

# Hope College: Brown's Oldest Residence Hall



The interior of a student room in Hope College in 1897. Image in Tolles, Bryant F. 2011. *Architecture & Academe: College Buildings in New England Before 1860*. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, p. 46. Google Books. <http://books.google.com/books?id=NIJCGeoDB8AC&lpg=PP1&pg=PR4#v=onepage&q&f=false>

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ARCH 1900

October 1, 2013

Hope College sits unassumingly on the northwestern corner of Brown University's Main Green, its brick exterior easily overlooked beside the striking columns of its neighbor Manning Hall or the bustling Blue Room café which borders Hope College to the east. Ask a student on campus about Hope, and one is likely to receive a response extolling the dorm's central location on the Main Green and proximity to freshly-baked Blue Room muffins. While a bronze plaque outside the front door serves to offer a taste of Hope College's long history, and students moving into the dorm are provided paper slips with a brief history of the building, few residents are cognizant that their living space has served the same function for nearly two hundred years. From the relatively-forgotten namesake of the building – Hope Brown Ives – and use of coal stoves to heat rooms in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to debates about gender-neutral bathrooms currently taking place among residents, the history of Hope College has proved colorful, entertaining, and insightful, offering a glimpse into the daily life of a Brown student across centuries and helping to connect current students to the university's past.

In 1822, Brown University was facing a crisis of space. One hundred fifty two students had enrolled in the 1821-22 school year, forty nine of whom were freshman (Bronson 1914: 171). If the student population continued this growth, there would simply not be enough space for the college's academic exercises. In recognition of the need for increased facilities, the Corporation (the administrative body overseeing the university's economic and logistic affairs) established a committee to tackle the issue of acquiring or constructing a third building for the campus (Bronson 1914: 171). The shrewd decision to include Nicholas Brown, a wealthy and notoriously generous alumnus and trustee, on the committee led to his single-handedly purchasing a new plot of land for the university from one Nathan Waterman (Bronson

1914:172). The building erected on this land would serve as a new dormitory for student housing, and construction began in 1822.

By January 13, 1823, construction of Hope College was complete (see Figure 1). Sitting atop granite foundations, it was an “elegant brick building,... length 120 feet Width 40 feet four stories high and containing 48 rooms,” (as it was described by the Corporation upon completion) and stood proudly to the north of University Hall (Tolles 2011:45; Bronson 1914: 172). Trees were also added to the campus of Brown at the time of Hope’s construction, and the college grounds enclosed by a fence (Bronson 1914: 175). It is perhaps interesting to note the name of the architect of Hope College has been lost to history, despite his addition of an important and attractive structure to Brown’s campus (Tolles 2011: 45). While perhaps not obvious to the architecturally uneducated, Hope College “is reputed to be one of the purest specimens on colonial architecture in all of New England... light and graceful in its lines” (Bronson 1914: 173), and distinguished architectural historian Bryant F. Tolles Jr. states “it leaves a neat, ordered, and aesthetically positive impression” (Tolles 2011:45) (see Figure 2). Indeed pleasant to look at, Hope College also served the role of initiating the “campus row” organizational plan to Brown, already present at Yale at this time (Tolles 2011:45) (see Figure 4).

For the tidy sum of \$5,189 for the lot and \$20,000 in construction costs, Brown’s campus now possessed an edifice to house its rapidly expanding student population, thanks to the generosity of Nicholas Brown (Bronson 1914:172). Brown refused the Corporation’s offer of a marble monument outside the new building to memorialize his gift. He did, however, compose a letter, stating his vision for the building to be “useful in the promotion of Virtue, Science, and Literature, to those of the present and future generations, who may resort to this University for education” (Bronson 1914:172). In this same letter, he also made one simple request: that the

new dormitory be named after his only living sister, Hope Brown Ives, to whom we shall now briefly turn.

While the bronze plaque currently adorning the main entrance to Hope speaks at great length of Nicholas Brown's many roles among the university administration, and commends later financial beneficiaries of the building, no mention is made of the dormitory's namesake. Likewise, in the *Encyclopedia Brunoniana* and Walter Bronson's *The History of Brown University: 1714-1914*, references to Hope Brown Ives are kept to a minimum. She was, the *Encyclopedia Brunoniana* tells us, Nicholas Brown's "only surviving sister and the wife of his business partner, Thomas P. Ives" (Mitchell 1993). But can Hope be known as an individual independent from her association with two prominent male figures? A short obituary of this oft-neglected individual was printed in the 5<sup>th</sup> Volume of the *American Journal of Education*, published in 1858, which describes Hope Brown Ives' "tenderest sympathy for every form of suffering, and a humility which none but those who knew her well would have conceived possible; she united that fearlessness of danger, which is hereditary in her family" (Barnard 1858: 311). Her generosity with money is also cited in the passage, extolling her charity towards friends and the poor (Barnard 1858:311). While certainly still not an intimate glimpse into the life of Hope Ives Brown, her obituary at least provides a hint of her character, and serves to more fully represent the namesake of Hope College as more than a sister and wife of two important individuals in the early days of Brown University.

What has received more thorough and easily-accessible coverage is the condition of student life in Hope College during the nineteenth century. In its initial days, Hope College housed around one hundred students in its forty eight rooms, and served as the residence for two of Brown's literary societies (Tolles 2011: 45). Students had to draw water from a well outside

the dormitory, and once used, this water was discarded into the building's single drainage pipe on the south end of the building (Mitchell 1993). If the pipe froze during the winter, waste water was dumped out the window (Mitchell 1993.) Such examples of nineteenth century "water issues" in Hope College seem to place current students' complaints into perspective when, on rare occasion, there is no hot water in the showers (which were not added to the building until 1904) (Mitchell 1993). Each room was equipped with a coal fireplace for heating (see Figure 3), and one can imagine the added inconvenience of rushing to finish an assignment while simultaneously keeping an eye on the coal stove to ensure heat throughout the night (Mitchell 1993). Additionally, staying up late to finish a paper would indeed involve "burning the midnight oil," as candles provided the only source of lighting the rooms at nighttime (Tolles 2011:45). Again, one gains a fascinating glimpse into changing norms across the centuries, especially when this is juxtaposed against the current policy of a \$100 fine for each candle found in a dorm room!

Hope College was renovated three more times in its history. The first came in 1891, when the building "was much out of repair – the north wall cracked, timbers rotting, and the whole interior worn and dingy" (Tolles 2011: 45). Again, Hope was refurbished between 1957-9, and its occupancy singled out for upperclassmen in the highest academic standing (Mitchell 1993). Hope College also received special attention in the fall of 2012, when the university's Archaeology of College Hill class excavated outside of the building in search of material traces of the past (Draper 2012). The group recovered "beer bottles and garbage that people have been throwing out of dorm windows since 1800," including "bullet casings dated between 1860 and 1912, broken glass, ceramic, nails and some bones," as well as a stone path feature (Draper 2012, para. 14-5).

Most recently, in the summer of 2013, Hope received a minor makeover, with rooms receiving new paint jobs and the replacement of appliances in the student kitchen (Ark 2013, para. 12). In its current state, Hope College houses sophomores in thirty one single and sixteen double occupancy rooms. The most pressing debate among residents is over the inclusion, after the summer 2013 renovations, of strictly gender-neutral restrooms on all floors. While very different from shoveling coal to heat one's room, and certainly unthinkable in a nineteenth century context, the issue of mixed gender bathrooms is equally representative of the social reality of the current age. It is small instances such as these which, while not memorialized on plaques, offer thought-provoking details and more-broadly applicable information about the vastly different realities of students across time, all sheltered and housed by the old brick walls of Hope College.

## Figures

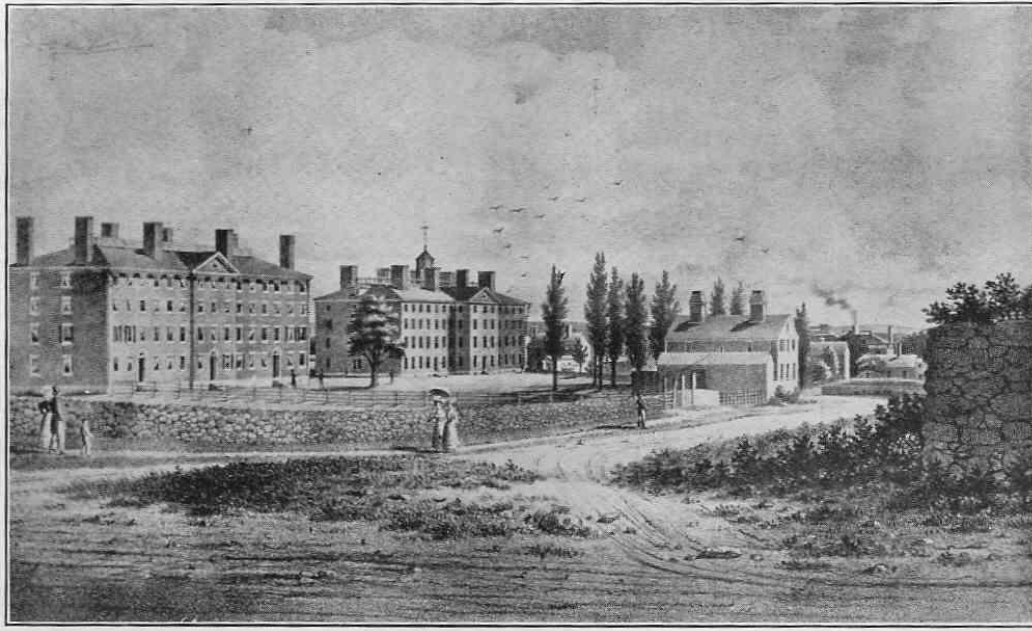


Figure 1. Brown University in 1825. Hope College on the left. Image in Weeden, William B. 1910. *Early Rhode Island: A Social History of the People*. New York: The Grafton Press, p. 334. Web. [http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/p/2005/dins\\_doc/www.dinsdoc.com/weeden-1-10.htm](http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/ebook/p/2005/dins_doc/www.dinsdoc.com/weeden-1-10.htm)

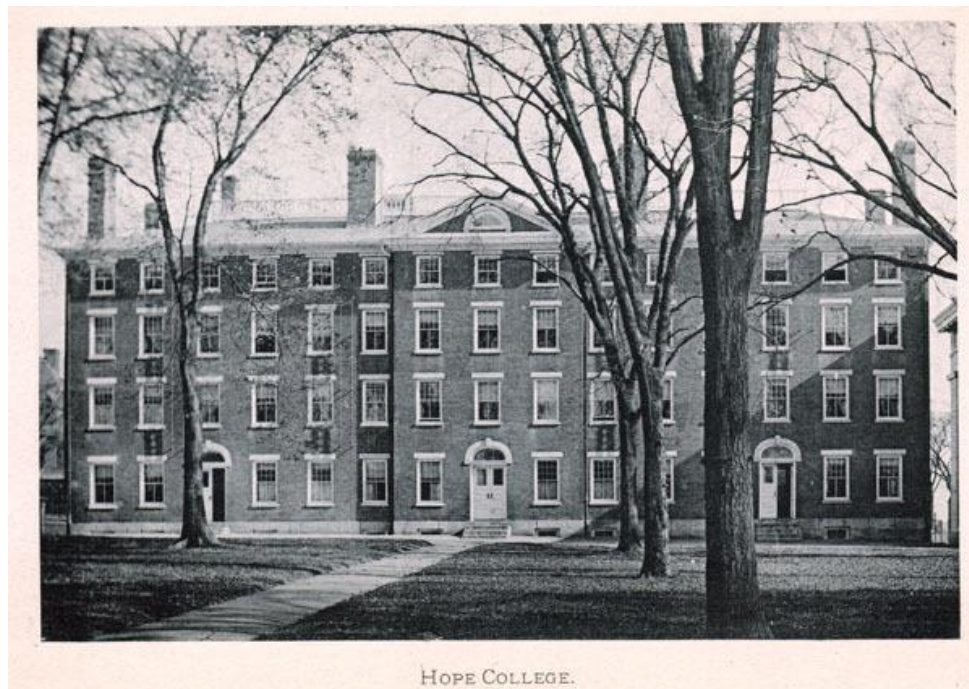


Figure 2. Hope College in 1891. Image on “BROWN University, Hope College Dorm 1890s Gravure Print.” 2013. *eBay*. Accessed September 29, 2013. Web. [http://www.ebay.com/itm/BROWN-University-Hope-College-Dorm-1890s-Gravure-Print-/161117328138?pt=Art\\_Prints&hash=item258357530a](http://www.ebay.com/itm/BROWN-University-Hope-College-Dorm-1890s-Gravure-Print-/161117328138?pt=Art_Prints&hash=item258357530a)



Figure 3. The interior of a student room in Hope College in 1897. Image in Tolles, Bryant F. 2011. *Architecture & Academe: College Buildings in New England Before 1860*. Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, p. 46. Google Books. <http://books.google.com/books?id=NIJCGeoDB8AC&lpg=PP1&pg=PR4#v=onepage&q&f=false>

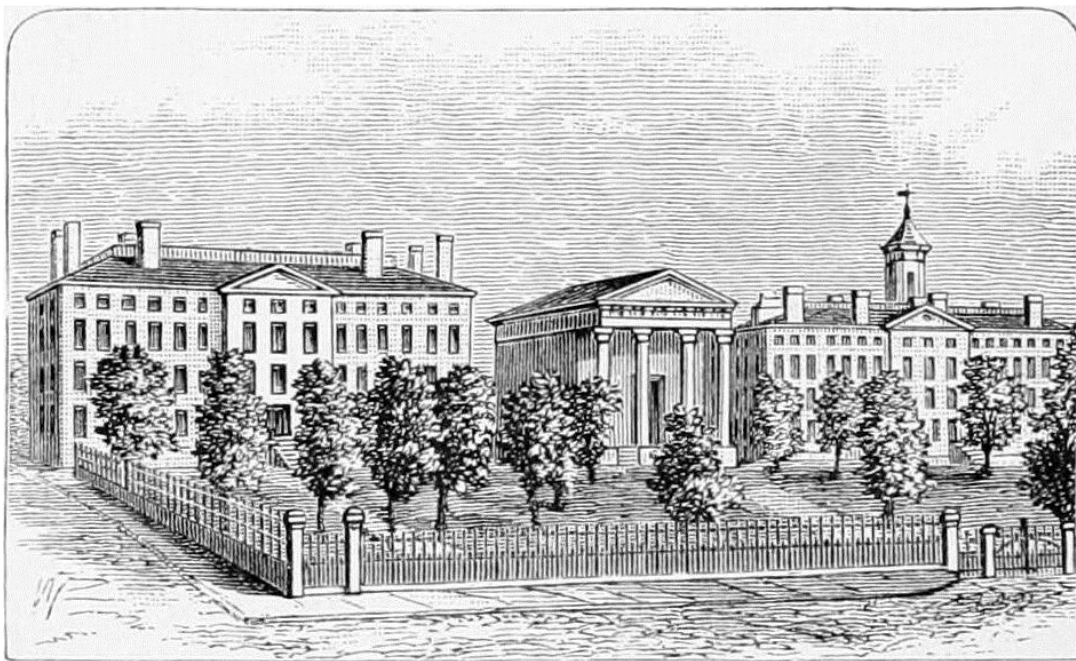


Figure 4. Brown University in 1900. Hope College on the left. Image from *Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography*. 1900. Vol. 1, p. 395. Published on the web at *Wikisource*. Accessed September 29, 2013. [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/File:Appletons%27\\_Brown\\_Chad\\_-\\_Brown\\_University.jpg](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/File:Appletons%27_Brown_Chad_-_Brown_University.jpg)



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