SOUTH PORCH, BALLOU HALL (1852-1854) BY GRIDLEY J. F. BRYANT.
TUFTS UNIVERSITY, MEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS
Photograph by the Author.
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, 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. 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 remained 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,” 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-
sistent dispatch, and . . . to report, to call
a meeting of the Board to hear the re-
port, and act on the same. Two months
later a verbal report was presented to
the trustees, and votes were taken to
enlarge the building committee, to “proceed im-
nediately to erect a Building for the use
of the College,” to complete the founda-
tion the ensuing fall, and “to expend a
sum, not exceeding $20,000.” 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.
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. Work was ener-
ggetically resumed the following spring
on the then barren eminance which com-
prised 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 photo-
graph 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 Universal-
ist 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 com-
ing until the services were half through; and
we are confident there were upwards of a
thousand present.

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. Readied for academic use, Bal-
lou Hall must have looked much the
same as it does in an 1856 woodcut en-
graving 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 sur-
roundings” during the earliest years of
the institution. While under construc-
tion, it was described by the Trumpet and
Universalist Magazine:

The principal college building . . . is de-
signed in the Italian [Renaissance Revival]
style, being a parallelogram in outline, measur-
ing 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 bracketed
cornice, and balustrade around the roof. The
main entrance to the building is to be arched
and covered by a Roman Ionic portico, sur-
mounted with a balustrade.

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. 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 sand-
stone belt courses extended around the
FIG. 1. "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 Ballou'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 seg-
mental 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.) Cen-
tered above was a flat-headed Palladian
window which repeats the tripartite ef-
cfect 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 restora-
tion work done by the New York archi-
tectural firm of McKim, Mead and
White in 1955-1956, 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. A stylistic rarity
for its building type and locale, Ballou
Hall reproduces the basic form of the
astylar Italian palazzo of High Renais-
sance 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-stand-
ing blocks that lacked noticeable diver-
sions in detail and shape. Emphasis was
placed upon "correctness," and upon
balanced and unified composition. De-
spite a slight awkwardness and heaviness
of form conditioned by its raised site, Bal-
low 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, Su-
ervising Architect of the United States
Treasury Department in the 1850's.

Unlike the exterior, still relatively in-
tact, the interior of Ballou Hall has been
partially renovated and rearranged on
several occasions since 1854. With each
passing generation of students, it has ap-
propriately changed its character and
purpose. Most sweeping of all altera-
tions were those implemented in 1955-1956
when the building was totally gutted,
new steel-reinforced walls and floors in-
serted, and conversion to a modernized,
exclusively administrative facility real-
ized. As initially planned, however,
Ballou was intended to serve as the multi-
purpose academic center of Tufts Col-
lege. 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 sub-
sequently been developed. Purposely
well financed and soundly built, it has
stood for over a century as a symbol of
institutional pride and academic leader-
ship.
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. 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.) 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. Designed 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. 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.

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. 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.
The First Building at Tufts College

*Universalist Magazine* identifies Bryant as architect, while at the same time it names Boston contractors Joseph W. Coburn, Wyatt Richards, and S. C. Felton as the builders. 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 courthouses 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.”

Despite an extensive listing of known commissions, Bryant prepared very few designs for higher educational institutions. 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.

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.

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.

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.


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 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 II (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.


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


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


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.


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.


20 Treasurers' Cash Book (Entry of January 15, 1855, p. 3), and Ledger Book (Entries of January 17, 1856, pp. 2 and 18), 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.

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

The First Building at Tufts College


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.