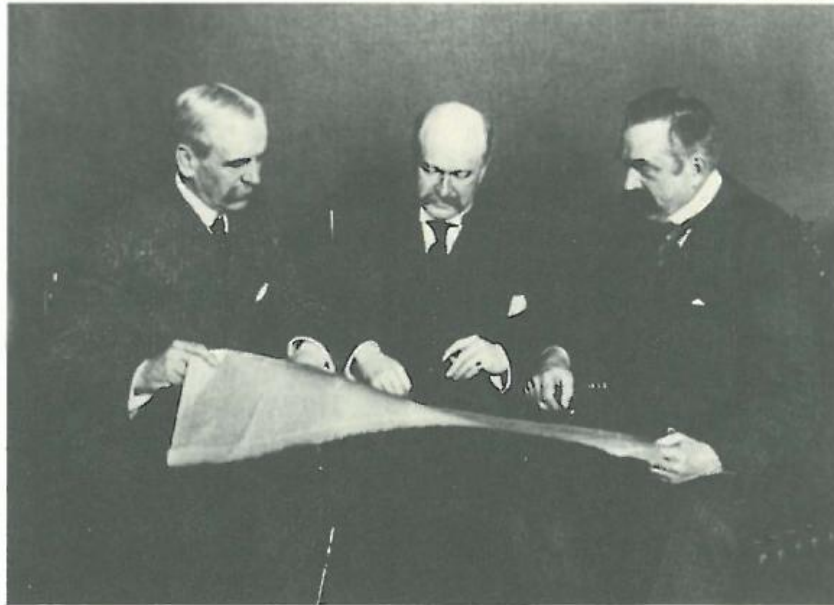


# A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



William Rutherford Mead, Charles Follen McKim and Stanford White, c. 1905.

## McKim, Mead & White

The architectural firm McKim, Mead & White, perhaps the most illustrious partnership in practice at the turn of the last century, receiving more than 785 commissions across the United States, built a number of buildings in Maine, most of them in Brunswick for Bowdoin College, but also an addition to the summer house of Joseph Pulitzer in Bar Harbor and a project for Frank A. Munsey in Lewiston. To be exact, the buildings represent the work of two firms, for the first group of buildings from 1892 through 1902 was done by the founding partners, while the larger number of buildings from 1910 through 1955 were designed by the young partners who continued the practice for many decades under the original name.

McKim, Mead & White was the happy combination of several complementary personalities. The oldest was William Rutherford Mead (1846-1928), a native of Brattleboro, Vermont, whose elder brother was the well-known sculptor, Larkin G. Mead. William R. Mead studied at Amherst College and in the office of architect Russell Sturgis in New York before studying in Florence, Italy, where he lived with his brother. When he returned to the United States in 1872, he shared an office with Charles

Follen McKim and gradually the two entered into a loose partnership. Charles F. McKim (1847-1909) was born in southeastern Pennsylvania, the son of staunch abolitionist Quakers. He studied engineering at the Lawrence Scientific School at Harvard University before pursuing architectural studies at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris from 1867 to 1870. Upon his return to the United States he entered the office of Henry Hobson Richardson (then in New York) to gain practical experience; by 1872 he was ready to start an independent practice. By 1877 McKim and Mead had added to their partnership William B. Bigelow, who then withdrew in August 1879; his place was taken by the young Stanford White (1853-1906). White, a native of New York City and the son of a prominent writer and critic of literature and the arts, originally planned to become a painter but decided instead on a career in architecture and in 1872 was placed in the office of H. H. Richardson for his training; here he met McKim and later Mead.

These three combined mutually complementary talents: Mead was the business manager and construction supervisor; McKim was the more studious designer who appealed to corporate clients; White was an energetic flamboyant designer who attracted scores of clients and who handled the bulk of the

firm's residential work. The volume of work they received was staggering for the time, and by 1890 they had established the largest architectural practice in the world, with roughly 110 employees.

The young architects rose to prominence in the early 1880s designing shingled summer and country homes principally in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, especially in Newport, which was then becoming a most fashionable watering place for the wealthy of New York City. Then in 1882 they designed a cluster of six severely elegant town houses in the form of a single expansive Italian Renaissance palazzo for railroad entrepreneur Henry Villard in New York City. The success of this was such that they received the commission for the Boston Public Library in 1887. Since this was planned by the library trustees to be a major public building, McKim suggested that, as in the best work of Beaux-Arts-trained architects, this too ought to incorporate the contributions of prominent painters and sculptors in the form of relief sculpture and murals. Then, in the first building the firm was asked to do in Maine, McKim received an opportunity to test this approach on a smaller scale. That building was the Walker Art Building for Bowdoin College (1892-94) (Figure 1).

Bowdoin College was among the first educational institutions in the United States to possess a teaching art collection. The school was chartered in 1794 as a memorial to James Bowdoin II, former governor of Massachusetts (Maine was then a part of Massachusetts). Bowdoin and his son James III were keenly interested in the visual arts and commissioned portraits as well as collected old masters. When the school was established, the son gave this collection to the college, and the family later added to this gift. By the mid-nineteenth century Assyrian reliefs and other sculpture had been added to the collection, but there was no adequate place to display the growing collection. Theophilus Walker, a resident of Waltham, Massachusetts, and a cousin of the then president of Bowdoin, hoped to donate funds for construction of a proper gallery, and after his death his nieces and legatees honored his wish. They contacted McKim and placed the commission in his hands in mid-1891.

The Walker Building was planned with three major gallery spaces lit from above; these spaces were arranged around a central rotunda capped by a hemispherical dome clearly visible from the exterior (Figure 2). The block of the building (in the shape



Figure 1. Walker Art Building, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1975 view.  
(Photo by Richard Cheek).

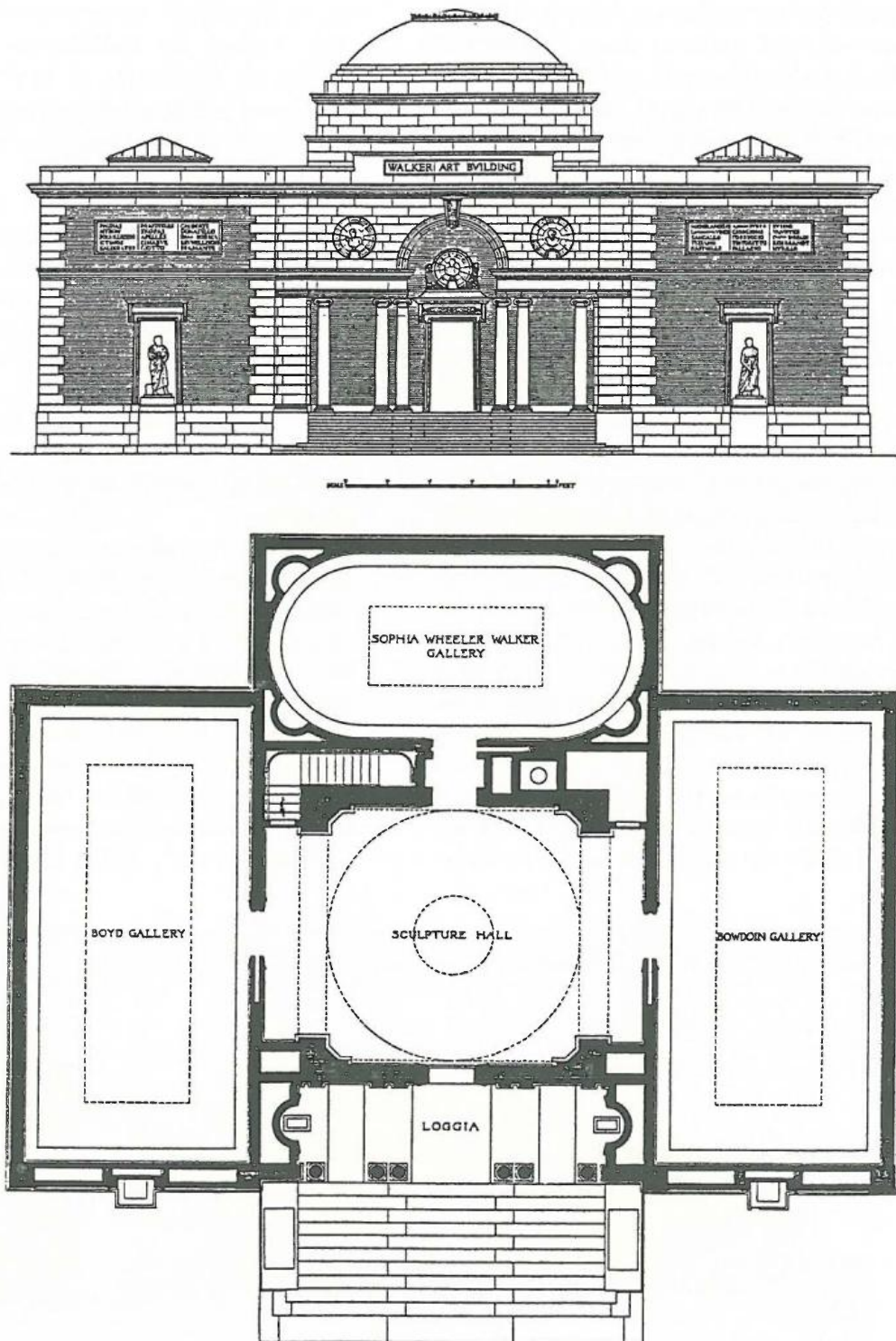


Figure 2. Elevation and Floor Plan of the Walker Art Building (The Monograph of the Work of McKim, Mead & White, 1879-1915, 4 Vols., New York, 1915-1920).

of a stubby T) was set up on a broad podium, providing for the generous gentle approach up to the shaded entrance loggia behind a screen of Ionic columns carrying an arch (the entrance being a variation on the Palladian motif). Perhaps in deference to the variegated college buildings nearby, the firm chose a mixture of brick with cut stone trim for the walls rather than the more austere granite being used for the Boston Public Library at the same time. McKim wrote the Walker sisters that he believed "a balanced and symmetrical design will be more likely to be at home amongst them, than any other."<sup>1</sup> Like the library, the gallery, too, was to incorporate mural painting; not only was the gallery to house works of art, it was itself to be a work of art. The central rotunda dome was to be carried, in the traditional way, by four corner pendentives coming to points at the corners of the square room beneath. This left four semicircular lunette panels between the dome and the room below. In 1892 as construction started, McKim conceived of only one mural painting in the lunette space opposite the entrance and on the main axis of the gallery. This was entrusted to the American painter Elihu Vedder (who worked in Rome) and was to portray allegorically *The Art Idea*.<sup>2</sup> Then McKim's vision expanded, and the Walker sisters agreed to extend commissions to three other painters whom McKim recommended. Kenyon Cox was to do an allegorical mural showing *Venice* to the right of the entrance over the door leading to the room where the paintings collected by James Bowdoin II were to be hung; he, like the Venetians, had made his fortune in maritime trade.

Opposite it, to the left of the main entrance, was to be *Florence* by Abbott Thayer. Above the main entrance, the last mural to be seen upon entering and the best of the four, was to be *Athens* by John La Farge; it was the last canvas started and the longest in execution, for it was not installed until 1898. The Walker Art Building is thus distinct among American buildings in incorporating superb examples of mural painting done at the moment when this art form was emerging in its own right in the United States.

In 1901 McKim, Mead & White were again approached to design a memorial gate to the Bowdoin campus by the Class of 1875. Not wishing to propose the type of gate that would require construction of a fence, as they had done around the Harvard College Yard, the firm proposed instead a pair of large Maine granite Doric columns, twenty feet high, with flanking urns, similar in effect to but smaller than the columns they had used to frame the Grand Army Plaza entrance to Prospect Park in Brooklyn.

The other major building done by the founding partners in Maine involved important renovations and the addition of a tower to Chatwold, the summer home of journalist Joseph Pulitzer in Bar Harbor in 1895-97<sup>3</sup> (Figure 3). Pulitzer gradually developed an obsession for total silence in his residences, and this tower was to provide the necessary refuge. A mass of granite, it was dubbed "The Tower of Silence" by members of the household. Unfortunately it was destroyed in 1945.

From the early 1880s the principal partners had

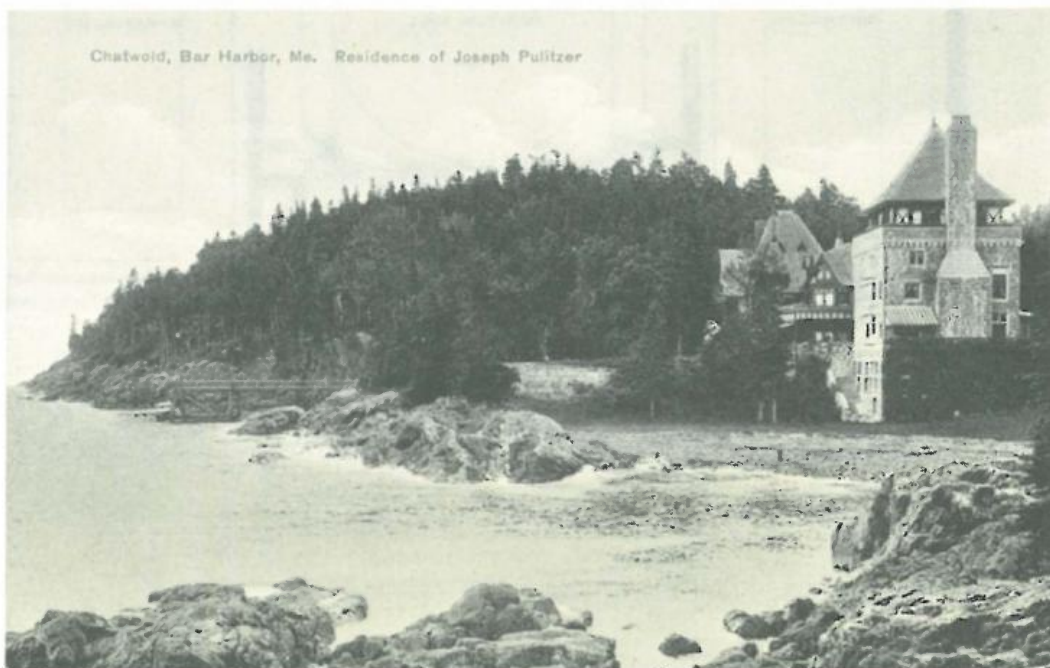


Figure 3. Chatwold, Summer Home of Joseph Pulitzer, Bar Harbor, c. 1905 view (MHPC).



Figure 4. Moulton Union, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1984 view (Cheek Photo).



Figure 5. Gibson Hall of Music, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, c. 1953 rendering (Buildings and Grounds Department, Bowdoin College).

worked with assistants who gradually assumed the roles of junior partners. They were: William Mitchell Kendall (1856-1941, Harvard '76, who studied architecture at M.I.T. and entered the office in 1882); Burt Leslie Fenner (1869-1926, who studied at the University of Rochester and M.I.T. before entering the office in 1891); and William Symmes Richardson (1873-1931, who studied at the University of California, Berkeley, M.I.T., and at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts before joining the firm in 1895). In 1914 Lawrence Grant White (1888-1956, a student of Harvard and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts), the son of Stanford White, joined them. In January 1906 they were formally added as full partners (Lawrence Grant White was made a partner in 1919), thus assuring continuity of the firm's work. It was probably Kendall or Richardson who, in 1910, drew up the scheme for the house which magazine publisher Frank A. Munsey proposed to build in Lewiston for his sister, a project that came to naught.

In the early 1920s these new partners, now fully in control of the firm, began to specialize in collegiate design, and it was in this role that they were engaged to start what became a long association with Bowdoin College.<sup>4</sup> They began with Curtis Pool, dedicated in 1927, and the Moulton Union begun that same year and finished in 1928 (Figure 4). The Moulton Union established the type used for all subsequent buildings at Bowdoin—generically Georgian or Federal, of brick with white stone or wood trim. The War Memorial Flagpole of 1930 was the last work they did at Bowdoin before the Depression halted building activity.

In 1929 another partner was admitted to the firm, James Kellum Smith, and he and Lawrence Grant White were responsible for the last and busiest phase of the firm's work at Bowdoin.<sup>5</sup> This began in 1940-41 with their Moore Hall, a dormitory which faced Moulton Union and formed a small quadrangle with

it. In 1946 they designed a theater which was not built. At this time, too, they developed a master plan for the campus. After the Second World War they continued with Sills Hall and Smith Auditorium in 1949-1952. This in turn was followed by Parker Cleaveland Hall, a classroom building for chemistry in 1951-52, and then the Harvey Dow Gibson Hall of Music in 1953-54, which resembled Moulton Union in general massing and several details (Figure 5). The work of McKim, Mead & White at Bowdoin ended with Pickard Theater in Memorial Hall in 1954-55. All of these continued the foursquare classicism introduced in the Italian Renaissance Walker Art Building and modified in the Federal classic architecture of Moulton Union, but with an increasing sparseness of decorative detail.

Leland M. Roth  
University of Oregon  
February, 1985

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> C.F. McKim to the Misses Walker, August 10, 1891, quoted in Richard V. West, *The Walker Art Building Murals*, Brunswick, Me., 1972, p. 2. The discussion of the Walker Art Building given here is adapted from my paper, "The Walker Art Building, Bowdoin College," delivered as part of a Symposium, *Nineteenth Century American Architects and Their Buildings at Bowdoin*, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, April 19, 1975. See also Louis C. Hatch, *The History of Bowdoin College*, Portland, Me., 1927.
- <sup>2</sup> For the imagery and meaning of the Walker Building murals see Richard V. West, op. cit.
- <sup>3</sup> Notices in the *Bar Harbor Record*, July 11, 1896, and November 4, 1896, describe the extent of work at Chatwold.
- <sup>4</sup> For a sampling of this collegiate work see the book prepared and published by the firm, *Recent Buildings Designed for Educational Institutions by McKim, Mead & White*, Philadelphia, 1936.
- <sup>5</sup> For the later work of Lawrence Grant Walker and James Kellum Smith at Bowdoin see their booklet, *Recent Work by the Present Partners of McKim, Mead & White, Architects*, New York, 1952.

## SOURCES

References for the individual buildings are cited in the footnotes. For the work of the architects the standard comprehensive study is Leland M. Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects*, New York, 1983, which includes an extensive bibliography; see also Richard Guy Wilson, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects*, New York, 1983. Statistical data on the firm's buildings, including all those in Maine, is given in Leland M. Roth, *The Architecture of McKim, Mead & White, 1870-1920: A Building List*, New York, 1978. This is derived from the massive McKim, Mead & White Archive, New York Historical Society, New York, which comprises over 1000 correspondence files and 500 tubes of drawings. For the relationship of the Bowdoin murals to the development of American art see: Edwin Howland Blashfield, *Mural Painting in America*, New York, 1928; and E.P. Richardson, *Painting in America*, New York, 1965. For views and a plan of the Walker Art Building see *The Monograph of the Work of McKim, Mead & White, 1879-1915*, 4 vols., New York, 1915-1920, 1:45-46. A contemporary account of the Walker Art Building and the Bowdoin campus is given in Montgomery Schuyler, "The Architecture of American Colleges: VII. Brown,

Bowdoin, Trinity, and Wesleyan," *Architectural Record* 29 (February 1911), 151-56. For the voluminous bibliography on the partners and their firm see the references in Roth, *McKim, Mead & White, Architects*, 421-28. Information on Chatwold and the Munsey house project was furnished by Gladys O'Neil of the Bar Harbor Historical Society and by Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.

## LIST OF KNOWN COMMISSIONS IN MAINE BY MCKIM, MEAD & WHITE

Walker Art Building, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1892-94, Extant.  
Addition, Joseph Pulitzer House, "Chatwold", Bar Harbor, 1895-97, Destroyed.  
Class of 1875 Memorial Entrance, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1902, Extant.  
Frank A. Munsey Residence, Lewiston, 1910, Not Executed  
Curtis Pool, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1927, Extant.  
Moulton Union, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1927-28, Extant.  
The War Memorial (flagpole and base), Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1930, Extant.  
Moore Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1940-41, Extant.  
Sills Hall and Smith Auditorium, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1949-52, Extant.  
Parker Cleaveland Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1951-52, Extant.  
Searles Hall, Bowdoin College, Alterations, 1952, Extant.  
Harvey Dow Gibson Hall of Music, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1953-54, Extant.  
Pickard Theater, Memorial Hall, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, 1954-55, Extant.

## ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

The New York Historical Society maintains the largest collection of McKim, Mead & White drawings. Maine buildings in this collection include the Walker Art Building (blueprints only), the Class of 1875 Memorial Entrance, Curtis Pool, Moulton Union, the War Memorial Flagpole, Searles Hall alterations, Gibson Hall, and Pickard Theater.

The Buildings and Grounds Department of Bowdoin College has blueprints for Curtis Pool, Moulton Union, Sills Hall and Smith Auditorium, Cleveland Hall, Searles Hall alterations, and Gibson Hall. This collection also contains a colored pencil rendering of Gibson Hall.

Photograph of McKim, Mead & White  
Courtesy of Avery Library, Columbia University.

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