

**Site Report: Hope College**  
**ARCH1900**  
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Historical Background

Hope College is undoubtedly a place of great historical significance not only to Brown University, but to the city of Providence as well. Built in 1822, it was the university's second edifice. It has the unique distinction of serving uninterrupted in its 190 years, as a dormitory for Brown students. Drainage and heating was installed in 1885 and 1890, respectively. Since then, the building has been renovated twice, once in 1891 and most recently in 1958. In the former—a project led by Marshall Woods 1845—the damaged north wall was repaired and other structurally weak parts of the building were strengthened. The interior, described as “worn and dingy” was redone, and a new cellar dug. The 1958 renovation was by far the more comprehensive, however.

Presidents Wriston (1937-55) and Keeney (1955-66) are both known to have remarked on the battered state of Hope College. President Wriston described Hope College as “an historic structure, one of the oldest in continuous use in the United States, the College home of famous men for 135 years. Yet, after 135 years, it stands in a condition unworthy of its great past.” His successor President Keeney echoed the view that Hope College was, despite its poor condition, a vital “sentimental and architectural asset.”

Sometime in the 10 years preceding the 1958 renovation, Hope College's west doors were “blocked off to prohibit traffic” and “the paths to those doors... obliterated” as the university's focal point shifted to the Main Green from what is now called the Quiet Green. In 1958, the university seized an opportunity presented by a rare housing surplus and commenced renovation. There was little difficulty accruing funds and support for the project (the Providence

Preservation Society also pledged its support); the university's bicentennial was fast coming and Hope College's historical significance to the university and the greater Providence area was widely recognized.

#### Practical and Archaeological Concerns: Locating the Trenches

Because Hope College is in use at present, excavations will be limited to the building's surroundings. The east side is not a viable location as it experiences heavy foot traffic. However, the west side is a suitable location to excavate, for two reasons. First, it is relatively removed from human activity. Second, prior to the mid-20th century when its doors were blocked off, the west side of the building was the front. A path once led from the west side of Hope College through the Quiet Green, down College Hill. This area is also, with the exception of one gas pipeline and several trees, free of obstructions.

Photographic records of the area in question date back to 1874 (Fig. A). Fig. A depicts the west face of Hope College in comparatively sound condition. A straight path leads to the central door. This path is also featured on a 1907 drawing (Fig. B). In Fig. C, which dates to 1912, we have a profile shot of the area. Robinson Gate provided a northern egress route from the path, which is extended to run parallel to the whole building. The process by which the path(s) were removed as part of the 1958 renovation is unknown. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether pieces of the path(s) would be uncovered. However, as the main entryway into Hope College for well over a century, the area must have experienced considerable traffic. This would make the finding of material culture statistically more favorable than, for instance, an area by the east side of the building.

The path(s) was no longer extant in 1959, as Fig. D and Fig. E show. Fig. D in particular is interesting because it demonstrates that during renovation, the area in question was littered with construction material. Some of these may not have been cleared but covered up. After 1959, the west side of the building would have experienced increasingly less traffic. It is thus likely that finds in the area will date pre-1959.

### What We Can Learn

Although, in the present, new buildings are erected at an astonishing pace, older buildings are seldom completely raised. For reasons of historical preservation, many old buildings are instead renovated, as was the case with Hope College in 1958/9. Even in the more distant past, renovation (or at least reconstructing an edifice directly on top of a previous edifice) was not an uncommon practice. Can this process be identified archaeologically? Hope College's 1958/9 renovation are recent enough that, added to disuse of the west side of the building after the renovation, we should be able to verify the process archaeologically.

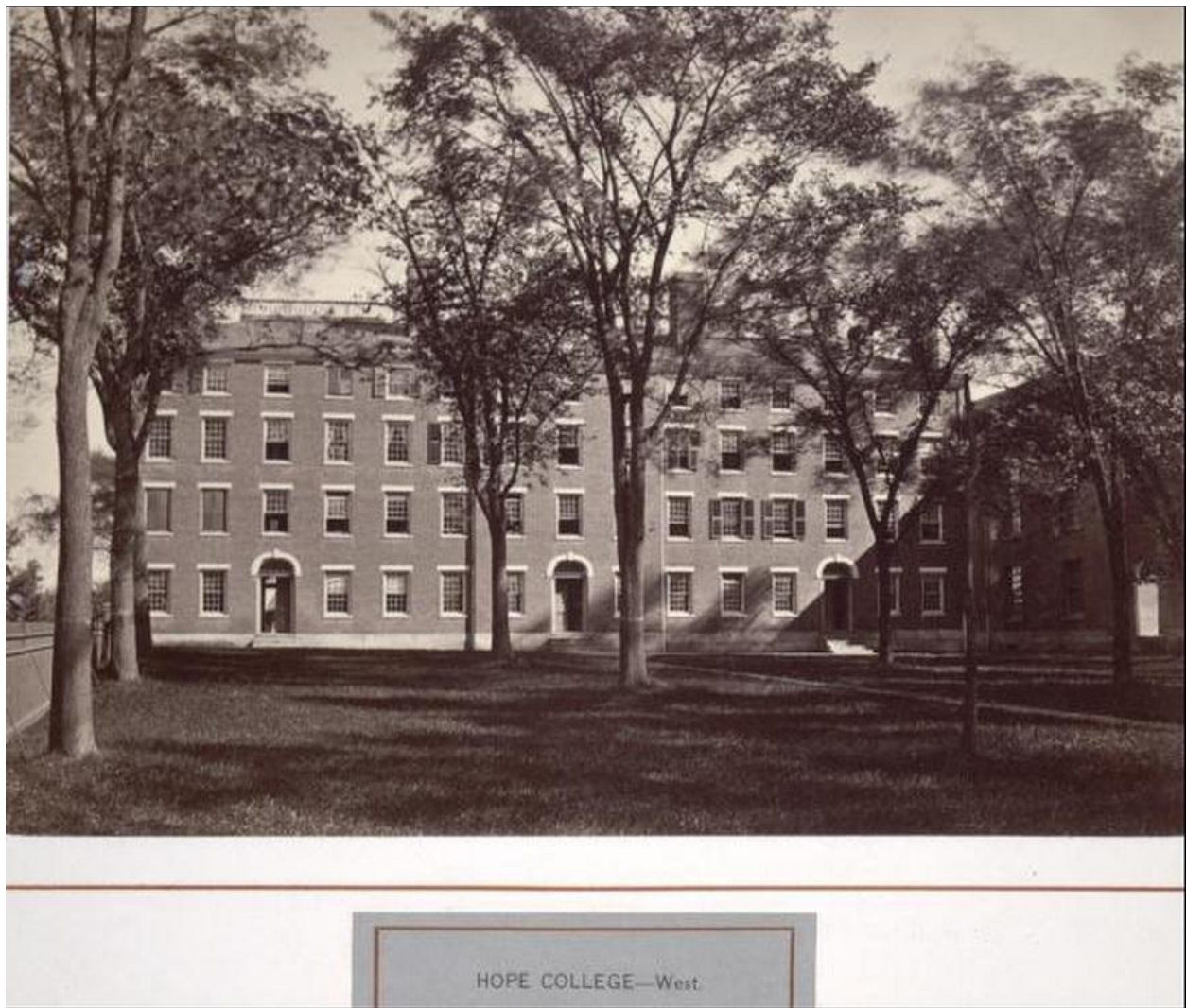
Hope College, however, has undergone another renovation in 1891, for which no photographic evidence is extant. Promisingly, this 1891 renovation reputedly involved the addition of a new cellar to the structure, which can be verified (cf. Fig. A and Fig. B; Fig. B clearly shows the addition of half-covered windows for the basement level and more steps leading up to the doors due to lower ground level). Note that it is not entirely clear from the photographic evidence whether these windows are a product of 1891 or 1958 (cf. Fig. C which dates to 1912, which may or may not depict them).

Thus, a successful excavation of Hope College can shed a number of valuable insights. While not highly likely, finds may include the possessions of 19th century residents of the

building. Such finds may provide more information on dormitory life in the past. The chief aim of the proposed project, however, is to gauge to what extent and in what manner building renovations appear in the archaeological record. Such a study is relevant in the broader context of historical archaeology: It will inform us not only on how building renovations were done in the years around 1891 and 1958, but also more generally how renovations can (or not) be seen through archaeology.

Figures

**Fig. A**



**Fig. B**

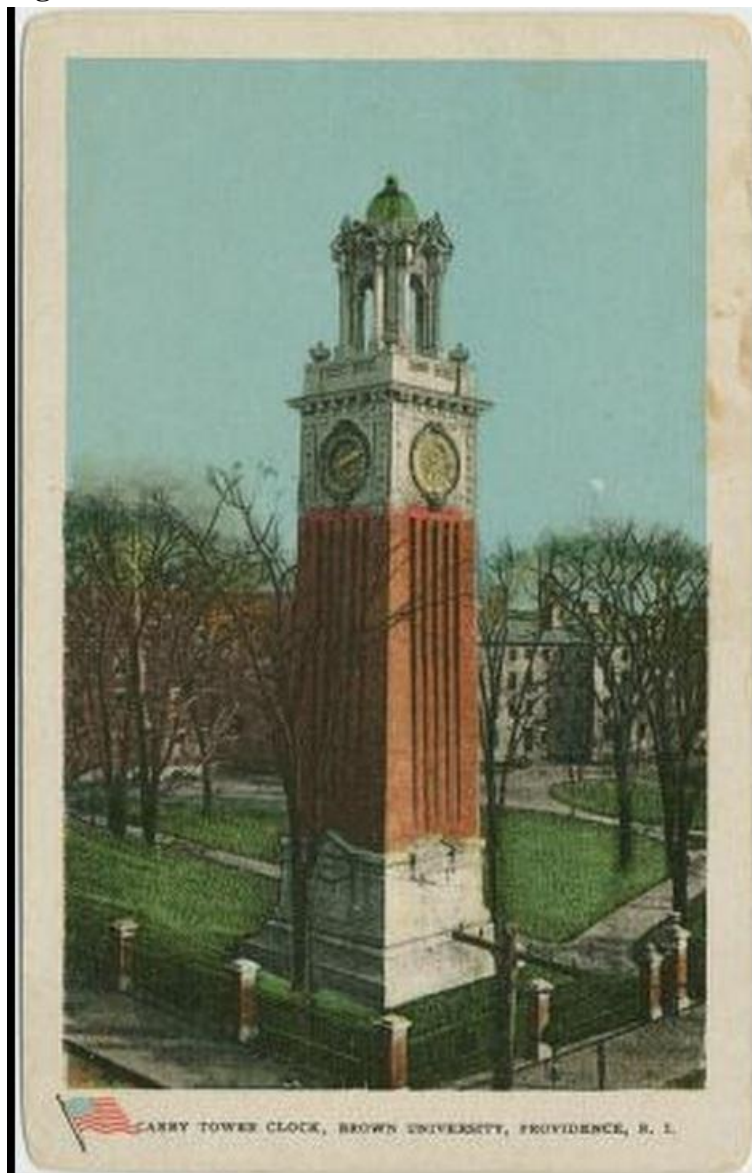




Fig. C



**Fig. D**





**Fig. E**



References

*Brown Alumni Monthly*, Vol. 58, no. 6 (March 1958).

*Brown Alumni Monthly*, Vol. 57, no. 5 (February 1957).

“Hope College,” Martha Mitchell’s *Encyclopedia Brunoniana*, 1993.

[http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News\\_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=H0210](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=H0210).

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