

Liberty Hall ^[1]

Liberty Hall

by Stewart Lillard, 2006

See also: [Private Education](#) ^[2]

Liberty Hall, an eighteenth-century academy of higher learning in [Mecklenburg County](#) ^[3] located in the former Queen's Museum building in [Charlotte](#) ^[4], was the product of [Hezekiah Alexander](#) ^[5] and [Waightstill Avery](#) ^[6]'s efforts in the Halifax Convention (1776) to provide for the instruction of youth through direct public support. North Carolina's constitution committed the state to the [public support of education](#) ^[7]. The [General Assembly](#) ^[8]'s May 1777 term saw the approval of a bill to create Liberty Hall, but the fledgling state government was unable to provide funds for public education during the [Revolutionary War](#) ^[9].

Of the trustees who met in Charlotte on 3 Jan. 1778 for their first organizational session, five had served as trustees of the earlier [Queen's College](#) ^[10] (1771-73): [Thomas Polk](#) ^[11], Abraham Alexander, Thomas Neal, John McKnitt Alexander, and Waightstill Avery. Isaac V. Alexander served as president; additional trustees were Ephraim Brevard, John Simpson, Adlai Osborn, James Edmonds, Thomas Reese, Samuel E. McCorkle, Thomas H. McCaule, [James Hall](#) ^[12], and [David Caldwell](#) ^[13]. The trustees elected a local scholar, Robert Brownfield, as the school's first president for one year. The president's salary was set at £195, and additional town lots in Charlotte belonging to Col. Thomas Polk were sought for expansion. At first, Liberty Hall provided education for men too young for combat and for older men whose service was no longer needed.

During 1779 [Alexander MacWhorter](#) ^[14], an "eminent preacher of the gospel" and "ardent patriot," was persuaded to relocate from New Jersey to the dissenter stronghold in Mecklenburg County and serve as pastor of Sugar Creek Church and president of Liberty Hall. Liberty Hall closed its doors as an academy in September 1780 when Lord Charles Cornwallis moved troops into Charlotte. After the British withdrew, the institution, which had been used as a hospital during the occupation of the city, did not reopen. In 1784 trustees reported that the buildings were in ruin and decay. The trustees petitioned the legislature to move the academy to Salisbury and change its name to [Salisbury Academy](#) ^[15].

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