Introduction

In March 1795, George Hadfield, the most talented and knowledgeable young architect in Great Britain, who had recently returned from Italy 'covered with honors', agreed to sail to America to become the supervising architect of the US Capitol in the Federal City.[1] By the time he arrived in America, the country had, in economic terms, largely recovered from the War of Independence. There was little industry, apart from those associated with a rural economy such as flour milling, fishing and lumbering, and manufacturing only slowly expanded. Hadfield probably decided that one opportunity to advance his fortunes in America would lie through his specialised knowledge of the latest advances in building technology. While helping Hadfield prepare for his journey to America, John Trumbull, the American painter and an old friend, had suggested that he learn as much as possible about the new cements and stuccos, for example.

Immediately after the war, a depression was occasioned by rivalries between the states, a weak central government, an increase in imports and a very confused currency situation. The problems with currency frequently resulted in interrupted supplies. In addition, the British campaigns had impeded the production of various export staples such as rice and tobacco. Generally speaking, most of these difficulties were solved by the Constitution (1789), which established America as a united nation under a strong, centralised government, as the Constitutional Convention had hoped. Of all the new government's problems, the most important was revenue, which was needed to pay for the military establishment at home and abroad, the national debt and the operational expenses of the government. After General George Washington was inaugurated as the nation's President on 30 April 1789, tariffs were introduced, affording some protection to American exporters. Amid considerable controversy, Alexander Hamilton introduced the US Funding Bill in which he proposed to create a bank which would be chartered by Congress and owned by the federal government and investors from the private sector. The war debts would thus be funded by the government and gradually retired by tax receipts. Opinions were divided about this fiscal

[1] John Trumbull to Tobias Lear et al., 9 March 1795, John Trumbull Papers, NYPL.

system and also about foreign affairs, because some supported the British and some the French, and this led gradually to the rise of political parties, continued by the protest against the Jay Treaty signed in London in 1794.[2] The Republicans (later including Hadfield), followers of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who favoured France, objected to the Federalists' interest in centralisation, their preference for Britain and their ties with commercial interests. Nevertheless, the financial laws were successful in strengthening the federal government and bringing order to the financial situation, except for currency, which was completely inadequate until the system was changed in 1834.[3]

Many Americans applauded the news of the French Revolution in 1789, although they were appalled by the ensuing 'Reign of Terror'. When war broke out in 1793, with the monarchies of Europe banding together against the new Republic, the United States was in an awkward position. All parties generally agreed that the US should remain neutral. However, the outbreak of war brought new opportunities for American commerce and shippers, and a wave of prosperity resulted, most unlike the contemporary depression in England.

As Tobias Lear wrote to John Trumbull on January 4 1795:

> in this part of the Country a disposition for quietude prevails very generally – all men of prudence & industry are contented with the progressive state of things hereabouts – and, if we can be at peace with all the world upon terms consistent with our reputation as an Independent Nation, I can venture to say that the good Citizens of this Country will pay the due tribute to those who have so conducted our public affairs so as to prevent the United States from being plunged in to the evils of the tremendious contest which has agitated all Europe.
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> The interest which you take in the prosperity of our new City leads me on to say, that, if events should take place in Great Britain (of which I have but little doubt) to cause a great number of the ingenious & industrious Inhabitants of that country to look towards the United States for an Assylum, this quarter opens to such a field for prosperous exertions equal perhaps to any others in this extensive Country. – To you who know the Country well it is unnecessary to enumerate its peculiar advantages; but perhaps it may not be amiss to say, that the careful mechanic will meet with more encouragement here than elsewhere – the labourer will reap rich fruits, Sasperses [disperses] of that description, if steady & provident … You know, my dear Sir, that the Solid prosperity of every Country, & particularly ours, depends upon the industry of its inhabitants more than upon the speculations of Individuals.[4]

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[2] The main points of the (Jay) Treaty of London were that the British army would withdraw from the forts in the Northwest Territory, boundary and other disputes would be sent to arbitration, and America was given the right to trade in British India and the Caribbean colonies in return for limiting exports of cotton.

[3] The shortage of specie was referred to in contemporary letters and literature, for example, Parkinson, *A Tour in America*, I, 591. Writing to Martin Van Buren on 3 November 1803 from Washington, John Van Ness, a seriously rich man, said that: 'owing to the embarrassments here for the want of money … cash [is] out of my power … [however] my Note … is at your service'. Clark, 'General John Peter Van Ness', 148.

[4] Tobias Lear to John Trumbull, 4 January 1794 [5], Trumbull Papers, folder 12, NYPL.

From the spring of 1798, there was a Quasi-War with France, occasioned by the French alarm at the Jay Treaty, which it regarded as an alliance with England. War was never actually declared, although there were a few naval skirmishes. President John Adams successfully negotiated a peaceful settlement with France in 1800. Soon after President Jefferson succeeded him, the United States began a war with the Barbary pirates of the Mediterranean, which lasted for some five years. These minor wars affected construction in that trade was considerably impeded and therefore most building supplies were unobtainable because almost all paint, glass, hardware, fabrics, metal-ware and furnishings came from abroad, as well as some bricks, carved stone, slates, stoves and paper. It took decades in some cases for manufacturers to achieve the quality of the supplies from Europe.

In October 1803 the country's size was doubled by the Louisiana Purchase, when the United States bought 828,000 square miles west of the Mississippi River from France for about four cents an acre. During Jefferson's second term, relations with both France and England deteriorated, especially with England, partly because America was caught between the two. As a neutral nation, America benefited considerably from a great increase in exports. But in December 1807, Congress enacted the Embargo Act in response to violations to US neutrality by European nations that forbade all foreign trade and ordered American ships to stay in port. In practice, this did not affect England much, although it probably would have done so in the long term, but it did create very considerable economic difficulties for the United States and, just over a year later, in March 1809, the Non-Intercourse Act was passed against England and France. This lifted all embargoes on American shipping, except for vessels bound for English or French ports, and was then repealed in favour of an act allowing the President to institute non-intercourse against one or other country if the other side made peaceful overtures. Napoleon promptly cancelled all decrees against the United States, but England did not and so, in 1811, President Madison proclaimed the cessation of trade with Britain. In June 1812 Congress declared war on Britain for a variety of reasons, including the impressment issue.[5] The financial situation was chaotic during the war. In 1814 the British burned much of Washington in retaliation for the burning of the public buildings of York (now Toronto), then the capital of Canada, in 1813. This was one of the reasons for the tremendous rise of nationalism at this time.

During the Era of Good Feelings after the Treaty of Ghent in 1814, the economic situation improved slowly, but the financial situation remained very unsettled. John Trumbull wrote to Jabez Huntington in 1816: 'in times like the present., there is little demand for works of ornament or taste: my [artistic] profession is therefore affected more than perhaps any other'.[6]

[5] During these years, thousands of American seamen were seized and press-ganged onto British ships.

[6] John Trumbull to Jabez Huntington, a lawyer and politician from Connecticut, 18 October 1816, John Trumbull Correspondence and Papers, folder 1810–1816, N-YHS, New York.

When the 20-year-old charter of the Bank of the United States expired in 1811, the Senate opposed its renewal by one vote. The opposition came from the states' banks and from the West, as well as stemming from the general public's suspicion of any centralised institution. Numerous banks sprang up, many of them non-specie-paying, resulting in the Great Banking Bubble. The whole situation was exacerbated by the fact that the government found itself in considerable difficulties in paying for the War of 1812, only being able to do so by taking out huge loans. It is interesting to note that the situation in England was no better; the architect J.B. Papworth wrote to his brother George in Dublin on 9 May 1815: 'Business on this side of the water is dreadfully bad and may be worse before it is better. This is owing to a great want of money and the unsettled state of affairs as well as the undetermined extent of the taxes – we live however in hope of better times'.[7]

In 1816, amid general agreement, the Second Bank of the United States was chartered for 20 years. The bank was a commercial bank as well as the government's fiscal agent issuing banknotes, redeemable in specie on demand. In the economic crises of 1825 and 1828, Nicholas Biddle of Philadelphia directed the bank very effectively to calm the situation.

The depression, which began in the spring of 1819, started with the collapse of cotton prices and therefore lasted much longer in the South than in the North. It was during the decades after the end of the War of 1812 that the manufacturing system became established.[8]

From this brief overview, it can be seen that the economic and financial situation was tenuous for most of the 31 years of Hadfield's professional life in America. The resultant financial insecurity forms the background for all artistic transactions for Hadfield and for his fellow artists and architects, none of whom was immune; indeed, Charles Bulfinch, was for some years probably the most successful builder architect in New England, actually spent time in jail for bankruptcy, while later John Haviland (1792–1852) ran into trouble with the Philadelphia Arcade scheme, and both Thomas U. Walter and Robert Mills had problems with 'design-build' projects. John Trumbull, who prospered for a while, although he ended his life impoverished, wrote in 1797: 'My Profession [art] does not flourish in times like these: and I must look to other Objects, if I mean to eat anything better than *black broth*'.[9] In this situation an architect would be more likely to gain commissions if he were affable and adaptable as well as professionally competent and artistically talented.

During the Federal Period after the Declaration of Independence, new policies, systems and institutions evolved, and there were changes in every sphere of life, including architectural design. The foundation and establishment of the new republic, which was consciously aligned with the Ancient Greek democracies and the Roman Republic, was echoed in the neoclassical movement in architecture. There are numerous histories of

[7] RIBA, Pa. Fam. 1/2/1.
[8] Faulkner, *American Economic History*, 152–159, 221.
[9] John Trumbull to Jeremiah Wadsworth, 26 March 1797, Trumbull Papers, HSNY; soup made of toasted bread and water.

American architecture, so a lengthy overview is redundant here. It is useful, however, to set Hadfield's innovatory work in context, albeit briefly.

The Federal Style, which was employed up and down the Atlantic seaboard for about 50 years after the Declaration of Independence, was derived from Palladianism, Georgian architecture, especially the work of Robert Adam, and French styles. It is essentially conservative, although it showed a greater use of columns, pediments and balustrades, and is characterised by gracile and carefully restrained ornament, an emphasis on vertical elements, symmetry and harmonious proportions. It was so popular in some areas that delicate Adamesque architectural designs were still being constructed in, for example, the conservative cities of Boston and Charleston long after the Greek Revival was dominant elsewhere. Jeffersonian Palladianism remained the architectural style of choice for conservatives for a long time. The last neoclassical architectural movement was the Greek Revival, which became the dominant building style in many states during the first half of the nineteenth century. The description 'Greek Revival' was first used by Charles Cockerell in 1842; Hadfield and his contemporaries used terms like the Grecian style. The Greek Revival in America is distinguished by, among other things, the fact that it was largely disseminated by immigrant architects rather than by pattern-books, architectural guides or Grand Tour travellers.

As there was so much transatlantic travel and correspondence and there were numerous architectural books in circulation, it seems odd that buildings were often provincial in style and years out of date in design. The reasons may include the difficulty of obtaining materials, the shortage of currency to facilitate imports and the preference of pioneers to put their resources into developing the land rather than building large houses. Those settlers 'who reside in the interior and back parts of the country … generally dwell in miserable log huts, incapable of defending them effectually from the severity of the weather'.[10] European travellers in America particularly noticed the fact that most buildings, whether public or private, were built of wood, the most easily available material. Another reason may have been a basic conservatism; this theory is borne out by some of the comments on Hadfield's ideas discussed later on. Writing in 1815, an author disliked the contemporary use of pattern books: 'Our domestic architecture is for the most part copied, and often badly copied too, from the common English books, with but little variety, and no adaptation to our own climate or habits of life'.[11] Compared with those in Europe, American buildings tended to be relatively small; the grandest houses in Virginia, for example, were almost all the size of a manor house rather than the size of an English nobleman's seat. For the same reasons, many of the more ambitious American buildings of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century were built 'in parts', as indeed were many of Hadfield's designs, including Arlington House and City Hall, which is, even

[10] Mackenzie, *A New and Complete System of Modern Geography*, I, 591.

[11] Anon., 'Remarks on the Progress and Present State of the Fine Arts in the United States'.

now, unfinished. Americans who travelled in Europe at this time particularly noted the 'huge' size of the public buildings.

It took many years for architecture to become established as an accepted profession in America, even longer than in Britain, where young Robert Smirke, for example, in 1796 drew up a written list of 'objects of study which it is necessary an Architect should understand'.[12] From his own writings, it seems clear that Hadfield understood how builders, who had been constructing all types of structures to their own and their clients' satisfaction, did not see why an architect was necessary to the process. He saw clearly that architects had to establish their credentials as artists and as practical men whose buildings would be greater than the sum of their parts; not merely a collection of bits from pattern books or a copy of an existing design, but an original work by an artist-architect. This original conception would have stability, economy of space, convenience and beauty, regularity, symmetry, grandeur and propriety. Hadfield understood that an architect must have unique talents to offer and, moreover, that clients had to believe that he did. From the newspaper comments about City Hall, it is clear that it was generally accepted that as an architect, Hadfield had talents which could not be emulated by non-architects, quite aside from his professional training. From reading Latrobe's correspondence and journals, it seems as though Latrobe never accepted the necessity for this two-way process of recognition and respect, which may have been a reason why he regularly fell out with his clients. Hadfield is described as having many friends and was clearly easy to work with; one of the few generalisations one can make about his patrons and clients is that he had a good relationship with all of them, starting with Sir James and Lady Wright and continuing throughout his career.[13]

When Hadfield arrived in Washington, he was the only trained and experienced professional architect in the area. A predecessor in Washington, Etienne-Sulpice Hallet (c. 1760–1825) had had some training in France. According to John Trumbull, Pierre-Charles L'Enfant, the city planner, was a trained military engineer, but not an architect. A number of amateur architects including Thomas Jefferson and William Thornton were also on the scene and there were also builder-architects, including James Hoban and Samuel Blodgett. The entries for the US Capitol competition bear this out; most were naïve and derivative, and the more sophisticated ones were based on English country houses or Palladian villas.

In the controversy over the Executive Office Buildings (discussed in detail in Chapter 4), when he referred to his rights as the architect who designed the buildings, Hadfield was trying to establish the professional canons of architecture. According to his theory, the professional architect employs his long training, his technical expertise, his mastery of theoretical knowledge and his own ideas to create original designs consistent with good architecture.

[12] Farington, *Diary*, 22 December 1796, III, 729; Smirke studied first with John Soane and at the Royal Academy.

[13] London, The Royal Bank of Scotland (Drummonds' Branch) (hereinafter Drummonds), DR/427/51.

Such designs demonstrate the architect's taste and knowledge, and their intrinsic beauty as architecture, according to Hadfield, depends entirely on consistency, symmetry and correct proportion in style. For himself, he thought that the style of Grecian origin was of the most agreeable appearance, a chaste architecture of an economy and plainness most suited to 'our Republican Government'.

During the course of Hadfield's career, the situation changed in that a wider public became much more aware of the latest architectural ideas, as demonstrated by the comments about City Hall where Hadfield's design is praised for its originality and use of the Grecian style, and also described as being at least equal to any of the great monuments of the past.

Although the Commissioners did not appreciate the conventions of architectural practice that prevailed elsewhere, Hadfield's other clients do seem to have done so. Hadfield was the pioneer in establishing the architectural profession in the Washington area and further afield in America, including founding his Architectural Academy in 1801. He was well qualified for this as he had completed his studies at the Royal Academy with distinction and had spent six years working for one of England's best-known architects. Much less is known about Benjamin H.B. Latrobe's training, although he laid claim to having been the first architect in America, in spite of arriving in the US the year after Hadfield.

From an early date, Washington was a popular destination for European and American travellers, a number of whom wrote about their experiences. As well as these travel books, many of which had maps of the city, there were some general books written on the history of American art and architecture during the first half of the nineteenth century. On the whole, the writers were critical of the architecture of their day. William Dunlap (1766–1839), well-known author of a history of American art and architecture, although rather derogatory about most architects, described Hadfield as 'a man of uncommon talents'.[14] Benson J. Lossing extolled the beauties, among other things, of Arlington House and its surroundings in a long article, but, generally speaking, had little to say for the 'tasteless edifices' of American architecture of the past.[15] He wrote in 1840 that: 'It is only within a few years past that classic taste has been cultivated in the construction of our dwellings and public buildings; but a new era in the art seems to be just dawning upon us'.[16] James Fenimore Cooper wrote in 1838: 'An extraordinary taste is afflicting this country, in the way of architecture … nothing but a Grecian temple being now deemed a suitable residence for a man in these classical times'.[17]

Later in the nineteenth century, the Gothic Revival and other styles became popular with architects and historians so that the Greek Revival, as the historian Talbot Hamlin said, 'passed away'. Nevertheless, there were some architects who continued to admire the outstanding buildings of a century

[14] Dunlap, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, I, 36.
[15] Lossing, 'Arlington House, The Seat of G.W.P.Custis, Esq.', 433–54.
[16] Lossing, *Outline History of the Fine Arts*, 112–13.
[17] Cooper, *Home as Found*, 8, quoted in Magie, *Architectural Fashions*, 7.

or so earlier, including Charles McKim. Charles Moore said of the Army War College: 'certain motifs suggest Washington's Old City Hall, a Greek Revival design by George Hadfield which Charles McKim in 1903 cited as one of America's most beautiful old buildings'.[18] Some forty years later, City Hall was described as 'the best example of neo-Greek architecture in the city … It has seen additions since it was first completed in 1820 but those additions have not been allowed to spoil it'.[19]

In his designs for two of his best-known buildings in Washington, John Russell Pope referred specifically to Hadfield's architecture: the general design of the National Gallery of Art was conceived specifically as a graceful tribute to City Hall[20] and the design of the Jefferson Memorial was intended to echo City Hall's (as-yet-unbuilt) rotunda.[21] The central portico of the Longworth House Office building, designed by Allied Architects in 1932, was also inspired by City Hall.

It is a truism that Washington has a short history compared with most cities. The federal government moved to Washington from Philadelphia in 1800, five years after Hadfield's arrival in September 1795. Hadfield soon decided to settle in the city which was to become the scene of his major works. Some of the historic buildings of Washington have been quite thoroughly researched, although much of the earlier work is now being revised in light of recent discoveries. It seems remarkable, therefore, that so much information should have been mislaid, lost or destroyed, and that the list of Washington's demolished historic buildings is depressingly long. In addition, many of the surviving early buildings have been denatured by renovation or remodelling.

In these circumstances it is unsurprising that Hadfield, who was famous in his own time and well known for most of the nineteenth century, is now almost unknown, even to architectural historians: some of his designs have vanished with little if any visual trace, and some of his buildings have been erroneously attributed to other people.

Until now, apart from short entries in the biographical dictionaries, little has been written specifically about Hadfield and his work. The material on Hadfield is largely manuscript and very widely scattered. The drawings, papers and models which he left to the Columbian Institute (subsumed into the National Museum/Smithsonian Institution) have not been seen since the 1890s.

Of the other members of the family, several books and articles have been published about Maria Cosway, Hadfield's eldest sister, but very little about the other siblings. All the new information about the family, and about his father's political views, is vitally important to the study of Hadfield's

[18] Moore, *The Life and Times of Charles Follen McKim*, 237.
[19] Stevens, *Washington: The Cinderella City*, 194.
[20] The late John Walker, former Director of the National Gallery, personal discussions with the author, 1994.
[21] According to T. Jefferson Coolidge, who was on the Commission and discussed the design with his daughter, who informed the author.

architecture because his background, upbringing and family influenced him, his decisions, his ideas and his ideals all his life.

As an Anglo-Italian-American artist/architect, Hadfield is particularly interesting from a cross-cultural point of view. Transatlantic travel, together with the exchange of ideas and information across the Atlantic, was much more extensive and important than hitherto appreciated. The complicated networks of patrons, clients, family, friends and colleagues have not been teased out until now. One of the reasons for discussing Hadfield's patrons and clients in various chapters is that the situation in early Washington with regard to the commissioning of buildings has been little researched so far.

By the 1830s, 'the Greek style' was already the dominant mode of building in the United States and by about 1850, it had been adopted by all classes in every corner of the country, the first style to be consciously understood and 'embraced as a truly national mode of building'.[22] Hadfield designed the first monuments of the Greek Revival in America; he was the first to use a canonical Greek order. His other innovations range from the temple-form house, full-colour perspectival drawings, fireproof buildings and associationist architecture to the dome+portico E-shaped model for public buildings all over the country, which was derived from his designs for City Hall. He was a distinguished, intellectual and professional architect whose considerable achievements have been drastically underrated for many decades. In light of the new material presented here on all aspects of Hadfield's life and career, his posthumous reputation can be reconsidered and the conclusions reached in this study will enable him to take his rightful place as one of the most eminent architects of America.

[22] Pierson, *American Buildings and their Architects*, I, 417.