



# MEAD

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Drew University

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## Drew's Gem in The Forest

By Alice Glock

**M**ead Hall, the symbolic heart of Drew University, is one of America's architectural gems. An especially large and imposing example of Greek revival architecture, the mansion was built in 1836 as the country home of William Gibbons, the son of Thomas Gibbons, a wealthy Savannah lawyer.

Father and son came north in 1802 to operate a profitable ferryboat business between New Jersey and New York and after his father's

death in 1826, William inherited his fortune. He married Abigail Louise Taintor of Connecticut and, shortly after, sought to settle his growing family in New Jersey in an area where he could also engage in breeding and racing thoroughbred horses.

He found what he was looking for near Bottle Hill, now Madison. An estate of 95 acres was pieced together and named "The Forest."

Builder George A. Jenkins began construction of their new home in 1833. It was a structure of massive dimensions and fine, sturdy materials, including brick

(kilned at Benjamin Pierson Lum's brickyard in Chatham), brown-stone foundation and steps, marble hall floors, mahogany doors, stairs, and woodwork imported from Santo Domingo and hand-carved in England, even silver-plated hardware. Some of the most "modern" conveniences of the day, central heating and baths, were

installed.

The Greek revival style of architecture, of which Mead Hall is a shining example, was considered to be America's first national style

when it blossomed in the first half of the 19th century.

A primary feature of the Greek revival style is the front porch or portico, an entry area supported by columns. Mead Hall's particularly monumental portico is reminiscent of grand plantation porches of Gibbons's southern roots.

The front door opens to an unusually large T-form entrance hall, the main part of which measures 25 feet wide and 50 feet deep. Impressive features include the diagonal laid checkerboard marble floor tiles, doorways with elaborate entablatures, high ceilings with

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Jack E. Bloucher

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## A Star Is Born

She's older than Norma Desmond (born in 1833) but this star is ready for her close-up and contemporary directors and cinematographers still love to capture her on film.

The elegance and architectural beauty of Mead Hall still has what it takes for the silver (and small) screen.

Over the years, Mead Hall has played supporting roles in films and television, providing the right background and atmosphere for director Woody Allen, New Jersey's favorite "businessman" Tony Soprano, and America's "It" girl Sarah Jessica Parker.

Woody Allen became familiar with the Drew campus while his future wife, Soon Yi Previn, was a student here. So when it was time to select a location for his 1996 feature film *Deconstructing Harry*, about a man who returns to his old university to receive an honorary degree, Allen knew he had found the perfect setting at Drew.

Mead Hall and its beautifully restored interiors are featured prominently in the film. Through the magic of Allen's filmmaking, Mead Hall guest starred when rooms on the first floor were converted to a living room and bedroom.

*The elegance and architectural beauty of Mead Hall still has what it takes for the silver (and small) screen.*



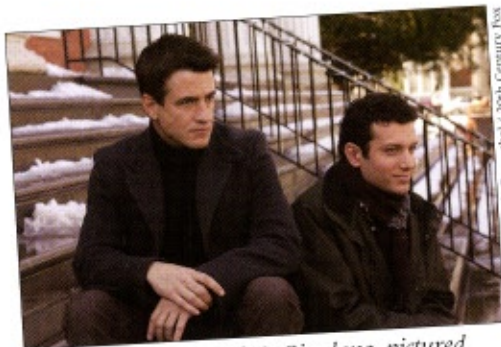
The wildly popular HBO series "The Sopranos" brought a production crew to Drew to film Tony Soprano's trip to Maine with his college-shopping daughter,

Meadow. Drew played the roles of Bowdoin, Bates, and Colby when the campus and Mead Hall were used to represent all three colleges by using different exterior camera angles and interior rooms and spaces.

In one scene, Meadow surveys the campus from the vantage point of the Mead Hall steps. Tony, taking a gander himself, is captivated by the view. "Gees," he mutters, "this place is beyootiful!" The rest of the episode, in which Tony strangles a rival gangster while on the college tour, was not filmed at Drew.

Most recently, *The Family Stone*, a movie starring Sarah Jessica Parker, Diane Keaton, and Dermot Mulroney, was filmed on campus last spring. The film, which will be released this fall, used the exterior of Mead Hall to represent a New England town hall. Although most of the scenes were shot at night, the cold March air did not deter crowds of students and staff from watching the characters stand around in fake snow on the steps of Mead Hall.

Like any star who looks great in front of the camera, there are lots of staff people behind the scenes who have to scramble to make Mead Hall ready for the lens. Drew loves the excitement associated with having a movie company on campus, and while it is very discerning about selecting film projects, the University loves to welcome artists who can see the enduring charm and grace of its grand old dame.



Dermot Mulroney and Ty Giordano, pictured in front of Mead Hall during the filming of *The Family Stone*, due in theatres this fall.

Zade Roseenthal / 20th Century Fox



## William Gibbons' Wallpaper

By James C. Massey

*Historic Preservation Consultant to Drew University for the Rehabilitation of Mead Hall*



One of the most distinctive features of William Gibbons' mansion, The Forest, was its extensive use of wallpaper, an expensive and stylish treatment that handsomely complemented the building's architecture. There is remarkably extensive physical and documentary evidence for these embellishments.

On March 30, 1838, Gibbons began to buy large amounts of paper from Charles McAuley of New York City, including paper and border for the first-floor hall. This paper featured a large pattern, suiting the height of the hall, executed in soft shades of yellow and light gray in a complex design of leaves, flowers, and vines around large scrolls. The purchase also included 225 yards of a very expensive "gold border," a section of which was uncovered in a rear first-floor room behind a later partition. The six-inch strip featured a deep gold-printed Greek leaf-like anthemium and vine-like scroll.

McAuley's source for the wallpaper is not known, but it could have been American, French, or English. The best papers at this period were handprinted in Europe and were sold by the "piece," actually a short roll. French pieces generally were about 18-1/2" wide and 27' long, and the hall paper matches the normal French width. The high quality of printing and the stylish design also suggest a French rather than an American source.



McAuley came to the house to hang the paper, charging \$78.23 for sizing and hanging the full order.

When Drew Seminary was set up in Mead Hall, it was apparently decided that rich finishes such as fancy wallpaper and silver-plated hardware were not appropriately ascetic for budding Methodist ministers. The papers were removed, and the silver-plated hardware was coated with dark varnish.

During our first study, carried out in 1983 by a team working under the auspices of the National Preservation Institute, enough of the hall paper was removed to provide a repeat of the pattern. The University commissioned a custom, museum-quality reproduction from Thibaut Wallcoverings, Inc., using a silk-screen printing process, which, curiously, was never

hung. Incidentally, with the University's permission, Thibaut also produced a commercial adaptation of the design using the original pattern and colors in a reduced scale since not everyone has 15-foot-high ceilings.

Then, in 1989, a disastrous fire struck at Mead, but the first floor, with its hall mirrors, mahogany doors, and marble floors, survived intact except for water damage. The mirrors and doors were removed for safekeeping and refinishing, revealing the original hall paper where the mirrors had hung. For historical purposes,

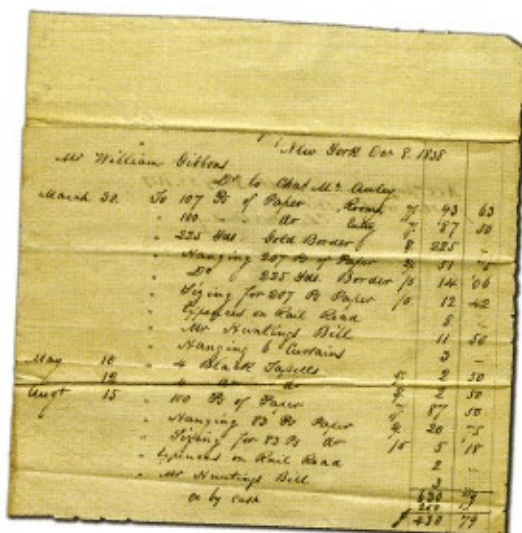
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however, a section of the damaged original paper was kept in place on the west wall under the restored mirror.

As part of the restoration, I encouraged the University to hang the museum-quality reproduction paper, which was still snugly in storage, as well as to reproduce the original gold border paper. To our disappointment, it was decided instead to undertake a second reproduction of the wallpaper, an adaptation in muted tones, and not to reproduce the gold border at all. The adaptation, sans border, is what now hangs on the first-floor hall walls.



*The 1838 bill for the Gibbons wallpaper*

## Connecticut Brownstone Perfect for Mead’s New Portico Steps

By Catherine Messmer

Thanks to a project completed last fall, visitors to Mead Hall now ascend to the building’s impressive portico by way of beautifully restored steps of Connecticut brownstone. An important contributor to the majesty of the portico, the steps had badly deteriorated despite repeated efforts taken by the University to arrest the process.

While the Gibbons mansion was built in the Greek revival style that was so popular in the 1830s, it is unusual in that it was built high off the ground. New Jersey builders of the period favored building close to the ground, but William Gibbons had his country retreat set above a raised basement.

The 19th-century builders laid the steps over a vaulted brick arch, roughly one foot

thick, which was covered with a fill, or substrate, of pieces of stone and bricks mixed with sand and possibly some sort of mortar. The fill was firmly packed to form a hard surface on which the brownstone was laid.

Records dating to 1913 trace the ongoing efforts of the University to maintain the

steps. Mortars dyed dark red to match the existing stone were used again and again to seal the cracked surfaces and replace badly deteriorated sections. In 1989, the massive amount of water used to put out a disastrous fire caused further deteriora-



*Mead Hall steps under construction*

tion. In October 2000, the firm of Holt•Morgan•Russell Architects, was commissioned to undertake an assessment of the steps. They discovered that the

courtesy of Facilities Resource Management



rubble and sand fill on which the steps are laid had become porous and unstable.

Even more alarming, they discovered that the columns and portico had shifted.

The University chose a long-term solution to the instability situation which included replacing the deteriorated substrate with a solid concrete base, building column supports and replacing the steps with newly quarried brownstone that was a near perfect geological match to the original. It was obtained from the last remaining brownstone quarry in Connecticut. Modern building codes were satisfied by the addition of hand rails and an increase in the height and depth of the steps.

Holt•Morgan•Russell were selected to undertake the project and work began early in the summer of 2004. During the dismantling phase, a roughly carved 1832 date stone was found underneath the steps. It can now be viewed on the west side of

the building. The historic mounting block was reused but it was necessary to replicate the hitching posts with newly quarried brownstone.

The project was completed early in October, 2004 and one month later, the University received the very welcome news that its application to the New Jersey Historic Trust for partial funding of the steps project had been approved. The Trust's grant was a strong signal of the state's support for the University's ongoing preservation of this architectural treasure.

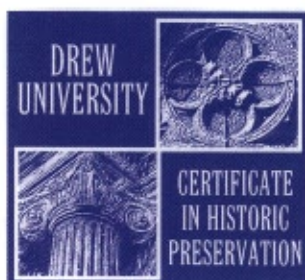


*This 1832 date stone was discovered underneath the original steps.*

## Eleven Receive Preservation Certificates

At the annual certificate award ceremony on June 17, eleven students were honored for their completion of Drew University's certificate program in historic preservation.

In the seven years since the program began, 88 students have earned certificates and more than 80 courses in preservation studies have been offered, most meeting once a week for 10 weeks and addressing topics as diverse as architectural history, the history and theory of the preservation movement, the history of interiors and landscape architecture, photographic documentation and the economics of preservation. The program also sponsors one- or two-day workshops, which offer students the opportunity to get



their hands dirty while laying floors, doing paint analysis, or repairing old windows. Students have visited Clinton, Llewellyn Park and Salem in southern New Jersey to study the very special architecture in these communities. In April of 2006, the program will return to south Jersey to learn about the efforts to save the Doo-Wop architecture of the Wildwoods.

Designed to appeal to anyone interested in learning about preservation, the program includes students who are owners of historic buildings, town planners, architects, real estate professionals, developers and community volunteers. For a brochure, course list and further information, contact Angelica Gonor in the Office of Continuing Education at 973/408-3185.



## Drew's Gem

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*Mead Hall, as pictured in a 19th-century painting, location unknown. E. Leslie Byrnes Jr. C'51 discovered this photo in a 1950s issue of Antiques.*

ornate cornices and wide period baseboards. The temple-like interior space of the grand entrance hall is further enhanced by an unusual oval opening in the ceiling that leads to an oval skylight in the roof.

On the left side of the entrance hall is a pair of adjoining rooms that served as Gibbons' office and library, connected by a double door flanked by Ionic columns, that replicate the columns of the entry portico.

On the right is a large parlor with bold Greek decorative details that also echo the entry portico. Large Ionic pillars frame a tripartite center window and support the dentilated entablature encircling the entire room.

At the center back of the entrance hall, magnificent double doors, with fluted Ionic columns on the sides and a double-faced

clock above, open into a spacious formal dining room.

A grand staircase on one side of the T-form entrance hall led to the second floor bedrooms. The family sitting room was the largest room in the center back and is

graced by a pair of handsome marble fireplaces.

The Gibbons family, including four children, ages 1 to 7, and servants, moved in the mansion in 1836. Unfortunately, they enjoyed their home a mere eight years before Mrs. Gibbons died in 1844. William Gibbons died in 1852. The middle daughter remained alone in the house until her

death at age 24 in 1857. The house was inherited by her one and only brother William Heyward, but he had since moved back to Savannah, joining the Confederates in the Civil War. He returned a broken

*Daniel Drew paid \$140,000 for the Gibbons mansion and property and made possible the founding of the Drew Theological Seminary, named in his honor.*





and defeated man to sell the now vacant house in 1867 to Daniel Drew, a self-made capitalist and devout Methodist, who had heard an appeal for donations for a new seminary during the Methodist Church 1866 Centennial in his church in New York. Drew paid \$140,000 for the Gibbons mansion and property and made possible the founding of the Drew Theological Seminary, named in his honor. The Gibbons mansion was renamed Mead Hall, in honor of his wife, Roxanna Mead.

Mead Hall was listed on the state and national historic registries in 1976. The commitment to Mead Hall as an important architectural landmark, however, was sorely tested by a horrific fire on August 24, 1989, which burned for 23 hours. With insurance money and other generous support, the fire gave the University the opportunity to engage in a

three-year historical restoration. The "silver lining" was the opportunity to modernize the infrastructure of the building and return Mead Hall to its 1836 splendor. The restoration allowed for the re-creation of the original floor plan and details, including the replication of historic wall-paper and paint colors, and the repositioning of paintings and furnishings. Mead Hall was rededicated in December 1992.



Josh Berenbaum

Left: The Mead Hall fire, seen here from the rear of the building.

Below: The main entry hall, today. The front door is to the far right.



Jack E. Boncher

## SAVE THE DATE!

### *A Spring Benefit in Support of Mead Hall*

Join us for a reception and a lecture on interior styles of the early 19th century by Ulysses Dietz, Curator of Decorative Arts, Newark Museum.

*Sunday, March 12, 2006*

More information to follow after the holidays.

If you are not on our mailing list, please call

Catherine Messmer at 973/408-3646

so that we can send you an invitation.



The Friends of Mead Hall was established in 1999 by the Drew University Board of Trustees to ensure the continuing preservation of Mead Hall, a state and national architectural landmark. Constructed between 1833 and 1836, this Greek revival mansion is one of the most eminent examples of that style in the country.

Through a wide range of educational events and programs, the Friends seek to encourage greater public awareness of and support for the University's signature building and its historical significance to the greater community.

## Friends of Mead Hall

Enclosed is my/our gift at the level of:

- Student - \$10                       Friend - \$35                       Sustainer - \$100
- Benefactor - \$250                       Mead Hall Circle - \$500                       Evergreen - \$1,000

A check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_, payable to "Drew University" is enclosed.

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