

The
GARGOYLES
of
Princeton University

*A grotesque tour
of the campus*



HERE WE WERE TAUGHT BY MEN
AND GOTHIC TOWERS
DEMOCRACY AND FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND LOVE OF UNSEEN THINGS
THAT DO NOT DIE.

H. E. Mierow '14

For centuries scholars have asked why gargoyles inhabit their most solemn churches and institutions. Fantastic explanations have come down from the Middle Ages. Some art historians believe that gargoyles were meant to depict evil spirits over which the Christian church had triumphed. One theory suggests that these devils were frozen in stone as they fled the church. Supposedly, Christ set these spirits to work as useful examples to men instead of sending them straight to damnation. Others say they kept evil spirits away.

Psychologists suggest that gargoyles represent the fears and superstitions of medieval men. As life became more secure, the gargoyles became more comical and whimsical.

This little book introduces you to some men, women, and beasts you may have passed a hundred times on the campus but never noticed. It invites you to visit some old favorites. A pair of binoculars will bring you face-to-face with second and third-story personalities.

Why does Princeton have gargoyles?

Here is one excuse:

...If the most fanciful and wildest sculptures were placed on the Gothic cathedrals, should they be out of place on the walls of a secular educational establishment?

("Princeton's Gargoyles," *The New York Sun*, May 13, 1927)



East Pyne

Built: 1879

Design: W. A. Potter

Unseeing Reader

Over the east arch, facing Firestone Plaza

Technically, this figure with blindfolded eyes is a chimere, a decorative carving. It represents the type of architectural ornamentation that is appropriately symbolic of the University's purpose—opening the eyes of those who seek understanding and casting aside the obstructions of prejudice. Symbolism aside, this figure evokes sympathy from anyone who has ever picked up a book and not understood a word of it.

To the right of the *Unseeing Reader* is a person holding a T-square. To the left of the arch you will find a figure almost hidden among the foliated curlicews beneath a bay window. This little man has a trowel in his hand and still adds finishing touches to the masonry. In the decorations beneath the corresponding bay window to the right of the arch is a little man working with a chisel. Although their names may have been forgotten, the efforts of the many artisans who contributed to Princeton's gothic splendor have thus been commemorated.





Harvey S. Firestone Memorial Library

Built: 1948

Design: R. B. O'Connor and W. H. Kilham Jr.

Flute Player

Extreme right of the south wall, western wing,
facing Firestone Plaza

The main library hosts ornamental figures closely related to its purpose. Excellent examples are the eight sculptured bosses on the exterior wall of Firestone's reference reading room. (A boss is an ornamental carving that covers the intersection of two or more stone ribs.) These are based on printers' marks of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Many of the volumes printed by these craftsmen are part of the rare book collections of the University.

The original marks were copied in plaster by Rene Chambellan. The actual bosses were then carved from the plaster models by the Indiana Limestone Company and shipped to the building site. Many of Princeton's gargoyles and grotesques were produced this way.

All gargoyles begin the same way—as a block of stone roughly cut into the right shape at the quarry. A carver would then cut features, limbs, and details according to a



plaster model. The completed piece would be hoisted aloft and the uncarved end anchored in the masonry of the building. An architectural firm would approve the design of gargoyles, but would not produce them.

Of particular interest in this regard is the *Flute Player*, a boss based on the book ornament of Simon Vostre. The cast submitted by Mr. Chambellan to the staff of the architectural firm, however, proved to be modeled on the architect, Mr. Kilham, who was also an excellent flautist.



University Chapel

Built: 1927

Design: Cram and Ferguson

Chained Dragon

Northwest doorway, facing Firestone Plaza

The Legend of La Gargouille

Long ago in the country of France a dragon named La Gargouille would come out of his cave near the river Seine to swallow ships and destroy property with his fiery breath. In order to appease him, the people of Rouen would feed him a live victim each year. It was known that La Gargouille preferred innocent maidens, but the townspeople usually offered him one of their convicts.

St. Romanus, a priest who came to Rouen about 600 A.D., persuaded the villagers to let him deal with the dragon. The villagers promised to be baptized and to build a church if he subdued La Gargouille.

Laden with the equipment of exorcism—bells, books, candles, and crosses—St. Romanus and that year's convict disappeared behind some great beechwoods on the other side of the Seine. A few hours later, they emerged from the grove, leading La Gargouille by a leash fashioned from the priest's robe. The citizens of the town tied the dragon to a stake and built a great fire around him. Only the neck and



head did not burn; they were accustomed to being heated by the dragon's fiery breath.

The heads and necks of frightening beasts became popular motifs for medieval drain spouts. The word for throat in old French is *gargouille* closely related to the words gurgle and gargle, both descriptive of a gargoyle's vocation. Princeton

has very few figures that carry on the noble tradition; instead many Gothic buildings have beautifully wrought drain pipes as well as decorative beasts.

Beautifully detailed carvings, such as the *Chained Dragon*, surrounding the Chapel's doorways rival those of any cathedral. At the southwest doorway you will be able to observe at close range a bat and an owl. If you continue walking east along the south facade to the southeast corner of the building, you will discover a mark left by Architect Ralph Adams Cram, a Yale alumnus. Up on the metal drain pipe is a bulldog's scowling countenance.



McCosh Hall

Built: 1907

Design: R. C. Gildersleeve

Football Runner

West doorway, McCosh A

McCosh has a rich cast of characters sitting above the second floor windows (north wall) facing the Chapel. Gazing over the courtyard are roaring tigers, twin owls, the masks of comedy and tragedy, a raven perched on a large head, and a donkey who looks up from reading a good book. Above and to the right of the doorway to McCosh 1 is a goose who has just opened a large volume. Note the mortar board and glasses; her reading material is probably not nursery rhymes .

Gargoyles don't always sit placidly on the moldings. Sometimes they sprint across them. The *Football Runner*, above the doorway to McCosh 10 (west facade of the building), has been dashing to the goal line for about seventy-five years. He is dressed in a football uniform of old: quilted pants, a laced shirt, and a turned-up stocking-knit cap.

Some of the gargoyles on McCosh are repeated high up on the south side of the building. They look as if they could



have been made of cement poured into a mold. However, each gargoyle, even if it appears to be exactly the same as one of its neighbors, has been individually carved. During the era in which they were created, the cost of making the mold and pouring each piece might well have equaled the cost of having someone carve duplicates.

The inscription at the beginning of this booklet can be found in the archway that connects McCosh and Dickinson halls.



1879 Hall

Built: 1904

Design by: Benjamin Wistar Morris Jr.

Monkey with a Camera

West side, center archway, up to the right

The *Monkey with a Camera* captures a gargoyle's-eye view of humans. He is more of a humoresque than a grotesque. How many people stop to pose for a picture? If someone could only develop that film!

This candid cameraman may also be symbolic of academic endeavor. He's playing with technology beyond his understanding; perhaps one day he will discover how to use it. Maybe mankind looks just as amusing playing with fusion.

There are several monkeys on 1879 Hall. Sometimes they cavort over tigers. On the left side of the center archway is a larger-than-life-size head of a tiger, roaring at the three mischievous monkeys who, oblivious to danger, are tweaking his jowls.

Traditionally, monkeys have been equated with rambunctious behavior—as have students. If one assumes that mankind evolved from apes then it would be logical to assume that professors can evolve from irreverent students.



Monkeys may symbolize that lower life form
from which alumni arise.
Proof of expeditious evolution may be found in the
following literary gem:

Said the ape as it swung by its tail,
To its children both female and male,
“From your children, my dears,
In a couple of years,
May evolve a professor at Yale.”*

Or Princeton, but that wouldn't have rhymed.

*From *There Was a Young Lady Named Alice and Other Limerics* by John Armstrong and Anatol Kovarsky.
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Palmer Physics Laboratory

Built: 1908

Design: H. J. Hardenbergh

Benjamin Franklin

Northeast gable

This ornament commemorating the discovery of electricity has been explained by an article in the *Nassau Sovereign* (December 1947):

Ben Franklin, in spite of his lack of a Princeton degree, is justly famed. The venerable ancestor of the *Saturday Evening Post* has been depicted sneaking in late one Saturday evening after a bout at Fraunces' Tavern, a key in his hand and a bolt of lightning over his shoulder, representing the light Mrs. Franklin has just turned on. The artist has captured the gay old dog's look of guilt and apprehension very well. (It was once thought this figure of Franklin symbolized the great man's scientific experiments with kite and key, but this school of thought has been overruled as much too prosaic for Princeton gargoylery.)

The same article goes on to describe a companion gargoyle under the southwest gable of the building overlooking the Isabella McCosh Infirmary:

The figure mentioned seems to represent Teddy Roosevelt and his 'Big Stick' policy. The old Rough Rider himself is up on the



wall, desperately trying to move a world the size of a baseball with a length of goal-post as his lever. The famous grin is accurately caricatured, his luxurious mustache and rimless *pince-nez* are recognizable, and his horselike teeth stand out like marble gateposts in the moonlight.

A commemorative figure is present under each of Palmer's gables.



Guyot Hall

Built: 1909

Design: Parrish and Schroeder

Dinosaur Head

Northwest corner

This dinosaur head, lunging from the roof corner, brings medieval dragons and grotesques to mind. Dinosaurs must have been truly dragonesque; perhaps the discovery of a huge bone or tusk is the true source of the mythical beast.

Guyot Hall is a veritable barnyard for gargoyles. Appropriately, the biology wing (east end) is populated by living species while the geology wing (west end) is decorated with carvings of extinct animals. Some are thought to have come from the studio of Gutzon Borglum, the sculptor responsible for the presidential heads at Mount Rushmore, South Dakota.

The late Glenn L. Jepsen, professor of geology and geological sciences, was very interested in these fossil replicas and mentioned them in his course in evolution. He even assigned an elective project to interested students—a survey of all the “gargoyles” around the building. He recommended field glasses as a means of study safer than hanging out the windows.



Guyot hosts the greatest number of educational gargoyles on campus—more than sixty-five. Look for the trilobite, ammonite, horseshoe crab, giant scallop, ram, elephant, rhinoceros, eagle, wild boar, pelican, frog, turtle, sea horse, and pterodactyl.



Patton Hall

Built: 1906

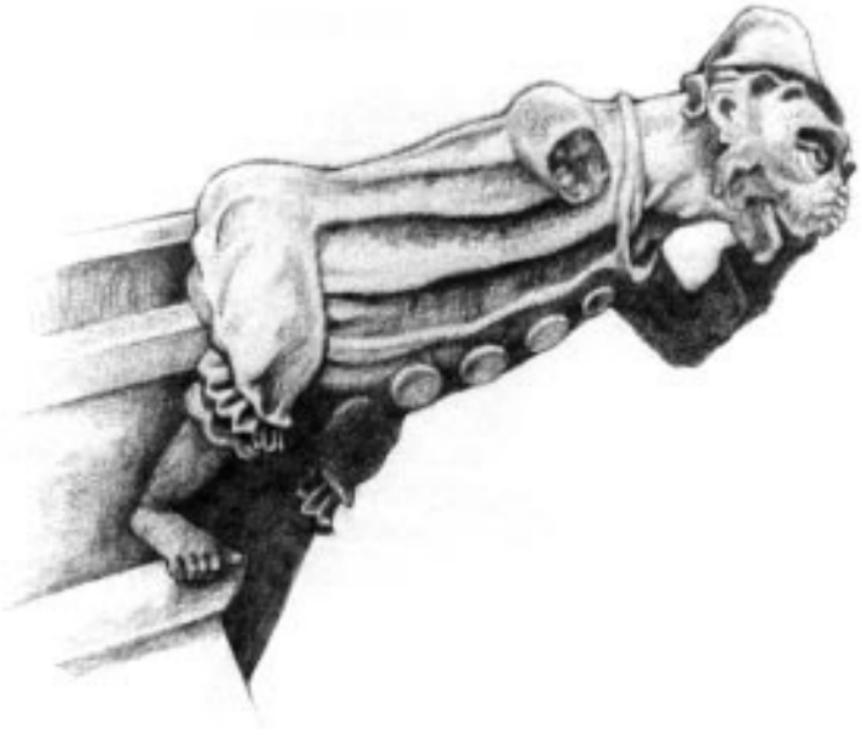
Design: Benjamin Wistar Morris Jr.

Monkey Clown

East side, at the foot of Cuyler steps, or
west side, center tower, south corner

Patton's several *Monkey Clowns* are both comic and tragic. They wear pointed hats, ruffs, coats with huge buttons, and voluminous pantaloons. Despite their grand attire they are barefooted. Usually they have their hands cupped around their mouths as if to amplify hooting laughter. One poor monkey has an arm missing.

Gargoyles age slowly but surely. Sometimes their disintegration is hastened by the acid rain of the industrial northeast. As minerals in the stone dissolve, it becomes weak, and the sculpture's free, heavy limbs fall. Some very frightening gargoyles are the griffins that jut out of Patton's tower. Their features have been gouged deeper by the weather; they've grown skinny and skeleton-like. They look as if they could spring off the building at any moment. And perhaps they could—not out of malice, but from fatigue.



As you proceed to the next gargoyle, take the route between Patton and Walker. After climbing the stairway to Cuyler Arch, be sure to look at the ceiling. The vaulting is punctuated by many intricate and interesting bosses. Together they form an exquisite bouquet of stone flowers.



Dillon Gymnasium

Rebuilt: 1947

Design: Aymar Embury II

Literate Ape

Main (north) entrance

The marks of the sculptor's chisel can still be seen on the surface of the *Literate Ape's* face. The carving is very stylized—his hair and beard are composed of triangles and chevrons. Look closely at his book; it has only four pages. Economy of strokes and exaggeration of features make the sculpture readable from a distance.

The *Literate Ape* is one of four figures that lunge over the gymnasium's main doors. He is dressed in dignified robes.

Perhaps he is lecturing on Darwin. To the right is a football player clutching a ball; to the left is a tiger about to spring from a shield. To the extreme left is a professor, also holding an open book. Visually, the ape and the professor have a lot in common.

Dillon also has many smaller figures who perform acrobatic feats of all sorts. Above the side (east) entrance is a pudgy figure lifting barbells. Around the corner to the right is a pop-eyed contortionist and a squatting baseball catcher. To the left you will see a fierce serpentine figure engaged in whatever sport serpents enjoy. Next to him is a



hairy-haunched satyr ready for a game of soccer.
Strange heads and groups of characters line both arches of
the east entrance. Note the tiny trio of football players who
appear to be praying for victory. Or are they praying they
won't be eaten by a nearby large, ferocious-looking
grotesque wearing a monocle?



Stafford Little Hall

Built: 1899

Design: Cope and Stewardson

Man with an Open Mouth

North wall facing Witherspoon Hall

Little Hall has the most amazing array of true grotesques on campus. A group of figures distorted and deformed by holding books or crouching within their stone blocks watch the courtyard facing Witherspoon. One figure, sometimes known as the *Second Story Man*, crouches on his window ledge (10th Entry) and peers through a telescope braced by his knees. He seems to have frightened a peaceful reader curled up on the other side of the window.

The *Man with an Open Mouth*, located above and to the left of the 1st Entry, is reminiscent of medieval themes. A large, open-mouthed figure was a common Romanesque motif.

Giant figures are thought to be pagan gods. The smaller figures that often surround them are thought to be human priests. Some medieval grotesques show these smaller figures helping to shove another small figure into the giant's mouth. Such a scene may represent the pagan acolytes engaged in human sacrifice. Eventually, pagan gods



became equated with the Christian devils who consider humans a great delicacy.

According to British folklore, giants were often symbols of virility and prosperity. Princeton's *Man with an Open Mouth* clutches a sack full of something—perhaps payment for eons of steady employment as a gargoyle.

Little's tower and north end are home to a sundry company of gargoyles. Don't miss the *Bear Bass Player*, the *Angel with a Lute*, *Maiden with a Monkey*, the *Trumpeter*, the *Pugilists*, the *Grim Reaper* (with a lamb), various contortionists, including one hanging upside-down with a ball from a crook in the molding, and way up a student beer drinker.



Blair Arch

Built: 1897

Design: Cope and Stewardson

Goblin With a Shell

Northeast cornice, facing Alexander Hall,
third figure from right

This is the gargoylophile's gargoyle. Some gargoyles are so ugly, they deserve sympathy for their fate.

The goblin might just be a grotesque human but for his clawlike toes protruding from underneath his trousers. He is bent over, his elbows touching his ankles, holding his ear to something in his hands. The object seems to be a spiral shell. Listening to the sounds of the ocean through a shell is a rather poetic pursuit for a goblin.

To the left of the goblin is a figure who is literally head-over-heels. He remains hat-in-hand, however, as he tumbles. A bird swoops out from under his right shoulder.

His hat seems to hold three or four of her eggs.

Inside the arch itself are several elaborately carved bosses. Students and preceptors huddle under piles of books, shake hands, and burn the midnight oil. Over the arch on the side that faces the University Store are some stock characters—scholar with skull in hand (right), student with beer stein at lips. The latter reclines against a keg. Various



musicians (left) serenade them with trumpet and mandolin. A few out-of-the-way grotesques live on the tower over the arch that joins Blair and Joline halls on University Place.

Facing the courtyard, above and to the right of the bay window over the arch, is the *Tongue Twister*, a diminutive woman who grasps the tongue of the huge face next to her.

On the left side of the bay window is a swashbuckler holding a curved sword in one hand and his opponent's head in the other. On the north side of the tower, seen from the street, an architect displays a model of the dormitory and a bag filled with money. On the west side of the tower, facing University Place, a student has fallen fast asleep over a book on his desk.



Class of 1905-Foulke Memorial Dormitory

Built: 1922

Design: Zantzinger, Borie, and Medary

Head of a Football Player

Southwest end of dormitory near archway

Among Princeton's gargoyles are a few serious and eloquent portraits. They should probably not be called gargoyles at all, except to be included on our tour.

The *Head of a Football Player* is a serious piece. The eyes gaze skyward toward many kinds of victory.

Walter Longfellow Foulke '05 died at Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas. Over the building's memorial plaque is a statue of St. Michael, who "fought against the dragon" in a war in heaven. (Revelation. 12:7.) Perhaps war is the modern world's dragon.

If you look to the left of St. Michael you will find a prophetic gargoyle. The long hair and delicate features of this young woman prefigured women being admitted to the University fifty years later.

Other parts of the dormitory are decorated with winged propellers. Underneath the bay window facing University Place is the insignia of the Signal Corps—a torch with



crossed flags. Over the window are two true gargoyles.

On the northeast end of the building, facing the north courtyard over the Harry Steele Morrison entrance (3rd Entry), a biplane is about to take off from the gutter. It's stirring up a lot of dust in the process. Higher up on the right are two cannons aimed at Little Hall. Since each one has a pipe inserted through its barrel, they appear to be real gargoyles. Directly below them, at ground level, is a frieze that shows a biplane being tossed out of control by the breath of four titans.



Class of 1904-Henry Memorial Dormitory

Built 1922

Design: Zantzing, Borie, and Medary

Head of a Soldier

Northwest end of dormitory near street

The *Head of a Soldier* is not only the depiction of one man, but of many men who died during wars. They are commemorated by the bronze stars on the window sills of the dormitory rooms where they once lived. The soldier looks toward an open sky, perhaps to a better world. His expression is placid and hopeful.

Above the plaque that dedicates the building to Howard Houston Henry '04 is a statue of St. George, a slain dragon at his feet. This statue, like the one of St. Michael on the adjoining building, is by A. Sterling Calder (father of Alexander) and is flanked by swords over which open books are laid.

Other decorations include horses' heads below the bay window overlooking University Place and a star-studded wheel crossed by a sword and a key—the insignia of the Quartermaster Corps. Above this bay window are two true water-spouting gargoyles. Sometimes they are called frogs, but they also look like “dolphins,” those whimsical water



creatures that frolic alongside sinking ships and mermaids
in rococo paintings.

If you walk south on University Place, you will find some
fierce eagles perched on the west wall of Henry's tower. The
tower itself is adorned by several beautiful shields and way,
way up on the south side near the fire escape a pensive
statue portraying the scholarly warrior also by A. Sterling
Calder.

The side of Henry that faces the courtyard has two
interesting friezes at ground level. One shows Washington
crossing the Delaware; the other depicts the Battle of
Princeton. Also at ground level, the Middle Entry is
guarded by the head of a baseball player, his face covered by
a catcher's mask.



The Graduate College

Built: 1913

Design: Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson

The Joy Ride

East wall, fifty yards north of parking lot
by Cleveland Tower, over the first bay window

The Graduate College, the epitome of Collegiate Gothic architecture, could provide a tour all by itself. Fondly called “the home of the gargoyles” by some of its human inhabitants, it is lavishly decorated with dragons, grotesques, and scholars.

Roaring tigers crown Procter Tower.

The *Joy Ride* is Princeton’s most famous gargoyle. At the time it was installed, it depicted the most modern trends in fashion and behavior. An article from the *New York Sun* (June 8, 1927) describes it:

Too long now have the gargoyles adorning the buildings on the Princeton campus represented grotesque and mythical figures, in the opinion of the architect designing the new Graduate College addition. Therefore, the architect has introduced some ideas of his own. In this instance, it’s a student abandoning care in favor of an automobile and a gay companion. She’s quite modern, this young lady. Note the cigarette, the bobbed hair, and the expression of unconcern as her ‘boy friend’ manipulates the steering wheel with a single dexterous hand. It might be added, too, that, in view of



the recent ban on student-owned motor cars, this particular gargoyle is an especially significant commentary.

A squealing pig and a ruffled goose rush from under the wheels of the small vehicle driving toward Princeton Inn College. Today, her cigarette and his cigar are gone. Not far to the left of the *Joy Ride*, a startled, bespectacled *Book Worm* emerges from the large volume he has just burrowed through.

Also on the east wall (between the *Book Worm* and the parking lot, over three vaulted windows) a little man, pipe

in mouth, reads by the light of a gooseneck lamp. Another young man has cranked up his gramophone and basks in its silent racket.

Inside the inner courtyard to the north are many small carved figures. On the left, on one side of a vaulted window (to the right of the 21st Entry) a carefree motorist at the wheel of his car is brought to a halt by a solemn policeman on the other side. A helmeted knight prepares to skewer a tiny dragon on either side of the 20th Entry. A hawk in *pince-nez* looks down from the drainpipe at the northwest corner of the courtyard near the 19th Entry. A dog-eared bat and an owl guard the 17th Entry. Behind some large bushes (southeast corner of courtyard over a bay window) an explorer raises his telescope and an alchemist balances a retort.

Within Procter Hall is the subject of the best-known gargoye rumor: the heads carved on the ends of the wooden hammer beams portray the smiling countenances of the Trustees of the day, several with an object in their hands denoting the source of their wealth.

In the year 2000 or thereabouts, no doubt some enterprising student in the Graduate College will make these grotesque carvings the subject of a dissertation for his doctorate.

(Princeton Alumni Weekly, February 10, 1909)

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