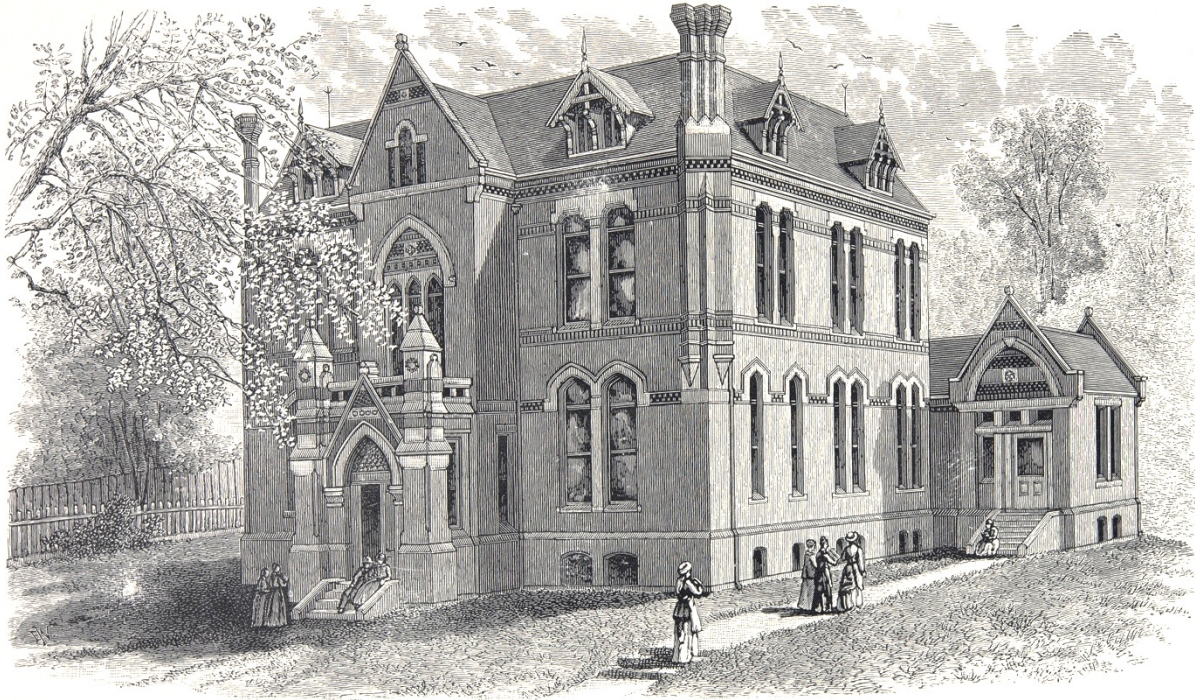


Williston Hall, 1876-1917



Williston Hall, c. 1880

On December 22, 1917, Williston Hall, dedicated to the sciences, was destroyed by fire.¹ It was the second great fire that devastated Mount Holyoke College. The first had burned down the college's huge central structure in 1896 and for a several years Williston Hall became the hub of campus life. Until 1876 there had been only one building on the campus, Seminary Hall, which had been successively enlarged to house classrooms, dormitories, faculty living quarters and administrative offices, even the power house. These additions honored Mary Lyon's insistence that the whole seminary would be under one roof.

¹ For this history I owe an enormous debt to James Gehrt, Digital Projects Lead for Digital Assets and



Seminary Hall, Hearn cabinet card, c. 1890

It's true that in 1870 a small library was built but it was connected to the main building by a corridor with its own entrance and so could be considered as part of the seminary structure.



Seminary Hall and Library, c. 1875

However, it became apparent that there was insufficient room for the growing collections of minerals, plants, animals and other objects (continually sent by former students, some from abroad), and only makeshift laboratories for the sciences. Furthermore, many pointed out that art would be better pursued if there were a gallery. To respond to the urgent need for more room, the trustees decided in 1873 on a new building for science and art.

But where to put the new building? That was a really vexing problem because many of the seminary's people wanted it attached to the large building to preserve the ideal of one community under one roof. Accorded to the reminiscences of Anna C. Edwards, the location being debated centered upon a ninety-foot tall black walnut tree just northeast of the seminary structure.² Some wanted the new building to be joined to the old by a corridor, and teachers accordingly were invited to examine a ground plan laid out in front of the walnut tree. "As we stood, not at all satisfied

² Anna C. Edwards, "The Beginnings of Williston Hall," *Alumnae Quarterly*, II, April 1918, pp. 1-6.

by what we saw, some one said ‘Why not put the Hall *back* of the walnut tree?’” Hence the momentous decision to erect a second building for the school, entirely separate from the huge original one.

In July 1873 the trustees approved a plan for the new Natural History and Art Building by Peabody & Stearns of Boston, one of New England’s leading architectural firms. Another Boston firm, Bowditch & Copeland, surveyed the ground and laid out the site.³ Funds were already being solicited. One appeal signed by a special committee of the trustees, wrote that “This is distinctly a Christian School [. . .] *This school is in no way sectarian.* [. . .] Its work is for Christ’s kingdom.” \$100,000 was needed both for the new building and for the Seminary’s needs as a “Family School” where each “young lady” is required to spend from 45 to 70 minutes a day in some part of the family work. Donors were told that “Rev. O. H. White, D. D., of New Haven, Conn., is authorized by the Trustees of the Seminary to solicit and to receive donations for the same.” Several men had agreed to lecture when the new building was ready: Charles H. Hitchcock and Charles A. Young of Dartmouth College, Charles O. Thompson of Worcester, and John W. Churchill of Andover. Contracts for the foundations were assigned in October, 1874, to Dexter Brunette of South Hadley, and for the superstructure to Joyce and Burnham of Springfield; ground was broken a month later.

Despite the committee’s frank solicitation of the Christian faithful, the simultaneous appeal by Principal Julia Ward was entirely secular.⁴ “In the department of Art we are especially needy and we solicit paintings, engravings, photographs, statues, busts, coins and other articles suitable for such a collection.” She doesn’t list scientific objects. On June 1875, however, when the erection was well underway, she sent a second appeal,

³ *Opening of Lyman Williston Hall. Address of Prof. W. S. Tyler, and Exercises of Dedication* (Springfield, 1877), pp. 5-6. Here also is the chronology of the decisions about the new building. In the present essay, unless otherwise credited all documents referred to are in the college archives RG 24, B & G, series 3, buildings, Williston Hall, boxes 106, 107 and 108. They will not be individually referenced.

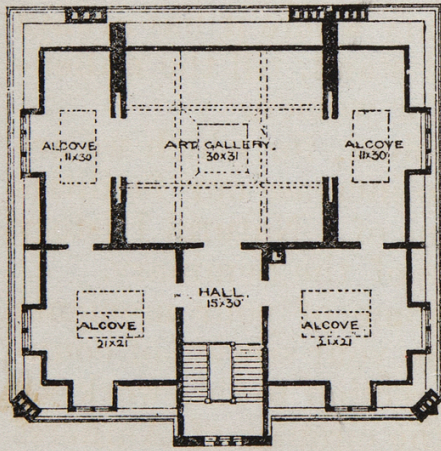
⁴ A three-page leaflet of 1874 with a cursive letter by Ward lithographed on the verso of a ground plan of the new building.

repeated with little variation in November. This time she asked alumnae for specimens of natural history, quoting the long list of specimens covering all fields provided by Professor Edward Hitchcock, Jr., of Amherst College.

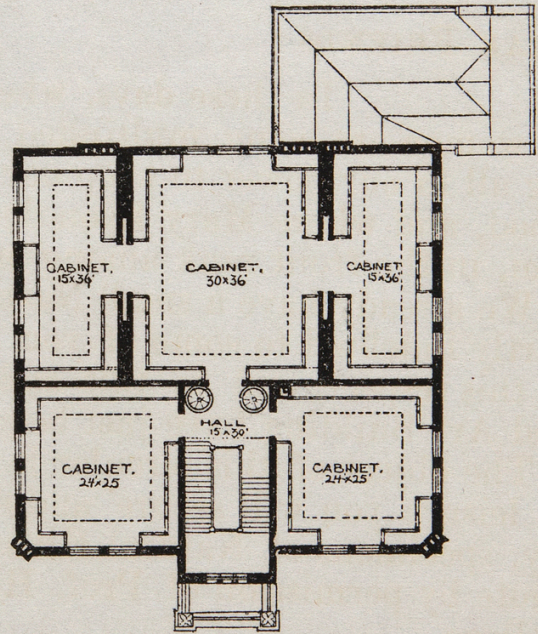
The secular tone of Ward's appeals didn't challenge the Seminary's Christian mission, of course. She didn't need to refer to it; it was the context that framed her words. Indeed, the dedication speech of the Rev. W. S. Tyler is a deeply religious document.⁵ "The idea which it [the new building] represents is that of Science and Art in a woman's Seminary, united and consecrated to Religion. Science and Art are sisters, and Religion is mother of them both." He drew Mount Holyoke into the current national focus on the arts and sciences in the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition by praising that exhibition's "Women's Pavilion."

Principal Ward's appeals were printed on the versos of a plan of each of the proposed four floors of the new structure. Its third floor had an art gallery and side rooms, the second, five "cabinets," the first, a lecture room, two cabinets, an "Apparatus Room," and a "Professor's Study." The basement specified rooms for Zoology and Geology and a large room labeled simply "slabs." Projecting from the southeast corner of the building was a small attached wing with utility rooms at the basement level, and a laboratory equipped with sinks at the first story.

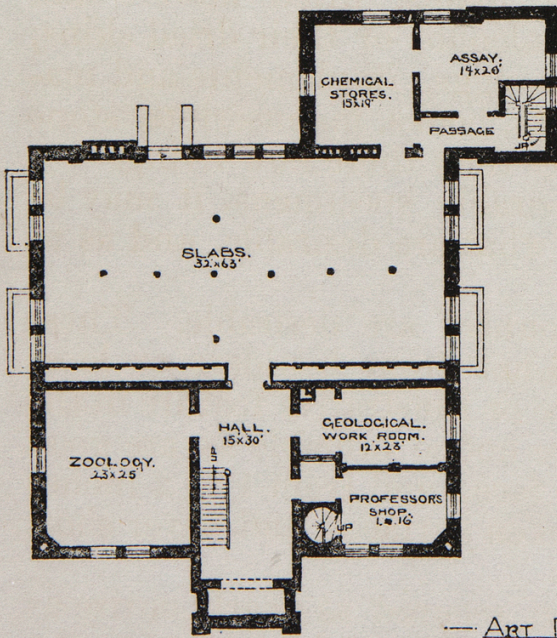
⁵ Tyler (1810-97), a trustee of the Seminary, was a professor of Greek at Amherst College, and a biographer of Edward Hitchcock whose sons maintained close associations with Mount Holyoke.



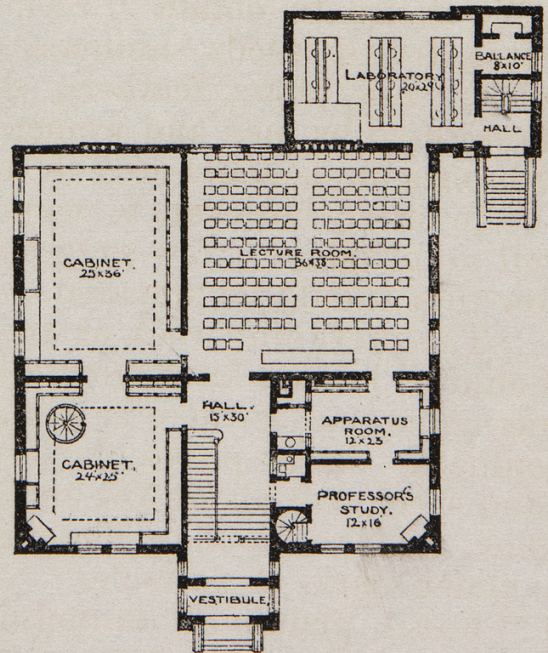
THIRD STORY PLAN.



SECOND STORY PLAN.



BASEMENT PLAN.



FIRST STORY PLAN.

— ART BUILDING —
 — MOUNT HOLYOKE SEMINARY —
 SOUTH HADLEY.
 • — DEABODY & STEARNS —
 ARCHITECTS.
 — BOSTON. —

Williston Hall plan, 1875

The homely word “slabs” needs an explanation. It referred to early Jurassic sandstone tracks of theropod dinosaurs (initially called giant bird tracks), published to acclaim in America and Europe in 1936 by Edward Hitchcock of Amherst College. In her memoir, Anna Edwards wrote that upon entering the Seminary in September, 1853, she became fascinated by tracks that Hitchcock had given the school. When she began teaching geology at the college in 1869, she determined to add to Mount Holyoke’s collection of tracks that included several purchased by the school and housed in the cellar of the seminary building. When the plans for the new building were being made, Edwards lobbied the reluctant architect successfully for space to house tracks.⁶ She sought the assistance of Charles Hitchcock, Edward’s son, who went with her and Louise Cowles to look for tracks. He recognized some about a mile north toward Amherst which were freely given to the school by the owner of the land. He then steered them toward other tracks a bit further away along the Amherst road, a quarry which his father had exploited for Amherst College, called the “Moody quarry.” There were still tracks to be dug out there and a number were brought to the new building by a four-horse team shortly before the dedication in November, 1876. Hitchcock also returned to his father’s former sites in Connecticut and there bought some tracks with money furnished by the school.

The basement room labeled “slabs” was therefore designated early in the planning stages. The structure’s foundations were completed by the autumn of 1874, and construction began the following spring. The cornerstone was formally laid on June 1, 1875, and the building dedicated a year later on November 15, 1876. The walnut tree is here on the left. The

⁶ Among several teachers lobbying for the new building, Edwards (1835-1930) took the lead in acquiring sandstone tracks and continued to have a major role in establishing the exhibits in the science rooms. She was an energetic participant in college affairs after becoming a full-time teacher in 1868. She signed and dated to the month in 1876 and 1877 several of the stereo views that will shortly be mentioned. Associate Principal from 1883 to 1888, she retired in 1892.

Peabody & Stearns building in brick with sandstone trim was a sober Gothic Revival structure “of a distinctly English flavor.”⁷



Williston Hall, c. 1880 (Thomas Chubbuck engraving)



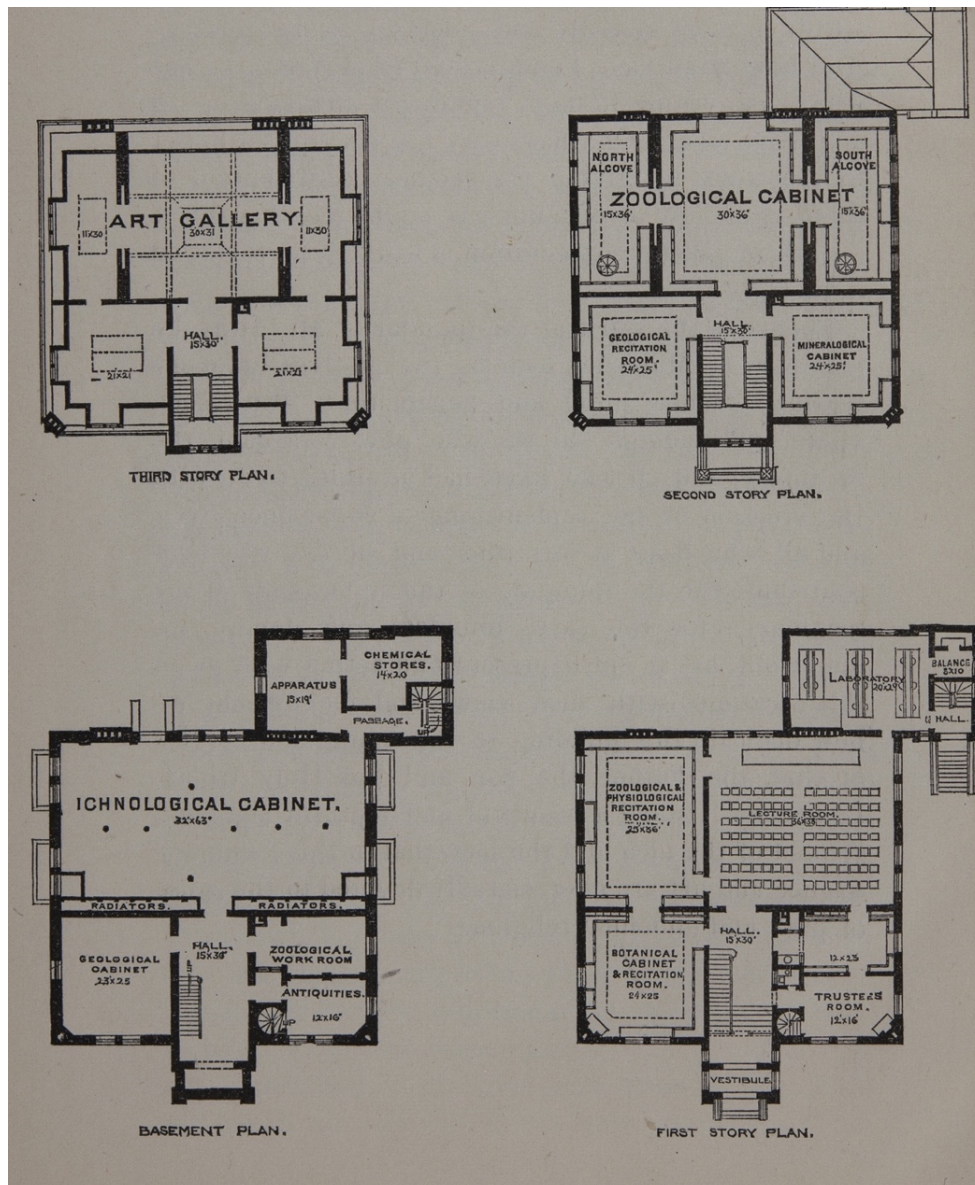
Williston Hall staircase, 1876

A stereo photo of the second floor of the staircase features the three pointed windows over the façade. They bear geometric patterns as do all

⁷ Michael Davis, personal communication Oct. 29, 2016. He continues: “It’s an interesting mash-up of ecclesiastical features—especially those [of] the central entrance bay where one finds a gable and tracery in the large window above—and secular/domestic forms in the corner chimneys, dormers, and window forms of the lateral sections of the façade and sides of the building.”

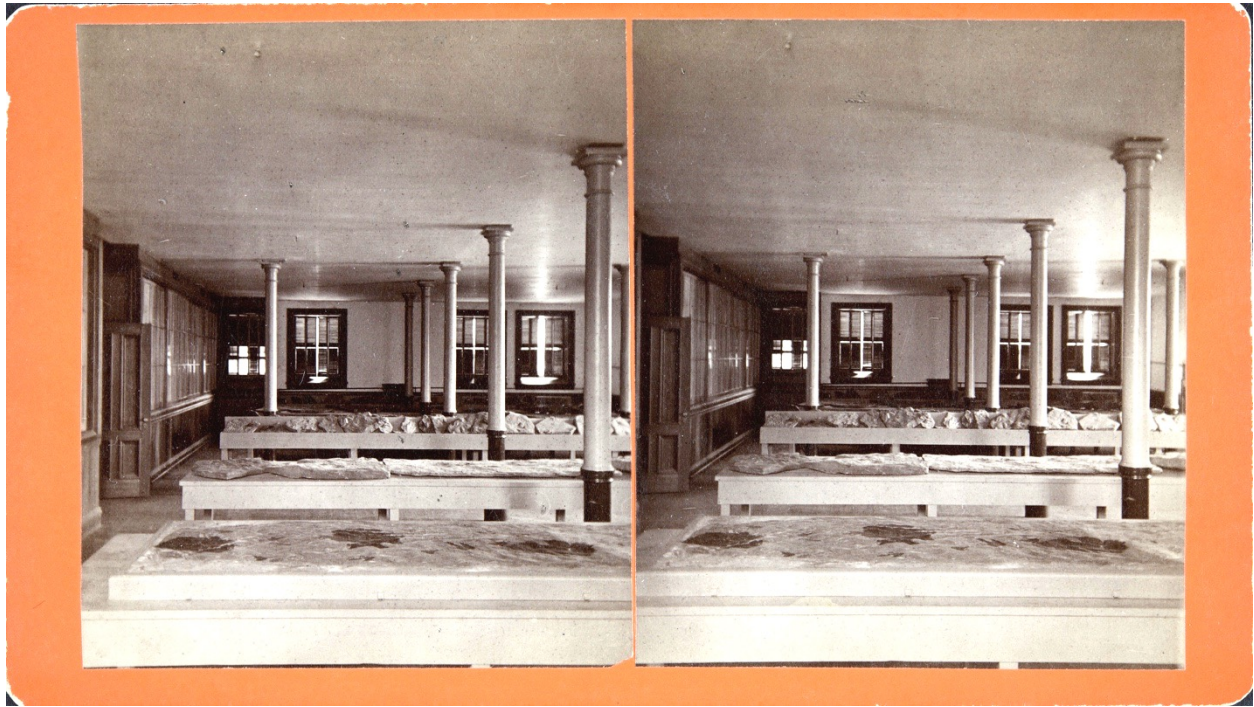
the other windows of the building. It was named for A. Lyman Williston not only because his \$10,000 was the largest contribution toward the building's cost of \$50,000 but also because of his long association with the institution. Having retired from his business, he took on the superintendence of the construction. The building was warmed by steam from the nearby power plant, which had survived the 1896 fire, and speaking tubes ("voice pipes") were installed throughout.

For the dedication pamphlet, *Opening of Lyman Williston Hall*, the plan of 1875 was reproduced but except for the art gallery, all the rooms were renamed.



Williston Hall plan, 1876

“Slabs” became the more elegant “Ichnological Cabinet” and the adjacent basement rooms were now Geological Cabinet, Zoological Work Room, and a smaller space labeled “Antiquities” (its use was not explained). The first floor retained the Lecture Room, now accompanied by the Zoological & Physiological Recitation Room, the Botanical Cabinet & Recitation Room, as well as the Trustees Room and an unspecified small room. The second floor had a large Zoological Cabinet, a Geological Recitation Room, and a Mineralogical Cabinet.



Williston Hall basement, Ichnological Cabinet

The dedication pamphlet and photographs of 1876 and 1877 give accounts of the objects on each floor.⁸ In the basement's Ichnological Cabinet were an astonishing 100 slabs, including the eponymous Otozoum Moodii named by the elder Hitchcock. The sandstone tracks were placed on several angled tables at convenient heights. The second floor's principal room, although labeled "Zoological Cabinet," held a large collection of prehistoric casts associated with geology, and was sometimes referred to as "Geological Cabinet" or as "Palaeontological Cabinet." This was described as the collection of casts made and sold by Henry A. Ward of Rochester NY (the company is still in business), purchased for either \$1600 or \$2000 (both figures are given).

Tear sheets in the archives from Ward's *Catalogue of Casts of Fossils from the Principal Museums of Europe and America* (Rochester,

⁸ Several stereo photos by the Knowlton Brothers of Northampton were annotated by Anna Edwards and dated 1876 and 1877. Her dates allow other photos by comparison to be given the same dates.

1866) print a letter from Edward Hitchcock of November, 1863, saying he had shipped Ward molds of twelve “of the more prominent slabs of tracks in our Ichnological Museum.” Ward had casts from other major institutions in Europe and America.



Williston Hall Geological Cabinet, 1876

The costliest of Ward’s casts was the *Megatherium Cuvieri*: \$250. It is the large cast, seven feet high, in the right foreground of the Knowlton Brothers 1876 photo of the ichnological cabinet (“zoological cabinet” on the floor plan) Daniel Brinkman of Yale’s Peabody Museum of Natural History has kindly identified most of the exhibits.⁹ The *Megatherium* was a giant ground sloth. Among the casts on the floor to the left is “a proboscidean skull” and “the carapace and ‘armored’ tail of a glyptodont.”

⁹ Personal communication of July 8, 2016. He continues: “going from right to left along the tops of the cases: cephalopod, mosasaur jaws, cephalopod, [an unknown], large bony fish.” In the glass cases: “Second on the right on top shelf of the case immediately to the right of the doorway is a cast of the so-called *Homo diluvii testis*, now known to be a giant salamander called *Andrias scheuchzeri*. The first object on the right on the top shelf may be an eurypterid and on the shelf directly below it may be a fossilized horseshoe crab next to what is definitely a fossilized bony fish. Second to the left on top shelf of the case immediately to the left of the doorway is a giant Cambrian-aged trilobite.”

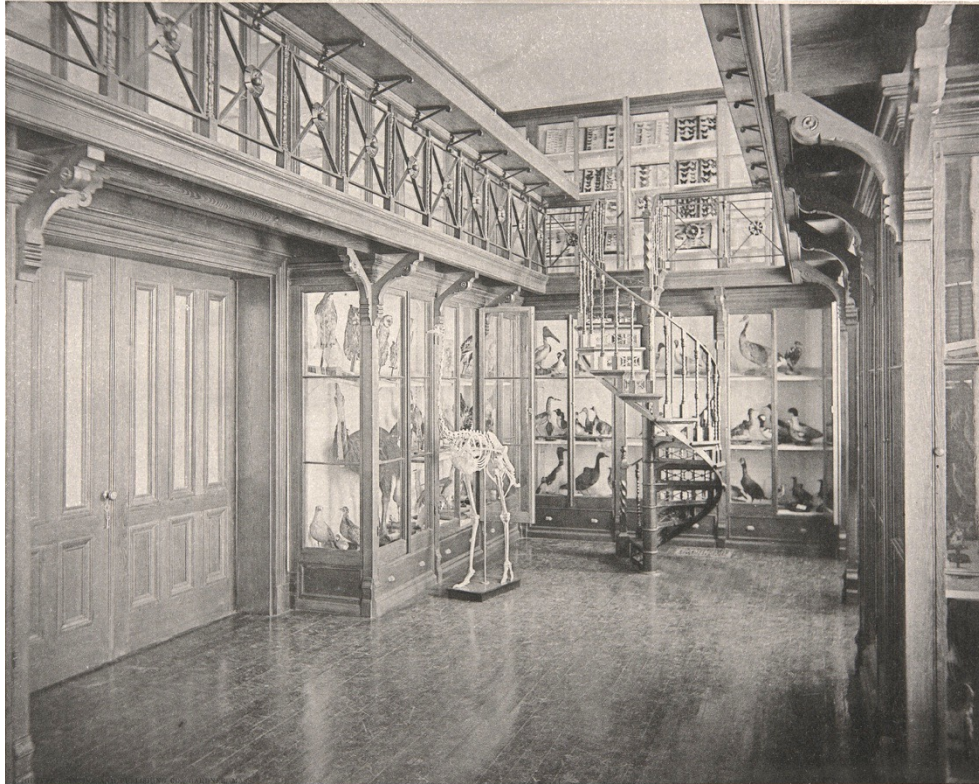
Stretched on the wall above is a large plesiosaur. Near the Megatherium is a tree trunk, presumably the cast of a petrified tree. Yet another, a cabinet card of the 1880s, has a sideways view of the fossil; beyond are the three windows of the outside east wall.



Williston Hall Geological Cabinet, 1876

The first of the views of the Megatherium mentioned above was taken from the doorway of the north side looking toward the south alcove which held the ornithological exhibits. It and the north alcove were elongated spaces, 15 x 36 feet. Each had a spiral staircase leading up to extended balconies which held exhibits in glazed wall cases. “The Ornithological Alcove” is printed from a cabinet card of the 1880s. A Moa skeleton from Ward’s set of casts stands on the floor next to cases of stuffed birds. The skeleton was obtained by Prof. C H. Hitchcock of Dartmouth College, and mounted by Dr.

Edward Hitchcock of Amherst.¹⁰ On the balcony above spread out in glass cases are double-page books illustrating butterflies.



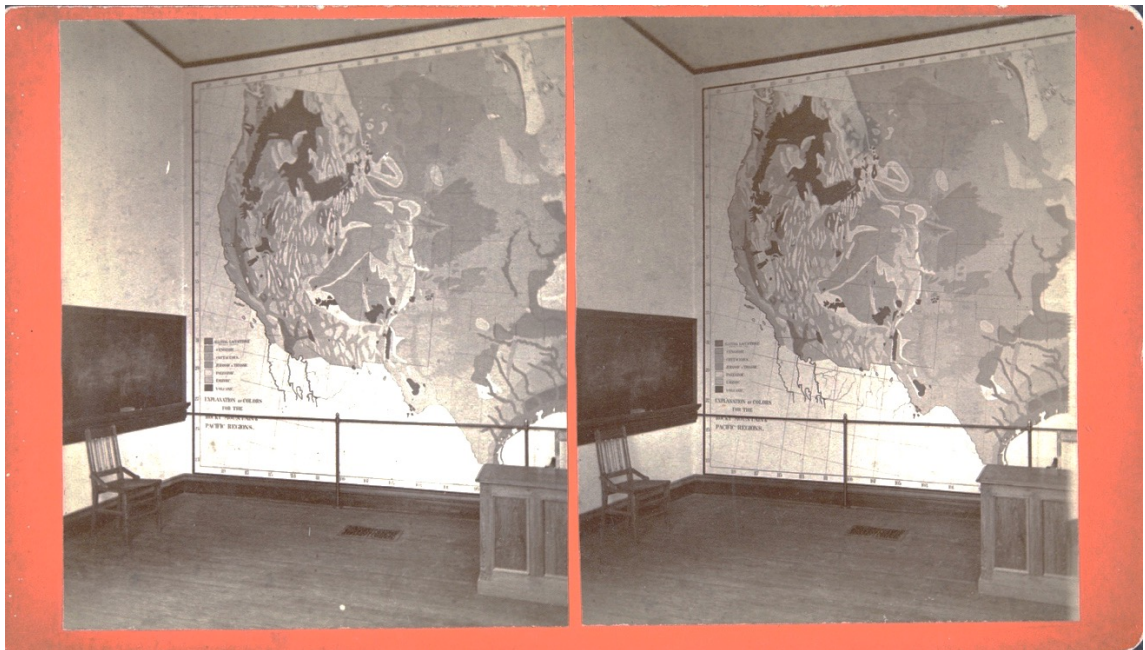
Williston Hall Ornithological Cabinet, before 1879

The north alcove was in fact the zoology collection, also called the “Zoology Museum.” A raccoon can be seen in the right foreground and small stuffed animals on other shelves.

¹⁰*Opening of Lyman Williston Hall, 1877*, p. 10. Edward Hitchcock (1828-1911) was a trustee of the Seminary and College from 1869 to 1911.



Williston Hall, Zoological Cabinet, before 1889



Williston Hall, U.S. Geological Map, c. 1880

In the geological lecture room, “on one wall is frescoed a 15 x 22 geological map of the United States, projected by Professor C. H. Hitchcock, and executed by Morgan of Springfield. It embodies the results of the latest scientific researches, and is the one which took the prize at Philadelphia, where, after October 15, it was exhibited in the government building.”¹¹ This hand colored map was one of many contributions to the Seminary made by the Hitchcocks. It followed logically upon the first geological map of Massachusetts (the first for any state) made a generation earlier by Charles’ father Edward. Indeed, the Hitchcocks were among the stoutest friends and supporters of the Seminary. Edward and Orra White Hitchcock had put up Mary Lyon for a year before she founded the school, and she taught their children. Orra designed the vignette for the school’s diploma in 1938. Edward lectured for Miss Lyon from the first year, and helped devise the science curriculum. He gave some dinosaur tracks to the Seminary and as we’ve seen, his two sons were major collaborators.



Williston Hall lecture room, 1876

¹¹ *Opening of Lyman Williston Hall*, 1877, p. 11. The exhibition referred to was the Centennial Exhibition.

Williston had one large lecture room on the first floor, here seen from the desk. It was used by all the classes in the building, and occasionally for guest lectures.



Williston Hall Physical and Chemical Lecture Room

Some of the other “cabinets” on the first and second floors were adaptable for lectures, as pictured in the photograph of the Physical and Chemical room. Presumably here the lab devices were piled up for a visual inventory, but normally only those used in a class would be on the desk. There was a chemistry lab in the small projecting wing. Botany, zoology, geology and physiology each has a lab or work room in one of the smaller rooms. Like the Physical and Chemical room, the zoological lab was photographed to show all the apparatus available, before it was thinned for a particular class.



Williston Hall Zoological lab, 1880s

Looking back to Williston Hall's destroyed exhibits, we are fortunate to have photographs of many from the 1870s and 1880s. The Knowlton Brothers of Northampton produced two series of stereopticons, one called "The Mt. Holyoke Seminary Series" that included views of exteriors and interiors of buildings as well as the campus and some of its activities. The other, "Connecticut Valley Views," offered much the same selection. Hearn and Davis of Boston also made stereos of similar views in the 1870s, and many cabinet cards in the 1880s and early 1890s.

The top floor of Williston attracted more photographers than the other floors. Its art objects and casts lent themselves to the camera more frequently than the scientific rooms. A view camera photograph of the late 1870s shows one end of the main gallery with *Diana and Stag* and a nearby bust ceding the space to paintings on the wall, *Conway Meadows* by George Inness, *Hetch Hetchie Canon* by Alfred Bierstadt, and

Leonardo and his Pupils by Edwin White. Through the doorway a number of objects are visible.



Williston Hall Art Gallery, c. 1878-80

A print by Hearn & Davis of the 1880s or early 1890s looks across the main gallery toward the north alcove, which is free of most of the objects in the previous view. Life-sized casts of the *Venus de Milo* and *Diana and Stag* are accompanied by several casts of busts.



Williston Hall Art Galley North Alcove, c. 1888-90



Williston Hall Art Gallery, study collection, c. 1888-90

In another photograph of about the same time, a corner room of the upper floor looks into the south alcove. Both spaces are stuffed

with casts. They were not for public viewing but awaited students for their study. In one of the “recitation rooms” on the ground floor many reproductions of antique art and architecture are hung on the walls, giving a good idea of an art history class.



Williston Hall Recitation Room, c. 1888-90

The 1889 Annex

By the mid-1880s, the growing needs of the sciences, especially biology, were not being well met by Williston, where the same rooms had to accommodate different departments. Some biology classes had to meet outdoors in a tent. After three years of debating plans for a new building,

in 1888 it was decided instead to build an addition to Williston which would have rooms for biology, zoology, physiology and ancient languages. Part of the stimulation for the new construction arose from the campaign underway in 1887 to change the institution's name to Mount Holyoke College and Seminary. For the grant of the new charter by the state legislature in March, 1888, the school had revised its entrance requirements and introduced elective courses. The high quality of existing courses permitted the conferring of B.A and B.S degrees. Frustrated opposition to this momentous change came from some alumnae who wished to retain the Seminary's rank, and from rival colleges, including Harvard, Vassar and Boston University. The new name retained "Seminary," but in 1893 the college was granted the state's designation as "Mount Holyoke College." The way to this honor was eased by the opening in 1892 of Shattuck Hall, dedicated to physics and chemistry.

Opened May, 1889, and called the "Annex," the new addition was attached to the northeast corner of Williston. One of the best views of its architecture is the engraving by J. H. Daniels of Boston. The large walnut tree is unaccountably diminished (it appears normally in contemporaneous photos); in the distance the Pepper Box, built in 1884, surmounts Goodnow Park on Prospect Hill.



LYMAN WILLISTON HALL
MOUNT HOLYOKE SEMINARY & COLLEGE
SOUTH HADLEY, MASS.

Williston Hall, 1889-90 (J. H. Daniels)

Peabody & Stearns of Boston designed the structure; the Matthew Brothers of Northampton were the contractors. In brick to harmonize with the existing structure, it had its own entrance and was distinguished by a pyramidal tower. On sloping ground, the addition's basement was below the main building but its first and second floors communicated directly with the main building.



BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF THE COLLEGE BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS.

Seminary Hall, Library and Williston Hall, c. 1890

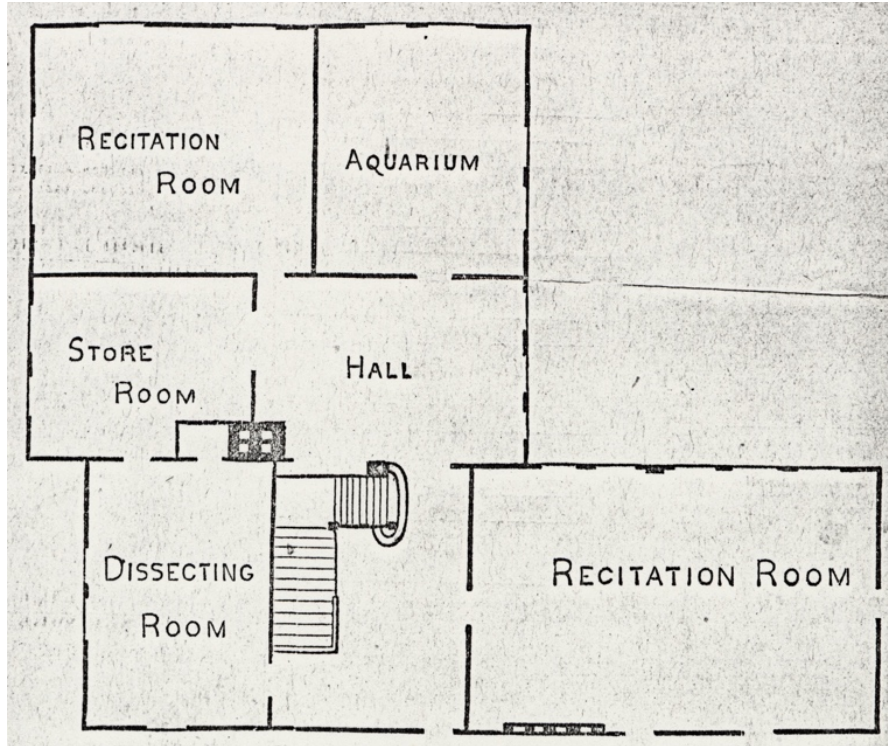
The remodeled structure's relation to the Seminary building appears in an engraving of about 1890 by the Moss Engraving Company of New York. This bird's-eye view shows the whole campus just before Shattuck was constructed in 1892 (except for the Observatory opened in 1881 on the other side of College Street). Williston Hall assumes its importance as the first academic building beyond Miss Lyon's enlarged institution, although the attached library, expanded in 1886-87, has a substantial presence. In the lower left corner of the engraving is the former Dwight homestead acquired in 1882 and named North Hall, used for classrooms and a small dormitory. (It was later moved and renamed Everett House.) On the lawn in front of Williston are two tennis courts, while in the distance are seen the Carriage Way and the footpath leading up Goodnow Park to the Pepper Box.



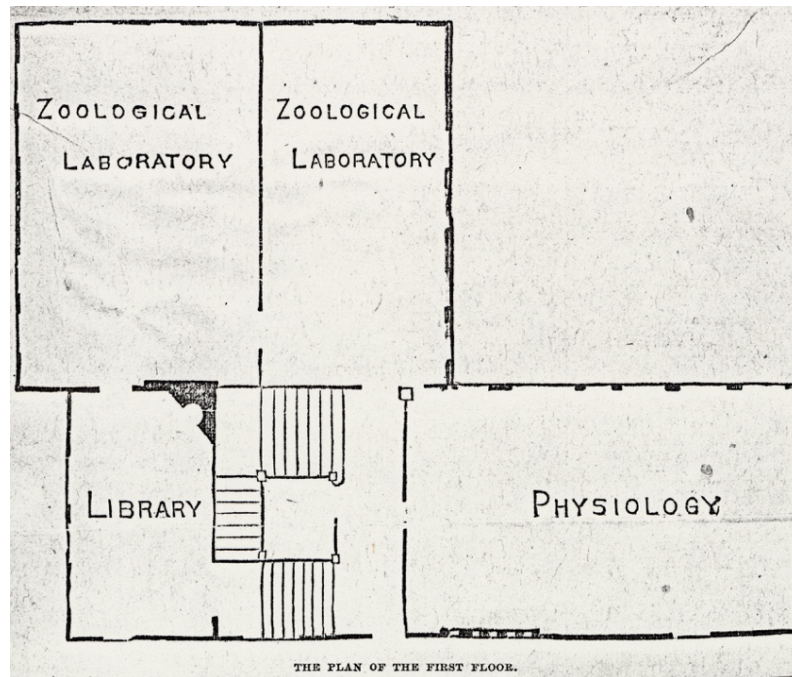
Williston Hall Annex, Springfield Union, May 24, 1889

The only known representation of the Annex from the north side is the engraving published by the *Springfield Union* on May 24, 1889.¹² This article, “Fair Mt. Holyoke, the advantages afforded by her new last building,” was sent to the Union by “Special Correspondence.” Its author was obviously one of the college’s scientists (most likely a biologist) with intimate knowledge of the new addition. The floor plans and details of the Annex come from this article, as do most of the following descriptions.

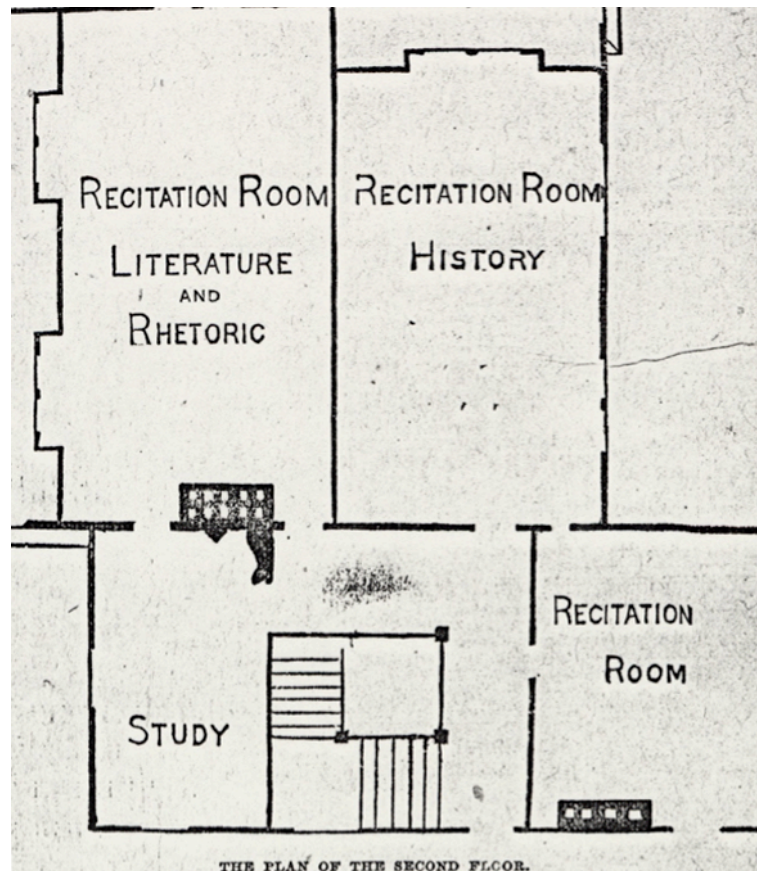
¹² This article, “Fair Mt. Holyoke, the advantages afforded by her new last building,” was sent to the Union by “Special Correspondence.” Its author was evidently one of the college’s scientists with intimate knowledge of the new addition. The floor plans and details of the Annex come from this article.



Annex basement, 1889 plan



Annex first floor plan, 1889



THE PLAN OF THE SECOND FLOOR.

Annex second floor plan, 1889

The structure had a broad L-shape, the larger part 60 by 44 feet, and the projection to the south, 30 by 20 feet. In the basement was an aquarium that supported live specimens of aquatic plants, frogs and fish for classes in zoology and botany. Two recitation rooms were used by classes in ancient languages. On the first floor, the library housed books and periodicals on zoology and botany. The larger zoological laboratory had sinks with individual faucets and waste pipes which the *Union* article said were the only such college facilities in the country. The other zoological lab had various apparatuses but was then being used for recitations. Projecting to the south was a large room, 20 x 36 feet, dedicated to human physiology. Several clever devices there “demonstrate the fact that a woman’s mind is often in advance of a man’s where measures of utility are concerned.” The second or top floor has three

recitation rooms for Latin, literature and rhetoric, and history, and a supporting library.

Botany was the chief beneficiary of the removal of zoology and physiology from the original building to the Annex. Moving into vacated spaces, it now had two large and two small rooms. However, still more room was needed, especially for a proposed morphological herbarium being planned by Henrietta Hooker who brought the idea from Germany, along with plant models and major publications. When completed it would be the only such herbarium in the US.

However, physics and chemistry were still in the old building in cramped and inadequate rooms, so the last portion of the *Union* article turned into a frank appeal for funds for a new building. \$8,000 was already in hand, with \$30,000 still needed. It's evident that the campaign for an entirely new building, detoured to the Annex, had not really ceased. The existing chemical laboratory allowed only sixteen students at a time to work there, although there were forty-five in the class. Physics was similarly squeezed. The agitation for a new building quickly gained, and in 1892 Shattuck Hall was opened for physics and chemistry (it was replaced in 1932 by the new Shattuck Hall). This freed space in Williston, and again it was botany that was allowed to expand.



Williston and Shattuck Halls, c. 1895

Throughout these alterations of Williston, the art gallery and art study rooms had been maintained, but the collections of paintings, sculpture and decorative arts, the many casts of antique and Renaissance art, and the reproductions needed for art history—all of these were pinched for space. History of Art had entered the curriculum in 1874 (only three years after Harvard), and a Department of Art was established in 1892 under the leadership of Louise Fitz-Randolph (1851-1932). She appears in a photograph of about 1892-95 with mounted reproductions of antique art on portable panels. In the photograph previously seen, the large recitation room on the second floor was set up with reproductions of art, but this room was in constant use by other departments, so Fitz-Randolph made provision for a smaller room.

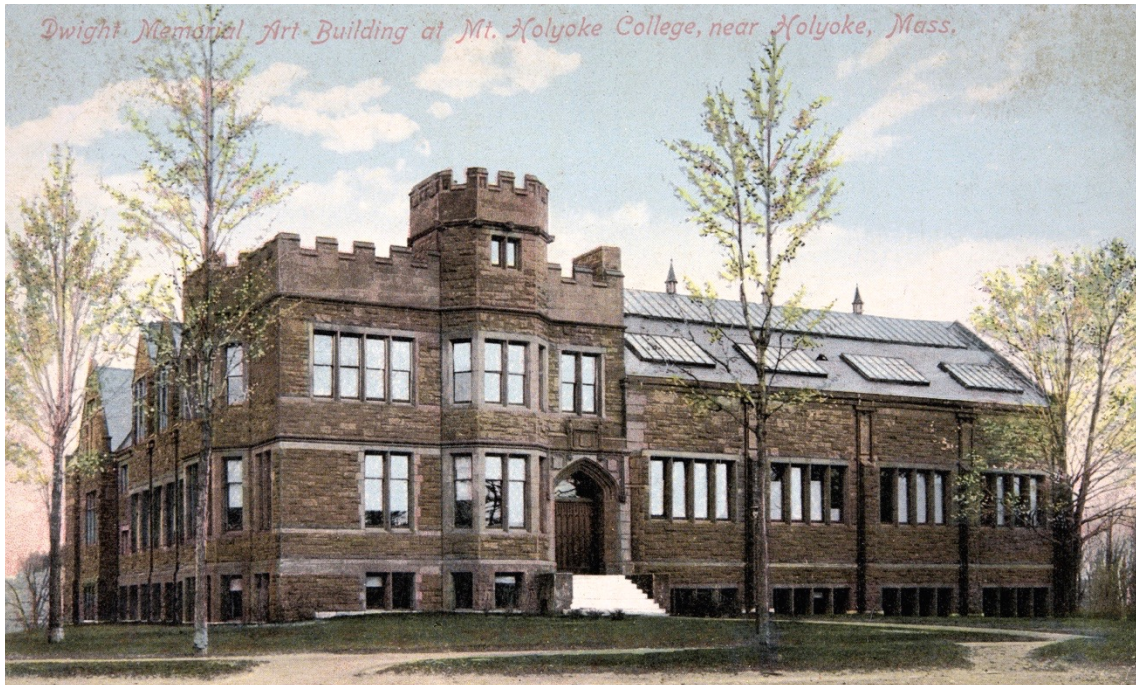


Louise Fitz-Randolph with mounted reproductions, c. 1892-95

It's true that there was now increased space thanks to chemistry and physics leaving for their new quarters in Shattuck in 1892. However, this increase didn't satisfy Fitz-Randolph and her colleagues, so on January 1, 1897, she published a three-page flyer "An Art Building for Mount Holyoke College." Study illustrations of the history of art were limited because other classes need the smaller rooms, hence Fitz-Randolph resorted to movable panels. More space was sorely needed for reproductions for the art survey (100 students) and to enable advanced courses in the history of art.

In 1900 the call for an art building was answered by John Dwight (1819-1903), a longtime resident of South Hadley and a patron of the Seminary. In 1846, with his brother-in-law Dr. Austin Church, he had begun marketing baking soda, which went from his kitchen to commercial success in New York (eventually to "Arm & Hammer"), making Dwight a wealthy man. The former Dwight homestead, North Hall, was moved down Park St. (renamed Everett House) to make room for the Dwight Art Memorial. It was designed by George F. Newton of Boston and built by

the Holyoke contractor Caspar Ranger. Ground was broken for it in December, 1900. In the “Gothic collegiate style,” it was an L-shaped structure in reddish Kibbie stone.¹³



Dwight Hall, postcard c. 1905

A postcard of c. 1905 shows it from College Street; its skylights for the long gallery and the floor below are clearly seen.

¹³ Louise Fitz-Randolph, “The Dwight Memorial Art Building,” *The Mount Holyoke*, 10 (Feb. 1901), 347-52. details of the building come from this article.



Dwight Hall and Congregational Church from Clapp Tower, c. 1925. Asa Kinney Photograph

A photograph of the new building taken from the tower of Clapp gives a clear view of its L shape. The much loved copper beech planted in 1904 in the building's angle has a substantial growth of two decades.

The main floor of the new building housed the sculpture gallery (first called "Cast Gallery"), seventy-five feet long, a library, and lecture and seminar rooms. The "Painting Gallery" of the same dimensions was on the second floor, with frosted glass skylights, together with a room for the "Collection of Engravings." Already by the building's dedication on June 18, 1902, shipments of important casts of sculpture were arriving. During the new building's early years there were further acquisitions of casts and in the art gallery several original paintings and more copies joined the objects transferred from Williston. The crowded rooms of

Williston had given way to generous spaces now that art was on its own, separated from the natural sciences.

Williston after 1902

At last consolidated in one building, the natural sciences, always strong, gained momentum in the college. In 1904 Mignon Talbot (1869-1950) succeeded Louise Cowles in geology, geography and mineralogy, and distinguished herself in 1910 by discovering near the college campus the unique fossil of an early Jurassic dinosaur which she named *Podokesaurus holyokensis*.



Fossil dinosaur in situ (Asa Kinney, 1910)

She was the first women member of the Paleontological Society, founded in 1915. In 1906 Samuel P. Hayes (1875-1958) was appointed in psychology. He was soon noted for his special interest in vision and blindness, including the use of spectrographic analysis, and acquired a national reputation with numerous publications. He followed Asa Kinney as the second man on full-time appointment at Mount Holyoke.

Zoology and physiology expanded at the turn of the century under the leadership of the charismatic Cornelia Clapp (1849-1934). Before she retired in 1916, she was joined by Abby Howe Turner (1875-1957) and Anne Haven Morgan (1882-1966). Turner was the proverbial bundle of energy who left her mark on the running of Williston and the collections of specimens and books for zoology and physiology. She taught zoology and introductory biology, comparative anatomy and physiology. Morgan, who taught from 1906, was more the researcher, and published widely. She exploited the college's streams and ponds and was appropriately nicknamed by the students "Mayfly Morgan" and "Water Bug Lady."¹⁴ Like other departments of science, physiology became more specialized. In 1911-12 the one-term physiology course was amplified to a year-long course. Then in 1914-15 the survey was divided in two, one for students who had chemistry, the other for zoology majors.



Botany faculty, 1908

¹⁴ In 1930 she published *Field Book of Ponds and Streams*.

In the previous generation, Mount Holyoke had developed a well-known department of botany, first led by Lyon's student Lydia M. Shattuck (1822-1889) and then by Henrietta Hooker (1851-1929), who taught from 1875 to 1908 (fourth from the left in the photograph). Miriam Levin has observed that in this era "the teachers still divided the labor with male lecturers . . . in the fields of chemistry, astronomy, physics, and geology—that is, the physical sciences most closely associated with industrial growth and national economy and traditionally with interpretations of natural law. [Women] retained the right to have charge of botany and physiology, those biological sciences most identified with laboratory work, the manipulation of living organisms, systematics, and evolutionary theory and least with economic and industrial interests. Those fields, at least botany, in these years were becoming feminized."¹⁵

Hooker retired in 1908, but she was immediately succeeded by Alma Stokey (1877-1968). Stokey gained national recognition for her work on ferns (she was a pioneer scholar of the fern *Prothallia*); she collaborated often with the botanists at Woods Hole. She shared botany with Asa Kinney (1873-1961), who taught plant science and directed the college gardens, and Anna M. Starr (1877-1968). Starr was a founding member of the Ecological Society of America in 1915. The botany department was called into service in March, 1917, just weeks before the country entered the World War when the National War Garden Commission urged Americans to produce more food. The college's war garden was planted on land west of the campus beyond Ashfield Lane. Kinney was made director and a man was hired to assist him. 400 students were assigned to work in the garden that spring, and three groups of twenty each, in the summer. "Miss Stokey and Miss Starr worked on the

¹⁵ Miriam R. Levin, *Defining Women's Scientific Enterprise: Mount Holyoke Faculty and the Rise of American Science* (University Press of New England, 2005), p. 64.

college farm from August 16 to the opening of college. They had charge of the drying of corn and the salting of beans.”¹⁶



War Garden, 1917 (Asa Kinney photograph)



Canning corn, 1917 (Asa Kinney photograph)

¹⁶ *Mount Holyoke News*, vol. 1, Oct. 1917.

The 1917 fire

The war was on everyone's mind when on December 22, 1917, during the winter holiday, a fire broke out in Williston's annex and soon consumed the entire building and its contents. Five months earlier there had been a calamity that some, including Asa Kinney, probably later took as a portent of the December disaster. On July 21 a storm took down the large black walnut that in 1876 had determined the site of Williston. Kinney took five photos of students standing and seated on the venerable campus artefact.



Fallen Walnut Tree, July 1917 (Asa Kinney)

The student newspaper lamented the loss.¹⁷ It had been adopted as “class tree” by the classes of 1912, 1916 and 1920. This titan, 102 feet

¹⁷ *The Mount Holyoke News*, vol. 1, Oct. 3, 1917, n.p.,

tall, shows in many of the photos of the exterior of Williston that we have already seen. Kinney, ever the scientist, spurned the students' folkloric accounts of its origins (a walking stick from Ohio that took root!), and told the newspaper that when the tree was about twenty years old "it was moved to its location in front of Williston Hall from a spot that now marks the southeast corner of Dwight." He hoped to replace it.

Williston's spectacular fire was discovered about 4.30 on Saturday, December 22, 1917, by Reverend J. P. Nichols who spotted it from his Congregational Church nearby. It began on the first floor of the Annex; the basement could be entered at first. Miss Woolley had been entertaining guests at her home and was among the first to enter the flaming building. Eleanor Mason, a junior at the time, was snow-shoeing from nearby fields with friends when she saw the smoke and flames. "We were still able to carry out some books for Miss Turner from the Physiology department [. . .]. I remember even loading up Miss Woolley with a pile of books, and Miss Marks arriving with overshoes for her. It was bitterly cold and the snow was deep."¹⁸

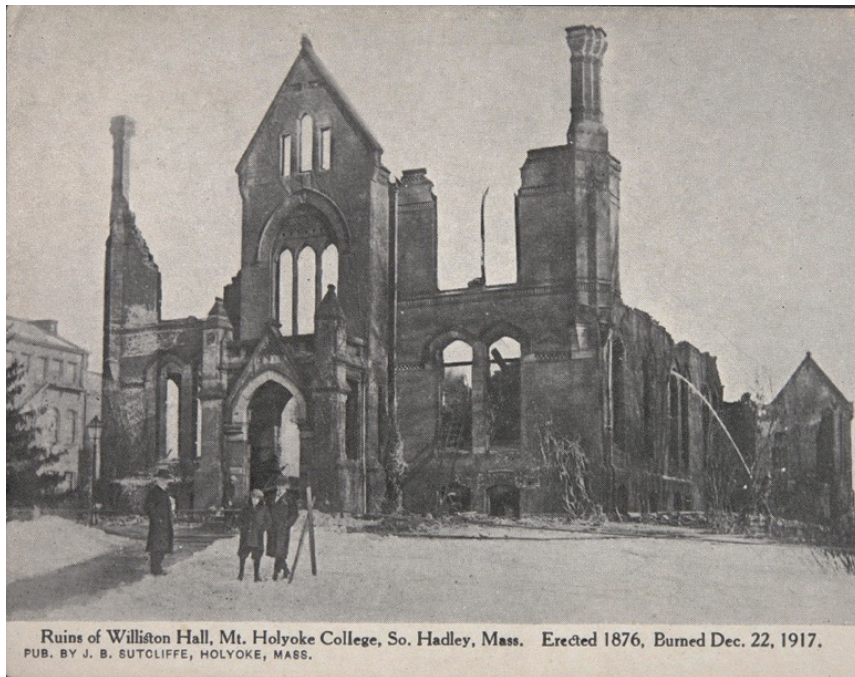
Firemen from the college and South Hadley responded soon and companies from South Hadley Falls and Holyoke came not long after. By about 6 p.m. six streams from fire hoses were doing their best but the fire, which had begun on the first floor of the Annex, was accelerated by two explosions of the botany department's chemicals and alcohol. So rapid and devastating were the flames that by early evening only the shell of the structure remained; it was still smoldering the next morning when Asa Kinney brought his view camera.

¹⁸ A letter c. 1983 to Irma Rabbino, office of Public Information, in Williston Hall file, box 106, folder 2. Jeannette Marks, teacher of theater, was Miss Woolley's intimate friend.



Williston Hall after the fire (Asa Kinney)

In Kinney's photograph, the tripods may have been supports for fire hoses.



Williston Hall after the fire (J. B. Sutcliffe)

A day or two after the fire had died down, J. B. Sutcliffe of Holyoke also used a 5 x 7 view camera to make a photograph which he published as a postcard, an indication of the widespread notoriety of the conflagration. His three figures are not looking at the fire but have been posed for the photograph.

December 22 was a holiday so the campus was depleted, but several people were nearby and rushed to the building before it was completely enflamed. Abby Howe Turner, a teacher of zoology and physiology, was among the first there. Four weeks later she wrote a lively account of the conflagration, a four-page typescript in the form of a letter in duplicate copies, one signed and dated January 21, 1918.¹⁹ Coming in a rush from the village store about 4.30 that Saturday, she entered the burning Annex and joined a few others, including Miss Woolley and Asa Kinney, to carry things outside.

We saved many of the department things from my office, Miss Stokey's office was well cleared and most of her research materials saved. [. . .]. Miss Woolley who was early in the building helping take things out says that the lecture room looked like a bed of coals when she saw it last, only a few minutes later. Mr. Kinney came [. . .] almost as soon as I did though we did not meet at once. He tried to get into the botany laboratory to save their microscopes [but the fire was too great]. He thought of Miss Talbot's fossil, her famous dinosaur, but that was inaccessible to one man though two perhaps might have dashed up through the smoke and carried the heavy thing out. [. . .] there were men going into my laboratory windows! [. . .] The flames were

¹⁹ "Williston Hall Fire," typed ms. dated Jan. 21, 1918, among the Williston Hall documents in the archives, box 106, folder 2. It's not known to whom the letters were addressed.

rolling out of the windows above but the men under Mr. Kinney's direction went in again and brought out 26 microscopes and two cases containing dissecting instruments, in all about \$1800 worth of apparatus.

Turner's letter is full of romantic phrases drawn from her vivid flashback to the raging fire.

It was wonderful out in the grove – that magnificent blaze, for the roof fell very soon and the flame was all unhindered. We all worked in that magic place, with the gorgeous light, the fierce heat near the fire, the rain of sparks even as far as Porter – the beauty of it all a thing to remember as well as the tragedy. There were wonderful red colors in the flames [. . .].

After the fire, Asa Kinney took poignant photographs of Mignon Talbot and her students poking through the rubble. He made two slightly different ones, proving that they were carefully posed. One has an important inscription on the verso, crediting “C. H. Dickerman, Press Representative, Mt. Holyoke College.” (This explains its frequent publication.) It says Talbot and her students were searching for fragments of her fossil *Podokesaurus* “twice excavated for.” This last phrase is the only evidence that there was a concerted effort to recover portions of the fossil; none was ever found. In 1910 Talbot had asked Kinney to photograph the fossil so both would have had a stake in this memorial image of its disappearance.



Mignon Talbot and students after the fire (Asa Kinney)

Three months after her typescript memoir of the fire, Turner published a longer recounting in which again she resorted to romantic imagery.²⁰ “Williston was never more appealing than when its empty windows framed rosy clouds of steam and drifting smoke as the fire died down. The night mercifully covered the harshness of destruction while the clustered windows showed their dignity and grace of outline as never before.” Her imagery shows the persistence of picturesque romanticism inherited from the previous century. This aesthetic also characterized Kinney’s photographs of campus buildings, from which he set his tripod deliberately at a distance so that trees and foliage would create a stage-like setting for the architecture.

In her article and her typescript memoir, Turner mentioned the few objects that were recovered and she summarized the losses. The contents of Stokey’s and her own offices were rescued, and some

²⁰ “The Williston Hall Fire,” *Alumnae Quarterly*, vol. II, April 1918, pp, 6-13.

microscopes recovered. Except for a few books the departmental libraries of botany, geology, psychology, zoology, and physiology were destroyed as were numbers of specimens and slides. Acute personal losses were the papers and collections of Cornelia Clapp, Lydia Shattuck, Mignon Talbot (including her famous fossil), Anna Morgan, and Samuel Hayes. For the occasional visitor to the building as well as for students, the most grievous losses were the ornithological, botanical, zoological, and mineral collections and the impressive exhibitions of casts including the star attraction, the Megatherium. Surprisingly, not even fragments of the fossil animal tracks in the basement were found. Although of sandstone, they were demolished by the fiery collapse of the upper floors.

The shock of the disaster and the first thoughts about what to do were expressed in an undergraduate's letter shortly after the return from Christmas vacation.

“Poor ‘Willy’ is certainly a most dejected looking place. It is being torn down as far as the first floor. The walls of the first floor are fairly sound, so a temporary structure is to be made out of that for the departments of zoology, geology, and botany. Psychology is now in Room 4 Mary Lyon until the third floor of Skinner can be fixed up. [. . .] Apparatus of various kinds and descriptions have been loaned already so that the work may go on. President Woolley said the other morning in chapel that just as soon as money could be raised a new science building would be erected. It would be as fire-proof and modern as possible.”²¹

Appeals were made to sister institutions for duplicate books and slides, which were generously answered in the coming weeks. Temporary provisions around the campus were made for all the classes but after their return from the winter holiday, students lacked

²¹ Letter of Ruth Ferry '21 to her father, January 6, 1918, in the archives, LD 7096.6.

the laboratories and departmental libraries, so their teachers had to be inventive. Classes were continued “without interruption” in Skinner Hall and the library according to an appeal for funds sent out by President Woolley.²² She lamented particularly the loss of the papers of Morgan and Hayes, “the results of several years of investigation nearly ready for publication.” Funds were needed for a new building. “From the bricks of Williston Hall, most of which were saved, a building will be erected on the site of the rink to be used temporarily for the departments of Botany, Zoology and Physiology, permanently as a much needed service building, accommodating storerooms for provisions, bakery, carpenter shop and laundry.”



“Little Willy,” Temporary Science Building, c. 1920

Abby Turner wrote that “Willy, Junior” (soon superseded by “Little Willy”) “will be built very simply, not in true laboratory style.”²³ Officially named “Temporary Science Building,” it opened in October 1918, and housed the three departments until 1924, when the large Clapp Laboratory was dedicated. Then Little Willy became the school’s service building. It no longer has its nickname but today,

²² “Williston Hall after the Fire,” three printed pages, undated, presumably sent to alumnae and potential donors. Among the Williston Hall documents in the archives, box 106, folder 2.

²³ Turner, *op. cit.*, April 1918, p. 11.

much remodeled, it still houses several campus services. It's the only tie, although a very indirect one (only its bricks!), to Williston Hall.



Williston Hall, c. 1885

The other way to recall the lost building is to stand in front of Clapp and with the aid of photographs conjure up the college's early science building on that site. As the first autonomous academic building on the campus it had developed a special aura. After the great Seminary fire in 1896, it had become the most stable structure on campus, center for many academic pursuits and the site of many ceremonies. Although its entrance was relatively small, it became the "senior steps" where many student groups sang together and occasionally posed for ceremonial photographs. A century has passed and no memory of it survives among living alumnae. Readers of this present memoir will at least learn how vital a part of the Seminary and then the College was served by Williston Hall.