

Where the Future Meets the Past

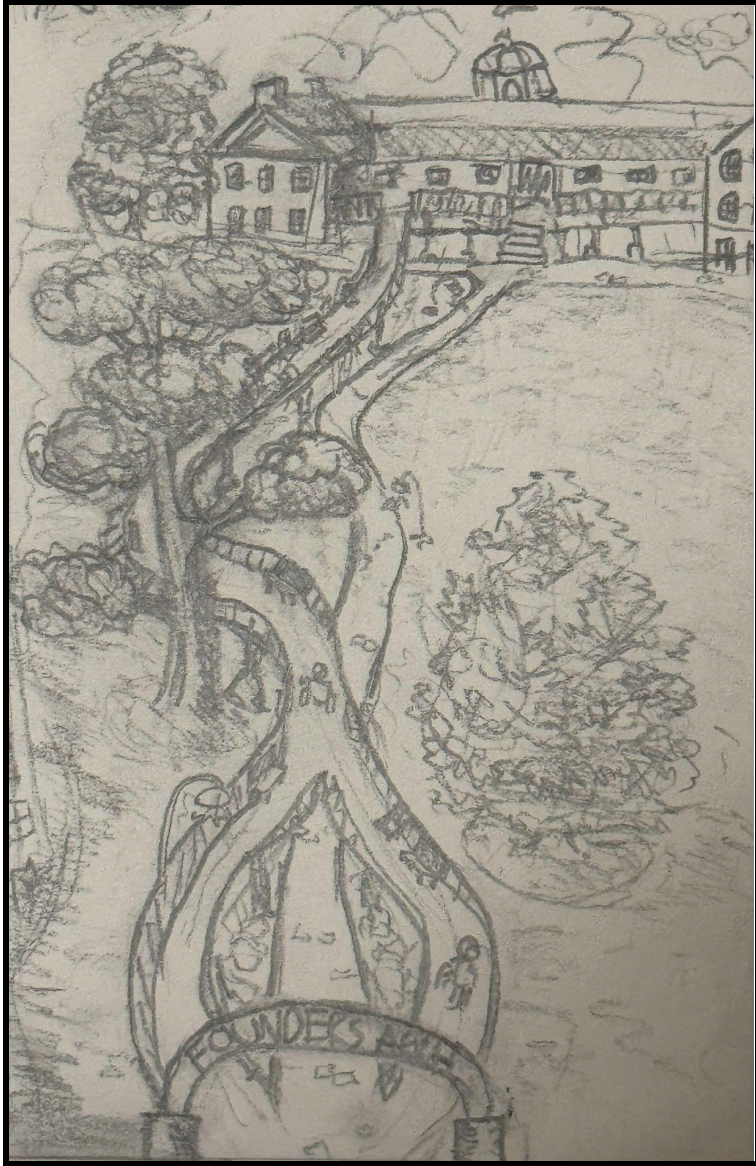
Founders Hall was first built in 1833, acting as the only dormitory on the Haverford campus until 1877. It was built with a simple and unassuming Quaker architectural style. Given the lack of any disability-minded architecture at the time, this was extremely inaccessible. The stairs leading into the building had no railings; there was a spiral staircase that left a lot to be desired, and all the dorms were on the second floor. Reading "A New Yorker Rediscovered Her City, in a Wheelchair" by Yewande Komolafe made me think critically about these same issues on Haverford's campus. Komolafe, a New York Times food writer who became a wheelchair user after losing her legs, describes how steps, thresholds, and closed doors constantly impede her forward progress through a city she has called home for nearly two decades. She talks about being unable to enter a Blue Bottle Coffee because the accessible entrance was a full block away, and encountering a blocked elevator on the High Line. These small failures of design add up to a profound sense of exclusion. What struck me most was her observation that she wants spaces that are truly accessible to all, ones that don't assign a separate lane to those who are differently abled. Founders Hall, with its hidden key-operated elevator tucked at the back of the building, does exactly that! It technically provides access while making those who need it feel like an afterthought.

As a conclusion to my timeline, I wanted to tackle the problem of why and how Founders is still so inaccessible, and some ways to fix this. All of my ideas are concepts and would require serious time and effort to implement, but I believe they are necessary to make the hallmark of Haverford (Founders) welcoming to current and future students.

Founders Hall. As It Was

The original mock-up of Founder's Hall (redrawn below) left lots of room for improvement. When looking at Founders using disability-theory-grounded principles, I found myself trying to make adjustments that hid the improvements, conforming to the societal tendency to only accept change if there is still a "façade of normalcy." I quickly changed my thinking when drawing to celebrate the beauty of accessible architecture, integrating it with nature, and making it the star of the show.





Founders Ramp

Instead of adding a classic, switchback ramp (however, a mock-up of this option is available below), I decided to take notes from many modern campuses and create a sloping ramp, with places to sit and read books. Trees flank the ramp to provide pedestrians with shade on hotter days. The stairs are still in the same place, but now, attention is drawn to the much grander and accessible entrance! Lamps are also present on the walkway, as Founders Hall has no lamps on the lawn pathways, which I have found very inaccessible when walking at night. When I was navigating campus on crutches after a major surgery, I realized there were long stretches (namely, Founders Green) without places to rest besides the grass. With this experience in mind, the ramp railings provide places to rest if the

walk becomes too tiring. The benches are also wheelchair accessible, with either wheelchair shaped gaps in between them, or space next to them to park (for ambulatory wheelchair users or those with a caretaker). I understand that this design option is much more expensive than the switchback ramp. However, I wanted to show the possibility of thoughtful design.



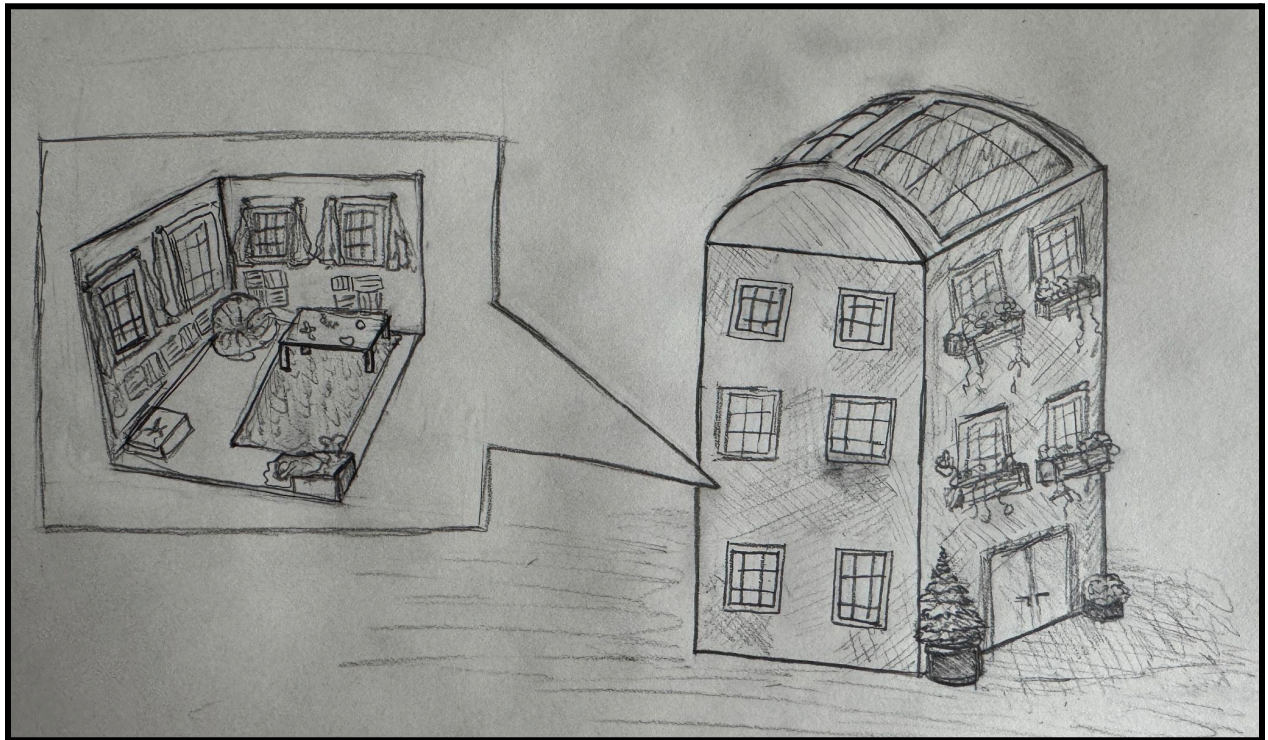
Glass Elevator

When designing this project, I also found that the interiors of the hall were inaccessible. Many professors have offices on the second floor, which is only easily accessible by a shaky, steep spiral staircase. An elevator exists, but when talking to people with disabilities on campus, it was revealed to me that it is at the back of the building and requires a key to operate! This is one of the many examples of halfhearted accessibility design that unfortunately exists in a lot of these older, partially renovated buildings. Buildings are often technically “accessible”, but not barrier-free, which was the idea of the legislation changes starting in the 1950s, as shown in my timeline. To remedy this, I suggest a redesign of the elevator that celebrates inclusivity rather than hiding the needs of people with disabilities. The elevator will be added on the left side of Founders, with a sleek (but still simple and Quaker style) glass elevator shaft. This would provide a unique view and experience to those who take the elevator. It is topped by a semi-dome, where people can look out over Haverford’s campus.



Sensory Room Addition

Finally, building on Magda Mostafa's Universal Design ideas, I also want to use this project to make Founders Hall a more inclusive space, acknowledging the needs of neurodiverse students. My fellow students with ADHD and students with autism spectrum disorders could benefit from additional space dedicated to be a low-sensory calming environment when needed. This is achieved by the addition of a two-story sensory building. An example of the rooms is shown below. They include acoustic panelling to ensure low noise levels, heavy blackout curtains when low light is needed, and many fidget toys on the table. This addition is also accessible from the outside, to give a more private, less busy entrance for those who need to use the low sensory rooms.



Haverford is not different from other organizations in doing the right things by law, but not making enough changes to make those with disabilities really comfortable. Founders Hall is a perfect example; an elevator exists, but it is hidden at the back of the building and requires a

key, making it technically accessible but practically exclusionary. True accessibility means ensuring that every student, regardless of ability, can navigate, learn, and rest in spaces that feel designed *for* them rather than as an afterthought. Haverford prides itself on its Quaker values of equality and inclusion, and its physical spaces should reflect those values just as loudly as its words do. A sloping ramp flanked by trees and benches, a celebrated glass elevator, and a dedicated low-sensory building are not compromises to the historic character of Founders; they are enhancements to it. I find it exciting to combine the beauty of old architecture with new, accessible design, and through these drawings, I wanted to show how disability theory-based thinking can and should be at the forefront of our minds when renovating these historic buildings!

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