

Woolsey Hall at Yale University and its war memorial

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Woolsey Hall is the primary auditorium at Yale University, located on the campus' Hewitt Quadrangle in New Haven, Conn. It was built as part of the Bicentennial Buildings Complex that includes the Memorial Rotunda and the University Commons, designed for the Yale Bicentennial Celebration in 1901. With approximately 2,695 seats, it is the university's largest auditorium and hosts concerts, performances, and university ceremonies including the annual freshman convocation, senior baccalaureate, and presidential inaugurations. The building is named for Theodore Dwight Woolsey, President of Yale from 1846 through 1871.

During the 19th century, Yale became one of the largest higher education institutions in the world, establishing seven graduate and professional schools in addition to the undergraduate college founded in 1701. Although Yale was nominally organized as a university in 1887, its constituent schools remained mostly independent of the university administration, and they lacked any shared facilities. In 1896, as one of several initiatives to unify the new university, Yale President Timothy Dwight V proposed the construction of a central dining hall and auditorium, for which the university would need to raise \$1.5 to \$2 million.

The task of construction fell to the administration of Arthur Twining Hadley, who became president in 1899, two years before the university bicentennial. The position of the buildings was selected as a central node between the Old Campus of Yale College and the Sheffield Scientific School, positioning the new university buildings as separate from the dominant College and partial to no school in particular.

Succeeding Battell Chapel as the university's largest assembly space, the new hall was the university's first secular auditorium, coinciding with Hadley's appointment as the first non-ordained person to lead the university. In 1910, a seat on the first balcony was made extra large to accommodate Yale's ultimate "big man on campus," trustee, alumnus and U.S. president, William Howard Taft.

In 1911, at the 50th anniversary of the Civil War, President Taft wrote: "We have reached a point in this country when we can look back, not without love, not without intense pride, but without partisan passion, to the events of the Civil War. We have reached a point, I am glad to say, when the North can admire to the full the heroes of the South, and the South admire to the full the heroes of the North. There is a monument in Quebec that always commended itself to me—a monument to commemorate the battle of the Plains of Abraham. On one face of that beautiful structure is the name of Montcalm the French commander and on the opposite side the name of Wolfe the British commander. That always seemed to me to be the acme of what we ought to reach in this country; and I am glad to say that in my own alma mater, Yale, we have established an association for the purpose of erecting within her academic precincts a memorial not to the Northern Yale men who died, nor to the Southern Yale men who died; but to the Yale men who died in the Civil War."

The architects were Carrere and Hastings, who a decade later designed the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue. Built in a Beaux Arts style that contrasted with the university's more somber Victorian Gothic taste in the last 19th century, the new building was considered by critics to be overreaching and gaudy.

The ornately decorated hall is home to the Newberry Memorial Organ, one of the most renowned symphonic organs in the world. This hall serves as the main performance venue for the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, the Yale Bands, the Yale Symphony Orchestra, the Yale Philharmonia, the Yale Glee Club, and many smaller, student-run ensembles such as a cappella singing groups.

Woolsey Hall's murals represent the ideal of a classical education and include images of the nine muses and the goddess Athena. They reflect the age when Yale was an all-male college. The Hall is entered via the Memorial Rotunda, a vestibule containing memorials to the sons of Yale who lost their lives in all American wars from the Revolutionary War to the Vietnam War.

Yale honors students and graduates killed in the country's wars with memorials in the lobby of Woolsey Hall.

Woolsey Hall's lobby walls feature large marble slabs, arranged by war, inscribed with the names, military and Yale affiliations, and date and place of death.

The Civil War memorial, flanking the corridor between the hall's rotunda and its west entrance, was dedicated in 1915. Reflecting the spirit of reconciliation common at the time of dedication, the memorial blends Yale graduates and students who died while serving the Union and Confederate forces.

The floor between the memorial plaques has an inset dedication reading, "To the men of Yale who gave their lives in the Civil War. The university has dedicated this memorial that their high devotion may live in all her sons and that the bonds which now unite the land may endure. MCMXV."

Below the dedication, which is now illegible after years of foot traffic, is evidence of an earlier inscription.

The Civil War tablets list 113 killed defending the Union, and 54 killed serving the Confederate states.

The north wall features allegorical figures representing peace and devotion. Peace is depicted as a woman holding a child and an olive branch, and an inscription above her head reads, "Peace crowns their act of sacrifice." Devotion is pictured as a toga-draped flag-bearer. An inscription reads, "Devotion gives a sanctity to strife."

The south wall features allegorical depictions of Memory and Courage. Memory is depicted as a woman holding an hourglass, and an inscription reads, "Memory here guards their ennobled names." Courage is pictured as a classical warrior, and his inscription reads, "Courage disdains fame and wins it."

Among the students and graduates honored is Uriah Nelson Parmelee, a Guilford native who left Yale as a junior. He served with a New York regiment and was named a captain in the 1st Connecticut Cavalry before he was killed April 1, 1865, at the Battle of Five Forks in Virginia. Parmelee was killed less than two weeks before Lee's surrender at Appomattox.

The memorial also honors Francis Stebbins Bartow, a law school graduate, and Georgia native. A fervent secessionist, Bartow organized an infantry company and was killed during the first Battle of Bull Run/Manassas in 1861. Bartow was the first brigade commander killed in the war.

Yale is the only Ivy League college to commemorate all its Civil War dead.

The memorial was created by sculptor Henry Hering, whose other notable works include the World War plaza and memorial at the American Legion's headquarters in Indianapolis.

Veterans of other wars are honored with similar tablets along the lobby's interior hallway. In 1920, for instance, the university added eight tablets honoring 225 graduates and students killed during World War I.

The west lobby also contains plaques honoring graduates killed while serving as missionaries, including several who died during the Boxer Rebellion in China.

Woolsey Hall, at the corner of Grove and College streets, was dedicated in 1901 as part of the celebration of Yale's bicentennial. The building is also known as Memorial Hall.

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