

ABOUT THE COVER...

Colin Campbell Cooper was born in Philadelphia and studied with Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. He traveled to Europe in 1885, visiting Belgium and Holland and taking instruction at the Académie Julian and the Ecole Delecluse in Paris. Most of Cooper's works from this early period were destroyed by a fire in 1897. Five years later, he began a series of paintings depicting New York skyscrapers, and became known particularly for his images of these high-rise structures in New York and Philadelphia. His urban scenes are rendered in an impressionistic style that emphasizes effects of light and atmosphere, while conveying the dynamism of the city.

Hunter College is a departure for Cooper, showing neither skyscraper nor bustling streetscape, but, rather, a peaceful collegiate scene. The work depicts the original academic building, built in 1871-73 between 68th and 69th Streets facing Fourth (now Park) Avenue. The school was constructed on a plot within the former confines of Hamilton Square, city-owned park space that once encompassed the land from Fifth Avenue to Third Avenue between 66th and 69th Streets. In response to the creation nearby of Central Park, Hamilton Square was reduced in size in 1867 and closed in 1868. At the time this section of the upper east side was largely undeveloped and relatively undesirable.

In the 1870s the city attempted to encourage and direct development of the area by making land available to a variety of public or charitable institutions and organizations, including German (now Lenox Hill) Hospital, the Hahneman Medical College, the Mount Sinai Hospital, the Sisters of Mercy (for an industrial school), the Association for the Improved Condition of Deaf Mutes, the Ladies' Baptist Home Society, the Seventh Regiment of the National Guard, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as the newly proposed college.

What is now Hunter College was established by the New York City Board of Education in 1869 for the purpose of training female teachers. Until 1914 the institution was called "Normal [as in teacher-training] College of the City of New York," at which time its name was changed to honor Dr. Thomas Hunter, the New York City school principal whose vision, perseverance, and political acumen brought the College into being. Dr. Hunter was the College's founding President until his retirement in 1906, and President Emeritus until his death in 1915. The College prospered and grew immediately upon its founding. It was a focus of civic pride, and a leading force for educational reform and high academic standards both for students in the public school system and for the young women who trained there as teachers.

The building, whose exterior Colin Campbell Cooper painted, was a pastiche, designed by Dr. Hunter, with professional guidance from David I. Stagg, a Board of Education architect. Hunter recounted, in his posthumously published 1931 *Autobiography*, the genesis of the building project:

I, who was neither architect nor builder, sat down in sheer desperation to draw plans for a college of fifteen hundred students. The only advantage which I had was that I knew what the interior of such a building should be....

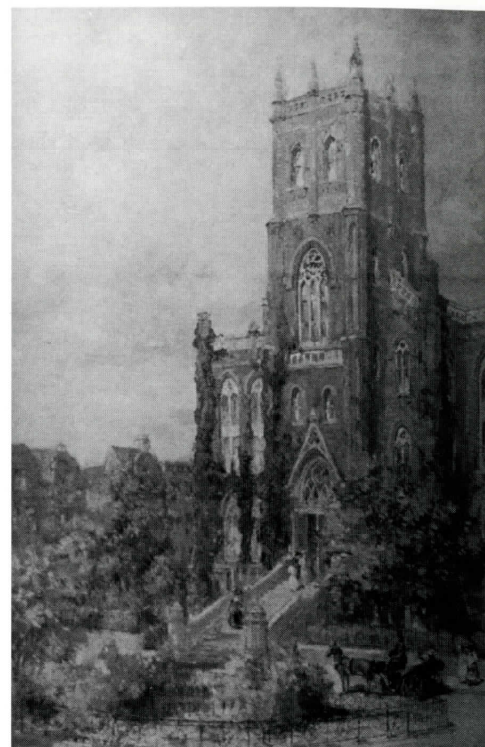
The edifice was in the form of a cross or of the letter T with the upper part on Park Avenue and the training school on Lexington Avenue I made provisions for thirty large classrooms, two great lecture rooms, a drawing room, a calisthenium, a large open promenade, retiring rooms for professors and tutors and two large and airy offices for the President for Faculty meetings; also, for a chapel capable of containing two thousand students. Especial care was taken to make the corridors fifteen feet wide.

Thomas Hunter had to accept changes in his original design, particularly in the facade, but, in fact, this rag-tag architectural pedigree produced a perfectly satisfactory building, meeting the requirements of functional progressive architecture in that it was designed "from the inside out," and presenting a view to the world that was thoroughly consistent with Ruskinian/Victorian belief that Gothic was the only appropriate architectural style for an educational building. The original Hunter College building survived until Valentine's Day 1936, when amidst discussions of how to find more space or modernize the old facility, the building burned down, making way for the current Park Avenue building erected in 1940.

Cooper's painting is undated. The tall climbing ivy vines gracing the building, the horse-drawn carriage in the foreground, and the costumes of the young ladies coming and going in front of their school suggest a turn-of-the-century date. The lovely and bucolic setting still retains the aura invoked by the recollection of Hunter alumna Helen Gray Cone, a member of the first class of students to enter the building in 1873:

Goats roamed around the barren neighborhood....There were vacant lots from Fifth to Third Avenues, with...only one real house [Lenox homestead, no doubt] in the near vicinity, and the only sidewalk, that around the College building. But to the girls of 1873 our...building was...spacious and magnificent....

Cooper's picture, however, could have as easily been painted at a somewhat later date and transposed into the kind of sentimental, nostalgic, and genteel context considered suitable for an "alma mater" image. If *Hunter College* is the original title of the painting, it would have to have been executed after 1914, when the school was renamed. Perhaps, indeed, the renaming was the inspiration for Cooper's choice of subject. Whatever the actual date may be, the artist has caught, in this rendering, the true spirit of the "Normal College of the City of New York," born of the movement for public school educational reform of the 1870s, a proud, gracious, and enduring first-rate institution for the higher education of the young women of New York City.



***Hunter College* by Colin Campbell Cooper (1856-1937), Oil on Canvas, 40 in. x 25 in. Colin Campbell Cooper Collection, S. Henderson; Photograph courtesy of Hirsch & Adler Galleries, New York**