

Dwight Hall, Yale University  
69 High Street  
New Haven County  
New Haven, Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-285

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
801 19th Street, N. W.  
Washington, D. C.

## DWIGHT HALL, YALE UNIVERSITY

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Location: 69 High Street, New Haven County, New Haven, Connecticut (east side of High Street between Chapel and Elm Streets, facing the campus, with the rear of the building on High Street).

Present Owner: Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut

Present Occupant: Yale University

Present Use: Chapel and meeting rooms.

Statement of Significance: Dwight Hall was designed by Henry Austin in 1842. It is a fine example of the early Gothic revival style and was reputedly modeled after King's College Chapel in Cambridge, England. It was built to house the college library but was later remodeled to contain Dwight Memorial Chapel, assembly rooms, a library, and offices of the Christian Association.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built in 1842 on land owned by Yale University. "Dwight Hall was erected of Portland sandstone in early Gothic style in 1842-46 to house the college library...was known as the Old Library from 1889 to 1930 at which time the books were removed to the Sterling Memorial Library." The Buildings of Yale University, Bulletin of Yale University.
2. Date of erection: 1842-46.
3. Henry Austin, 1804-1891.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The original plan was much as it is now. Austin's intentions are recorded in various drawings, one of which shows many pinnacles which apparently were never executed. (See Section B., Part II, Architectural Information).
5. Alterations and additions: Major renovations were made in 1931 from designs by Charles Z. Klauder to include Dwight Memorial Chapel, assembly rooms, a library, and the offices of the University Christian Association.

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D. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

Dwight Hall was named to commemorate Timothy Dwight, B.A., 1769, eighth President of Yale, and his grandson, Timothy Dwight, B. A. 1849, twelfth President of Yale.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Interview with Miss Lottie Bishop, 100 York Street, New Haven, who is compiling the second and revised edition of The Buildings of Yale University.

2. The Secretary's Office, Yale University, The Buildings of Yale University, published in 1961, compiled from all of the available University records. Revised edition published 1965, Series 61, No. 3.

George Dudley Seymour, Researches of an Antiquary, New Haven, private printing, undated.

The New Englander, Vol. I., No. III, July 1843, chapter on "Public Libraries," pp. 309-11.

Prepared by: Jonathan B. Conant  
Research Assistant  
National Park Service  
August 31, 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: A good example of Henry Austin's work in the early Gothic revival style. Rare in American architecture is the use of reversed arches of heavy masonry used to spread the loads of the lofty nave piers in the main building.
2. Condition of fabric: Good; well maintained and in constant use as a chapel and center for many community and campus oriented activities at Yale University.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The over-all dimensions, excluding the projecting buttresses, are 145'-9" x 89'-7"; the main building in the center measures 44'-10" x 89'-7"; the lofty single story blocks on each end are approximately 62'-5" x 24'-2"; these are connected to the main building by two story wings which are 26'-2" wide by 45'-3" deep. It should be noted that these dimensions approximate but do not agree exactly with dimensions recorded in an early description of the building before it was completed. An article in the New Englander, Vol. I, No. III, July 1843, "Public Libraries," stated:

"It is hardly necessary to add a description of the building. The ground plan and the view tell the whole story, except what relates to dimensions. The whole pile extends its front, including the buttresses above the base, one hundred and fifty-one feet. The front of the main building, measured in the same way, is fifty-one feet; and its depth from front to rear, is ninety-five feet. The front of each of the extreme wings is thirty feet, and the depth sixty-seven feet. The connecting wings are each twenty-six feet by forty, between the walls. The extreme height of the towers is ninety-one feet.

"The main building, designed to contain the college library, will include only one room, the interior measurement of which will be forty-one feet by eighty-three. It will resemble in form a Gothic chapel, with its nave and aisles. The height of the nave will be fifty-one feet; its breadth seventeen feet. Between the clustered pillars of the nave,

there will be alcoves, as shown in the ground plan, fourteen in number, and each ten feet by twelve in extent. A gallery is to extend on all sides of the room, and is to contain the same number of alcoves. The ceiling is to be finished with groined arches.

"The extreme wings, and the south connecting wing, will be finished for the several society libraries, with alcoves and galleries, and shelves for books above the galleries. The north connecting wing will contain a suite of rooms for the librarian, and a reading room, in which books may be consulted at all times.

"The walls are of red sandstone, from the quarries at Portland, on the Connecticut river. The roofs are covered with tin. And though the several buildings are thrown into one pile, for convenience, as well as for architectural reasons, each library occupies a fire-proof building by itself, completely separated from the others. Thus the security against fire is about as nearly perfect as the nature of the case will permit.

"The entire cost of the building, when completed is expected to fall short of thirty thousand dollars.

"It is perhaps due to the architect to say, that the pinnacles which crown the buttresses will not seem so tall and bayonet-like in the building, as they are represented by the engraver."

2. Foundations: The undressed stone foundation wall is faced with ashlar. Loads from the interior piers in the main block are spread by the use of heavy masonry reverse arches. Also the ceiling in the basement consists of a brick vault to carry the first floor load to the foundation wall.
3. Wall construction: Red sandstone walls and buttresses; buttresses of the main building terminate above the roof in light pyramidal stone blocks, whereas the buttresses on the two end blocks terminate with flat stone blocks. In this connection, reference should be made to an engraving of the plan and exterior which was presumably done from the architect's drawings for the July 1843 article quoted above. This drawing indicated tall pinnacles surmounting each buttress in all of the main block and the end blocks. Seymour mentions that "the

building fairly bristles with pinnacles, the intention being to execute them in wood and to paint them to imitate the reddish brown masonry of the building." (See George Dudley Seymour, New Haven, The Tuttle, Morehouse and Taylor Company, New Haven, 1942, p. 219). He conjectures that the design was never fully executed "and was never essentially different from what it is today." Besides the portal and steps on the northernmost block, which has been sealed off with masonry, another glaring difference between the existing conditions and the engraving is the fact that the links which connect the three blocks are shown in the engraving to be one story with crenelated parapet, while today they are two story with crenelated parapet. The octagonal turrets at the four corners of the main block are essentially as shown including the domed copper roofs with copper crockets and finial. The gable ends of the main block terminate above the roof in open copper parapets in a design of pointed arches and quatrefoils, similar to the engraving. The end blocks today do not have such a treatment, although such is indicated in the engraving.

4. Chimneys: Two.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: Two of the three original stone stoops on the east front are in place as are the minor entrance stoops in the connecting wings. There are four stone bulkheads with double wooden doors leading to the basement.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The wooden doors with Gothic paneling are set within portals with pointed arches, without trim except for a stone molding at the heads.
  - b. Windows: A slender pointed-arch window is set at each end of the nave of the main block. They are leaded stained glass with Gothic tracery, though not original. In the end blocks, the windows above the doorways are leaded clear glass with Gothic tracery. Windows in the connecting links are casement with diamond-shaped lights. There are clerestory windows in the nave of the main block.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Relatively flat gable roofs of copper sheets and battens.
- b. Cornice: Raking cornice of main block is plain with carved foliate forms widely spaced; wooden cornices on gabled roofs.
- c. Cupolas, towers: Placed in the center of each end block is an hexagonal tower containing a skylight.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The plan of the main block, which has been converted from its original library function to a chapel, consists of seven bays of a typical aisle-nave-aisle relationship, the nave piers supporting the clerestory wall. What is thought to be the architect's original drawing in the Yale Memorabilia of Sterling Library, Yale University, indicates that each bay was enclosed with shelves in the aisles to form alcoves. This same arrangement is found in the 1843 engraving of the plan and also in an interior photograph dated prior to 1931. This later photograph also shows that there was a gallery over the aisles which was also partitioned off into alcoves. Today, without the alcoves, there is the typical open cathedral space now used as a chapel.

At the third bay from the east there are double wooden doors leading to the connecting wings which have been altered from the two drawings referred to above. The eastern half of these links each serve as generous stair halls to the second floor. Behind them, on the west front, are reading rooms and offices. Double doors lead from these links to the two end blocks. The block on the south consists of a single high-ceilinged room. The block on the north has been converted to small offices.

- b. Second floor: The second floor of the two wings also contains various office spaces.

2. Stairways: One in each connecting wing. They are light oak terminating in a post to the ceiling instead of a newel. The lower portion of the stairs is framed above the balustrade by a flat arch springing from the post. The stringer is enclosed.

3. Flooring: In the main building the floors are travertine; other floors are of wood or vinyl tile.
  4. Wall and ceiling finish: Main building; plaster scored to imitate stone above wood paneling which is carried from the floor to height of former galleries. Ceilings over nave and aisles are wooden and divided into bays by wooden arches springing from corbeled colonettes with longitudinal wooden ribs connecting the arches at the peak. The clerestory wall is supported by stone piers with clustered columns supporting ribbed pointed arches. Walls in the two end blocks are also scored plaster and ceilings are plaster. Walls in stair halls are paneled wood.
  5. Doors and doorways: Doors between the main block and the connecting links are wooden with two vertical panels; doors connecting the links to the end blocks are six-paneled double doors, with panels having a carved vertical motif.
  6. Decorative features and trim: The two large traceried stained glass windows are the main feature of the interior of the main block. Besides the stone surround on the interior of the main exterior doors, there is a carved surround in wood on the interior doors.
  7. Notable hardware: None.
  8. Lighting: Modern electrical fixtures.
  9. Heating: Modern central heat; also fireplaces in the end blocks and the connecting wings which are for the most part simple openings with stone trim and without shelves.
- D. Site and surroundings:
1. General setting and orientation: The rear of the building faces High Street on the west, with the main entrance on the east campus yard. The setting from this view is amid trees, walks, and lawns.

Prepared by: Woodrow W. Wilkins  
Supervisory Architect  
National Park Service  
August 3, 1964

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the NHPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the NHPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President.

The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichey, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.