

## **Dining at Bucknell, 1846-1946**

by

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The University at Lewisburg, which was renamed Bucknell University in 1886, consisted of several distinct parts throughout its existence from 1846 to about 1915. During this time there were two male parts, the Academy and the College, and one Female part, the Female Institute. After 1883 females were admitted as students to the College, but they continued to reside in the Female Institute building. By 1917, both the Academy and the Female Institute ceased to exist as parts of the university. The Academy was closed and the Female Institute became the Women's College. Although men and women took classes together and shared academic resources such as the Carnegie Library and the Chemical Laboratory, they lived on separate parts of the campus with women living at the bottom of the college hill, embedded in the town of Lewisburg, and men living in college buildings at the top of the hill, somewhat away from the town. Some men lived in fraternity houses that were located off campus scattered throughout the town while others rented rooms from townspeople. This was the situation from 1915 to 1946, the centennial of the founding of the university.

Throughout these one hundred years, the male and female students in the university had to eat. Interestingly, the university provided different dining opportunities for the women and men. From the very beginning, the university provided dining facilities for the women who were residents of the Female Institute building, which was located on St. George Street between South Fifth and South Sixth streets. Although a dining room was provided in the Academy Building designed by Thomas Ustick Walter and completed in 1848, no dining facilities were provided in the College Building, also designed by Walter, which was completed in 1858. The remainder of this article describes the dining

facilities provided to the university students during this period. We begin with the female students in the Female Institute.

The Female Institute building, designed by Stephen Decatur Button, was completed in 1858 and the South Wing was attached to the back of it in 1869. From the beginning the girls and young women who attended the Institute were a diverse group in terms of age and the type of education pursued. Some females either commuted from their Lewisburg homes or lived with relatives in town, while others lived in the Institute building. From the beginning those women who lived in the



Addition to Institute dining room ca. 1906 (Bucknell University Archives, Digital Collection).  
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building were provided with board as well as room. The dining room was located to the rear of the central part of the Institute building. In the 1870s a vegetable garden was located between the building and Loomis Street. This garden probably disappeared later in the century, and meats and groceries were probably purchased from local merchants. In 1904, the dining room was enlarged with the addition of a porch at the rear of the building. At this time, the kitchen was probably located at the rear of the first floor of the South Wing that had been added in 1869. By the late



Women's Dining Hall circa 1944 (Bucknell University Archives, Digital Collection).  
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1920s, the female collegiate population had grown so large that the coeds had to eat in two shifts. In 1928, the Women's Dining Hall was built and it continued to serve the females until the construction of the Roy Grier Bostwick Dining Room in the University Center that opened in the early 1970s. When the Women's Dining Hall was built, the kitchen remained in its former location but was remodeled and modernized. All resident female college students were required to purchase a meal contract and take their meals in the Women's Dining Hall.

Dining for males was quite different. We will begin with the Academy. Some of the boys lived with their families in the town and some of the boys from out of town probably lived with relatives in Lewisburg. These boys probably boarded where they lived. Some of the boys lived in the Academy Building or in the Annex that was attached to it in 1889. Boys who lived in these buildings also boarded in the dining room that was located in the Academy Building. Probably most of these boys were in the course preparing for college rather than in the courses preparing for business or teaching. Older boys and young men attending the Academy lived in the College Building, but could take their meals in the Academy dining room if they paid for board.



Academy Dining Room ca. 1915 (Bucknell University Archives, Digital Collection).  
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Dining for male college students was quite different in several respects. The College did not provide any dining facilities for college students until 1939 when it opened a dining room for sixty freshmen males in Scott House on South Sixth Street across from the Women's College campus. From the 1860s until the demise of the Academy in 1917 college students could board at the Academy dining room while living in the College dormitories. In fact, one of the boarding clubs described in the 1896 *L'Agenda*, the "Compagnie De Academy" with dining times at 7:15, 12:30 and 5:30, was probably composed of college students who dined in the Academy dining room. But, from 1917 when the Academy closed until 1939 when the dining room was opened in Scott House, college students were on their own as far as food was concerned.

In the Nineteenth Century, college males had four means of obtaining meals in addition to the dining room in the Academy, which remained open to them after the Academy closed in 1917. The earliest students ate in boarding clubs, also called eating clubs, which date almost from the founding of the College. They began when a group of students would find some local person to prepare meals for them and would then purchase food supplies in bulk and have their meals prepared for them. By the 1890s such boarding clubs had become rather sophisticated and published ads in the *L'Agenda*, the Bucknell yearbook. The names of the members of the club were published along with a satirical description of the members or of the food provided by the club. By this time, some of the

clubs were commercial enterprises as well as communal organizations. Some of these clubs, which sponsored advertisements in the *L'Agenda*, including the Bon Ton, the Neyhart Club, and the Reitmyer Club, existed for at least a decade from the 1890s to the early 1900s.

Many college students took their meals with private families. For example, John Howard Harris, who later became Bucknell's longest serving President, when a student at the University at Lewisburg right after the Civil War, lived on the second floor of the East Wing of the College Building but took his meals at Derr's, which was a mile and one-half from the College on the road to Cowan, presumably what is now Route 192. Many male students made similar arrangements.

Fraternities provided another source of boarding for students who chose to become members. Fraternities had houses where students both roomed and boarded. Until 1931 when Phi Kappa Psi built the first house on the college hill on land purchased from the Strohecker family on what could become known as "Fraternity Row," these houses were located off-campus in the town. Most houses employed someone to cook meals for the brothers and many fraternity men took their meals at the house even if they did not live in the house.

Restaurants were the final choice for college males and they were an important choice for non-fraternity males from 1917 until after the Second World War. Restaurants advertised in the *Orange and Blue* and the *Bucknellian*, the college newspapers, during the first half of the Twentieth Century, especially during the fall semester of the academic year. Many of these restaurants offered weekly meal plans for interested male students at a reasonable price. One of these was actually located on the college campus. The College Inn, operated by Guy Payne '09, became a



College Inn ca. 1934 (Bucknell University Archives, Digital Collection).  
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campus legend. Opened as a one-storey brick building in 1916, it grew into a three-storey building by 1925. In addition to a lunch counter and a cafeteria with a small dining room, it came to house other enterprises espoused by Guy, including a tailor shop and a barbershop as well as rooms for male students. It offered weekly meal tickets at a discount for either two or three meals a day, with one plan being all vegetables and the other including meat. Similar plans with similar prices were offered by Lewisburg restaurants off-campus including Wagner's Cafe. For example, in 1933 Wagner's, which was located at the corner of Sixth and Market Streets in downtown Lewisburg, advertised in the *Bucknellian* two meal plans, one for two meals a day for \$5.50 a week and one for three meals a day for \$7.00 a week, as well as .25-.30-.35-and .50 dinners. Just before the Second World War, a snack shop establishment named George's was located on Seventh Street behind what was then the Sigma Chi fraternity house and what is now Seventh Street House. Later, after the war, the original Bison would be constructed at that location. Now the Seventh Street Cafe is housed in that building.

During the Second World War, especially from 1943 to 1945, there were very few civilian men attending Bucknell. All of the male dormitories on the hill were occupied by the Navy V-12 program that prepared naval and marine officers. As a condition for

obtaining this program from the Navy Department, the university had to provide a mess for the cadets. It purchased the former SPE house on University Avenue for this purpose and added a one-storey addition to the house, which housed the mess and the kitchen. At the end of the war, this mess was converted to the Men's Cafeteria where male students could take their meals if they purchased a meal ticket. This building is now Cooley Hall.

By 1946, the centennial of its founding, the university was providing food to both male and female college students in separate facilities: the Women's Dining Hall attached to Larison Hall (the former Female Institute Building) and the University Cafeteria, which was for males only. Females who did not live at home had to purchase meals at the Women's Dining Hall, but males living on or off campus did not have to purchase meals at the cafeteria. Many males continued to take their meals in fraternity houses or at local eating establishments, but as time passed, fewer males ate at local restaurants so that in time most dining off-campus would be for special occasions or for sandwiches or soda fountain treats with dates. By 1946 eating clubs were becoming part of a forgotten past for most students and faculty, and very few, if any, students took meals with private families. With certainty, no students walked a mile and a half from and to campus to take their meals as did John Howard Harris. Those days were gone!

### **Endnotes: Photo Credits**

- 1 Unknown photographer. "Female Institute." 1910. BUH1910. Bucknell University Digital Collections. Lewisburg, PA.
- 2 Unknown photographer. "Larison Hall." 1944. BUH1987. Bucknell University Digital Collections. Lewisburg, PA.
- 3 Unknown photographer. "Academy Dining Room." no date. BUH0025. Bucknell University Digital Collections. Lewisburg, PA.
- 4 Unknown photographer. "College Inn." 1934. BUH1171. Bucknell University Digital Collections. Lewisburg, PA.

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