

FEATURE

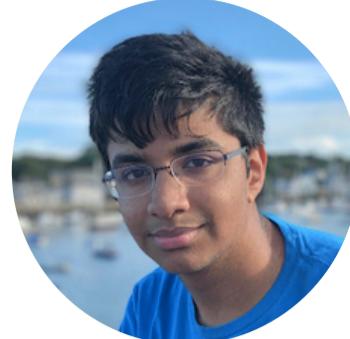
Pearson Hall

Introduction

Pearson Hall, with its distinctive cupola, metal railings, and four white doors, stands at the center of the Phillips Academy campus. Straddling the border of the two adjacent quadrangles facing its front and back, Pearson Hall is surrounded on both sides by the newly renovated Oliver Wendell Holmes Library and aging Morse Hall. The home of both the Classics Department and its newest addition, the Academic Skills Center (ASC), Pearson Hall has four classrooms: Pearson A and C (First Floor) and D and G (Second Floor). Pearson A, D, and G are Classics classrooms, while C was converted in 2019 to the Academic Skills Center due to the renovation of the OWHL. One of the two wooden staircases leads from a small conference room next to the main entrance up to the second floor, while the other staircase, notorious for its inestimable number of steps and ear-splitting bell that catches all too many students late for their next period class, ascends from next to the ASC. As you tour through Pearson Hall, you will observe the distinctive metal heaters, cozy wooden architecture, and startling busts of famous Romans and Greeks scattered throughout the building, along with countless other niche features that make Pearson Hall unique from any other building on campus.



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With a long and varied history from the place where Oliver Wendall Holmes Sr. translated the entirety of Vergil's Aeneid in his freshman year or where George H.W Bush may have practiced riflery, Pearson Hall has remained largely the same even as the campus around it has undergone a gradual transformation. Pearson Hall is special; the sturdy oak benches of Pearson A & G, the busts scattered throughout the building (and underneath...), the faded artwork high above, and more, all come together to form the storied home of the Classics at Phillips Academy.

History of Pearson Hall

Pearson Hall, named after the first principal of Phillips Academy, Eliphalet Pearson (1778-1786), has had a tumultuous but rich history, serving as one of the oldest landmarks on Phillips Academy's campus. Through the primary accounts of Claude Fuess, Phillips Academy's 10th Headmaster from 1933-1948, who led the school successfully through a new era in history with the Great Depression and World War II, we can gain an idea of not only his deep passion for Pearson Hall, but also his frustrated thoughts about its management. Fuess recounts, "In 1817, the benevolent William Bartlet, having watched with interest the development of the Seminary [now Pearson Hall], resolved to provide that institution with a suitable Chapel...but the building is included in a list made out by Bulfinch himself, where it is designated as 'Chapel and Library for Theological Institution.' As completed in 1818 and transferred to the Trustees by the donor, it was made of brick, containing a chapel at one end and a library at the other, with recitation rooms above. The total cost was apparently \$23,374. It was this building which was known for more than ninety years as Bartlet Chapel and used by Andover Theological Seminary. (Below: Comparison of Bulfinch Hall and Pearson Hall)



Pearson Hall



Pearson Hall

In the '70's some ill-advised persons altered it by adding a preposterous clock tower, thus destroying the effect of the Bulfinch façade. In 1908, when the Seminary was moved to Cambridge, the building was purchased by Phillips Academy, rechristened Pearson Hall, to distinguish it from Bartlet Hall (then in use as a dormitory), and divided into recitation rooms. In 1924, it was shifted from its commanding location to a new site to the southeast; the inappropriate tower was taken down and the beautiful Bulfinch lines were restored just as far as that could possibly be done; and it stands to-day much as it was originally constructed, although the interior has been completely changed--not altogether for the better" (Claude Fuess, Men of Andover. Biographical Sketches in Commemoration of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of Phillips Academy. New Haven: Phillips Academy. 1928.).



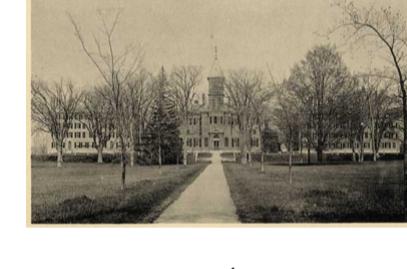
Below is a series of photos documenting the change of Pearson Hall from its original form in the 1860's to its modern form (Courtesy of Paul Neshamkin, PA Class of 1959 Website):



1870s



1870s (Different View)



1878-1922 (Victorian Tower Added)

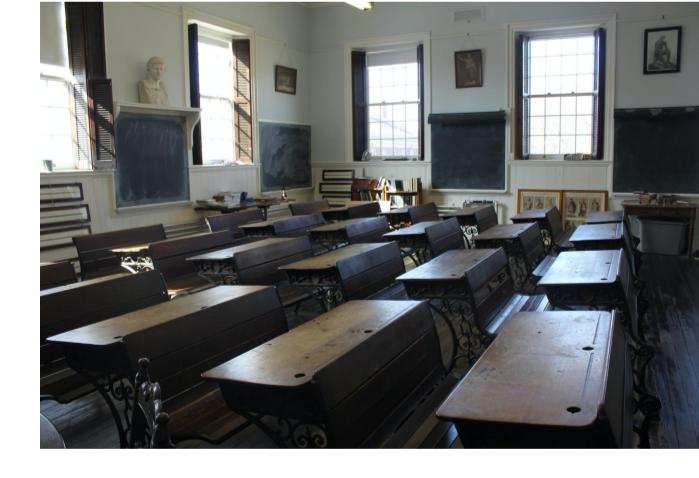


1912 (Phillips Hall now Foxcroft Hall)



1930s (Restored to Bulfinch-like Design)

Claude Fuess wrote about his dissatisfaction with the interior design of Pearson Hall, writing "The sequel to these interesting events ought not to be left untold, perhaps as a warning to other younger headmasters. The other Bulfinch building on the Hill was Pearson Hall, purchased by the Academy from the Theological Seminary and later moved by Mr. Cochran in the 1920's from its central position in Seminary Row to a site on the south side of the Great Quadrangle. There on the ground floor I had taught English for many years, in a classroom eighteen feet high, with old-fashioned desks and antediluvian lighting. In a mood of optimism I thought how fine it would be if Pearson Hall could be reconstructed as Bulfinch Hall had been and devoted to the study of foreign languages...Unfortunately the school has never since been able to make the interior of Pearson Hall what it properly should be" (Claude Fuess, Independent Schoolmaster. Boston: Little, Brown. 1952.).



Nevertheless, the interior of the Pearson Hall which Claude Fuess disliked so much is the one that has evolved over the years into the cherished home of the Classics Department.