A sense of the pastoral environment may be gained by examination of a rare ca. 1870 photograph of the campus, now kept in the files of the Tufts Archives. (Fig. 1.)

Sufficient progress was made on the project so that gala cornerstone-laying ceremonies for Ballou Hall were held on July 19, 1853. The occasion was vividly recounted in the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*, a leading Universalist Church publication:

The Corner-Stone of Tufts College was laid with appropriate religious services on Tuesday forenoon last. A special train left Boston at 9 o'clock. On arriving at the hill it was found that Mr. Yale of Boston (one of our brethren of the faith) had spread a very large awning, under which seats were prepared for the ladies. Three American ensigns were floated from the top at proper distances from the canvas, and equidistant from each other. A part of the wall of the college had been built;

and a section of the freestone laid, at one of the corners, some fifteen feet in height. The day was delightful—balmy—and the tent screened the people from the rays of the sun, and no one suffered from the heat. The people kept coming until the services were half through; and we are confident there were upwards of a thousand present.⁸

Inspired by this momentous event, the contractors completed the walls and roof by November, and hastened to finish the interior in preparation for the fall session of 1854.⁹ Readied for academic use, Ballou Hall must have looked much the same as it does in an 1856 woodcut engraving from *Ballou's Pictorial*. (Fig. 2.)

Professor Russell E. Miller, historian of the college, has aptly observed that the exterior of Ballou Hall presented a "more imposing appearance than its surroundings" during the earliest years of the institution.¹⁰ While under construction, it was described by the *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine*:

The principal college building . . . is designed in the Italian [Renaissance Revival] style, being a parallelogram in outline, measuring 100 by 60 ft., and 3 finished stories [60 ft.] in height, . . . the exterior construction to be of faced [red] bricks, with [Connecticut brown] sandstone basement story, corner quoins, and window and door dressings. The whole crowned with an enriched bracketted cornice, and balustrade around the roof. The main entrance to the building is to be arched and covered by a Roman Ionic portico, surmounted with a balustrade.¹¹

Six paneled brick chimneys rose above a slate truncated roof, two at each end wall, and two atop the roof plane of the north or rear facade. (Cover.) Enclosed within a wooden balustrade was the cast-iron college bell, employed to sound emergencies and to call students and faculty to lectures, chapel services, and special events. Broad brown sandstone belt courses extended around the

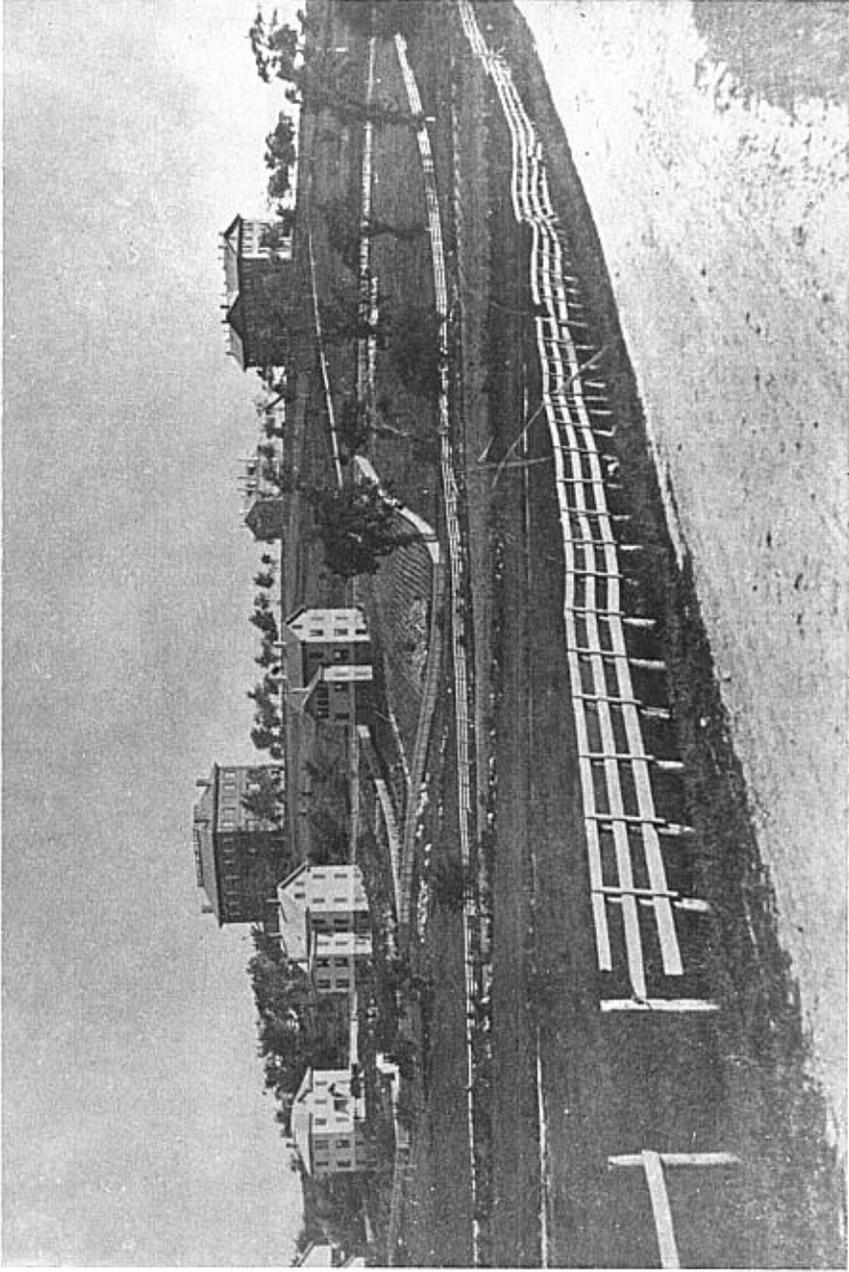


FIG. I. "COLLEGE HILL IN 1870." LEFT, BALLOU HALL (1852-1854),
TUFTS UNIVERSITY, MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS
Photograph courtesy of the Tufts Archives, Nils Y. Wessell Library, Tufts University.

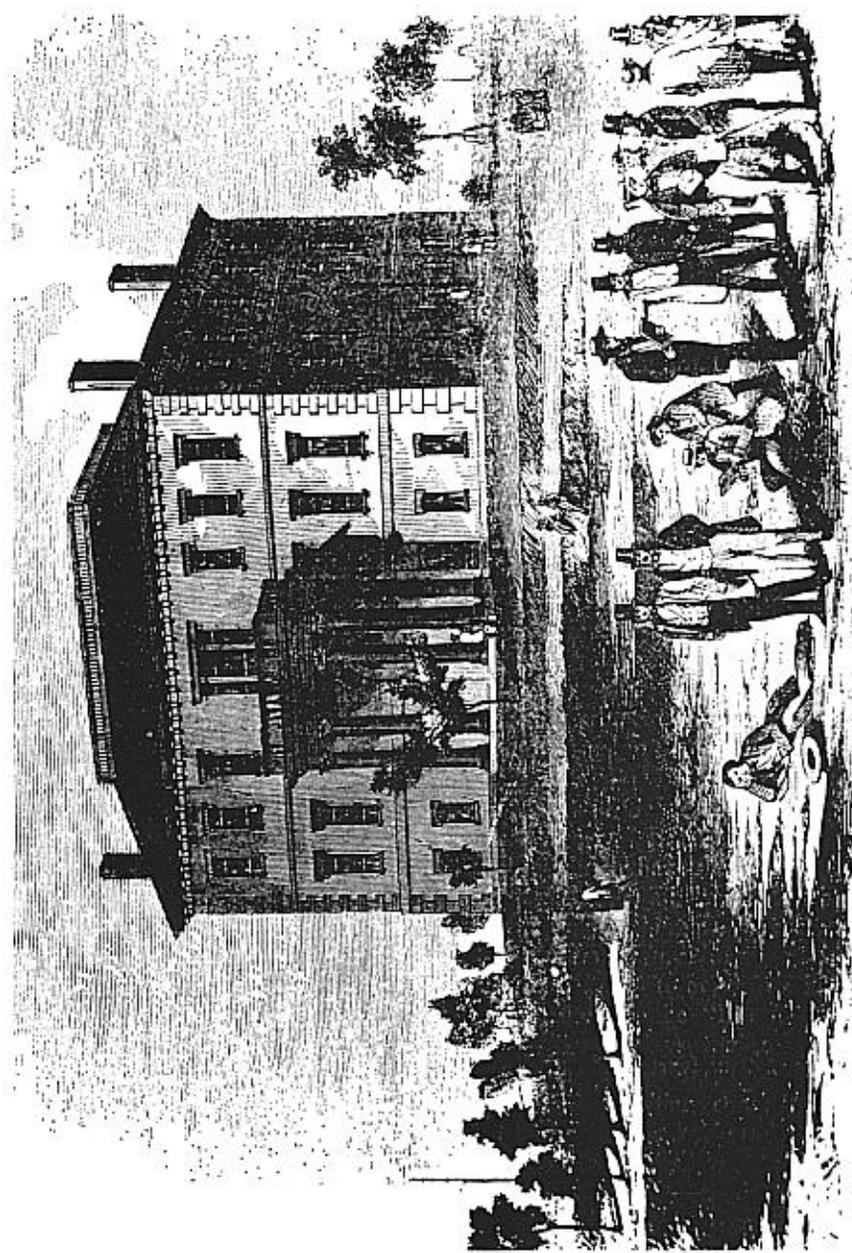


FIG. 2. BALLOU HALL (1852-1854) BY GRIDLEY J. F. BRYANT
Woodcut engraving reproduced from *Balloou's Pictorial* 11 (October 11, 1856): 225.

entire structure at the second- and third-floor levels. Apart from the belt courses and rusticated corner quoins, the brick wall surfaces were smooth and plain, and served as an effective neutral background against which the doubled-sashed wood-framed windows, doors, and south porch were set. First brown, then white paint was used on all exterior woodwork. The window lintels varied, with plain block and bracketed entablatures displayed at the second and third stories, and the segmental arch variation featured at the first. Highlighting the entire edifice was the tall south porch with its beautifully proportioned entablature and graceful Ionic columns. (Frontispiece.) Centered above was a flat-headed Palladian window which repeats the tripartite effect created by the paired porch columns flanking the central entrance space.

We are fortunate today in being able to view Ballou Hall in much the same form externally as it appeared during the 1850's. (See Fig. 3.) Thanks to restoration work done by the New York architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White in 1955-1956,¹² the building is little altered from the original except for the absence of the south porch balustrade, the presence of paired dormer windows in the east and west roof planes, and the addition in 1939 of the Eugene B. Bowen Porch to the formerly unadorned north entranceway.¹³ A stylistic rarity for its building type and locale, Ballou Hall reproduces the basic form of the astylar Italian *palazzo* of High Renaissance Rome and Florence, first revived in England by Charles Barry in the late 1820's, and introduced to this country during the 1840's. In contrast to the popular and adaptable Italian Villa mode of the same era, the Renaissance Revival was essentially nonpicturesque, monu-

mental and symmetrical. In the manner of Ballou, buildings designed in this style were restrained and dignified free-standing blocks that lacked noticeable diversions in detail and shape. Emphasis was placed upon "correctness," and upon balanced and unified composition. Despite a slight awkwardness and heaviness of form conditioned by its raised site, Ballou Hall adheres well to the stylistic principles which inspired its conception. Elsewhere in New England, it has few stylistic rivals among higher educational structures, and is comparable to certain civic structures, most notably those erected under federal auspices from the designs of Ammi Burnham Young, Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury Department in the 1850's.¹⁴

Unlike the exterior, still relatively intact, the interior of Ballou Hall has been partially renovated and rearranged on several occasions since 1854. With each passing generation of students, it has appropriately changed its character and purpose. Most sweeping of all alterations were those implemented in 1955-1956 when the building was totally gutted, new steel-reinforced walls and floors inserted, and conversion to a modernized, exclusively administrative facility realized.¹⁵ As initially planned, however, Ballou was intended to serve as the multi-purpose academic center of Tufts College. In the fashion of its counterparts at other New England colleges, Ballou was built as the educational as well as architectural focal point of its institution—an object of reference around which a full campus plan could be, and has subsequently been developed. Purposely well financed and soundly built, it has stood for over a century as a symbol of institutional pride and academic leadership.

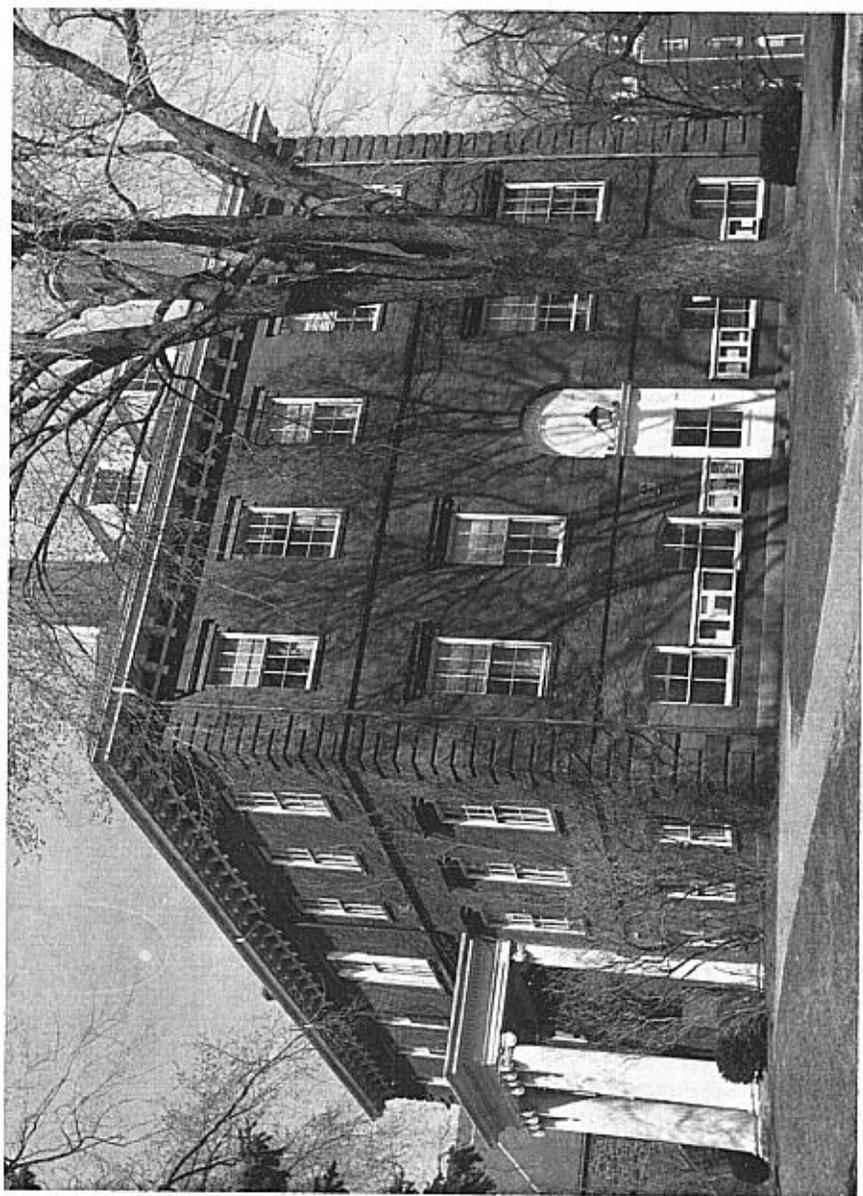


FIG. 3. BALLOU HALL (1852-1854) BY GRIDLEY J. F. BRYANT.
TUFTS UNIVERSITY, MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS
Photograph of southeast view by the Author.

The original interior of the structure was characterized by broad functional flexibility and versatility. Classrooms, laboratories, a library, student living quarters, and administrative and faculty offices were combined under one roof. But such a scheme was hardly novel. For over three hundred years since the Renaissance, educational philosophers and planners had been professing the advantages of intimately associating all facets of a student's higher educational life so as to widen knowledge, deepen experience, and promote personal growth and individualism. In the physical plans of the first English universities, provision was made for the implementation of such thinking. American educators prior to the time of the Civil War continued to subscribe to this principle. Actual extant structures such as Ballou, designed after this long-standing conviction, are physical testament to such a powerful ideal. Moreover, what could be more appropriate than the Italian Renaissance Revival style to suggest externally the cultural basis of this educational philosophy!

Sadly, it appears that the original floor plan drawings for Ballou Hall no longer exist. Nonetheless, an indispensable record of the building's initial interior layout is preserved in the Tufts Archives.¹⁶ The top floor was first utilized for student dormitory rooms, but within a few years was altered and refurbished in order to accommodate faculty offices, a literary society room, the college library, a mineral cabinet (museum), and classrooms. The second floor was intended to be the main floor of the building and was reached by a broad stairway from the porch on the south facade. The principal room on this floor was the so-called "Large Chapel," the somber and formal

appearance of which is conveyed in a ca. 1875 photograph stored in the Tufts Archives. (Fig. 4.)¹⁷ This space required enlargement ca. 1861, but later was partitioned for classrooms after the construction of the Goddard Chapel building in 1882-1883. Also present were a smaller chapel room, a recitation room, and the president's office. Designated as a "service space," the first floor was given over to offices and classrooms, and featured a lower ceiling than was present in the upper two stories. Upon the founding of the Engineering School in 1865, laboratory space was created in the cellar that provided areas for a dynamo room, a battery room, a laboratory for electrical measurements, a workshop, a furnace room, a coal bin, and a deep well from which water was pumped by hand.¹⁸ Most of the interior wall surfaces were plain with the exception of those in the library and "Large Chapel," upon which decorative stucco was spread. Certain motifs of the external pilasters and cornice were repeated in stucco in the hall and staircase areas inside. On all floor levels the rooms were conveniently arranged in relation to a central stairwell and corridors, and were close enough in proximity to allow the interrelationship of college programs and activities.¹⁹

Credit for the architectural design of Ballou Hall should unquestionably be given to Gridley J. F. Bryant. Although the architect's drawings and professional papers appear to be beyond recovery, it is possible to grant a conclusive attribution on the basis of 1855 and 1857 entries for \$950 in fees in the Tufts College treasurer's cash and ledger books and the presence of Bryant's signature on a college legal document.²⁰ Furthermore, in a June, 1853 article, the *Trumpet and*

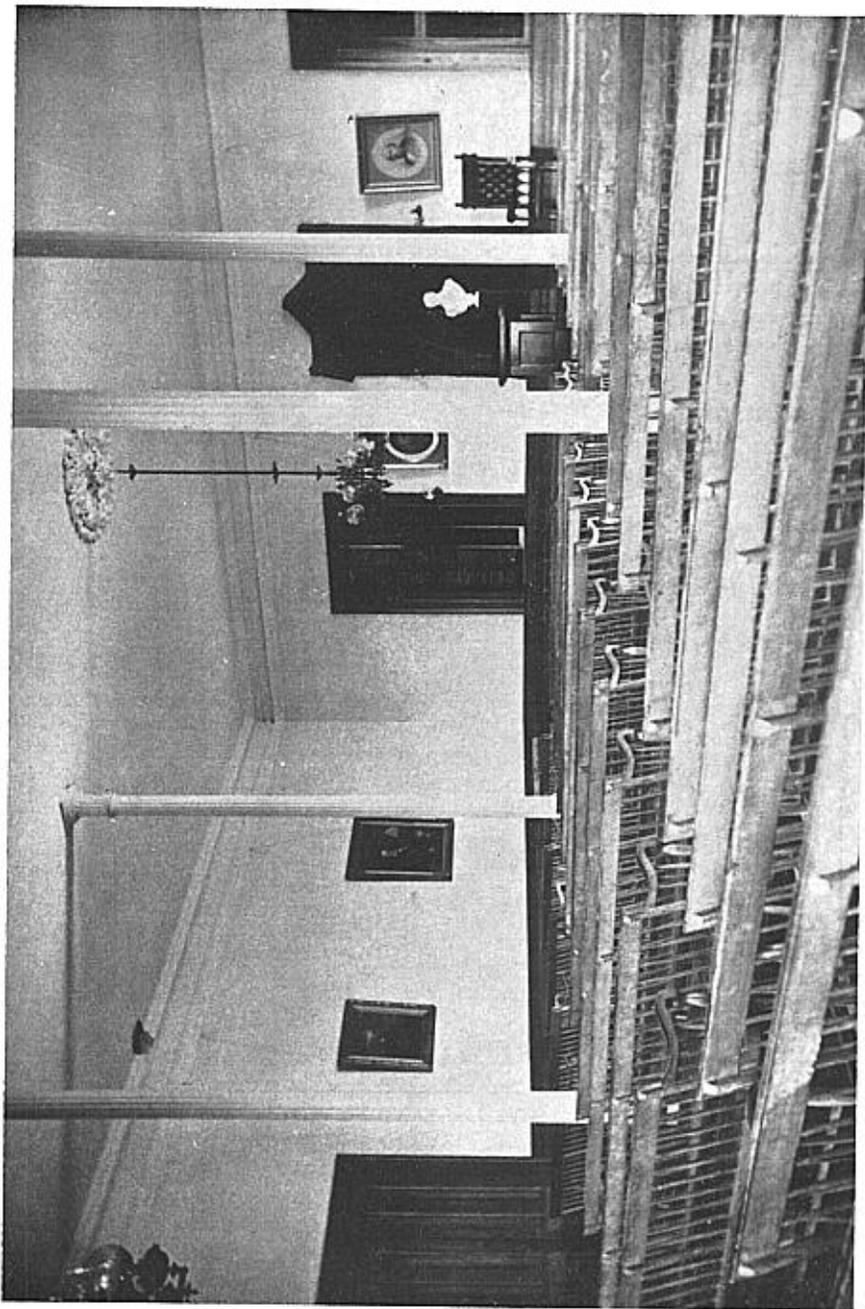


FIG. 4. ORIGINAL CHAPEL, BALLOU HALL (1852-1854) BY GRIDLEY J. F. BRYANT.
TUFTS UNIVERSITY, MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS
Photograph (ca. 1875) courtesy of the Tufts Archives, Nils Y. Wessell Library, Tufts University.

Universalist Magazine identifies Bryant as architect, while at the same time it names Boston contractors Joseph W. Curn, Wyatt Richards, and S. C. Felton as the builders.²¹ Indeed the college was very fortunate in attracting a practitioner with Bryant's structural engineering skills and architectural knowledge. After the completion of the Ballou commission, undertaken at the midpoint of his career, he carried on a distinguished and lucrative practice and designed numerous residences, business and commercial buildings, jails, schools, railroad stations, civic structures, hospitals, churches and court-houses in Boston and elsewhere throughout New England. It has been said that downtown Boston from the 1850's to 1870's was practically a "Bryant-built" city. Best known among his surviving works are the Boston City Hall, designed with Arthur Gilman between 1861-1865, and the Charles Street (Suffolk County) Jail, built in 1850-1851. On the basis of such sensible utilitarian architecture, Bryant deserves notice as "a stabilizing force in an architecturally uncertain age."²²

Despite an extensive listing of known commissions, Bryant prepared very few designs for higher educational institutions.²³ Possibly the best of these is Hathorn Hall (1856-1857) which he conceived as part of a full campus master

plan for the Maine State Seminary, today Bates College, in Lewiston, Maine.²⁴ This structure displays the same powerful three-story block mass, dentiled cornices, varied window treatments, and front Roman Ionic entrance porch as Ballou Hall. As Ballou, Hathorn conveys a feeling of functional simplicity, handsome proportion, and discreet detailing present in the majority of the architect's buildings. Although he was later to make his reputation through the use of the awkward French Second Empire style, one might very well argue that Bryant was even more successful, if not more productive, with his earlier efforts in the Italianate. Ballou offers visible support to such a contention.²⁵

The architectural and educational significance of Ballou Hall will no doubt continue to interest scholars and critics in the years to come. In an era when our colleges and universities have been curiously inconsistent about preserving their architectural legacies, the first building at Tufts College has remained safe in the care of respectful and appreciative educators. The focal point of a modern, bustling university community, its current academic role is as viable as over a century ago when an infant college staked an uncertain future within its stolid walls.²⁶

NOTES

¹ The building remained unnamed until 1892 when it was christened "Ballou Hall" by the Tufts College Board of Trustees on recommendation of the students. See the Records and Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Tufts College, Meeting of July 15, 1892, Tufts Archives, Nils Y. Wessell Library, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.

² For a comprehensive treatment of the history of Tufts College, consult Russell E. Miller, *Light on the Hill: A History of Tufts*

College, 1852-1952 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966). An older and far less impressive work is Alaric B. Start, ed., *History of Tufts College Published by the Class of 1897* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1896). Brief historical essays recounting facets of Tufts' history appear in Medford and Middlesex County histories, and in various periodical articles.

Tufts College was founded under a Commonwealth of Massachusetts charter granted

April 21, 1852. The institution became officially a university in 1955. The movement resulting in its establishment was initiated in 1847 through the efforts of Rev. Thomas J. Sawyer of New York, Rev. Hosea Ballou 2d of Medford, and Rev. Thomas Whittemore of Cambridge.

³ Edwin C. Rollins, Ballou Hall References, "Tufts Buildings" (Vol. 1), Tufts Archives, Nils Y. Wessell Library, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.

⁴ Records and Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Tufts College, Meeting of July 21, 1852.

⁵ *Ibid.*, Meeting of September 21, 1852.

⁶ "Tufts (Universalist) College, Somerville, Massachusetts," *Ballou's Pictorial* 11 (October 11, 1856): 225; Records and Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Tufts College, May 3, 1853.

⁷ Miller, *Light on the Hill*, p. 51; *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* 25 (November 13, 1852): 2.

⁸ *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* 26 (July 23, 1853): 26.

A large framed black-and-white lithograph portraying the cornerstone festivities and showing Mr. Yale's magnificent tent is stored in the Tufts Archives.

⁹ Start, *History of Tufts College*, p. 24.

¹⁰ Miller, *Light on the Hill*, p. 61.

¹¹ "The Tufts College," *Trumpet and Universalist Magazine* 26 (June 11, 1853): 2.

¹² Tufts College Public Relations Office News Release (1955), Tufts Archives, Nils Y. Wessell Library, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts; "Ballou Hall Restoration," *Tufts Alumni Review* 2 (February, 1956): 18a-18d.

¹³ Rollins, Ballou Hall, "Tufts Buildings" (Vol. 1), pp. 9-10; see also the *Tufts Weekly* 43 (November 2, 1939): 1, 3. The porch was presented to the college by alumnus Eugene B. Bowen (Class of 1876), and was formally dedicated in special ceremonies (October 28, 1939) by then President Leonard Carmichael. Markedly similar in scale and spirit to the south porch, the Bowen Porch added a coherence and monumentality to the north facade of Ballou Hall. Its four Greek Ionic columns were taken from an old academy building, once the property of Maplewood Institute in Pittsfield, and were transported to the Tufts

campus at Mr. Bowen's expense. The porch was built somewhat wider than the south porch in order to permit automobiles to pass underneath it. During the 1955-1956 renovation of Ballou Hall, the north door became the main entranceway to the structure. Today, it faces the grassed and tree-shaded mall which forms the main axis of the hilltop campus.

¹⁴ For perceptive and scholarly discussions of the Italian Renaissance Revival style, consult Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth* (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1958), Chapter 5, and, Clay Lancaster, "Italianism in American Architecture Before 1860," *American Quarterly* 4 (1952): 127-148.

¹⁵ "Ballou Hall," *Tufts Alumni Review* n.s. 1 (October, 1955): 4; "Ballou Hall Restoration," pp. 18a-18d; "Ballou Hall Restoration Will Centralize Admin.," *Tufts Weekly* 59 (May 13, 1955): 1.

¹⁶ See Rollins, Ballou Hall References, "Tufts Buildings" (Vol. 1), p. 10.

¹⁷ In the 1955-1956 renovations, the "Large Chapel" was reconstructed, albeit not too faithfully, and today as the "Coolidge Room," serves as an attractive lounge and meeting area for faculty, trustees and students. Present here are replicas of the original ornamental wall cornices of the old chapel, as well as the four original cast-iron supporting columns in the center of the room.

¹⁸ Rollins, Ballou, "Tufts Buildings" (Vol. 1), pp. 1-6.

¹⁹ "The Tufts College," p. 2.

²⁰ Treasurers' Cash Book (Entry of January 15, 1855, p. 3), and Ledger Book (Entries of January 17, 1856, pp. 2 and 38), Basement Vault, Ballou Hall, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts. An amount of \$250 was paid out to Bryant on the first occasion; \$700 was added a year later upon completion of the interior of the building. Curiously, at no point in the Records and Minutes of the Trustees of Tufts College is Bryant's name mentioned. Such documents are customarily excellent sources for information about institutional architects.

See also, Award of the Arbitors in the Case of Coburn and Richards (Suffolk County Court), July 19, 1854, Tufts Archives, Nils Y. Wessell Library, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.

²¹ "The Tufts College," p. 2.

²² Walter H. Kilham, *Boston After Bulfinch: An Account of Its Architecture, 1800-1890* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 67.

²³ "A Complete Catalogue of Plans, Specifications, Architectural Drawings, Photographs, etc. of Gridley J. F. Bryant (In Custody of Henry T. Bailey, North Scituate, Mass., 1890)," University of Oregon Library, Eugene, Oregon, [1890].

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11; *Catalogue of the Officers and Students of the Maine State Seminary* (Lewiston, Maine: Journal Office, 1857), p. 22; *Maine State Seminary Advocate* (Vol. vi, No. 1) (April, 1861), p. 2.

²⁵ A broad study of Gridley J. F. Bryant's life and career has yet to be compiled due to the lack of original drawings and manuscript materials. The best treatment, published at the

turn of the century, is Henry Turner Bailey's, "An Architect of the Old School," *New England Magazine* n.s. 25 (1901): 326-349. Among other writings dealing with Bryant's earlier years are: Kilham, *Boston After Bulfinch*, pp. 65-67; "Gridley James Fox Bryant" (Obituary), *American Architect and Building News* 64 (1899): 97; and, two brief articles discussing Bryant's Boston commercial architecture by Ada Louise Huxtable which appeared in *Progressive Architecture* 39 (1958): 105-108; 117-118.

²⁶ For assistance in the preparation of this article, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Russell E. Miller, Archivist, my wife Carolyn K. Tolles, Archives Assistant, and members of the staff of the Nils Y. Wessell Library, Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts.

With this issue OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND has returned to its normal schedule of circulation, answering for the contiguous appearance of the last two bulletins.