

The Gold Coast's Malleable Luster

Situating FDR's Harvard residence within
its architectural contexts through time

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1. Mount Auburn Street, 1912
(Collection of Author)

An oft-reproduced photograph from Cambridge, Massachusetts of Mount Auburn Street in 1912 shows luxury apartment houses marching with a stateliness that befits their appellation as the 'Gold Coast,' the not-so-humble abodes of elite Harvard students who could afford room and board at a

level of expense over ten times greater than other affordable dormitories of the day. This family of masonry structures – Claverly, Randolph, Russell, and Westmorly¹ Halls – constituted the largest contiguous grouping of such luxury apartment houses; the metaphorical ‘coast’ could also include the similar apartment houses elsewhere near the college and just east on Dana Hill along Harvard and Massachusetts avenues², and it most certainly included the range of private social clubs along Mount Auburn as well³.

Yet this iconic glimpse is only one snapshot in the architectural and social contexts of the past two centuries which have framed the significance of the Gold Coast⁴ and its inhabitants, most notably the student who resided at the southwest corner of Westmorly (the window highlighted in red) from 1900-1904 and became our longest-serving president less than three decades later. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) is one of the most defining figures of twentieth-century world history and his connections to the Gold Coast are far from incidental.

These reflections on the luster of these housing elements are intended to offer insight into how this golden thread in the physical fabric of Harvard in Cambridge past and present provides connections to the world and milieu of FDR. His clear intentions for this Westmorly home, scrawled and sketched in correspondence⁵, are an embodiment of his formative years at a time when his attendance was an

¹ Westmorly is occasionally spelled ‘Westmorely’ (even by FDR) but the primary sources and the carved name of the building at its entrances confirms the former spelling without the second ‘e’.

² George Fogerty, the architect of Claverly Hall, was also responsible for Ware Hall and other nearby construction through the 1890s.

³ Sullivan, Charles M: Harvard Square History and Development, <http://www.cambridgema.gov/~Historic/>

⁴ For other general sources on architectural and urban contexts, see the following:

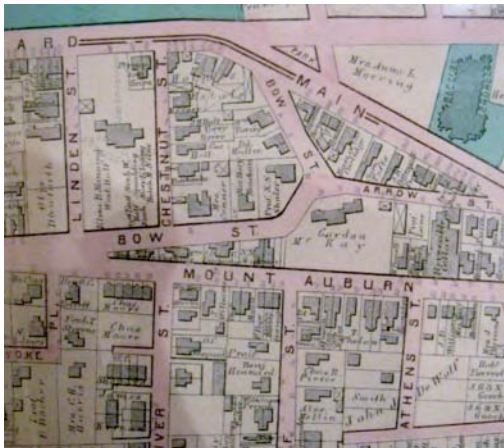
Bunting, Bainbridge and Henderson Floyd, Margaret. *Harvard: An Architectural History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Bunting, Bainbridge and Robert H. Nylander. *Old Cambridge, vol.5*. “A Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge,” Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Historical Commission, 1973.

For specific history of Adams House, the author has also reviewed the interiors survey completed by Boston Affiliates in 2007-08, which is being expanded by Einhorn Yaffee Prescott Architecture and Engineering, P.C.; it is noted that the author is employed at EYP/ for Harvard at the time of this writing, but this writing is done independently and does not represent Harvard, EYP/, etc., nor is it a comprehensive historic inventory of the spaces discussed herein.

⁵ Letter, FDR to his mother Sara, 1900, now housed in the FDR suite. See discussion that follows in this writing.

expected component of his social journey based on family connections⁶. Far more than his good but unexceptional student performance at Harvard⁷, or than his year of law school at Columbia, it was the years in this suite that offer an embodied glimpse at what privilege entailed, and what societal expectations FDR later challenged as he sought public leadership. And this world of social clubs for men is an incarnation of Harvard that is largely diminished in today's diverse research institution: the 'Gold Coast' has been changed, and it is now in desirably close proximity within the collegiate district rather than an elite colony away from the Yard. The clearly aristocratic name⁸ did not denote far-off seaside haunts or colonialist locales⁹, but it also did not connote a deliberate master plan from Harvard or the city; it was a private development that has been co-opted for its identities both real and imagined. It resonated most clearly with the patrician northern shore of Long Island, where Roosevelts, Vanderbilts, and select elites summered, and which during the first decade of the 1900s became known as the 'Gold Coast' around the same time that the Crimson first used the term to describe the apartments at Harvard.¹⁰



2. Cambridge, 1890

But how did it become 'golden' and 'coastal', and what do the luxuries of the Gold Coast architecture imply for our understanding of FDR?

From the Gold Coast to the River's Shore

The 'golden' qualities were the undeniably luxurious provisions compared to the rundown housing in Harvard Yard, which was largely over a century old. But all that is 'gold' is not gilded: these apartment houses had lobbies and

⁶ FDR's father James received his LL.B from Harvard Law in 1851; Theodore Roosevelt came to Harvard College in 1877; up to nine Roosevelts at a time were enrolled and dozens of relatives and descendants of FDR attended from 1900 to 1993. See Bethel, John: "Frank Roosevelt at Harvard," *Harvard Magazine*, November 1996

⁷ Smith, Jean Edward: *FDR*. New York, NY: Random House, 2007, pp.25ff

⁸ The Gold Coast was a nickname for the coast of Long Island, particularly the northern area with estates.

⁹ Such as the Gold Coast in Africa (now Ghana), also the Gold Coast of the Mediterranean.

¹⁰ The first appearance of the term "Gold Coast" in the Harvard Crimson is in January 1912, see Appendix.

incidental spaces which were embellished with mosaic floors, full-height dark-stained wood wainscot panels and cornice molding, even with leaded glazing in the sidelights of doors, but these features are consistent with the manner of other urban apartment houses in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere – even the Back Bay of Boston. These reproduced the upper-crust lifestyle to which inhabitants were accustomed and to which they aspired. But the treasured luxuries George Fogerty built into Claverly in 1893 – electricity, modern plumbing and private bathrooms, private rooms with steam heat and fireplaces, and an ornamental lobby with an *elevator* – were instantly desirable and yet in constant need of one-upmanship by ‘rival investors’¹¹. Randolph offered a breakfast room and squash areas in 1896; Westmorly offered an indoor pool in 1898. The luxury of materials in entry vestibules changed from being the appropriate way to treat public spaces, and these transitional spaces became the appetizer for other amenities within and for the private suites customized by their early residents.

The district’s ‘coastal’ qualities seem to emerge from a partially negative connotation that has evolved over time¹². It was a defensively isolated area of patrician display, and it was lamented by President Eliot and the rest of the faculty¹³ because it only reinforced the segregation of the ‘have-nots’ in the Yard and elsewhere from the ‘haves’ who inhabited this wall-like district¹⁴ of tall, modern edifices towering over the

¹¹ Sullivan, Charles M: Harvard Square History and Development, <http://www.cambridgema.gov/~Historic/>

¹² This is fairly typical of nicknames in design (not unlike ‘impressionism’ as critics labeled certain Parisian art in the late 19th century), or in areas of cities (‘Foggy Bottom’ in Washington, DC).

¹³ Professor Eliot was President of Harvard from 1869-1909. In a related vein, Jean Edward Smith reproduces how “Philosopher William James lamented that the young men who lived in the Yard ‘seldom or never darkent he doors of Pudding or the Porcellian; they hover in background on the days when the crimson color is most in evidence, but they nevertheless are intoxicated and exultant with the nourishment they find there.” James, William: “The True Harvard,” Harvard Graduates Magazine, v. 7 (Sept 1903) p.12; quoted in Smith n.48.

¹⁴ H.W. Brands sums up the inevitability of social class in context: “Franklin graduated from Groton in the spring of 1900 and enrolled that fall at Harvard, down the road in Cambridge. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Harvard aspired to intellectual eminence, but social standing still counted for more among the undergraduates than academic achievement. Boys from wealthy families inhabited the “Gold Coast” along Mt. Auburn Street [sic] living in large apartments, dining in expensive eating houses, and gathering in exclusive clubs. Boys from poorer families lived across Massachusetts Avenue in the drab, crowded dormitories of the Yard. The two castes mingled in the lecture halls, but outside the classrooms they

frame dwellings and industrial detritus toward the Charles river shore beyond. (It should be recalled that Harvard Square was populated primarily by woodframe construction well into the 1880s¹⁵.)

Yet these blocks were only a ‘coast’ at the periphery of the campus for a decade or two; FDR arrived at the Gold Coast’s heyday. Until 1898 there wasn’t a contiguous group of buildings, and by 1913 Harvard had constructed Smith Hall (now within Kirkland House) and Standish and Gore Halls (now within Winthrop House) to the south, leaping the coast to redefine Harvard’s spatial presence in the Riverside neighborhood. That year the faculty required students to live in dormitories starting in 1914-15; Randolph instantly lost any hopes for profitability¹⁶, and Westmorly and the rest followed shortly thereafter.

So the 1912 photograph is prescient, not because it is a fixed idealized past that resembles the current view but because it is the calm eye in the midst of the storm; it falls after the residences are complimented by the erudite folly of the Lampoon (1909), yet before the new expansion of undergraduate residences beyond Mount Auburn that would crescendo past 1913 with McKlintock (1925) and finally with the monumental houses (Lowell, Eliot, and Dunster) to create the entire district of student housing by 1931.

It is beyond the scope of this investigation to appraise the significance of this transformative reproduction of the Oxbridge¹⁷ typologies of college architecture into the full complement of River Houses wrought by architect Coolidge and his firm¹⁸. Coolidge transposed the medieval quadrangles (themselves with monastic precedents) as they

rarely encountered each other. Roosevelt, naturally was a Gold Coaster.” Brands, H.W. *Traitor to his Class / The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of FDR*.

¹⁵ Sullivan, Charles M: Harvard Square History and Development, <http://www.cambridgema.gov/~Historic/>

¹⁶ Sullivan, Charles M: Harvard Square History and Development, <http://www.cambridgema.gov/~Historic/>

¹⁷ While it is noted that Oxford and Cambridge are distinct and not administratively linked, and are often rivals, the shared traditions and traits have led to the conventional joined term as a neologism.

¹⁸ Heskel, Julia: *Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott: Past to Present*. Boston: SBRA, 1999.

had evolved through Regency-era parades of styles¹⁹, removed their chapels, but kept the dining and library functions to suit President Lowell's intentions for undergraduate House Life. On land donated and acquired from alumni, Coolidge fused these precedents with the local austere colonial-era brick of 'Harvard Coledge'²⁰ to produce fluent variations of inward-facing quadrangles: closed (Kirkland) and open (Winthrop), polygonal (Eliot) and square (Lowell), the latter being particularly mellifluous in its composition²¹.

But these were not meager loadbearing masonry structures; they incorporated modern steel construction to achieve an inflation of scale for interior volumes to a palatial extent that often exceeded the Oxbridge originals²². Moreover these River Houses are not an extension of the brick urbanism of the Gold Coast and of the rest of early twentieth-century Boston and Cambridge: they are truly what would now be evaluated as 'simulacra' – each a reproduction without a true original²³. They invoke the imagery of diverse Neoclassicisms (Colonial, Regency, Adamesque, Georgian, Federal, and so forth) in combination with vertical-staircase typologies, to link their interiors to pedagogical traditions begun seven centuries earlier.

The Gold Coast may have implied the impulse to reach toward the river prospect, but it was Coolidge's brick facades, gates, and especially the towering cupolas of the River Houses that allowed a branded identity of classicism to define Harvard the Charles River's edge.²⁴

¹⁹ For a particularly well-illustrated account from the 1920s, see Oswald, Arthur: *Cambridge / Its Colleges and University Buildings*. London: Country Life Ltd. and George Newnes Ltd., c.1930.

²⁰ See also William Burgis' famed "Prospect of the Colledges in Cambridge in New England" of 1740.

²¹ Lowell House was the first residential college or dormitory to win in 1938 the Harleston Parker Award for design from the Boston Society of Architects; it was followed by neighboring Quincy House (1960). The same honor was bestowed in 1952 upon Arland Dirlam's Scandinavian-influenced University Lutheran Church (built 1950) facing Quincy and Lowell. Confirmed in correspondence between the author and the Boston Society of Architects, 7 January 2009.

²² One could comparably note Yale's reproduction of the Bridge of Sighs larger than Oxford's, which is comparable to Cambridge's copy (over the river Cam at St. John's) itself a variant transformation of the Venetian Rialto bridge.

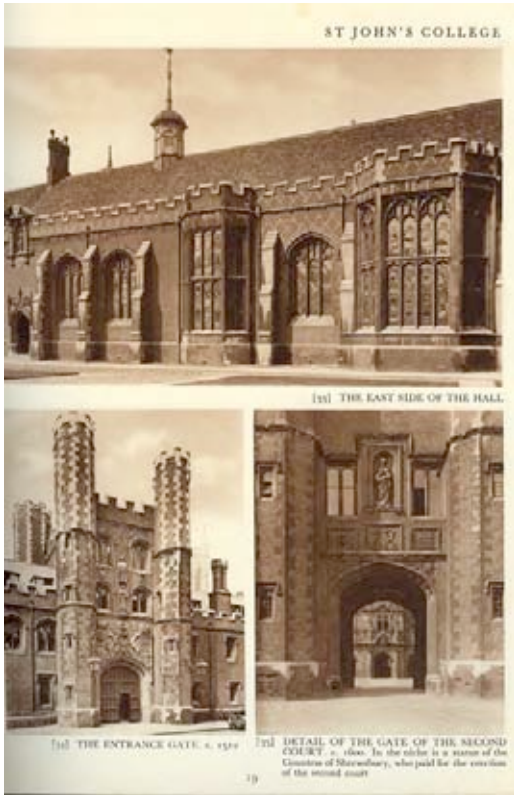
²³ For the term's use in postmodernism see writings such as Baudrillard, Jean: *Simulation and Simulacra*, 1994.

²⁴ See also Stern, Robert A.M.: "Buildings and Brands," Remarks delivered at the dedication of the Spangler Center, Harvard Business School, 22 January 2001.

“The Aspect of City Clubs”

So if the 20th-century heritage of Harvard housing grew independent from the Gold Coast, how does Westmorly (as the most demonstrably English of the halls) frame a more particular heritage? Not unlike many other luxury apartment houses facing Cambridge Common or the Charles River, Westmorly combined Tudor elements from Renaissance England with Jacobethan Revival mixtures of highly articulate brickwork with rusticated stone quoins and surrounds at façade openings. In fact, some of the strongest examples of this were St. John’s College, Cambridge (showing the style in its original seventeenth century sense) and at the women’s Newnham College, Cambridge (nineteenth-century Jacobethan Revival more akin to Randolph).

Westmorly has two entrances off of an exterior stone courtyard facing Bow Street, the southern of which is dated 1898 and the northern 1902 (it also has a service entrance on Bow). Its rather extravagant polygonal bays and stone base courses navigate the sloping topography to create a picturesque termination to Arrow Street as it meets Bow. The choice of Bow and Arrow as the access points reinforced the elevation of the main story above Mount Auburn’s pedestrian traffic, similar to Randolph and Claverly. Westmorly was conceived as a whole (rather than an ‘original’ with an ‘addition’) but the second phase of 1902 was delayed by the presence of an adjacent house and establishment on Bow Street under separate ownership, and the City of Cambridge’s indecision regarding the widening of Bow Street for traffic concerns²⁵. (As detailed elsewhere²⁶, the presently narrow Bow



3. St. John’s, Cambridge, UK, c.1930 (Oswald, op. cit.)

²⁵ See Appendix, 1901-1902

²⁶ Foxe, David: “Urban Slivers/An Investigation of the Bow Street Arrow Street Area,” 2002, for MIT architecture course 4.211 *The City*, supervised by Anne Whiston Spirn FASLA. Web site compilation of research archived online at <http://architecture.mit.edu/class/city/projects02/bow-and-arrow/city.htm>

The author notes serendipitously that this research project on urban streetscape evolution in this exact vicinity was completed long before any knowledge of (or affiliation with) Adams House; the buildings of Westmorly and the rest of the



4. Westmorly, view at end of Arrow Street, c.1904 (Avery Library, as reproduced in Pennoyer, op. cit.)



5. Pool, Westmorly (Avery Library, as reproduced in Pennoyer, op. cit.)

and Arrow streets in fact predate the much later Massachusetts Avenue and Mount Auburn Street thoroughfares.) Once the street's location was known and the house disposed of, the completed building appeared as a continuous whole from the exterior and only fire insurance maps²⁷ and aerial views hint at the winding firewall that demarcates the separation. This house, which appears masterful and luxurious at moments, was an early work by Warren & Wetmore²⁸, who exemplified the same social climbing of its residents. A partnership of a French-trained architect (Whitney Warren) and a lawyer turned real-estate mogul (Charles Wetmore), the pair built on Wetmore's previous maneuverings with regard to interests in Claverly and Randolph, and gained this job as one of their first commissions, designed and built within the same year Warren left the office of McKim Mead and White.

By 1904 when FDR left for New York City, Warren & Wetmore had long transcended the provincial league of socialite buildings for Cambridge²⁹; they had won the design for Grand Central Terminal and were en route to a career creating countless top-rate hotels and luxurious settings that would make the hammerbeam-supported gable trusses of Westmorly's Tudoresque pool and spa pale in comparison.

But in this work which would house their most famous Presidential resident, they defined two complementary visions of luxury living at Harvard, from two picturesque entrances³⁰ from a raised stone plinth facing down Arrow

block were merely noted relative to the private development elsewhere to the south and east of Bow, while "The area northwest of Bow Street [was] becoming occupied by Harvard-associated buildings."

²⁷ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Maps of Cambridge, MA, 1900. Note that in the MIT copy of 1900 maps, the alterations reflect alterations to the properties including the 1902 construction. These are pasted fully over the original such that it does not reflect 1900 conditions unless peering through the layers of pasted paper, as is typical of copies of this era.

²⁸ See the excellent monograph: Pennoyer, Peter and Walker, Anne: *The Architecture of Warren & Wetmore*, Forward by Robert A. M. Stern. New York: W.W.Norton, 2006

²⁹ Including the social club at 74 Mount Auburn, a moderate work with French compositional overtones and classical vocabulary, now occupied by the Harvard Office for the Arts.

³⁰ Douglas Shand-Tucci waxes into his imagination of how this scene could be transformed (absent the present reality of Bow Street being a frequently traveled route for metropolitan buses and other large vehicles): "Westmorley [sic] Court works so well with those other buildings [St. Paul's Church and the Longfellow Court apartments] – and with the elegant plaza buildings of the Harvard Catholic Student Center – the result is perhaps the most picturesque quarter of Harvard

Street. The north entrance³¹ from 1902 hearkens to medieval roots with its turret-like cylindrical vestibule with Guastavino tile vaulting, entering diagonally onto a timber-beamed squarish lobby with arcuated ceiling divisions, its gargoyle-infested hearth surround continuing the preponderance of Indiana limestone punctuated by dark wood. The south entrance from 1898 presents a clearer axial hall, its elliptical and arcuated openings forming thresholds with heraldic carvings, and its vertical panels recalling the heritage of the English Perpendicular mode. “Westmorley [sic] Court set new standards of luxury for the Gold Coast when it was built, both inside and out. Certainly the exterior is splendid[...]A robustly red brick Tudor Baroque extravaganza...”³²

The configuration and décor of student suites is known through photographic records; they show that the upper-floor suite of W. K. Vanderbilt had a full-paneled overmantel and shelf in dark-stained wood over a tile surround and dark brick hearth; the enframed tracery at cased openings at the entry is echoed in the rooms in this suite. Vanderbilt would leave Harvard not long after his first year and would pursue racing and other endeavors, spearheading the construction of the Long Island Motor Parkway near the ‘Gold Coast’ east of New York City.

Elsewhere the residents could share in amenities “sumptuously fitted with all the makings of a modern social club – gym, handball courts, showers, telephones, and fireplaces. Of most interest were the elaborate indoor/outdoor swimming pool with treillage, topiaries, and

Square. Only one thing is lacking: the Roman fountain the architect Gerhard Kallmann has often pointed out belongs here. Indeed the exact design has been mooted: that of the Fontana delle Tartrughe of the Piazza Mattei, a little Roman Square much like St. Paul’s Square. Four young men there disport themselves with dolphins, which spout water into a shell, while turtles meanwhile climb into the bowl above. Already, there is one American replica – in front of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. All this in front of Adams House is too appropriate. Church, bells (beautiful bells, newly restored), bookstore, café, and an American Looshaus: who will give the fountain?” Shand-Tucci, Douglas: *Harvard University An Architectural Tour*. New York, NY: Princeton, 2001, p.116.

³¹ Now ‘A’ Entry

³² Shand-Tucci, Douglas: *Harvard University An Architectural Tour*. New York, NY: Princeton, 2001, 116

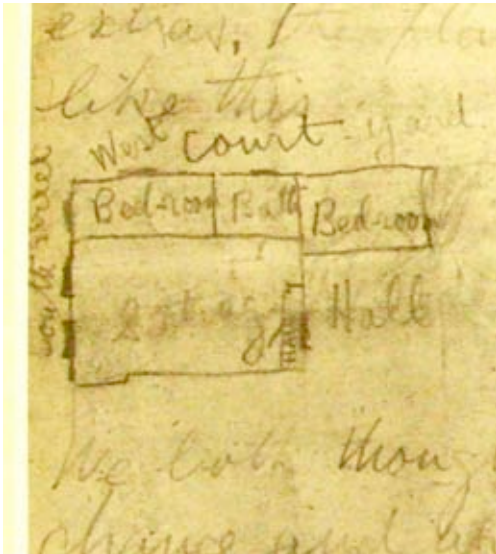
fireplaces³³.” Even besides this detailed knowledge of the interiors, publications of the era noted how the Harvard Gold Coast not only had private clubs as visible expressions of elite culture, their residences reinforced this urbane separation and conveyed “quite the aspect of city clubs” and that the excess limestone embellishments meant the architecture was “a little exaggerated beyond what would have occurred in the Tudor work, on which the design is based...the building gave rather the impression of an apartment house than a dormitory for a great university³⁴.” This is exactly why it was the apartment FDR sought.

“the pick was at Westmorly”

FDR wrote to his mother Sara in 1900:

“We saw many rooms, but the pick was at Westmorely [sic], 1st floor, corner, looking on the South-West. And guess the price? \$400 without extras. The place is roughly like this [sketch at left] We both thought it a chance and are sure of getting it as we will be given 1st choice on Mar 1st. On the W. side of Westmorely is Russell then Randolph [sic] then Claverley [sic] so all our buildings are together.”³⁵

In referring to the Gold Coast as ‘our buildings,’ FDR had indeed chosen a highly desirable corner unit, slightly more complex than the hasty sketch would indicate. The unit B17 (now the FDR suite itself) comprises approximately 600 gross square feet on the first level, which is nearly a storey above Bow Street. The hall door leads through a vestibule to a study and two bedrooms, which share two small closets and a bathroom. The study (common room) has two large French-type ten-by-ten multipane casement windows that provide access to small balconies, and the remaining windows are



6. FDR Sketch on letter framed in suite, 1900 (Photo: DMF)

³³ Pennoyer, Peter and Walker, Anne: *The Architecture of Warren & Wetmore*; Forward by Robert A. M. Stern. New York: W.W.Norton, 2006, pp.20ff. See also:

"Dormitories, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass," *The Architectural Review* v.10 (Jan 1901): 11.

"Dormitories, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass," *Inland Architect and News Record* 40 (Dec 1902): 14

"The Enlargement of Harvard," *Harper's Weekly* 53 (18 Dec 1909): 17-19

³⁴ "The New Halls at Harvard have quite the aspect of city clubs" *The Advocate* (17 Oct 1898)

³⁵ Letter published in *FDR: His Personal Letters, Vol I, 1947*; Edited by Elliott Roosevelt.

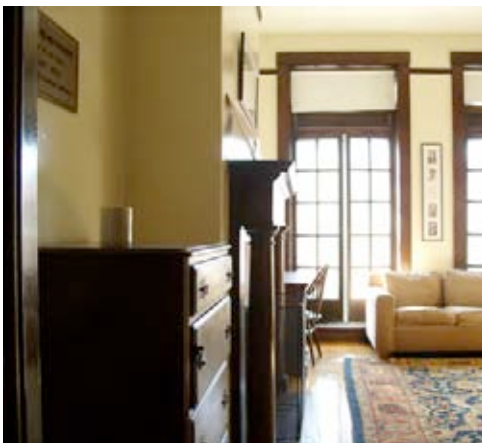


7. FDR Suite, view from Bow/Mount Auburn, 2009
(Photo: DMF)

generally eight-over-eight multipane windows in wood frames stained a rich walnut tone to match the other current woodwork. While the study is a generous 250 square feet, the bedrooms are just under 100 square feet: typical but not palatial scale for such spaces.

Brands summarizes and continues the same letter home to Sara:

FDR lived at Westmorly Court, a prime property, in a four-room apartment he shared with Lathrop Brown, another Grotonian. “The Sitting room is large enough for two desks, and the bedrooms and bath light and airy,” he wrote home. “The ceilings are very high.” The suite was bare when Roosevelt arrived. “The rooms look as if struck by sheet lightning, the sitting room having the chairs and tables but no curtains or carpets. . . . The bed is in place in my room, and it looks inhabitable, but one trunk is the sole piece of furniture of Lathrop’s room.” The apartment perked up when Sara sent carpet and curtains, and Roosevelt and Brown put pictures on the walls. A rented piano completed the décor and provided a focus for entertaining.”



8. FDR Suite, view south from entry door, 2009 (Photo: DMF)

It is crucial to note both Roosevelt’s dismay at encountering an undecorated room (likely not a usual occurrence in his life to that point) that merely had its woodwork, table, chairs, and a bed. It also must have had the masonry fireplace FDR neglected to mention, with its modest wooden mantel shelf and gently tapering craftsman-Doric wooden columns below. (Such details are found in countless apartments of the period, but are more refined than many of the ordinary room appointments of the later neo-Georgian houses at Harvard.) Moreover, the spatial integrity of the space a century later is as FDR found it; the layers of finishes and textiles which are the most effervescent in a building’s lifespan have indeed been lost but the relationship of spaces, the exposed wood floor, marble threshold to the purple slate bathroom with its clawfoot tub, marble sink vanity on rods, and toilet (model “number forty”) remain. Even the Vanderbilt suite (or the JFK suite at Winthrop) do not preserve such elements as extant reminders of a century ago.

In his retrospective of Roosevelt and Harvard, John Bethel notes the personalization of how Roosevelt and Lathrop settled in:

With its manorial façade, diamond-lead windows, and oak wainscoting, Westmorly was the most ornate of the privately owned residence halls that lined Harvard's Gold Coast. ...in the fashion of the day, [FDR and roommate Lathrop Brown] decorated the walls of their first-floor suite...with school pennants and banners, team pictures, bear steins, and social invitations³⁶.

Jean Edward Smith notes how even “By Harvard standards, FDR’s \$400-a-year suite was luxurious. He and Brown lived there for the next four years, surrounded by fellow Grotonians and other preppies.”³⁷ While FDR was denied admission to the prestigious Porcellian club, he was admitted to Fly (Alpha Delta Phi) and the Hasty Pudding, and “served as librarian of each” in addition to writing editorials for the *Crimson* before completing his degree in 1903 and being elected “permanent chairman of the class committee, the linchpin of alumni affairs.”³⁸

Yet for these years of living there, FDR was adjacent to a construction site as the 1902 portion of Westmorly arose during his last year of school. After this decade of lavishness, the luxury settings remained but as containers for an evolving clientele. Apthorp House³⁹ and the Randolph Courtyard around it had become Apthorp College. Thirty years later, the dark transitional interiors of the 1890s exuded a dated Victorian mustiness; the 1890s’ Russell Hall had decayed, and the Westmorly’s new neighbor visible from FDR’s west window would complete the transition from hovering just beyond the Yard, to being one more edifice in Harvard’s domain.

³⁶ Bethel, John: “Frank Roosevelt at Harvard,” *Harvard Magazine*, November 1996

³⁷ Smith, Jean Edward: *FDR*, 29

³⁸ Smith, Jean Edward: *FDR*, 33.

³⁹ While Apthorp House is attributed to Peter Harrison, it is not included in the authoritative account of his work nor his interaction with Apthorp on the First Church in Cambridge; see Bridenbaugh, Carl: *Peter Harrison First American Architect*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1949.



9. Adams House / Russell Hall, Gold Stair, 2008
(Photo: DMF)

Malleable treasures

Luxuries change; those that are not rooted in human use require renewal⁴⁰. Whereas the connotation of luxury had required modern facilities and typologies in 1893 – plumbing and circulation in Claverly’s L-shaped light-filled urban block – the connotation of FDR’s private luxury suite was no longer enough. The pool was a shared sybarite amenity, but nonetheless a private one. The reshuffled facilities added to the collegiate collage of Westmorly, Randolph, and Russell Hall (the latter rebuilt over the footprint of the dilapidated predecessor of the same name, and finished in 1932 with extra funding by Edward Harkness). The amalgamation would become known as *Adams House*, and would need public displays of opulence. Built at the same time by the same firm headed by Coolidge⁴¹, Adams could have a typical Georgian library and generous dining room not unlike those in the houses to the south – rife with dark-stained wood paneling and arched multipane windows – but it would need an entry befitting the imagined identity of the Gold Coast.

And this time it would be indeed golden: the only Harvard space with its walls and ceilings gilded in nothing less than broad sweeping surfaces painted with gold leaf. This interior linked the lower and upper common rooms’ variously exotic themes,⁴² from azure floor tiles to a cavalcade of Venetian light fixtures along the iron-railed stair, and culminating in the Moorish Revival geometric relief of the octagonal ceiling. Yet even in this opulence, the connotations of the social spaces would reinforce their domestic rather than civic aims. One might even compare the scale and configuration of the various gallery rooms at Isabella Stewart

⁴⁰ Shaker maxim, requoted in Allen, Zalewski, Foxe, et al., *Form and Forces*. New York, NY: Wiley, 2009

⁴¹ Heskell, Julia: *Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott: Past to Present*. Boston: SBRA, 1999.

⁴² Shand-Tucci abruptly concludes his discussion of Adams House: “High Society on the Gold Coast. Suddenly Russell Hall’s gilded, multi-colored Moorish and Mediterranean interiors (hiding behind Georgian facades?) seem to make sense after all.” Shand-Tucci, Douglas: *Harvard University An Architectural Tour*. New York, NY: Princeton, 2001, 118



10. Adams House / Russell Hall Lower Common Room, 2009 (Photo: DMF)



Five-year-old Ruthie Bie was the granddaughter of Christian Bie, caretaker of Top Cottage. This photo, taken by Daisy Suckley, is one of only two images known to exist showing FDR in a wheelchair.

11. Rare photo of FDR in wheelchair (Smith, op. cit.)

Gardner’s eponymous museum along the Back Bay Fens to Adams’ Lower Common Room, including their shared pronounced fireplace with tapering overmantel, overhead latticework of timber beams, and thematically juxtaposed rooms embedded within a more restrained urban block.

But this exoticism is a deliberate claim at history in a way quite different from Westmorly’s: it draws upon Andalusian and Mediterranean sources at will since it was the 1920s-era manner of asserting luxurious entrances to theatres and other places associated with pleasure. Whereas the embellishments of Tudoresque were one of a parade of styles, and Warren would go on to design in a fashionable range of hybrid English and French styles since the Renaissance, Coolidge’s River Houses employed interiors to assert particular narratives. Even the name ‘Adams House,’ the connection back to the family of Harvard-educated statesmen, is history by assertion rather than history by physical heritage; it is a deliberate leaping of temporal bounds to claim origins and reify them in the physical surroundings. Westmorly would serve as one ingredient within the larger context for students to marinate.

And after the first full year of Westmorly’s inclusion within the completed Adams, the election of a Roosevelt to the White House completed the arc from 1904 (when Franklin had left Westmorly and wed Eleanor at a marriage scheduled to accommodate then-president Theodore Roosevelt). FDR would go on to become associated not with these patrician surroundings, nor with the intellectualism of other Ivy-league educated presidents⁴³, but with the well-crafted but more streamlined American architecture funded by his New Deal financial mechanisms, from public buildings to landscapes and infrastructure⁴⁴.

⁴³ For broader discussion of political leaders and intellectualism, see Skoble, Aeon J: “Lisa Simpson and American Anti-Intellectualism” in Irwin, et al.: *The Simpsons and Philosophy*. Chicago: Open Court, 2001.

⁴⁴ For example see Foxe, “The Belt Parkway” within the larger volume of recent scholarly research and re-evaluation:

Yet by the end of FDR's life, the architectural of America through and beyond the Depression no longer resonated with the external provision of opulence. Even Harvard's architecture of the 1940s no longer accommodated the same range of expression. Where it recalled classical elements, the housing would be grandly sited but otherwise deferential (Pforzheimer); where it anticipated modernist composition, it would timidly sidestep modernist delicacy (Lamont). The championing of integral art and elaborate interior finishes would wait until the late 1950s when Jean-Paul Carlhian FAIA led the same firm as Coolidge⁴⁵, this time toward monumental modern interiors at Quincy and at the Leverett Library.

By this time Adams residents were far more in touch with counterculture artistic exploration than the imagery of tradition. Douglas Shand-Tucci, ever with a keenness for social undercurrents, notes how Joan Baez slept and dreamt in the window alcoves of Adams with Harvard freshman Michael New, and that "Adams House also figured in the more intense bohemia of the 1960s which otherwise only brushed the Gold Coast...Edie Sedgwick...was often to be seen in the early '60s at Adams, where [she] studied art with Lily Saarinen⁴⁶."

In time Westmorly's Pool became used for more than mere healthful aquatic exercise until its conversion to a theatre in the 1990s, and the house's reputation for its artsy residents rather than its physical situation became paramount. From the temporal distance of FDR's world (males from preparatory schools choosing based on comfort), today's residents would appear more exotic than any Andalusian ceiling: they are admitted from worldwide cultures based largely on their aptitude, they are let into Adams by a lottery

Ballou, Hillary and Jackson, Kenneth: *Robert Moses and the Modern City: The Transformation of New York*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2007

⁴⁵ Heskell, Julia: *Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott: Past to Present*. Boston: SBRA, 1999.

⁴⁶ Shand-Tucci, Douglas: *Harvard University An Architectural Tour*. New York, NY: Princeton, 2001, 117-118

run on newfangled ‘computers’...some residents are even female.

Since his death FDR’s significance has broadened as time has enabled a richer appreciation of his physical and fiscal legacy. While Lawrence Halprin’s new FDR memorial in Washington D.C. is a majestic but anti-monumental series of outdoor stone ‘rooms,’ FDR is not memorialized with an edifice or institution at Harvard⁴⁷, only with this even less monumental suite of interior rooms.



12. FDR memorial, Washington, D.C., view from 2006
(Photo: DMF)

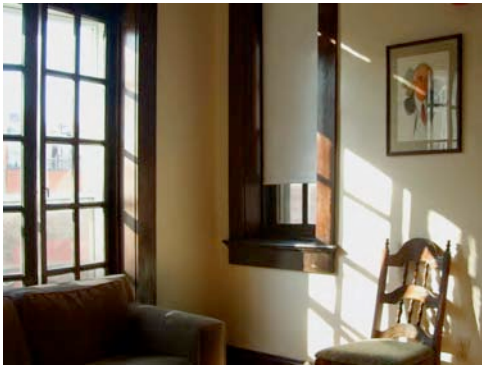
The architectural significance of the FDR suite resides not in its unchanging appearance as a museum relic. Rather, it is the malleability that is striking: it is a site for luxury living that has evolved over a century of collegiate change and yet the physical container remains. However often the fascination with Ivy League privilege populates the popular media of the past⁴⁸ or present⁴⁹, the luster of privilege in this case is no longer the literal value of the suite within *established* social circles. It is rather the implied value of an undergraduate experience with connections to the *expanding* social circles of Adams residents. Bethel supposes FDR sat shifting in his seat as President Charles Eliot addressed incoming students in October 1900 in Sanders Theatre and argued for the meritocracy that Harvard would become in his vision:

It is a common error to suppose that the men of this University live in rooms the walls of which are covered with embossed leather; that they have at hand every luxury of modern life. As a matter of fact, there are but few such. The great majority are

⁴⁷ “[Harvard] dealt less austere with the Harvard-educated presidents who preceded and followed him. The name of Theodore Roosevelt, class of 1880, LL.D.’02 [sic], is cut in stone on the 1880 Gate, outside Lamont Library, and carried on by the library’s Theodore Roosevelt Collection. When John F. Kennedy ’40 was assassinated, Harvard’s school of public administration was renamed in his honor. But no Franklin D. Roosevelt Center, no Roosevelt chair of political science, no Roosevelt lectureships, scholarships, or fellowships memorialize the most famous American of his time, a man who overcame severe physical disability and led his nation and its allies through the most desperate days of the twentieth century. Only a modest plaque marks his old rooms in Westmorly Court.” Bethel, John: “Frank Roosevelt at Harvard,” *Harvard Magazine*, November 1996

⁴⁸ Many characters in F. Scott Fitzgerald stories who attended Harvard, Princeton, or Yale as part of their background to their involvement in the novels (and even short stories such as “The Curious Case of Benjamin Button”)

⁴⁹ The CW drama “Gossip Girl” (i.e. episodes of Fall 2008 in particular) is but the latest incarnation of portraying New York aristocrats’ aloof interactions with Ivy League admissions and legacy traditions.



13. FDR Suite, view southwest, 2009 (Photo: DMF)

of moderate means; and it is this diversity of condition that makes the experience of meeting men here so valuable.⁵⁰

Westmorly preserves that dichotomy, a building built for a different vision of what Harvard would become, but one resilient enough to be an inspiring physical setting for a new population.

Rev. Peter Gomes has mused⁵¹ that Adams is “the seasoning in the meatloaf of Harvard,” and such a mixed metaphor is apt for the unexpectedly eclectic sensations by which Adams emerges within the mixed environs of Cambridge; its intensity would not be the whole dish, its contents could not constitute an entire university, but its mixture adds much richness. Its most memorable moments are not frosted in elaborate exteriors, not topped with the garnish of the tallest towers. Rather, it is a glinting labyrinth that conceals architectural gems, Apthorp House and the FDR suite among them, that are treasures hidden in plain view, treasures that reward discovery over time in a way that few architectural ensembles enable.

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David M. Foxe is a non-resident tutor in fellowships, design, and music at Adams House, Harvard College. He wrote much of this research in and near Adams and thanks all of the house administrators, alumni, and especially housemasters Sean '67 and Judy Palfrey for their support and Michael Weishan '85 for his vision for the FDR Suite.

While a 2003 Marshall Scholar to Clare College, Cambridge, Foxe read the M.Phil. in History and Philosophy of Architecture. Having previously completed undergraduate degrees at MIT in architecture and music, he returned to MIT to complete his professional M.Arch. degree. His publications range from historical analyses of New Deal infrastructure to the structural design textbook *Form and Forces*. Having taught graduate seminars at the Boston Architectural College, he has lectured on design and history at Stanford, Columbia, Liverpool, Eindhoven, and Wellesley. He practices in the architecture and engineering firm EYP/ in Boston, and he practices piano in Cambridge.

⁵⁰ Eliot, quoted in Bethel, John: “Frank Roosevelt at Harvard,” *Harvard Magazine*, November 1996

⁵¹ Interview with Timothy J. Smith, Adams '08, 11 January 2009

Appendix: Selected Articles from the Harvard Crimson, 1901-1926

Addition to Westmorly.

Published On Thursday, November 07, 1901 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

Work will be begun in January on an important addition to Westmorly Court that will more than double its size and capacity. Westmorly as it now stands is in the shape of a hollow half square, the east and west wings being only about one-half the length of the south side. The length of these two wings will be doubled and the fourth side of the square built. This fourth side, or north wing, will extend through to Bow street and will take up the ground on which Young's restaurant Low stands. The addition, which will contain thirty-two suites and accommodate about sixty men, will be four stories high, and will be finished both outside and inside in the same manner as the present building.

The arrangement of the building in the form of a hollow square leaves a court about fifty feet square, all of which will be used for a large swimming pool, protected from above by a glass roof. A large circular hall finished in stone will extend up to the top floor and will have corridors leading from it in every direction so that access may be obtained from it to every part of the building. Work will continue on these improvements during the spring and summer and it is expected that the rooms will be ready for occupancy by next September.

Plans for Westmorly.

Published On Tuesday, January 28, 1902 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

Until the plans for the proposed widening of Bow street are definitely settled nothing will be done towards the enlarging of Westmorly. Much of the Westmorly land now lies directly in the path of the proposed improvements, including that part selected as the site of the new addition. If it is decided that Bow street shall be widened, the plans for the new addition will have to be changed and the work of erection postponed until about July.

The Addition to Westmorly.

Published On Thursday, March 13, 1902 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

The plans for the enlargement of Westmorly Court are now ready. The addition, which will not interfere with the widening of Bow street, will be built on the same general principle as the old part. The new part will be joined to the two wings of the present building and will thereby form a large court on which a number of the rooms will face. The addition will have twenty-eight suites and will accommodate forty-eight men.

New Buildings Erected

Published On Thursday, September 25, 1902 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

During the summer a number of new buildings have been completed. The addition to Westmorly Court, containing twenty-eight suites, is now ready for occupancy and is finished with the exception of the terrace. It is built in the same style as the main building and has many new attractive features. The main hall, which is handsomely finished with Indiana limestone and quartered oak, has a large stone mantel with pillars carved to represent the different athletics of the University. Red and white tiles are used for the flooring. In the basement are two good squash courts and a swimming tank, forty feet long, twenty-nine feet wide and seven feet deep. Among the improvements to Randolph Hall are an addition to the Plympton street side containing twelve suites, and two new handball courts. [...]

Experiments in Wireless Telegraphy

Published On Friday, March 11, 1910 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

A new club known as "The Radiograph Company of Harvard University" has recently been organized by various members of the University who are interested in wireless telegraphy for the purpose of experimenting in this new science. Several of the men erected stations for their own use within the last year, and there are now four, situated on dormitories about the Yard; one each on Matthews, Holyoke House, Brentford and Westmorly.

At present the men are experimenting in the use of a newly invented instrument called a "transformer tuner." This instrument by means of a highly complicated mechanism cuts out all messages which are not within a certain radius of the receiving station, to which it is attached; thus obviating all chances of error in receiving despatches. In perfecting this instrument the club hopes to be able to aid greatly all receiving stations and to make a great step towards the perfection of wireless telegraphy.

First Small 1913 Smoker Tonight

Published On Thursday, April 14, 1910 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

The first of the series of small Freshman smokers will be held in Claverly 2 this evening at 8.30 o'clock. Light refreshments will be served. All Freshmen rooming in Dana, Thayer, Weld, and Westmorly are invited to this smoker, and are especially urged to attend

SENIOR DORMITORIES.

Published On Tuesday, January 09, 1912 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

[DMF Note, 2009: The first reference to the "Gold Coast" in the Crimson]

It has never been possible for Harvard to adopt the plan of class segregation which at Yale has been the chief means of building up a deep and inclusive college spirit such as Harvard--at least since the time of its recent tremendous growth--has not known. President Lowell has two plans for bringing about College unity which will have distinct advantages over the Yale scheme. The first of these is Freshman dormitories; the second is the thing for which the class of 1913 is now responsible--the Senior dormitories.

Within the memory of the two upper classes we have had an example of what a class may do to harm itself by allowing a number of agitators to keep up that distinction which is non-existent if nominating committees and class members would only choose to see it so--that between the Yard and the "Gold-coast." There is no reason under the sun for making such a distinction and it does perhaps more than anything else to harm Harvard in the eyes of the outside world. The best way to avoid the split which has destroyed more than one class in the past is to have a class spirit with the Senior dormitories as a foundation. The classes of 1911 and 1912 bear witness to what the Senior dormitories can do for a class. Managing the allotment of rooms is the most important work the class of 1913 does this year; it is one of the few things that it has ever had a chance to do as a class, and we cannot urge too strong support for the Dormitory Committee from the class at large.

The Corporation has already gone to great expense in providing the present four Senior dormitories with modern conveniences. It is announced this year again that if there are enough applicants to fill Hollis, Stoughton, Holworthy, and Thayer, the Corporation will remodel an entry of Weld in the same way. If 1913 is to keep up the record of the last two classes it will be necessary. We hope that every 1913 man will turn out for the smoker in the Union on Friday night and will hear from President Lowell himself the importance of the place of the Senior dormitories in University life.

FACT AND COMMENT

(New York Sun).

Published On Monday, April 22, 1912 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

What President Lowell of Harvard says of college democracy is worth repeating because it is true of all American colleges, so far as we know, and because the contrary is ignorantly believed by some folks: "A democracy is where all kinds of people are gathered, and here at college there are all kinds. Of course there are rich men at Harvard, but there is also much deep poverty."

There are no "rich men's colleges." At Harvard, whose "Gold Coast" is much and sometimes maliciously advertised, we believe that considerably more than one-fourth, and we have heard it put as between one-fourth and one-half, of the students are dependent upon their own exertions or on scholarships or both for their support in whole or in part.

UNIVERSITY ACQUIRES THREE PRIVATE HALLS

"GOLD COAST" DONE AWAY

Published On Wednesday, February 25, 1920 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

Acting in accord with President Lowell's policy of intensifying the influence of the College upon the students by housing as many of them as possible in College dormitories, rather than in private houses, the University has taken over Claverly, Apley and Westmorly Halls from their private owners. Next year these buildings will be administered by the University authorities as regular College dormitories.

The purchase extends the holdings of the University in the Mt. Auburn street district so that it now includes nearly all the larger dormitories that were formerly in private hands. Randolph and Dunster Halls have already been acquired, and the athletic buildings and swimming pools connected with them, instead of being reserved for a few wealthy students, have become part of the regular athletic equipment and are being used for the athletic training of Freshmen.

Hampden, Ridgely and Ware Halls, which formerly were private dormitories, have been recently turned into apartment houses. The only dormitories left in private control are Russell, Beck, Fairfax and Craigie.

The money with which the purchase was made was not taken from the Endowment Fund, but acquired from other sources. The Endowment Fund is still in progress, and the fund will be reserved for the raising of salaries of the teaching staff and other purposes announced.

The three dormitories which have been taken over were all built in the nineties--Claverly in 1893, Apley in 1897, and Westmorly in 1898. The action of the University in acquiring them marks the final downfall of "The Gold Coast."

Exit-the "Gold Coast."

COMMENT

Published On Monday, March 01, 1920 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

President Lowell scores again in his policy for the unification of Harvard University student life. The famous dormitories formerly in private hands now become the property of the University. A few years ago the

Freshman dormitories were erected for the announced purpose of keeping the members of the class together, promoting their mutual acquaintance and their co-operation as a unit in the affairs of the school. About the time the war began Randolph and Dunster Halls were acquired and converted into quarters for the Sophomores and Juniors. For a considerable time now the Seniors have been domiciled in the buildings about the yard--Hollis, Holworthy, Thayer, Matthews, and the others.

Now the University authorities buy Westmorly, Claverly, and Apley Halls, and the purchase of the only dormitories remaining in private control--Beek, Craigie, Fairfax, and Russell--is thought to be a matter of comparatively short time. Other former private dormitories--Hampden, Ridgely, and Ware Halls--have been recently transformed into apartment houses. The swimming pools in several of these private houses now become part of the regular athletic equipment of the College and available for all the students. Strategy and patience have been necessary in order to secure these results. The students themselves, some of whom a few years ago were not sure they liked the change, now in general approve the president's policy. --"Boston Herald."

COLLEGE WILL ASSIGN ROOMS IN RECENTLY ACQUIRED HALLS PRICES CHANGED BUT LITTLE

Published On Saturday, March 27, 1920 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

Rooms in Apley, Claverly, and Westmorly Halls, the three dormitories taken over recently from their private owners, are to be assigned this year by the College authorities.

On April 1 application blanks showing the prices of the rooms and plans of the halls will be ready at the Bursar's office and at the office of the Assistant Dean, w University Hall. Men who are thinking of applying for rooms in these halls next year are advised to call for these blanks and file them as soon as possible after April 1. Applications must be filed by April 15 at the Bursar's office or University 2.

If two or more students wish to apply for adjoining rooms, they are advised to file application together. Under college management the charges for rooms will be somewhat different from what they have been this year. There will be an apparent increase in price, owing to the fact that the college will add chares for heat and service (formerly listed as extras) to the stated price of the rooms. There will be changes, also, in the amount of these heat and service charges. The charge for heat will be increased from \$37.50 to \$50 per suite, to take care of the greatly increased price of fuel. The service charge, on the other hand, will be reduced from \$40 to \$20 per man, although it will be possible, by paying an additional charge, to obtain extra service beyond the minimum for which the college will charge every man. Men who wish to secure the same high grade of service as has been obtainable in these dormitories in the past will thus be able to get it.

The real price of the rooms, as distinguished from the apparent price, will average approximately what it is now. In a few cases it will be increased; in general it will remain about as at present; and in the case of some rooms it will be decidedly lowered.

Last Day to Re-Engage Rooms

Published On Wednesday, March 30, 1921 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

Today is the last day for men living in College dormitories, except those reserved for Seniors, to re-engage their rooms for next year. This ruling does not apply to the three recently acquired by the University, Apley Court, Claverly Hall, and Westmorly Court. Men who wish to re-engage their rooms may do so by filling out contracts at the Bursar's office between the hours of 9 and 1 today. Hollis, Holworthy, Stoughton, and Thayer will be excepted.

DUSKY DORMITORY DWELLERS PROTEST AT SOOT BARRAGE

Published On Saturday, November 27, 1926 12:00 AM

NO WRITER ATTRIBUTED

Owing to a filthy fog of soft coal smoke that descends inches deep upon Westmorly Hall early in the morning and rests there during the day, an emphatic protest has been registered by the dormitory inmates with the Cambridge Department of Public Safety.

An inspector appeared several days ago, according to J. F. Brady, janitor of the dormitory, and examined the clouded corridors, the mauve bed-spreads, and the soot-stained porticos of the dormitory. His attitude was non-committal but he ventured the statement before leaving that ordinances against soft-coal smoke had been seldom enforced since the recurrent coal strikes of the past few winters. He has not been seen since.

The cause for the coal fumes is a one foot chimney on the adjacent Harvard Garage, cunningly placed so that Westmorly's inhabitants are converted into synthetic brunettes before starting for their 9 o'clock classes.