A History of Food at Williams College
Dining, Farming, and Gardening:
How Williams Students Ate, 1793-2011

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# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction**

2. **Part One: 1793-1962**
   a. Context: The town around
   b. How Williams students dined, 1793-1962
      i. Fraternities and eating clubs
         1. Fraternities, after eating clubs
      ii. College Dining: College Hall
         1. Garfield Club
         2. Baxter Hall
         3. Athletes
     iii. Self-Cater
      iv. Summary: How Williams students ate, 1793-1962
   c. The College Garden
   d. The College Farm
   e. Historic Meals
      i. Class Suppers
      ii. Harry H. Hart's Favorite Recipes of Williams College, 1951

3. **Part Two: 1962-Present**
   a. Context
      i. Williamstown
      ii. Williams College and the Angevine Report
      i. The "Unit" System
      ii. The Shift to Whole Campus Dining: Driscoll, Greylock and Mission
      iii. The Phasing Out of Row House Dining
      iv. Baxter as a Creative Dining Space
      v. The 1980s and 1990s
      vi. Recent History: the Last Decade
   c. Sustainability in the Food Program at Williams
      i. Dining Services and Sustainability
      ii. Jim Hodgkins
      iii. Bob Volpi
      iv. Milk: The Story of High Lawn Farm
      v. Produce: The Story of Peace Valley Farm
      vi. The Harvest Dinner
   d. The Student Garden
   e. The Sustainable Food and Agriculture Program

4. **Part Three: College Properties of Interest**
   a. Mount Hope Farm
   b. Hopkins Memorial Forest
      i. Buxton Garden
      ii. The Sugar Bush

5. **Conclusion**
Introduction

Many Americans know – and can intuitively sense – that the way Americans have fed themselves has changed drastically over the course of the country’s 230-some year history. Before there were supermarkets, schoolchildren are taught, there was farmland; before the frozen hot dogs, families canned and preserved at home. Then came the Industrial Revolution, and with every additional innovation in food preservation, transportation, growth and productivity, food became more and more convenient – that is to say, processed. In recent years, amid concerns about public health and environmental stability, the topic of food sustainability has been of growing interest, and the local and organic food movements have both swelled.

It was from this recent fervor for food sustainability that I began this project. The issue I sought to consider was narrow: instead of studying the history of food in the broader United States, I wanted to conceptualize the role of food specifically at Williams College. How did Williams students eat, from the College’s founding in 1793 to the present day? Did they garden or farm their own food? Did they eat local foods? Did they cook for themselves? How did the dining options play into and affect the social scene? In part because my motivation for the project was sparked by an interest in food sustainability, I was especially curious how sustainable the Williams dining scene could have been. If it’s more sustainable to eat “the way our great-grandparents did,” then how exactly did Williams students eat two hundred years ago?

While many have written excellent histories on Williams College, none yet have focused exclusively on the way students have eaten at this institution. As exciting as that
was, that also meant that this project was a pioneering effort: where does one begin when one wants to write a food history? My research project, I soon realized, was more than anything a treasure hunt through College history. From the College Archives, I examined primary resources, like menus from 19th century Class Suppers, articles from student newspapers, and yearbooks from the 1850s. From the House of Local History, I traced the histories of local farms in Williamstown, and from a series of interviews with Williamstown residents and College affiliates, I began to make sense of the dining climate fifty years ago.

Not long after I began research, I realized that the way that Williams students today dine is vastly different from the way they dined in the 1800s and much of the 1900s, and the difference is mostly structural: quite simply, there was no school-wide dining service offered at the College until 1962. Before that, students were responsible for arranging their own room and board, and the most visible result of that was the development of fraternities, which provided both to students. This, in part, provides an explanation to why fraternities became such a tremendous part of student life at Williams; at the time, they offered what every student immediately needed.

Because of this significant turning point in 1962, I’ve divided this account of the history of food at Williams into three main parts. The first part concentrates on the way students ate from the time the College was founded in 1793, until 1962. Because students were each responsible for their own food, there are few complete records or explanations of the dining scene; the College, for instance, did not publish any sort of guide of manual to the system. As a result, this part is organized conceptually, around the three main ways that students ate: at fraternities (and, by extension, eating clubs), at the occasional College-operated cafeterias, or by cooking for oneself. I also trace the histories of the student garden and the College farm, and include a section that more carefully considers the exact foods that students ate.

Part Two encompasses food-related events and policies after 1962. The 1960s was a decade of serious change at the College, and because so many policies were implemented and changed in such a short amount of time, I’ve organized the chapter more chronologically than conceptually. I also spend a fair amount of space considering the development of food sustainability at Williams.
The final section, Part Three, is unlike either of the sections that precede it. The actual Williams campus is considered very little here; instead, Part Three gives brief histories of two College-owned properties that had connections to food, farming, and gardening: Mount Hope Farm and Hopkins Memorial Forest, which was once Buxton Farm. These were leads I followed in hopes of learning more about student agricultural efforts or a budding College agriculture program. However, for both of these properties, I learned that by the time the College acquired them, the farms and gardens were no longer in operation, and the College did not have intentions to reinstate them. I include them here to give a more full and complete picture of the local agriculture industry, and as a suggestion for further research.

To no one’s surprise, I quickly realized that in order to understand how students ate and why they ate that way, I needed to have a grasp of general College history, as well as local Williamstown history. As a result, I open both Part One and Part Two of this report with a brief summary of important town and College happenings; these, I hope, will contextualize and situate the content that follows.

Looking at the history of this institution through the lens of food is refreshing; it’s a novel way to consider this College and the social lives that students at this College lived. It’s also an illuminating way to look at how College responsibilities have broadened over time: whereas Williams was once a place to receive what was essentially just an education, the College after 1962 became invested not only in teaching, but also in the health, happiness, dining and living accommodations of its students. The history of food at Williams is a story not only of industrialization and a changing America, but also of a College navigating both ideological and physical shifts.
Part One: 1793-1962

_Context: The town around_

Though Williamstown’s current fame within the Berkshires is typically traced to Williams College or art museums such as the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, for most of its history, Williamstown has actually been a strong farming community. From its inception in 1749, the town specialized in dairy farming, sheep herding and wool production, and was composed of hundreds of self-sufficient family farms. Even those who supported themselves by other trades usually raised a few cows and chickens, and tended to a small vegetable garden to provide for their basic needs. Families made their own cheese and butter, and did plenty of canning and preserving in the summer months, so that visits to the general store were infrequent and only for items that could not be produced at home.¹ A 1994 research Williamstown project by Williams students found that even by 1850, the town was still largely agrarian, and that specialized trades, such as carpentry, blacksmithing, and wagonwrighting, were frequently still being done “in-house” in most families.² A typical farmer’s breakfast of the 19th century likely was composed of the following:

- Coffee
- Chicken (home-raised)
- Potatoes (home grown in house garden)
- Bread (homemade)

Indeed, in 1861, there were 138 farms in Williamstown, boasting a milk cow count of over 750, and the dairy farming industry remained strong until well into the 20th century. Even now, when there are only two dairy farms left in Williamstown, the number of cows being maintained by those two farms actually exceeds the number back in 1861, and is the most in the town’s history.3

Up until the railroad made its way to Western Massachusetts in the later half of the 1800s, Williamstown’s location, much more so than it is today, was entirely rural: students lived and studied in “perfect isolation,” as a Williams graduate of the class of 1817 wrote:

During my residence in the College, nothing in the form of stagecoach or vehicle for public communication ever entered the town. Once a week, a solitary messenger, generally on horseback, came over the Florida Mountain, bringing us our newspapers and letters from Boston and the eastern parts of the State... With the exception of these, not a ripple of the commotions that disturbed the world outsides of these barriers of hills and mountains, ever reached the unruffled calm of our valley life.4

George B. Torrey, another student, wrote similarly of the College’s location:

In 1824 Williamstown was a substantial farming town... Country stores, here and there a tavern and the little mills for carding wool, sawing, grinding, etc. that were found along the streams were the only business institutions, and the farmers were the lords of the land, in reality as well as in name. And in fact, such was the case in all the region at the time.5

The College’s hilly isolation remained unbroken for decades, though small enrollment bursts at the College coincided with the major improvements in transportation to the region: the Pittsfield and North Adams railroad in 1848, and the Hoosac Tunnel in 1875. The Hoosac Tunnel, which took more than two decades to construct, made, for the first time, “a through line from Boston to the West,” and contributed to a particularly significant surge of interest in the College.6

Unsurprisingly, as transportation to the Williamstown area grew, the farming landscape changed as well, and subsistence farming was exchanged for specialized dairy

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3 “From Wilderness to Williamstown,” Williamstown House of Local History.
6 Torrey, “The Good Old Days.”
and cash crop farming. Nevertheless, Williamstown’s historically successful farming
industry, together with its isolated location, suggest that local families and students
generally ate off the land, at least until shipping became a more economically efficient
option.

*How Williams students dined, 1793 - 1962*

Though most four-year American colleges today are expected to provide housing
and dining options for their students, Williams College has only been doing so for a
relatively short period of time that spans not even fifty years. The turning point was in
1962, and before that, students were generally on their own, as College-owned housing and
dining facilities were not only scarce in quantity, but also frequently decrepit in quality. It is
ture that West College – the first building established on the College campus - was fitted
with a working kitchen and small dining hall on the ground floor when it was built in 1793,
and it is also true that the Board of Trustees Minutes from 1805 refer to the establishment
of “a Commons where all shall eat.” However, it appears that, as time wore on, students
catered for themselves in primarily three ways: most frequently by contracting with a
fraternity and/or local “eating house,” by occasionally boarding at the College-operated
cafeteria, and in even smaller numbers, by cooking and providing for themselves. Generally
students were free to arrange their dining and living accommodations as they pleased, with
the exception of two guidelines: financial aid students were expected to live in the cheaper
College-run dormitory, and, as the Board of Trustees ruled in 1830, “no student shall board
at a house where wine or spirits are furnished or sold,” apparently in response to a trend in
late night excitements that some students tended to favor.

*Fraternities and Eating Clubs*

The first fraternity – then known as a “secret society” or “social society” - to appear
on the Williams College campus was Kappa Alpha in 1833, and it flourished. Within 20
years, Williams saw the development of five more societies, and by 1850, more than half of Williams students belonged to a fraternity. Fraternity rosters were soon regularly printed as a part of the College Catalogue.

Fraternities took charge of feeding their members by contracting informal dining services with local families. These board houses, or “eating clubs” as they were to later be referred to as, were often run by wives of College faculty, notably Mrs. Mark Hopkins (whose husband was College President from 1836 to 1872) and Mrs. Albert Hopkins (professor from 1829 to 1869). The 1878 Guelphiansian (the school yearbook) records student board houses as follows:

At College Hall.
Here board all not enumerated elsewhere.

At Mrs. Maynard’s.
The Kappa Alpha Fraternity.

At The Mansion House.

At Mrs. Robert’s.
The Delta Psi Fraternity.

At Mrs. Love’s.

At Mrs. Hopkins’s.

Hermits.

The above yearbook excerpt shows that though fraternities were the primary eaters at the board houses, some individual students were also known to self-contract with an existing eating club.

When the eating club model was first introduced to the Williams dining scene, it did not operate independently; rather, it was a group effort on the part of both the students

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9 Hermits: students who cooked for themselves. See the section entitled Self-Cater, beginning on page 18.
and the involved families. William D. Porter, class of 1850 Secretary, wrote for his 50th Class Reunion an explanation of the eating club of his day:

In our day [1846-1850], the majority of Students roomed in College but boarded in Clubs, which were managed as follows: Some Student would organize the Club, inducing as many others as possible to unite with it – and he would then arrange with some reliable family to cook the food, serve the same, and supply the necessary dishes and table linen; for all of which the uniform charge was what was then known as the Yankee shilling, or 16 2/3 cents each week for every student; while the student who acted as Steward of the Club would purchase in large quantities the required food, being allowed his own board in return for his services. At the end of each term the charge of the family for the weekly service – also any breakage in Crockery or Glass – together with the total cost of the food, were all added together and then the whole sum divided equally among the members of the Club, excepting the Steward; and each student was expected and required to pay his own quota before leaving town for the vacation. Of course, the larger the Club the more advantageous, both for the members and the families who entertained us; and during one term, after paying extra for additional milk furnished me daily by the Club where I belonged, my total charge was only 90 cents the week, and this for 21 meals of good food well cooked and served, and eaten by one whose good appetite never failed.\textsuperscript{10}

Porter goes on to mention that the eating clubs varied considerably in price, with board at either of the two hotels in town – Union House and Mansion House – at the top.

The charge for table board to students at either of these was $2.50 a week, so of course only the Nabobs\textsuperscript{11} could afford to pay so high a price; but, then, in strawberry time they always served an abundance of the fruit, especially rich strawberry short cake with cream for breakfast. And a student was entitled to order two pieces of pie at dinner, if desired, while at the Clubs we could not and at the private houses would not ask for a second piece.\textsuperscript{12}

It comes as no surprise, then, that membership to eating clubs quickly became a way of differentiating between individual socioeconomic backgrounds at the College.

Porter then closed his 1900 account with further details about weekend dining services at the eating clubs:

The intermission between Morning and Afternoon public service on the Sabbath was so very short...that in every house the Sunday dinner was only and always Bread and Butter, occasionally some very plain Cake, invariably

\textsuperscript{10} William D. Porter, \textit{Reunion of Class of 1850, 1900} (Williamstown, MA: Williams College, 1900), 17-18.

\textsuperscript{11} Nabob: a slang term for a person of wealth and prominence.

\textsuperscript{12} Porter, \textit{Reunion of Class of 1850, 1900}, 17-18.
a piece of Pie... Some families served coffee on Sabbath evening and a very few, hot meat, in addition, when so requested.\textsuperscript{13}

When not the weekend, however, eating club meal service appears to have been rather delightful. James A. Garfield, who later in his career served as the 20\textsuperscript{th} President of the United States, was a member of the Delta Upsilon fraternity (which housed its members in the building now known as Garfield House) while at Williams, and wrote a letter to his mother on August 2, 1854 explaining the culinary delights he was enjoying at the College:

\textit{We often have fresh clams and oysters for dinner, and this morning we had a Wood Pecker potpie. Wouldn't you like a piece? We have all kinds of berries and sauce.} \textsuperscript{14}

Students also grew very close to their host eating clubs, paying them visits during subsequent trips to the College as alumni. This glowing article about Miss Charity Root was printed in the \textit{Williams Vidette}, one of the several student publications of the time:

\textit{Who (Miss Charity Root) is, few, who have graduated here during the past forty years, will need to inquire. Often have we heard those, who, thirty or forty years ago were students on these grounds, asking after this old lady, and many have bade her sons, now here, to call on her, shake her kindly by the hand, and let them know how they found her. We asked her how many students she had, from time to time, boarded. She said: "Nearly three hundred, and I have the names of all of them." Three hundred witnesses to an active, earnest, disinterested work of over twenty years! Well might her face brighten, as it did when she talked of those who have been the almost adopted children of her care and love. Her strong mind has not forgotten one of them, and she too is not forgotten. She lives in that same house, which has been her home for nearly half a century. We found her cheerful and happy, anxious to hear from any of her old friends, and hoping to shake the hands of many of them again.} \textsuperscript{15}

In summary, then, eating clubs were a major component of the student life at Williams in the 1800s, and appear to have taken on the following qualities: as a home base and as a family-away-from-home; as a source of lovingly-cooked food; as an opportunity for free board for those willing to invest time and energy to source produce and ingredients; and, last but not least, as an informal gauge of socioeconomic background.

\textsuperscript{13} Porter, \textit{Reunion of Class of 1850, 1900, 17-18.}
\textsuperscript{14} James A. Garfield, Letter to his mother, August 2, 1854, Series 2 (Family Correspondence), Microfilm Reel 3, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
\textsuperscript{15} “In General,” \textit{Williams Vidette}, January 24, 1874, volume 8, p. 93.
Above all, though, fraternities vied against each other to be known as the society with the best eating club, and the dining component was a major attraction to join a fraternity.

**Fraternities, after Eating Clubs**

Though fraternities were becoming ever popular at Williams, for a long time they did not have much space to their own: most were only a room or lounge in a house or building. In fact, as late as 1883, most fraternities still did not have separate buildings (and, by virtue, separate dining facilities), as an article in the 1962 *Williams Record* about the history of Williams fraternities points out:

> The Sigs, the Delta Psis, the Alpha Delts, the Chi Psis, and The Zetes all ate together in the College Boarding Houses – and apparently did not suffer from this exposure. The separate Taj Mahals came later.\(^\text{16}\)

Nevertheless, fraternities gradually began to take exclusive control of their dining functions early in the 20th century, and the role of eating clubs was greatly diminished. This change, in large part, was made possible by generous donations from alumni to their old fraternities, with the intention of building eating and rooming accommodations patterned after urban men’s clubs. Most of the signature row houses and former fraternities scattered around campus were built within a few decades of each other, with Wood House (Zeta Psi) in 1905, Spencer House (Chi Psi) in 1909, and Tyler House (Psi Upsilon) in 1925. Phi Delta Theta, which owned what is now Weston Hall, added its own dining hall to the south side of the building in the 1920s, illustrating the phrasing out of the eating club. And just like in urban men’s clubs, Williams students were expected to wear jackets and ties while dining in a fraternity.

Even though fraternities were becoming self-sufficient in terms of food and housing accommodations, local families still played an important hospitality role when women visitors came to campus. The College was a men’s-only institution up until 1971, and before that change, student regularly threw parties and mixers with the nearby women’s colleges such as Smith and Mount Holyoke. When women came to visit the Williams campus, it was

the locals who made a makeshift business out of providing room and board to the lady friends and companions of the all-male Williams student body. Rita Hoar, a local Williamstown resident whose father used to own a large dairy farm in Williamstown in the first half of the twentieth century, remembered that when her family boarded female visitors, “the students were all up to mischief”:

Whenever a guest was staying over, it was my bed that they slept in... so I would be sleeping somewhere else. One night, my father heard noises coming from the roof (from a Williams student who had sneaked out to the farmhouse to visit his girlfriend), and oh boy! They never heard the end of it.17

**College Dining: College Hall**

For those students who were on financial aid or who did not participate in fraternity functions (around 70 per year in 1876), Williams College built a small cafeteria-dorm in 1872. Officially named College Hall, the cafeteria was known colloquially as the “Hash House” from its infamy not only from reputedly serving the worst possible food an institution could put together, but also because the building was a “glorious hot-bed of hazing and revelry.” As one student forcefully put it, College Hall was often site to “horrible scenes of the strong toying with the weak, which rivaled the Spanish Inquisition for the ingenuity of their barbarity.”18

So vicious was the word about College Hall that in 1891, when Trustee Frederick Ferris Thompson (after whom Thompson Memorial Chapel, Thompson Biology, Thompson Chemistry and Thompson Physics is named) came to visit campus, Thompson also sat in for a breakfast at College Hall. The follow article by the *Springfield Republican* outlines his visit, which he – to the horror of many a student – actually found rather satisfactory:

> Friday morning Mr. Thompson presented himself at the “hash” house. He was welcomed by a student but not recognized. He made himself known and asked for breakfast. “We are pretty full,” said the manager. “So I hope to be after breakfast” was the reply. Mr. Thompson found a seat at the freshman table and was served the same food as the students. The bill of fare consisted

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17 Rita Hoar, interview by Jennifer Luo, July 13, 2011, Williamstown House of Local History, Williamstown, MA.
of oatmeal with fresh milk from the college farm, beefsteak, well cooked and tender, two kinds of potatoes, four kinds of bread, coffee, etc. The millionaire trustee was well satisfied with his breakfast and thought it compared well with average hotel fare. The cost to the student is $3.25 a week.

Students immediately wrote angry letters to the College newspaper – *The Williams Weekly* – expressing their suspicions that the entire Thompson visit was a set up:

...Now, on that morning, most of those boarding at College Hall wondered what Mr. Thompson's object would be in breakfasting among the students. But soon they have more cause for wonder when they were offered "two kinds of meat, well cooked and tender, four kinds of bread," etc. No one noticed at the time the happy coincidence, but very many, the next morning, noticed a change again, and, since then, many a desperate boarder, as he wrestled with his steak has muttered a fervent wish to his neighbor that Mr. Thompson would again favor us with a morning call.... We trust that the above will partially, at least, place College Hall in its true light in the eyes of Mr. Thompson and we are certain that it will be heartily subscribed to by every boarder at the "Hash House." – M.P.

In the same issue, another student wrote,

In your issue of last week appeared a clipping from the Springfield Republican which seems to me to misrepresent the true state of affairs at the college boarding house. Mr. Thompson was undoubtedly right when he said that the breakfast served him was as good as anybody could desire but the young man that said the breakfast was an average one in quality and quantity made a mistake so grave that he ought to remember it with tears until his dying day. The truth is that the breakfast referred to was utterly unique in character, so far as College Hall is concerned. It stood in the same relation to the average breakfast that the feast of Dives did to the bread and molasses that Lazarus and his wife and small children were obliged to eat on the cold stones of an unsympathetic pavement. There is undoubtedly wisdom in the management of the college boarding house. It required an intended wisdom to think up such a scheme as was worked upon Mr. Thompson when he visited that institution, but along with this fact is another that is worthy at least of attention. The college boarding house may be an ornament to this institution but it is a very poor place to go if you are hungry. – One of the sufferers.

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19 Note the mention of fresh milk from the College Farm (for more information on the College Farm, refer to the section on it on page 22).
20 *The Williams Weekly*, October 29, 1891, p. 165. [Clipping reprinted from original in the Springfield Republican]
The original College Hall, with its notorious dining room and 22 small bedrooms, was torn down amid much cheer in 1912. It was located on what is now the grassy lawn between Hopkins Hall and Stetson Hall.

Garfield Club

As early as 1909, there exist records of another dining facility on campus, known first as the Commons Club, and later as the Garfield Club. It was established in Currier Hall, and its dining facilities could accommodate up to 500 students. As the fraternities gained larger and larger presences on the College campus, the Garfield Club became the home base for all students not affiliated with a fraternity, then called non-affiliates. A new dining room and lounge were eventually added, and a fifth of Williams students made the Garfield Club their social headquarters for their time at Williams.

The Garfield Club, however, had many shortcomings, and was the site of intense social tension. In the first half of the 1900s, the Williams fraternity network had the space to accommodate only 80% of all students, and the Garfield Club became a catch-all net for the remaining 20% “rejected” students (about 225 men in 1950)\(^\text{23}\). In other words, one out of every five students was socially rejected at Williams, and they were placed de facto into the Garfield Club, a social unit founded for “unbid, disappointed men who want to be somewhere else” and that could, by extension of logic, “never be unified into a strong organization.” As an editorial in the 1952 *Williams Record* expressed, “It is better to have no non-affiliate social facilities than to attempt to institute a ‘strong’ organized society to which 90% of its members do not want to belong.”\(^\text{24}\) A later report by the Board of Trustees remarked that the Garfield Club “failed of its purpose, largely because of the resentment felt by its members at being segregated in a group the very existence of which suggested their lack of acceptability as fraternity material.”\(^\text{25}\)

\(^{23}\) In comparison, each fraternity only had about 50 members.


In 1946, the Shriver Committee - a branch off the Board of Trustees - explicitly asked the College to renovate the much out-dated Garfield Club to be on par with the fraternity houses, in terms of dining, cooking, dorm, and recreational facilities. In spite of this, the College was slow to take the advice of the Shriver Committee. Five years later, the renovations were very much still in the architectural blueprint stage, and dissatisfaction was rampant; another committee, the Sterling Committee, reiterated the suggestions put forth by the Shriver Committee. In 1952, however, senior members of the Garfield Club voted to dissolve the Club entirely, and plans to renovate were completely scrapped. The move left a fifth of the student body unrepresented in the student government. The College assumed the property rights for Currier Hall, as well as dining facility responsibilities, and President Baxter took this as a cue to step up work on the new student social center (also a project proposed by the Sterling Committee), which resulted in Baxter Hall being built in 1953.

On a separate, but somewhat related note, non-fraternity men were housed separately in Greylock Hall (long since demolished), which was built in 1936, but was torn down in 1962 to make room for the present-day Greylock Quad.

_Baxter Hall_

With the Garfield Club dissolved, and a new policy prohibiting freshmen from partaking in any fraternity functions (including rush) in place, the College felt particular pressure to build a student center to feed freshman and non-affiliates. The result was Baxter Hall, which was built in 1953 on what is now Paresky Center. The new student center had multiple attractions: a dining hall on the east side for freshmen, another dining hall on the south side for upperclassmen (non-affiliates), faculty, alumni, parents and guests, as well as separate lounge spaces and bathrooms for each group. Professor of Architecture E.J. Johnson ’59 recounted his freshman year in Baxter Hall:

I remember frequent food fights in the freshman dining hall. Warm pats of butter stuck to the ceiling quite nicely. Every now and again we were served cream chipped beef on something called Holland Rusk. I don’t know it they are even made anymore. A Holland Rusk was a disk of dry bread, lightly toasted. Although smaller than a Frisbee, it had some of the same
aerodynamic qualities. They were pretty tasteless, and so throwing them across the dining hall actually put them to better use.\textsuperscript{26}

In addition to the two main dining halls, there was the “Dog House,” a student-initiated hot-dog lunch option, a Grab & Go station, and a root cellar for carrots and potatoes. There was also an incredibly popular snack bar in the present Paresky snack bar location, which both freshman and upperclassman alike enjoyed. “The Snack Bar is the best loved space in Baxter and maybe the whole campus,” Chris Williams, assistant director for architectural services said shortly before Baxter was demolished.\textsuperscript{27} The present-day Paresky Center was designed so that the new snack bar would be just like the old beloved snack bar, only updated.

Taking into account the freshman class and the non-affiliate upperclassman population, Baxter Hall was the dining hall for almost 40\% of Williams students when it was built. It was also the first major dining services project to which the College was committed, a precursor to the change that was to come in the 1960s. It was torn down in 2004 to make space for Paresky Center.

\textit{Athletes} 

Beginning in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, when sports became an increasingly influential aspect of campus spirit and life, it appears that the College hired a chef – Harry H. Hart - whose exclusive role was to cater to the nutrition needs of its athletes. He was at the College for 48 years, and in that time also created a number of specialty sandwiches for each fraternity. See the section on \textit{Harry H. Hart’s Favorite Recipes of Williams College}, page 26.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[26] “\textit{College says goodbye to Baxter Hall, ’54-’04},” \textit{Williams Record}, May 11, 2004, \texttt{http://record.williams.edu/wp/?p=8552}.
\item[27] “\textit{College says goodbye to Baxter Hall, ’54-’04}.”
\end{footnotes}
Self-Cater

Because Williamstown’s isolated location precluded the development of a strong restaurant culture, students who elected not to eat at a board house or at College Hall/Garfield Club were left with very few choices. It appears that students who chose to self-cater were, more often than not, students whose families lived nearby, or students on financial aid who were trying to save money.

Students whose families lived close to the College were often able to go home for many of their meals. Martin Ingham Townshend, who later became a member of Congress and Regent of the University of the State of New York, wrote this account of his 1829-1833 college years, in which he reminisced about his life as a college student on a self-cater plan:

My father resided three miles south of the college. He had an excellent farm, fairly stocked, clear of debt, and nothing more. Until the day of my graduation I never had an article of woolen clothing which was not spun and completed and made upon the farm from the wool of our own sheep, and I never wore a boot or shoe that was not made from the hides of our own herd, slaughtered on our own farm. Three years of the four of my college life I boarded at home; I occupied a dormitory at the college. We arose early, at the sound of the bell, attended prayers and morning recitations and then I walked three miles to my home, breakfasted, and returned with my dinner and supper in a basket upon my arm. I chopped my wood in our own groves, in vacation, into twelve feet lengths, and drew it to college and piled it upon the green and prepared it for the fireplace with saw and axe in the leisure hours of the term. The preparation of their own wood was largely practiced by students.  

In choosing to self-cater, Townshend may not have been unusual, considering this point in Williams College history. These were the years before fraternities were established on campus, and though speculation may be drawn that small eating clubs may have been serving students at this time, it is probable that many Williams students who attended the College in its first few decades were from nearby towns.

Not all students were so lucky to have a home so close by, however. The 1828-1829 Annual Catalog contained this particularly spiteful account:

I boarded myself five weeks. The first two weeks I lived entirely on bread and milk, I afterwards got a little butter and a few pounds of rice for variety and for 3 or 4 of the last days I lived… on bread and cheese. My furniture, consisting of a pitcher, plate, bowl, spoon, knife and fork cost me 37 ½

28 1895 Guelimensian (Williamstown, MA: Williams College, 1895).
cents... I have lived tolerable comfortable on my 1 ¼ pounds of bread and quart of milk a day but found at the end that the bones began to appear from my pale visage. My board cost me 2 or 3 cents over half a dollar per week. If I board myself again, as I intend to do occasionally, I shall try to have a greater variety.

William D. Porter, who also wrote an account on eating clubs, remarked that in 1850,

A few students would occasionally try to economize by boarding themselves, living chiefly on Bread, Crackers, Milk and Baker's Pies; but such experiments were always short lived and soon came to grief, for it was found very definitely, and generally by painful experience, that the Brain, when subjected to the continuous strain of hard study, could not accomplish good or satisfactory work without a regular and varied supply of abundant, nourishing food, well cooked and properly served.²⁹

Self-catering in Williamstwon without the support of a local family, it seems, was often difficult and impractical, not to mention unwholesome.

**Summary: How Williams students ate, 1793-1962**

In summary, this account paints the general dining scene of the early 1950s, a pattern that, in varying degrees, also describes the dining scene of the 1800s:

Meals were provided as board in each fraternity house and the Garfield Club (Currier Hall), which had a large dining hall attached on the east side. About 850 men dined in fraternity dining rooms attired in jackets and ties. The rest, also in mufti, dined at the Garfield Club, which was the social affiliation for non-affiliates. A very few took their meals on Spring Street in the Gym Lunch or Mike's College Restaurant.³⁰

Starting in the middle half of the 20th century, Williams students began exploring and thinking about a different social and dining system. This period of self-examination and mild conflict lead eventually to the College eliminating fraternities from campus and taking over dining and living accommodations for the entirety of the student body. In 1952, an editorial in *Williams Record* considered the benefits of communal dining:

Communal eating is the only way in which the dilemmas of both the fraternities and the non-affiliates can be resolved... It is the social benefits of communal eating, however, that would justify such a radical move. By gathering the college community together three times a day on a standing of social equality, more would be done to create a sense of community on a

²⁹ Porter, *Reunion of Class of 1850, 1900, 17-18.*
³⁰ Philip E. Kalker, “On being an Eph,” *Bicentennial Convocation Newspaper* [special], 1993. Kalker was a member of the class of 1954.
voluntary basis than by any artificial plan of regulated rushing. ...The biggest obstacle to instituting a system of communal eating is the fraternity man’s selfish refusal to sacrifice the benefits of eating in a small group, which he now enjoys.

It is unfortunate that the undergraduate body cannot have the similar experience of eating at the Harvard Graduate School. The dining room there caters to hundreds of students, yet is planned and operated so as to afford a high standard of civilized dining. One of its most attractive features is the division of the dining room into several alcoves seating about 100 students in each at small tables. If ten such dining sections could be built into the Student Union, much of the small group atmosphere would be retained...

The psychological effect at the present time of 800 students heading west on Main St. and 200 students heading east every meal-time is very demoralizing to the 200. Their sense of rejection would be greatly mitigated if they shared attractive common eating and social facilities with the whole college... Fraternities, moreover, would be strengthened in the long run. They would no longer base their appeal on such superficial values as eating facilities. The fraternity system would be forced to stand or fall on its supposed merits of fellowship and common interests. By surviving this test the fraternities would justify their existence.\textsuperscript{31}

The College eventually took the steps toward communal dining in the 1960s, more details of which can be found in \textit{Part Two} of this report.

\textbf{The College Garden}

Williams College currently has two gardens governed by the student organization Williams Sustainable Growers: one located just outside Parsons House in Dodd circle, and a smaller one near the President’s House. These student gardens were not the first, however. In fact, student-run gardens can be traced back to the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century.

In 1833 – forty years after the College was founded – Professor Ebenezer Kellogg, with the help and enthusiasm from two dozen students, originated the idea of a student garden, to which cause he purchased a small tract of land just south of West College on what is now Science Quad. Unlike the current student gardeners, who volunteer their time for the garden, the students in 1833 were paid 5 cents an hour for their labors, a decent amount at the time which offset the total cost of room and board to around 40 cents a

week. Each student was given his own small plot, on which he could cultivate whatever he wished: some planted edibles like raspberries, strawberries and gooseberries, and others focused more on flowers and trees like the horse chestnut.\(^\text{32}\) Either way, the garden was soon covered with “both ornamental and useful horticulture.” \(^\text{33}\)

As the garden blossomed, Professor Kellogg the founded the Horticultural & Landscape Gardening Society to govern it, and it quickly became popular with the entire student body. Students divided up responsibility to care for the garden over the summers, during which there seemed always to be a flurry of activity. Records from the Society’s Treasurer handbook show that in 1835 and 1836, peas were especially abundant, and were being sold, possibly to students and professors, at a rate of 25 cents per peck. The students were also very successful in growing potatoes and onions.

Sadly, the garden’s initial success was rather short-lived. When Professor Kellogg leased the \(\frac{3}{4}\) acre parcel of land to the College for 100 years to be occupied as a student garden, he could have not foreseen that the student garden would actually be demolished only 14 years later, after Kellogg’s death in 1846. In its place, the College built a dorm in 1847, and as consolation for the original Kellogg garden, it was named Kellogg Hall.

The razing of the Kellogg garden was not a tremendous set back for the Society, however; the “prosperity of the association” remained strong, and “its influence here and abroad” was noteworthy.\(^\text{34}\) The Horticultural Society built another garden just off East College immediately after the destruction of Kellogg garden, which alumnus William D. Porter reminisced about at his 50\(^{\text{th}}\) Reunion of the Class of 1850:

\begin{quote}
Our most common and favorite methods of exercise were to saw our own wood in winter, work on our individual flower beds in one of the College gardens during the Spring...\(^\text{35}\)
\end{quote}

Shortly afterwards, the Society’s mission began to change: instead of tending to personal garden plots and growing produce, students elected to take on the responsibility of “improv[ing] and ornament[ing] the college grounds.” Perhaps such a shift was spurred

\(^{32}\) Josiah Alvan Mills diary, May 27, 1838, Diary 1835-1861, Williams College Archives (Williamstown, MA). Mills was a member of the class of 1839.

\(^{33}\) Connecticut Courant, September 2, 1833, issue 3580.

\(^{34}\) Horticulture Society’s Treasurer Records, April 3, 1850 and April 4, 1849, Williams College Archives (Williamstown, MA).

\(^{35}\) Porter, Reunion of Class of 1850, 1900, 21.
by some frustrations from the East College garden: accounts from 1848 mention that the
garden was often trampled on by young residents living on Water Street, and that the
Society intended to raise money for a protective thorn fence. With this new mission, the
students managed the general upkeep and appearance of the college (“beautifying the
College,” as the record book specified in April 18, 1855), from the rocks to the buildings to
the trees and lawns, for nearly ten years. They considered turning a brook into a lake for
the College, as well as building new lawns across campus. They also prioritized educating
their fellow classmates about horticulture: in 1851, they launched a plan to “[plant] around
the College all the trees and shrubs indigenous to Massachusetts,” especially oaks, willow
and poplars. Professor Tatlock spoke at the 1851 annual Horticulture Society meeting of
“the importance of cultivating rural taste, and natural pleasures,” and the commitment to
the local tree project continued at least through 1855, when they encountered particular
hardship with the oaks and willows.

Unluckily, the subsequent years are pockmarked with strife: the 1856 meeting was
annotated with complaints about looting and destruction, as well as the resignation of a
major board member. No records exist beyond that unfortunate meeting, suggesting that
the Society died out for a few years before it was reestablished in May 1864 under the
name Sunrise Club. The preamble to their constitution follows:

We, the member of Williams College, in order to cultivate a love for the
beautiful, to secure healthful and pleasurable outdoor exercise and to
improve the college grounds, do adopt the following Constitution....

Sadly, the next page in the record book is blank, except for a few words scrawled in pencil
saying, "the initiation fee was never paid by any of the members."

The College Farm

Formal records of the College Farm are, to the best of my knowledge, rather scanty.
One did exist, however: an 1891 Springfield Republican article about F.F. Thompson's visit
to campus mentions that “fresh milk from the college farm” was served for breakfast in
College Hall, and around the same time, the Board of Trustees approved a budget to maintain a barn and salary a milk man. The farm appears to have been on the northern side of campus, on the area that is now Mission Park, Poker Flats and the tennis courts, on a tract of land that was originally the Tallmadge Farm, which was a gift to the College from Trustee F.F. Thompson in 1887. The College, for a while, was indecisive on how to use the land, and from records from Board of Trustee meetings, it seems to have kept the land primarily for its property value and to hold on for possible future expansion. Farm operations, however, did not cease: the management and conduct of the farm were discussed at an 1893 Board meeting (at which point they decided that the “treasure will” had power to decide its management), and in 1895, money was given to construct a new barn.\footnote{Minutes from the Board of Trustees, Sept. 8, 1893 and May 9, 1895, Williams College Archives (Williamstown, MA)} By 1896, Tallmadge Farm was called College Farm, and was run by a fellow named M.E. Tilley, who “was one of the best milk men that we have ever had, and started the (milk) route.”

The farm then disappeared from the Board of Trustees meeting minutes, and it is speculated that it went out of operation for a few years. The next mention of it is in 1917, when the Board made the following recommendation:

\begin{quote}
... That a college farm be established, without expense to the College, a competent farmer having already been engaged, and to allow any student unable to enter military service to find employment upon this farm. Upon motion all these recommendations of the Executive Committee were adopted.\footnote{Minutes from the Board of Trustees, May 10, 1917, Williams College Archives (Williamstown, MA)}
\end{quote}

However, because at the time the College did not have a school-wide dining service, it is difficult to trace how much of the dairy products being produced by the College Farm actually went to feed students, especially those who did not board at College Hall.
Historic Meals

Class Suppers

Williams College, for a significant time, used to have a noble tradition of holding a grand Class Supper for each of the four grades every June. The banquets were held in hotels in nearby cities such as Pittsfield or Albany, and consisted of a top-notch meal – in the range of eight to twelve courses – as well as a flight of toasts and speeches. The Williams College Archives has retained original copies of the menus from these events from 1859 to 1939, and studying them is quite telling about the attitudes toward food – particularly local and imported foods – of the day.

In the style of the most formal dinner events of the time, the meals were simply extravagant: after all, the menu itself was often gold-embossed and decorated in velvet ribbons and tassels. Guests were treated to course after course of every kind of meat, as this menu from a sophomore Class Supper on June 19, 1879 indicates:

**Soup.**
Consomme de Valaile.

**Fish.**
Salmon, Anchovy Sauce.

**Removes.**
Boiled Beef, a la Bourgeois.
Roast Spring Lamb, Mint Sauce.
Roast Capon, Bread Sauce.

**Entrees.**
Chicken Saute, With Olives.
Brook Trout, With Potato Chips.
Sweet Ommelete.

**Vegetable.**
Potatoes.
Green Peas.
Tomatoes.

**Relishes.**
Cucumbers.
Tomatoes.
Chow-chow.
Though the above menu does not include them, two tremendously popular dishes from the Class Suppers were an appetizer of Little Neck Clams and a dessert of strawberries with cream and sometimes shortcake. Both of these were local and seasonal foods: Little Neck Clams likely came from the northeast coast of New York’s Long Island and were in season beginning in early May, and strawberries were in full season in Massachusetts in June. Menus also served “Vegetables of the Season” or “Fruit in Season” (1868, 1878, 1881), as well as Kennebec salmon (from Maine), Penobscot salmon (also from Maine), Vermont turkey, Lake Saratoga bass (from New York), and seasonal vegetables such as celery and radishes.

Though a fair amount of the foods served at the Class Suppers can be traced to local origins, it is also rather unsurprising that more significant effort was placed on importing and transporting delicacies from afar for Williams students to enjoy, especially considering the socioeconomic profile of the average Williams student in the late 1800s. A Class Banquet held on June 17, 1879 posted the following poem on its tasseled menu:

O wasteful riot, never well content
With low-priced far; hunger ambitious
Of cates by land and sea far-fetched and sent.

The poem flatters the class for its ambition and inevitable success, complimenting members of the class that they have the money to be wasteful and the right to demand the best out of life. Accordingly, the menus feature many non-New England foods, a privilege that the typical well-to-do Williams student surely enjoyed and expected for a twelve-course affair. The following table traces a few of the more special dishes offered:
The tradition of Class Suppers sadly came to an end sometime towards the middle half of the 20th century. We can speculate that the pressures of WWII may have contributed to this.

Harry H. Hart’s Favorite Recipes of Williams College, 1951

As mentioned before, prior to 1962, the College did not assume the responsibility of feeding its students, making it very difficult to trace exactly what its many students ate on a day-to-day basis. However, there exists one book - *Harry H. Hart’s Favorite Recipes of Williams College* – that gives unparalleled insight into the daily diets of Williams student-athletes in 1950. The book was written by Harry Hart, who worked as the chef for the Williams College football team for 48 years, and includes not only a hundred of his most popular recipes with the student-athletes and the favorite sandwiches of each fraternity, but also a day-by-day, meal-by-meal breakdown of what the College football players were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Likely Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Edam cheese</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neufchatel cheese</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roquefort cheese</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pineapple</td>
<td>Florida, Puerto Rico, Texas, California, the Caribbean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orange38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grapefruit</td>
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<td>Lemon</td>
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<td>Banana</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Columbia River salmon</td>
<td>Pacific Northwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halibut</td>
<td>Alaska or California</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though citrus is not grown in New England, it appears to have been a popular food among the wealthy. Recipes from an 1890s Lenox, Massachusetts area farm show that pink grapefruit, blood oranges, navel oranges, lemons and limes were all used in various chicken, fish and dessert dishes. The owner of the farm was John Sloane, a founder of the furniture store W&J Sloane, and this farm was his summer residence. He was known to often import musicians from New York to entertain him on hot summer nights.
fed for the month of September, 1950. Hart clearly had his beliefs: he notes, "Raw carrot sticks are fed every day to improve eye sight," and that "steak and roast beef are the most valuable protein for developing the strength of body of an athlete. You will note that parsley is almost constantly served, as this is rich in iron."39

On game day, each football player was served the following meal, precisely four hours before kickoff:

- 3 oz. orange juice
- Rye bread, buttered with strawberry jam
- 10 oz. steak
- Medium baked potato
- Sliced peaches or diced pineapple
- Hot tea, with lemon.40

On September 2, 1950, the football team was served the following dinner:

- Strawberry Jam.
- Cream of Mushroom Soup.
- Roast Ribs of Beef Au Juice.
- Butter Sauce.
- Green String Beans.
- Hot Tea. Milk.
- Chocolate Ice Cream.41

An analysis of all the foods served to the football team during September 1950 yields the following insights:

- Very little breakfast meat was served. Ham and sausage do not appear on the menus at all, and bacon just once a week.
- Celery, radishes and olives were served everyday, without fail.
- When juice was presented on the menu, only one or two varieties appear at a time.
- The athletes were served a multitude of jams, jellies, and preserves: among them were strawberry, raspberry, cherry, grape, mint, peach, and pineapple.
- Salads were usually served without dressings. When dressings did appear on the menu, the most popular types were French and Russian.

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40 Harry H. Hart, *Favorite Recipes of Williams College*.
41 Harry H. Hart, *Favorite Recipes of Williams College*. 
- Beef was served 35 times over 23 days. Parsley was served 32 times.
- Bananas, though not feasibly grown in New England, made a significant appearance (12 out of 23 days). This is yet another indication of the growing connections around the nation at the time, and the growing ability to transport perishable food items long distances.
- The recipes for the menus show a strong presence of canned foods, which is not surprising considering the 1950s time period. Among those canned products: tomatoes, corn, condensed asparagus soup, evaporated milk, condensed tomato soup, spaghetti sauce, chicken broth, and crushed pineapple.
PART TWO: 1962 TO PRESENT

Context

The 1960s was one of the most decisive and significant decades in the College’s history, rivaling the 1821 crisis when President Moore abandoned the College with half its students to found Amherst. At the beginning of the 1960s decade, the College social scene was dominated by its fifteen fraternities, which provided dining services to the vast majority of students. Ten years later, the fraternities were nearly entirely phased out, the College had invested millions of dollars in building new residential and dining facilities, and 100% of students took their meals in College-operated settings. Women entered the College shortly after, and the first coed class graduated in 1975.

Williamstown

The town of Williamstown was not exempt from the tides of change that so affected the College. Dairy farms – on which industry the town had thrived for two hundred years – were becoming fewer and fewer as farmers sold out and moved to the city. Small shops cluttered Spring Street, and multiple larger employers such as General Cable, Williamstown Medical Associates, and the Mount Greylock School District made homes in the Williamstown area. As Williams College expanded to admit women in the early 1970s, the College itself became the town’s largest employer.
**Williams College and the Angevine Report**

The College officially abolished fraternities in the early 1960s, and slowly phased them out over a period of about ten years. The move was not unforeseen; in the years leading up to the momentous decision, student dissatisfaction with the system was rampant and loud spoken. The College too began applying pressure on the fraternity system, believing that it had become too influential in the student social scene. In 1946, the Shriver Committee recommended that freshmen be barred from fraternity membership and that rushing be delayed until sophomore year, so that freshmen could make their own judgment of the Greek life system before they were subjected to the infamous humiliations and antics of rush week and “Hell Week.” The College, after adopting that recommendation, built Baxter Hall in 1953 to act as a freshman dining hall and social center for the entire campus. The fraternities, predictably, were not pleased with the new developments, especially since the new policy banning freshmen proved to be extremely financially distressful on fraternities, whose budgets were all drawn assuming that an incoming freshman class would pay dues.

Tension continued to build through the 1950s, and the College implemented further policies, including a banning of all prejudice clauses in fraternity constitution. In 1960, in an effort to end the pain of rejection for the 20% of the Williams population that fraternities did not provide space for, the College enacted a program called “Total Opportunity,” which meant any student who wished to be placed in a fraternity would be offered a bid. This time, it was alumni who were incensed, saying that Total Opportunity made a “mockery of the original concept of fraternities as voluntary associations of like-minded people.”

In October 1961, the College decided that the fraternity system was more troublesome than necessary, and the Board of Trustees appointed eleven Williams men to form the Committee on Review of Fraternity Questions. The Committee, which later became known as the Angevine Committee after its chairman Jay B. Angevine II, was composed of nine alumni and two undergraduates, and ten out of the eleven were

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42 “Statement of the Board of Trustees and Report of the Committee on Review of Fraternity Questions.”
fraternity members. At the end of June 1962, the Angevine Committee put out a decisive and highly controversial report that recommended that the College “assume, at the earliest date, complete responsibility for providing housing, eating and social accommodations for the entire student body in unit owned and operated by the College.”43 In other words, two of the primary purposes of the fraternity – to provide dining services and housing to its members – were to be overtaken by the College, and fraternities would need to find a new model and a new source of attractions in order to survive. At that point, fraternities had been feeding 94% of Williams upperclass students, providing housing for 44% of the upperclass student body, and operating numerous areas of student government, discipline and social life. They, in many respects, were the essence of the social fabric of Williams.

With the abolishing of fraternities, the College became responsible not only for the educational growth of its students, but also their living conditions, from dorm life to dining services. It was a significant ideological shift as much as it was a practical one.

**How Williams students dined, 1962-2011: The School-Operated Dining Plan**

When Williams took over the Dining Services for all of its 1,150-some students, there was a myriad of factors to consider: how could the College make the shift away from fraternities as smoothly as possible? How could the College maintain the intimate dining environments that students and alumni were so fond of? How could the College serve the students what they wanted to eat, and yet still manage the budget balance? How would the College respond to the demands of its former fraternity men, who were accustomed to being able to exercise “fiscal responsibility, control of stewards, waiters, and cooks, and supervision of price, quantity, and quality of food”?44

43 “Statement of the Board of Trustees and Report of the Committee on Review of Fraternity Questions.”
The “Unit” System

When the 1962 Angevine Report suggested that fraternities be abolished, it also put forth a recommendation for a school-wide dining and housing plan that would be instituted in the fraternities’ place. Modeled after the small-group dining experience that fraternities offered and that students seemed to enjoy, the new “unit” system divided the school into groups of about a hundred students, who would each have their own dining halls operated by the College, their own living accommodations, their own quarters for socializing, and potentially their own small libraries. The Angevine Committee envisioned the units as a sort of equalized fraternity system:

Since there would be no appreciable difference between the units, there would be no basis for condescension or envy, but there could well be an intense rivalry between the units in intramural matters. Each unit might contain representatives of all classes, giving to each class the full benefit of contact with other classes, and each unit should have a form of self-government within limits.45

As the fraternities one by one leased, sold or donated their buildings to the College, each former fraternity house – now called row house – became one such unit, membership to which was random and determined by lottery. Williams College assumed control over the dining facilities in the row houses: the personnel working in the former-fraternity houses were hired by the College administration, and food for all dining locations was centrally ordered in bulk, meaning every day there was a constant menu for the entire campus. Row houses, because of their small sizes, usually only served one entrée per meal (or, as Jim Hodgkins, former Director of Dining Services, joked, “two choices: take it or leave it”), and it was served “waited service family style.” The College assigned only one or two chefs per row house, and instead employed large numbers of students to help serve, prepare food, and wash dishes.46

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45 “Statement of the Board of Trustees and Report of the Committee on Review of Fraternity Questions”
46 For those who dined at Dodd House before its closure in 2010, Dodd would be a relatively close approximation of row house dining. The dining rooms were small and intimate, and options were
A significant motivation to eliminate fraternities was simply to eliminate the discrimination inherent to them, and to position Williams as a school that could fit the needs of every student who attended. Indeed, there was nothing undesirable about Williams students developing close bonds with their friends, and wanting to live and eat together. The unit system that followed the abolition of fraternities was, in many ways, a looser form of fraternities, free from restrictions, rules, and discrimination. Unsurprisingly, the unit model was quite successful when first implemented, in large part since it was so similar to the fraternity system that it replaced.

**The Shift to Whole-Campus Dining: Driscoll, Greylock and Mission**

In addition to the unit system, the College considered an alternative dining model that was, in essence, a completely communal dining plan. The separated living and dining systems, in this plan, were to be slowly eliminated, and the students encouraged to dine together in large dining halls on campus. This most closely approximates the dining system that current Williams students enjoy, but at mid-century, Williams only had one large dining hall: Baxter Hall. Thus, the unit system was used at first, but it eventually fell away in favor of the communal dining system as more and more large dining halls were built. The unit system may also have faded away due to cultural changes; Jim Hodgkins, the Director of Food Services from 1982 to 2001, suspects that American student culture was drifting away from the small, insular club-like units and towards larger, more inclusive group gatherings.

Baxter Hall, which was built in 1953 to feed the freshman and the non-affiliate upperclassmen, had the capacity to feed 800 students. Ten years later in 1963, Driscoll Dining Hall was built to serve the students on the southeast side of campus, and when it opened, students affectionately called it the “Berkshire Hilton”.47 It was soon apparent that the dining hall fulfilled its intended purpose:

Several sophomores said they wished the building had been finished last spring. “It would have made me think twice before joining a fraternity,” said one.48 

Incredibly, even with the multitude of dining options on campus – nine row houses, plus Baxter and Driscoll, for a total of eleven dining locations at the beginning of the school year in 1963 – Williams board remained $50 below the lowest Ivy League school.49

It was during this time that the student body began voicing concerns about the guest meal system. Each Driscoll member – that is, a student who lived in Berkshire Quad, not a fraternity - was allowed 15 non-Williams guest meals per semester, a number that seriously upset many students. More pressing a concern for Dining Services, however, was the fluctuating number of non-members who, attracted by Driscoll’s new facilities and good food, made the trek to Berkshire Quad to eat. Anywhere from 40 to 120 non-members ate at Driscoll daily, making it impossible for the chefs to estimate the amount of food to prepare, and also resulting in overcrowding.50 Louis Schaul ’65 wrote in the Williams Record:

The Berkshire-Prospect dining hall had served nearly 2000 meals to non-members in February alone…. I firmly believe that the food served there is better, this is, better prepared than the food available in those houses whose members contribute to non-member dining at Berkshire-Prospect.51

It seemed that with Driscoll’s attractions, the unit system was becoming harder to maintain; students wanted to eat at the new dining hall, where there was far more variety, rather than eat in their own fraternities and row houses.

Driscoll Dining Hall wasn’t the last of the College’s ambitious plan to invest in dorm and dining halls; within the same year that Driscoll opened, plans were set to build Greylock Quad, which included four dorms and another dining hall, the original plans for which included separate dining rooms for each of the four Greylock dorms.

With the publishing of the Angevine Report in 1962, just after the arrival of Jack Sawyer ’39 as President, it became clear that the College would need more dormitory space and facilities for feeding students. Greylock came into being as a result. The residential house system in Greylock is the result of this

50 “Room, Board Fees Raised; CC To Study Cross-Dining,” Williams Record, March 5, 1965, p. 1.
51 Louis Schaul, “Chisholm and Dining: Pro and Cons; Louis Schaul ’65 Wants Better Food Preparation In Several Social Units,” Williams Record, March 12, 1965, p. 4.
change in the social environment of the campus, and is a fine indication of how the new Williams was to evolve.\textsuperscript{52}

Greylock Quad was finished in 1965. The College also converted the old facilities of the Garfield Club in Currier Hall into a “snack snack bar,” which was fully staffed and served drinks, sandwiches, and cold snacks.\textsuperscript{53}

In 1968, the College issued the final death sentence to fraternities when the Board of Trustees asked the remaining six fraternities to discontinue their activities. The College then began preparing itself for yet another significant change: the arrival of women, the first of whom would matriculate in 1971. That same year, Mission Park was built, but unlike any of the other dining halls at the time, it had one massive dining hall, instead of multiple separate dining rooms. The reason for this was primarily financial, but the result was significant: as Whitney Stoddard ’35 commented in \textit{Reflections on the Architecture of Williams College}, “This is quite a different concept from the multiple buildings of Greylock. It is a totally different approach to the housing and feeding of students.”\textsuperscript{54}

When Mission opened, the College also terminated dining services in three of the row houses, and opened up Dodd.

Also in preparation for the arrival of women on campus, Food Services began to offer more variety in the main dining halls (Baxter, Driscoll, Greylock, Mission), partly out of a somewhat ill-placed assumption that while men preferred beef and chicken, women would rather have salad. The students – men and women alike - did like the salad bar, but even more than that, they loved the chocolate chip cookies and brownies, the consumption of both of which increased dramatically when women began attending the College.

Students were, unsurprisingly, delighted with the increased options, and Food Services was also pleased, since the push for variety actually saved the College money. It was counter-intuitive, but true: if the dining halls offered not just steak, but also pasta and chicken, then they could expect to purchase less steak, which was the more expensive of the three.

Furthermore, if the dining hall served only one option, and no one liked it, more food would


\textsuperscript{54} Stoddard, \textit{Reflections on the Architecture of Williams College}. 
go to waste, whereas a more diverse food offering would result in a larger percentage being consumed.

At the request of students, vegetarian dining also started making regular rounds on the menu, and kosher and Halal dining was established in Greylock. The larger dining halls, already well known on campus for offering much more variety than any row house, also began to develop specialties: Greylock became famous for offering breakfast options for dinner five nights a week, Baxter had a fail-proof pasta bar, Dodd offered a popular lunchtime deli, and the Mission pizza grill became a reason on its own to make the walk down to the bottom of Mission Hill.

**The Phasing Out of Row House Dining**

With four main dining halls – Baxter, Driscoll, Greylock, and Mission - in full operation, the College decided to officially terminate dining services at the former fraternity houses in 1981. The change was not unanticipated; service in those houses was being gradually lessened in the fifteen years before. First came the elimination of hot breakfasts in 1966 due primarily to low student interest.

Cooks ... almost all concurred that very few students take advantage of the hot breakfasts offered during the week, although as one chef put it, “They like it on weekends.”

Most smaller houses have fewer than ten students at breakfast during the week, and there are often as few as three or four, according to the chefs. ... Several stewards pointed out that many of those eating breakfast merely take cereal, toast, and coffee, then go back to bed or off to class. Only on Sundays, however, when brunch is offered at 11:30 am, do most students wake up in time for breakfast...

Thus far are two major suggestions... First, students proposed that each house might elect or appoint one house member to cook hot breakfasts for the rest of the house. Second, the director of dining halls proposed that hot breakfasts in the smaller houses be replaced by cold breakfasts which the students could fix themselves, while those who wanted hot breakfasts could eat at either the Greylock, Student Union, or Berkshire-Prospect Dining Halls.

The financial realities of operating thirteen dining locations became undeniable, and over the summer of 1981, the College elected to eliminate Row House dining, without delay. This

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was not taken lightly by students, who, when they arrived back on campus, complained immediately of long lines at the dining halls, and less Row House unity.

Kate Heilmann ’83, a resident of Wood House, said "...We don’t see anyone from Garfield or Agard anymore now that we don’t have meals. The houses are dispersing... it’s really sad. We’ve lost all our house unity and spirit.”

Alumni were also particularly irritated, since eating at the former fraternity houses was the entirety of the Williams dining scene as they knew it. In the College’s defense, the closures meant that Food Services saved significant amounts of money, especially since each dining location required at least one full-time cook. The number of students eating at the row houses was also visibly dwindling; even though around 440 students lived in the row houses, only around 150 actually dined there. After the closures, the houses themselves were renovated, and the kitchen and dining facilities were replaced by kitchenettes, study areas, living rooms, and even classrooms, in the cases of Perry and Wood Houses.

Jim Hodgkins, the Director of Food Services from 1982 to 2001, recalled that closing the row houses did simplify the dining service operation greatly, though it also coincided with a cultural change:

Dinner used to be a prolonged event, maybe an hour, an hour and a half. Because of that, faculty came more often to dinner, and we had faculty/guest meals once a week at the dining halls. It was really important educationally, since a lot of what you learn is just by sitting at a table with a professor or two. That began to fall away when row house dining ended.

Other major changes occurred to Food Services at this time: in addition to the loss of Row House dining and the new restriction of guest meals, the College installed a new computerized meal-swipe system to replace the previous honor code meal system, and the changes sent students reeling. An article in the Williams Record claimed the changes have “meant longer lines and fewer of the charms that used to characterize William dining.”

The computerized ID system, though cumbersome and awkward at first, actually propelled the dining service into what we see today; a main effect of the ID system was that a student could eat anywhere he or she pleased, and was not necessarily expected to eat where he or

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57 Jim Hodgkins, interview by Jennifer Luo, August 8, 2011, Paresky Center, Williams College, Williamstown, MA.
she lived. The unit system, so carefully instituted in the 1960s, was being slowly phased out.

**Baxter as a creative dining space**

Baxter’s dining offerings were not just limited to the main dining halls on the upper floor; on the first floor, Baxter was the home of the original much-loved snack bar, and in the basement, there was a student run coffeehouse (which would later become Goodrich Coffee Bar) and the “Dog House” (which would later become Grab ‘n’ Go). The Baxter snack bar – the social center of campus - was located in the exact same location as the present day Paresky Center snack bar, though the old version had a bit more of the “flavor of a ski lodge” (as described by Jim Hodgkins), and since the booths were positioned higher than the floor, they gave the impression of privacy. Baxter was also the site of many a “sock hop,” which was a dance with “your socks on, not dancing your socks off,” as Hodgkins distinguished.

In Baxter’s basement, a small group of students founded and ran a coffeehouse known as the Underground. It was, as Jim Hodgkins put it, “drugs and LSD”: the entire room was painted black and white, and there were concrete posts all around the room. Though the project was quite popular among the students, it ultimately died out when its founders graduated, until it was rebirthed as the student-run Goodrich Coffee Bar in the mid-2000s.

Likewise, Grab ‘n’ Go was first a student initiative, though in its original form it only served hot dogs. Also located in Baxter basement, the Dog House, as it was to be called, became a place for busy students to grab a quick hot dog, piece of fruit and dessert for lunch. It was also outfitted with pool tables and a pull down projection screen, so it soon became another popular social center. In the late 1990s, Dining Services took over the operation and ran a Grab ‘n’ Go service with pre-made sandwiches. The idea of Grab ‘n’ Go caught on so fast that the space had to be quickly renovated to accommodate the demand. Dining Services had estimated that maybe 10% of the student population – perhaps those busy in labs or in long seminars - would take advantage of the food-to-go option, but they were stunned when 400 students began taking their lunches there.
The 1980s and 1990s

Jim Hodgkins, the Director of Food Services from 1982 to 2001 (and Assistant Director from 1970 to 1982), remembers that the three most popular and quintessentially Williams foods from his time at the College were the sheer comfort foods: there was the ubiquitous honey bun, a yeast-bread doughnut with a honey and cinnamon swirl that alumni still demand, without fail, at every reunion. There was also a drink known on campus as the “Hugger,” which we discovered to be a clever name for an Arnold Palmer, a combination of iced tea and lemonade. And then there was German Toast, which is the long-lost, deep-fried sister of French Toast. According to Williams dining lore, German Toast was invented by a cook in Driscoll, and was, put simply, a thin slice of crepe-like dough dipped in batter and then deep-fried until it floated. It was traditionally served with syrup and a side of sausage. Sadly, German Toast has not been spotted at a dining hall in recent memory.

Hodgkins also remembers that he was always tracking down missing plates, cups, and silverware that students had schlepped from the dining halls.

And salt shakers? Those might as well have been disposable. It seemed like every student must have a pair of salt and pepper shakers in their dorm room. We tried giving students a few shakers at the beginning of the year as a Welcome to Williams gift, but they still stole them anyways. And trays? Yes, the students loved to sled on them. We ended up putting aside a bunch of some really old trays, and held a contest to see who could make their tray look most like a sled, and then we gave them all away.59

The best part about Williams Dining, Hodgkins reminisces, though, was the people:

When I first moved to campus, I lived in the faculty housing at Poker Flats. It must have been April... in any case, my wife and my two daughters and I had just piled out of the moving truck, and we were sitting on the porch watching it drive away. Maybe we were exhausted; maybe we didn’t know what to do next. And then, as if on cue, neighbors living in the apartments around us came out bearing home baked breads and casseroles and salads. Those are still my friends to this day. That’s the attitude that existed then, and that still here today. People here are, for the most part, clean, neat, pleasant and sweet. It’s the staff – as well as the student workers - that make this place what it is; they take great pride in it.

59 Jim Hodgkins, interview by Jennifer Luo.
Recent History: the last few years

In the late spring of 2010, the administration elected to close the dining operations in Dodd and Greylock due to budget constraints, saying that the closures would save the College $880,000 each year. In an act of farewell, students published articles in the Williams Record reminiscing about the two dining halls:

Many of us have flocked to Kids’ Night at Greylock to enjoy the crispy chicken tenders and piping hot French fries that bring back childhood memories of picnics and barbecues. Who could forget Brunch Night, where people snarl viciously at anyone who dares to sneak to the front of the waffle line? What will we do now that we can no longer cram as many toppings into our omelet ramekins as possible, balancing those last few tomato chunks precariously on top?

Don’t forget Dodd’s dreamy smorgasbord that ranges from delicacies to home-style food. No longer will its compelling promise of hash browns and eggs drag us out of our beds as we struggle to recover from Saturday night. We won’t be able to feast on scrambled eggs with lobster, beef-a-roni, muffin tops, Pez and black-and-white cookies a la Seinfeld. With a few juicy chicken tenders on your plate, a side of crinkle fries and a dangerously chocolatey dessert to finish it off, you were sure to start off your week with a bang.

Despite the closures however, the dining service that current Williams student enjoy has never been more a more varied operation. Dining halls regularly serve multiple entrees per meal, not just two entrees and vegetarian options as was in the case in 1984, and the salad bars are no longer just large bowls of lettuce, but instead feature dozens of toppings. Students with special diets and allergies (everything from gluten to peanuts to dairy) are all provided for, and in addition to the main dining halls, students can dine at the 82 Grill, Snack Bar, Eco Café, Grab ‘n’ Go, Whitman’s Late Night and Goodrich Coffee Bar.

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**Sustainability in the Food Program at Williams**

The current Dining Services administration, at the leadership of Bob Volpi, has very much prioritized sustainable eating at Williams, as evidenced most poignantly by the fact that Williams now spends 15% of its entire food budget on sustainable food purchases.63 That said, such widespread efforts on the part of Dining Services have largely only been visible in the last decade.

Students themselves started thinking about organic food in the 1970s, when several groups of students living in co-ops worked out arrangements with Dining Services so that they could eat more organic foods. The group received staples, like rice, approximate to board expenses, though "most students who ate regularly at Seely House last fall, however, found his arrangement woefully inadequate."64 Jim Hodgkins remembers that these co-ops enjoyed only "limited popularity."

Organic food officially came to Williams dining halls in 1972, when one of the Baxter Hall dining rooms began purchasing it in order to “keep up with changing food habits”:

Presently, the organic food option is available at lunch and dinner. Granola has also been added to the regular breakfast menu.

Because of the size of Williams and the limited number of students seriously interested in organic foods, the program is intended only as a "supplement," Woodruff [Director of Food Services] said. The director maintained that it is not a complete substitute for the regular food service unless there seems to be widespread student demand. In such a case, a whole dining room might offer exclusively organic foods.

For the present, however, the simple menu offers, brown rice, mixed vegetables, omelets, organic peanut butter and yogurt. Brown rice and yogurt will probably be available at every lunch, Woodruff said. Food Services also plans to poll knowledgeable students for suggested foods and recipes. Although every suggestion cannot be acted upon, Woodruff admitted that the college has much to learn about the obtaining and preparing of organic foods and is actively seeking student opinion and help.

Junior Rory Nugent has spent the past week helping with some of the cooking, and the regular Baxter Hall cooks are adapting to preparing the organic food. Supplies are being ordered from A.E. Necker’s Natural Food

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63 Bob Volpi, interview by Jennifer Luo, August 2, 2011, Droppers House, Williams College, Williamstown, MA.
64 “Granola is no jive cereal (honest),” RecordAdvocate, February 18, 1972.
Store of Pittsfield, the same source that Cold Mountain Foods and Old Mill utilize. Shortly afterwards, dining halls began regularly serving vegetarian options, and when Whitman’s Dining Hall was opened in Paresky Center in 2007, it was designed with a station dedicated solely to vegan eating. Starting in the fall of 2011, Driscoll Dining Hall will feature a Meatless Mondays program, and since 2004, the College has invited Ken Bergeron, an award-winning vegetarian chef, to campus to run a workshop to train the dining hall staff about vegetarian food.

**Williams Dining Services and Food Sustainability**

More so than many large American universities, Williams Dining is very visibly committed to doing sustainable eating. A significant advantage is structural: Williams Dining is – and always has been - an independent dining service, meaning Dining Services is operated by the College, not a national corporation that the College is contracted with, as many large universities and state schools are. This allows Dining Services much more flexibility in purchasing local and sustainable foods. Out of the $3 million annual budget, currently 15% goes to sustainable purchases, with a goal of 20% in the next few years.

Dining Services currently defines sustainability with any one of the following three criteria:

1. **Local**: grown and processed within 250 miles of campus.
3. **Social Responsibility**: grown on a farm that operates as a cooperative, has a profit sharing policy for all employees, or has a social responsibility policy covering the following for all workers: union or prevailing wages, transportation and/or housing support, and/or health care benefits.

Among many other foods, the dining halls at Williams serve local farm-make yogurt, local hormone-free milk from High Lawn Farm, and produce of all kinds from Peace Valley Farm.

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65 “Granola is no jive cereal (honest).”
66 And ice cream is made on campus from that same hormone-free milk. See the section on *High Lawn Farm* on page 36.
The push for 20% sustainable foods, however, will not be easy to accomplish; in addition to the ever-present budget pressures, Dining Services has had difficulty with on-campus storage space to store items such as potatoes, onions and carrots through the winter. Many local farms also do not pre-chop vegetables, creating a burden of time and labor on the dining staff, which is already preoccupied with day-to-day operations. There are also challenges in accurately labeling foods and tracking sustainability standards. Eating habits and customs are also very personal and sensitive topics, and promoting change will be a significant educational effort.

Jim Hodgkins, Director of Dining Services from 1982 to 2001 (Assistant Director 1970-1982)

Though food sustainability had not become the national trend it is today when he was the director of Dining Services at Williams, Jim Hodgkins did his part to minimize waste and purchase locally whenever possible. In Baxter, for instance, Hodgkins installed a special circular dishwasher that not only took fewer people to run than the previous model, but also was a sophisticated recycling contraption. Edible food waste was washed off the plates into a great trough of water known colloquially as “the flume,” which was then sent through a pulverizer and water extractor. Water extracted from the food waste was sent back into the flume and recycled (the water replenishing rate was only 6%), and what was left of the food waste was, at that point, only 1/6 of its original volume, and could be composted at area farms. Cooking fats were recycled at rendering companies, and pig farms picked up vegetable trimmings and scraps. Cans were crushed, and glass and paper were regularly recycled. Grab ‘n’ Go went through multiple eras of reusable bags.

Though limited primarily by the budget, Hodgkins made an effort to purchase local and sustainable food when in season and when feasible. For example, Dining Services often purchased from the nearby Caretaker Farm salad greens in the spring, broccoli in the fall, and kale fresh out of the ground. Through it all, Hodgkins’ motivation for developing sustainable meals was rooted in his belief that because the college years are four of the most formative years of the students’ lives, how students ate while in college often dictated how they would like to eat for the rest of their lives.
Bob Volpi

Bob Volpi, the current Director of Dining Services, arrived at Williams in 2001, after working for a decade at Bates College. At Bates, Volpi earned a reputation for his success with integrating sustainability into the dining program, and had helped Bates win national awards for institutional sustainability.

Under his direction, and in conjunction with the Zilkha Center for Sustainability and College Council, Williams College has attained 15% sustainability on food purchases, installed compost systems for all dining halls, eliminated trays from all dining halls except Whitman’s, and implemented a reusable food container program in 2010 that eliminated all throwaway clamshells (paper waste). As always, Volpi is constantly exploring stronger agreements with local farmers.

Volpi’s enthusiasm for food sustainability is Williams’ own voice in the growing national trend toward farm-to-school dining. Colleges all around the U.S. - such as Yale, Cornell, Middlebury, and Dartmouth, to name a few - have developed extensive programs for food sustainability, underlining an emerging understanding that fresh, local, sustainable food can be feasibly served at colleges and institutions.

Milk: The Story of High Lawn Farm

High Lawn Farm, based in Lee, Massachusetts – less than an hour’s drive from campus – is the last remaining dairy farm in the Berkshires that oversees all aspects of its production: that is, it produces, bottles and delivers all its own milk. Theirs is a noble tradition that has been practiced in the same family for over 100 years. In the early 2000s,
Williams began a steady partnership with High Lawn Farm that has endured one period of economic strife after another.

Prior to working with High Lawn, Williams students were served milk from the national producer Hood. Bob Volpi, however, firmly wished to serve hormone-free milk, and conducted a campus-wide milk consumption survey to learn that the campus consumed more skim milk than any other kind. Counter-intuitively for a small and local farm, High Lawn Farm’s pricing for skim milk was actually cheaper than Hood’s (which had not yet adjusted for the growing demand for skim milk), and so making the switch from the national distributor to a local, hormone-free farm actually saved the College $10,000 a year. Considering the massive quantity of milk that Williams purchases every year, the partnership also saved High Lawn Farm, which was on the verge of closing. Since then, whenever economic difficulties have prompted budgets to be re-examined, the Williams community has shown its strong commitment to High Lawn, and has refused to cut High Lawn Farm milk. It is true that Hood skim milk could, by this point, be more competitively priced, and it is true that there are other dairies in New York that could force High Lawn prices down; however, time has shown that Williams considers its relationship with High Lawn “untouchable.” In return, High Lawn Farm holds the price of milk steady during tough times as well.

Students at the College now enjoy High Lawn Farm milk in all dining halls, and in addition, the ice cream that is made on campus (served at Whitman’s and Snack Bar) is made from the hormone-free milk.

**Produce: The Story of Peace Valley Farm**

In a remarkable partnership similar to that with High Lawn Farm, Williams College and Peace Valley Farm - an organic 3-acre vegetable farm located just off the New York border in upper-Western Massachusetts – have been extensively working together since 2002. Today, the College is one of the farm’s largest customers, and purchases such varied

\[68\] Bob Volpi, interview by Jennifer Luo.
vegetables as spinach, kale, cauliflower, broccoli, peppers, squash, cherry tomatoes and lettuce.

Prior to 2002, the College received local organic produce in small, sporadic deliveries. When Bob Volpi arrived at the College, he happened to notice a Subaru in the parking lot with a Bates sticker on the back – the school where Bob had worked for a decade and was still fondly attached to. It turned out that car belonged to Bill Stinson, the owner of Peace Valley Farm, and whose daughter attended Bates. Working off that connection and their mutual enthusiasm for sustainable foods, Volpi started purchasing from Stinson, quadrupling in ten years the volume of organic produce in the dining halls. In fact, during the growing season, all the peppers, tomatoes, and lettuce served in the dining halls are from Peace Valley Farm, and annually Dining Services allocates $30,000 exclusively for Peace Valley Farm purchases.

On a related note, more than 70% of the apples served in College dining halls are grown at Green River Farm, just a ten-minute drive south of the College. Because the apples store so well in a cellar, students eat Green River Farm apples all the way from harvest in September, until May.

The Harvest Dinner

Started as what is best classified as an all-out lobster fest, the Harvest Dinner is now an all-campus dinner that showcases the bounty of foods local and seasonal to western Massachusetts. A Williams Record article on the Harvest Dinner leaves readers salivating:

Roasted potato bread... I counted four different varieties of local cheeses, all of which had a good flavor. The roasted butternut squash salad... The vegetable sides, most of them procured from local farms, were a success. True to the harvest-themed menu, Dining Services provided plenty of local corn on the cob. The choice of salad was a bit more unexpected, but the combination of vitamin-rich mesclun greens with herb goat cheese, beets and pecans offered a welcome change in taste and texture from the normal salad bar options. ... Fresh Vermont apple cider was the drink of choice.... This cider

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69 Green River Farms was recently closed for reorganization. In the meantime, the College serves apples from local orchards in New York state.
Jennifer Luo
Summer 2011
History of Dining, Farming and Gardening at Williams College

was smooth and mild. For dessert, we had... Boston cream torte... apple crisp... Berkshire ice cream...\textsuperscript{70}

The Harvest Dinner originated in the early 1980s as one of a handful of very special dinners that Dining Services would host throughout the school year. The first Harvest Dinners were more of a clambake; fresh lobster was frequently served because Dining Services had a connection that could get the freshest lobster delivered to Williamstown in record time, though steak and chicken were also offered as main entrees. Other traditional clambake dishes such as potatoes and corn on the cob were served.

The best of what New England has to offer, obviously, is not native to the Berkshires: it is fresh-steamed lobster imported from Maine. And make no mistake: it is fresh. As Record photo editor Mary Catherine Blanton ’06 bit into her first piece at Driscoll, she was careful to point out that her lobster “was probably still alive at 2 o’clock this afternoon.” The opportunity to indulge in fresh lobster is what draws hordes of students and the occasional townie to the dining halls. In fact, the Harvest Dinner is also referred to as the Lobster Dinner by some and the while lobster bibs handed out at the beginning of the meal make suitable souvenirs. .... Alternatives to lobster included grilled sirloin steak and Hudson Valley chicken....\textsuperscript{71}

This tradition has become more of a local food dinner in recent years.

In addition to the Harvest Dinner in the fall, the Dining Services administration in the 1980s and 1990s put out elaborate theme nights, including a Clint Eastwood dinner, Movie night (“lots of popcorn everywhere,” according to Hodgkins), French night, Western night, a skating party in the hockey rink, and soul food night, a collaboration with the Black Student Union full of sweet potato pie, chicken, ribs and collard greens. “Recipes from Home,” a popular dining event and tradition today, was also begun in the late 1970s.


\textsuperscript{71} “For Harvest Dinner, Dining Services throws down the red carpet.”
The Student Garden

In the spring of 2010, a group of students known as the Williams Sustainable Growers brought back to campus a tradition that Williams has seen sporadically over its history: a student garden. In fact, there are now two gardens: sixteen raised beds in Dodd circle, just off of Parsons House, and a smaller plot just behind the President’s House. The garden, which is supported also by the Zilkha Center, produces primarily vegetables, among them lettuces, arugula, tomatoes, carrots, beets, collards, chard, garlic, onions and squash. The Williams Sustainable Growers also tends to multiple herb plots, and plants herbs in barrels just outside of Paresky Center for the dining hall to use, especially during the summer.

The produce grown is given to College dining halls, WRAPS (Williams Recovery of all Perishable Surplus), and special events with trustees and alumni, and all students who work on and contribute to the garden are welcome to harvest produce for their own enjoyment. The club does not sell its produce to students, out of consideration for nearby farms, with whom they would be creating competition against.

Prior to this set of student gardens, there was a small forest garden adjacent to Kellogg House. Despite its size, it was quite compact: in addition to a magnificent plum tree, it had multiple herb sections and other plants such as currant bushes and rhubarb plants. It had been overgrown for a few years before the Williams Sustainable Growers built the new Parsons garden in 2010.

The Sustainable Food and Agriculture Program

The Sustainable Food and Agriculture Program, an offshoot of the Zilkha Center, is a unique project designed to build a sustainable food culture at Williams. Using a “food systems” approach – that is, seeing yourself as part of a whole – the SFAP develops innovative operational strategies and educational programmatic opportunities, such as
taste education events, the sustainable garden project, food career counseling, lecture and film series, and dining services training. It also works with menu design, which the SFAP recognizes is an important basis for sustainability in the dining halls, and the SFAP also helps Dining Services develop contracts with local, sustainable farms.

The SFAP furthermore is working to develop curricular classes within the College that promote the understanding of sustainable food. One such offering was a sociology class on Food & Society, taught by Darra Goldstein, as well as a handful of other related Winter Study classes.
In this section, I will outline the history and current uses for two properties owned by the College which have some relevance to the history of dining, farming and gardening at Williams. These were leads I followed in hope of discovering more about how students ate, but which, I later realized, were not quite directly related. Both Mount Hope Farm and the Buxton Garden in Hopkins Memorial Forest (the former Buxton Farm) were indeed once used as a farm and a garden, respectively; however, by the time the College acquired the properties, neither were in operation as such.

Mount Hope Farm

Mount Hope Farm, a large section of land numbering in the hundreds of acres, is located south of the campus, and is most well known among students and alumni for its sprawling 72-room mansion known as Elm Tree House, which is used primarily for events during Senior week, as well as some special alumni gatherings. During the fall of 2009, Mount Hope mansion was also used to quarantine students suspected of suffering from the highly contagious H1N1 swine flu. For the most part, however, students at the College have very little access to, and little reason to be on, the Mount Hope Farm.

True to Williamstown’s history as a dairy town, Mount Hope Farm was first and foremost a cow farm. It was built in the 1920s by Colonel E. Parmelee Prentice, a Chicago lawyer, and his wife Alta Rockefeller Prentice, daughter of John D. Rockefeller, Sr, to be a sort of hobby farm for Col. Prentice, who was very interested in genetics, and sought to find a way to use science to solve the problem of famine throughout the world. In other words,
Prentice was interested in breeding animals not for looks, but for productivity. Within the next two decades, Mount Hope Farm gained national recognition as an experimental farm, and was especially lauded for its exceptionally high milk, butterfat, and egg production. It was a large-scale production: the Prentices employed a staff of 168, including two full-time geneticists, and in addition to cattle, they specialized in poultry breeding, apples, syrup, honey, corn, oats and other grains. They also had sizable vegetable and flower gardens. At its height, the farm orchard produced 25,000 bushels of apples, and the sugar bush annually yielded 1000 gallons of top-grade maple syrup.\(^7\)\(^2\) Col. Prentice chose not to retail his milk locally, however; because he had exceptional standards of cleanliness, the townspeople favored his milk over the local farmer milk, and Col. Prentice did not wish to harm local farmers with his hobby farm.

The Prentices lived on the farm during the summer months, during which they imported musicians from New York to entertain them at night. Williams College faculty and their wives were often invited to attend the concerts.

After Col. Prentice died in 1955, farm activity at Mount Hope came to a stop. Seven years later, after Mrs. Prentice’s death, the property was willed to New York’s Lenox Hill Hospital, and it was purchased in 1963 by Williams College, which had the intention of staving off land development in the area. The maintenance and upkeep of the property turned out to be more expensive than the College was willing to pay, however, and in 1978, the College sold the land. In 1984, Mount Hope came back on the market, and a group of Williams alumni known as the Purple Mountain Partners purchased the land, putting some of it in a private land trust, sectioning off parcels for themselves, and donating the rest – including Elm Tree House – to Williams College.\(^7\)\(^3\)

The College never used Mount Hope as a farm; instead, the College used Elm Tree House for academic conferences, banquets and special events. The property is significant to the history of food at Williams only in that it underlines just how much of a farming and dairy industry Williamstown was, even as late as the 1950s. Before the arrival of national

\(^7\)\(^2\) “From Wilderness to Williamstown.” Williamstown House of Local History. 1095 Main Street, Williamstown, MA 01267. July 15, 2011.

food distributors in the last half-century, local Williamstown residents and Williams College students were fortunate to be able to obtain much of their food locally.

**Hopkins Memorial Forest (Buxton Farm)**

The large 2600 acre section of land northwest of the College now known as Hopkins Memorial Forest is a useful area to conduct ecological research, in addition to being a popular hiking area in the summer and cross country skiing area in the snowy months. Before it was used as such, however, the land that is now Hopkins Memorial Forest was in fact composed of many, small farms, which remained in operation up until the late 1880s, when Colonel Hopkins – an 1863 Williams alumnus and the son of Williams College President Mark Hopkins – began amassing the farms to create a single large working farm. That big farm – known as the Buxton Farm - contained over 2500 acres, most of which was used as pasture for livestock, especially sheep and cattle. The land was also used to grow hay, rye, wheat and corn. Much like Mount Hope Farm, Col. Hopkins ran his Buxton Farm as a hobby farm, and he hired caretakers to do the actual farming work. When Hopkins died in 1912, his widow gradually ceased farming operations, and for ten years beginning in 1924, the farm lay fallow, which resulted in the birth of much of the forest that visitors can see today. Because the land was not worth very much, especially during the Great Depression, Hopkins’ widow had great difficulty selling the property, and eventually deeded the land over to the College, her husband’s alma mater.

The College, however, wasn’t very interested in the land at that time. It did not yet have an environmental studies program or a programmatic interest in the land, and had no plans to expand, so the College signed the land over to the Forest Service for a period of time. In 1968, the Forest Service completed its work in the forest, and the College once again gained ownership of the forest.
Buxton Garden

Though vegetables and non-grain plants were not the main focus of Buxton Farm, the caretakers did maintain a 2-acre garden. It was not entirely a functional vegetable plot, however; in accordance with the style of the day, much of it was a formal Victorian walking and leisure garden with herbs and perennials, including lilies, irises, poppies, and peonies. It was also decorated with ornamental rose hedges and elm trees, as well as a small amount of edibles such as heirloom squash and tomatoes, grapes, rhubarb, strawberries, apples, and asparagus. Because production levels were relatively low, it is suspected that the produce was grown mostly for the gardeners’ and farm caretakers’ personal use.

In 1993, in commemoration of Williams’ Bicentennial, the Center for Environmental Studies and the Williamstown Garden Club began restoration of the garden. Some original plant material was used in the project, which, to this day, is still well maintained by Hopkins Forest caretakers. The restored version of the garden is ½ acre large, and features such vegetables as beans, beets, broccoli, kale, carrot, cucumber, lettuce, pea, squash, pumpkin, tomato, spinach, radish, okra, cilantro, cabbage, basil, sage and chamomile.74

The Sugar Bush

In addition to livestock breeding and grain growing, the original Buxton Farm also planted about 200 maple sugar trees. Hopkins never tapped the trees for sugar, instead preferring the trees to be maintained as part of a park. Many of the maple sugars, however, were healthy and still in production, and so in 1970 – after the forest came back under Williams ownership - several Williams students started tapping the trees. In 1984, the students built a sugarhouse, which has been in use ever since. Remarkably, to this day, the majority of the trees are still in production; from the 140 active trees, the College harvests about 40 gallons of maple syrup every year. Much of it is given to the greater Williams community for education and public relations, though some of it is sold at the Center for Environmental Studies or to Dining Services for alumni events.75

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Conclusions

As I neared my deadline for this research project and was faced with the daunting task of sifting through hundreds of pages of notes, I began to fully appreciate that my study of dining at Williams throughout its history was not just a story about food: it was a story about the shifting social scene, the changing uses for the land around Williamstown, and a constantly evolving College. In retrospect, this shouldn’t have been surprising: food, after all, is not just a source of calories and energy, but is also heavily laden with cultural and personal values. Though the food itself is interesting, how - and in what kinds of situations - it is consumed is even more.

Toward the end of the project, I also faced the reality that there are no straightforward answers about how sustainably Williams students ate in the 1800s. Though we can speculate that, given the flourishing farming industry of the local land, students ate fresh produce and meat from the farms, we can also see that cultural trends of the aristocratic and well-do-do of the time favored imported products just as much. With that in mind, advocating for local foods to be served in our dining halls today isn’t a simple matter of “returning” to the way Williams students used to eat; the history of food habits is much more complex than that.

Lastly, I would like to stress that the three parts in this research paper are, by no means, an exhaustive or even nearly complete account of how students ate at Williams
throughout its history. Rather, I think of it as a basic overview, and a starting point for further research. If time permitted, I would have liked to do research on the dining history of other similar colleges in the area, with the intention of comparing them to Williams. Were there national trends? Does Williams’ remote location have a tangible difference on the farming and gardening habits of its students? I would have also spent more time focusing on the post-1962 Williams, examining not just written articles but also oral accounts. Changes in the last fifty years still counts as recent memory, and I wish I had time to interview alumni to collect more first-hand anecdotes. Research possibilities also include further examining of the land use history of Williamstown (Professor Henry Art of the biology department is an excellent resource here), completing more research (possibly by contacting alumni) on the Kellogg Garden, and speaking with William Stinson of Peace Valley Farm, who has been working with Williams and Williams students for years.

In my opinion, the study of food is, and will always be, relevant; after all, everyone must eat, and moreover, multiple times per day. By studying what and how students ate throughout Williams’ 200-plus years of history, we can deepen our interpretations of the changing social scene at this College, as well as appreciate the shifting values of an institution as it has changed through the years. Food, as it provides clues to Williams’ past, takes on roles beyond being physically satiating: it becomes a storyteller.
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