



R I C H A R D S O N
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 I N A L E X A N D E R H A L L



A Brief History of Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall

In 1890, the trustees of the College of New Jersey (as Princeton University was then known) determined that Princeton needed a convocation hall that could seat the entire student body for commencement and other large gatherings. Mrs. Harriet Crocker Alexander donated the money for such a building to be named in honor of her husband Charles B. Alexander '1870, his father Henry M. Alexander '1840 (a college trustee and member of the Committee on Commencement Arrangements), and his grandfather Reverend Dr. Archibald Alexander (founder of the Princeton Theological Seminary and its first professor, honorary Princeton doctorate '1810).

Construction on Alexander Hall began in 1892 and was completed two years later (though carving of the exterior sculpture continued long after the building was opened and dedicated on June 9, 1894). During its early years, Alexander Hall was used for many lectures, mass meetings, and various assemblies, such as the events at the sesquicentennial (150th) anniversary celebration and Woodrow Wilson '1879's inauguration as University President. For thirty years, freshmen were welcomed and seniors graduated in Alexander, but by 1922 commencement exercises had outgrown the building and thereafter were held in front of Nassau Hall. When the University's Marquand Chapel burned in 1920, Alexander was used for religious services until the new University Chapel was completed in 1928. An organ had been installed in Alexander Hall in 1910 and was used for forty years, but is not usable now. Alexander Hall continued to accommodate the needs and activities of many generations of Princeton students, from pep and political rallies to many concerts, speeches, and lectures. Course grades also used to be posted on the interior walls of the building.

In 1984-85, Alexander Hall was extensively renovated and renamed as a result of a major gift to a Campaign for Princeton from David A. Richardson '66 in memory of his father, David B. Richardson '33. The elder Richardson, a lifelong enthusiast of classical music and a successful lawyer and investor, died in 1980. This project revitalized the building for use as an 891-seat concert hall. Buddy Graham, winner of six Grammys and one of the most highly regarded engineers for symphonic recording in the late twentieth century, listed Richardson Auditorium in the company of Carnegie Hall and the Concertgebouw in Holland as one of the world's acoustically "great" concert halls.

Today, Richardson Auditorium is Princeton University's premiere performance venue for a wide variety of events presented by the Department of Music, as well as student and community organizations. Richardson is also home to the annual Princeton University Concerts series, featuring world-class professional musical artists. In addition, the hall is often used for the recording of chamber, orchestral, and solo instrumental and vocal music. Richardson Auditorium occasionally houses dance and dramatic performances, though it is not primarily equipped for this use. Finally, Richardson is the site of many official University ceremonies, lectures, and assemblies, from Freshman Orientation to Reunions activities.

As one of the most historic and recognizable structures on the Princeton campus, Alexander Hall was chosen by the U.S. Postal Service to appear on a postcard commemorating Princeton's 250th anniversary in 1996.

For more information on Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall and its programs, please visit our website at www.princeton.edu/richaud. For tickets to an event, please call the Ticket Office at (609) 258-5000.

The Architecture of Alexander Hall

Alexander Hall culminated the work of architect William Appleton Potter on the Princeton campus. Potter—who was not a Princeton alumnus—was the former Supervising Architect of the U.S. Treasury (in effect, the official architect of the United States). In Princeton, Potter had designed Chancellor Green Library, Stuart Hall at the Princeton Theological Seminary, and several other University buildings. He also collaborated with Robert H. Robertson on Witherspoon Hall. After Alexander Hall was completed, Potter also designed Pyne Library, now known as East Pyne Hall.

The design of Alexander Hall drew on several architectural sources, but was mostly Richardsonian Romanesque in style, as evidenced by the contrasting rough-faced granite walls and brown sandstone trim, as well as the steep gabled roof with tall dormers and zigzag detail under the eaves. (Note: The present name of the auditorium bears no relation to the name of its architectural style, which refers to Henry Hobson Richardson, one of the foremost American architects of the late nineteenth century.) Alexander Hall was the last High Victorian Gothic building constructed at Princeton, which was soon dominated by Collegiate Gothic architecture. As such, the building's unusual features convey both monumentality and whimsy. Alexander was conceived as an academic theater and cultural temple, and both its structural design and iconography reflect a scholarly, yet secular agenda.

Interior: On each of the column capitals of the ambulatory window arches is carved the names of scholars from many eras and nationalities. The east side of the building displays great scientists and mathematicians, such as Newton, Galileo, Ptolemy, Copernicus, Franklin, Bunsen, Dalton, Henry, and Guyot. On the west side of the hall appear the masters of the arts: Brunelleschi, Shakespeare, Goethe, Milton, Dante, Homer, Horace, Montesquieu, Thucydides, Descartes, Kant, Bacon, Plato, and Aristotle. The ambulatory was originally open, which created seven entrances to the hall and ensured good circulation. After more than thirty years of exposure to the elements, the ambulatory was enclosed with glass windows in 1928.

A beautiful mosaic with depictions of scenes from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* dominates the back wall of the stage. Homer himself is pictured in the center panel, framed by Helen, Paris, and Mentor from the *Iliad* on the right, and Telemachus, Penelope, Odysseus, and Achilles from the *Odyssey* on the left. The Greeks prepare for war on the far left, while Trojan warriors with chariot and horses await the call to battle on the far right. These panels were designed by J.A. Holzer and made of tiles from Tiffany Glass and Decorating Company.

A carving of Henry Alexander '1840 is set into the wall on the right side of the stage (from the perspective of the audience). Above this image, on the balcony level, is a Venetian choir loft for antiphonal singers. The opposite alcove still houses organ pipes from the instrument used during the first half of the twentieth century.

Exterior: The ornately carved southern exterior features a large, Tiffany stained glass rose window that portrays an allegorical study of Genius, Knowledge, Study, and Fame. Underneath the rose window is a bas-relief sculpture designed by J.A. Bolger and executed by J. Massey Rhind. The central figure, symbolizing Learning, sits on a massive throne and carefully steadies the Book of Knowledge on his knee. He is framed by Oratory, Theology, Law, History, Philosophy, and Ethics on his left, and Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Poetry, Music, and Belles-Lettres on his right. Each figure holds an object that reveals the identity of its owner—Theology carries a Bible, Architecture holds a miniature Greek temple, Painting grasps a paintbrush, Music displays his lyre, and so on.

On either side of this horizontal gallery there are four sculptured panels, stacked vertically. The enthroned figures of Christ and Moses, who holds the tablet of the Ten Commandments, sit at the top. Directly below, the story of the differentiation of Good and Evil is related through depictions of the Tree of Knowledge from both the New and Old Testaments. Below on the right stand men of science, such as an astronomer, geologist, botanist, and a mathematician (drawing geometric forms). The corresponding figures on the left gallery represent the literary and theatrical arts. The quasi-triangular shapes above the horizontal gallery feature scenes showing the exploration of nature and the study of books.

Two Latin inscriptions appear on the southern exterior. In translation, the top message reads, "*Harriet Crocker Alexander gave and dedicated this building to Princeton University in the glory of God and in the growth of knowledge the thirteenth of June 1894.*" The lower inscription is from Lucretius and translates, "*There is no greater joy than to hold high aloft the serene abodes well bulwarked by the learning of the wise.*"

—Provided by the staff of Richardson Auditorium in Alexander Hall