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THE MIDDLE CAMPUS



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Providence, R. I.

January 19, 1931



The Middle Campus

THE Middle Campus of Brown University, known before 1880 as "The Old Back Campus," has been memorialized by Dr. Walter Lee Munro in his engaging book, but a few chapters from his fascinating narrative might well be retold.

The Back Campus was not a large area. It extended from the "Old Front Row"—as Hope College, Manning Hall, University Hall, and Rhode Island Hall were called—to the graveled walk of Brown Street, and from George to Waterman Streets. Its level was considerably above the sidewalks of the last mentioned streets, and on the north and south it was enclosed by sturdy rail fences. Yet, small as was this campus, it was the scene of nearly all the activities of the undergraduates, all their athletics, pranks, and various kinds of recreation. In fact, it may well be said that bound up in this small tract of land was a good proportion of the old time college spirit.

Behind the Back Campus the University owned no more than a narrow strip of land which stretched to Thayer Street, but this

was mostly marsh and was of no value except to classes in botany. However, it did have one other practical use and that was as a place for pasturing the president's cows (if he possessed any). But inasmuch as these cows often strayed out of bounds and wandered about the Back Campus, getting in the way of those who wanted to play baseball or football, the undergraduates took their own means of ridding the grounds of the bovine menace. Some of the poor animals were decorated gaily with vivid bands of paint, but one of the creatures was induced to climb to the top floor of Hope College and was tied there, as, in a similar manner, the old grey horse of President Messer had once been persuaded to ascend the stairways to the top of University Hall.

There were two wells on the old Back Campus, for none of the dormitories were supplied with water. One stood about twenty-five feet from the middle of Hope College, while the other was farther south on the campus, about opposite the present location of Slater Hall. Both these wells had old-fashioned well house coverings and the water was drawn up in a bucket let down at the end of a long rope. The students had to run down the various flights of stairs in the

dormitories and, no matter what the weather, fill their pitchers and buckets and pans with what water they needed for the day. Perhaps the very difficulty or bother of obtaining water in this way did not encourage the "cleanliness that is next to godliness," and it is more than certain that it did not encourage shaving. The dormitories of that day were not supplied with heat as they are now, and students had to provide individual stoves for their rooms. Consequently the additional trouble of warming water before using it only fostered the growth of whiskers on many a youthful face.

Despite the fact that the two wells were the only sources of water, the undergraduates did not hesitate to make them the objects of many a prank. They often stuffed them with grass, and it was a favorite trick to let down the water bucket without drawing any water and then, by dropping the counter weight, let the pail come up with a clatter. Of course, the middle of the night was the time always chosen for such pranks, and many a bucket was smashed in the procedure. In addition to this, both wells suffered frequently from fire.

The south well never did have the popularity that the north well attained, and

around the latter centered much more college tradition. In 1872, an iron pump took the place of the old well house. It had none of the romantic significance of its predecessor, but it proved better for dealing swiftly and effectively with any individuals whose attitudes required chastening.

Practically every afternoon in the fall and spring the Back Campus was filled with undergraduates playing either football or baseball. As far as the former sport was concerned it was mostly a "free for all" affair, with everyone getting a chance at the ball. There were scrimmages, of course, and some attempts at organized play, but the game of football as such did not develop until long years after baseball had been well established.

Baseball began at Brown about 1862. Before that year the game had been called by various names—"one old cat," "rotation," or "rounders"—and had been played with a soft ball. The rules of the time made it allowable for a player to hit a base-runner with the ball to put him out. But with the advent of the real game, as we know it now, rules and methods of playing underwent many changes and modifications.

The ball field was laid out on the Back

Campus with the home plate just in front of where Rockefeller Hall stands today. This diamond was used extensively for practice but never for matches, being too circumscribed by buildings and elm trees. But here all the practicing was done, and in fair weather it went on for hours at a time. So ardent was the interest in this sport on the part of both the participants and their loyal supporters, that not infrequently students would slip out of a classroom window, after the roll had been called, and join their fellows at the game. It must not be supposed that professors did not see these culprits; rather, being enthusiastic baseball fans themselves, they chose to overlook such infringements of discipline.

The game then was not as refined a sport as it is today. Like football it was decidedly a rough sport. No gloves were worn, yet the ball was as hard as the one used now. The catchers wore no masks or chest protectors, but they stopped fast balls thrown by husky young pitchers from a distance of only 45 feet away. And if they did not stop them, they chased them for a block or more, for there were no such things as backstops. Generally they forestalled such a possibility by taking a stand well behind the batter where

they could pick up the ball on its first bounce. But for the third strike they moved up close and caught the ball just as it whizzed over the plate.

Brown quickly developed championship teams, playing matches with other colleges on the old Dexter Training Ground and then later in the Adelaide Avenue ball-park. Through the seventies the nines made a good name for themselves, but the teams of '79 and '80 were among the greatest in Brunonian history. The men who played on those teams were a match for all comers. The very sight of them, most of them be-whiskered, would be impressive, and when a pitcher like "Keifer" Tenney cast his malevolent eye upon the opposing batter and with superb composure delivered a last contemptuous spat of tobacco juice before sending the ball hurtling across the plate, we can readily understand how only a man of very steady nerves could be expected to hit safely.

As it was a center for athletic activities, so, too, was the venerable Back Campus the center for all class rushes and other activities. Here the cane-rushes took place between the members of the Freshman and the Sophomore classes. Members of the former class had no right to a cane under the student laws then in existence, but it was an annual

occurrence for some sturdy Freshman, backed up by a goodly number of cohorts, to appear on the Back Campus nonchalantly swinging a heavy cane. The bit of daring would bring action in a moment, and soon every member of each class would be engaged in a free-for-all fight. The man who succeeded in getting into any one of the dormitories with the cane in his possession won the struggle for his class.

Then, in the history of the Back Campus there were the famous series of bonfires, deliberately set at an exact hour every Friday night, in reply to the dogmatic announcement of the college authorities that any undergraduates caught building a bonfire would be expelled. At first the fires were made at some distance from the dormitories; but as the weeks went on and it became necessary to make a more swift affair of building the fire, lighting it, and beating a retreat, the flaming piles of old furniture and rubbish were set off within twenty feet or so of Hope College. But, after serving its purpose to show the authorities the futility of issuing dogmatic statements or orders, the practice of bonfire-building declined.

In 1880, the old Back Campus passed away. In that year Slater Hall was nearly completed and work on Sayles Hall was well under way. Finally plans were formu-

lated for reclaiming the swamp land in back of Sayles Hall and making of it a baseball field. The grade of the Back Campus was cut and the dirt used to fill in the swamp. All interest centered in the new project, and the old campus, thus desecrated, was neglected. Some of the elms were cut down, and it was left a sorry sight. But gradually order evolved out of the chaos. The Back Campus was regraded, new walks were laid out, new trees planted, and the ground sown with grass seed. After that it did not take long for everything to undergo a transformation. The Back Campus, as it had been known, was gone but in its place was the quiet Middle Campus that we know today. Even the grounds of Brown University had become sophisticated.

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86 South Main Street
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THE PROVIDENCE INSTITUTION FOR SAVINGS, familiarly known as "The Old Stone Bank," is in its own right a historic institution of Rhode Island. Founded in 1819 as one of the first mutual savings banks in the country, it has since contributed vitally to the development and life of this community.

Proud of its own historical significance, "The Old Stone Bank" has adopted this method of educational advertising to bring to light much that is of value and significance in the colorful annals of Rhode Island and national history.

The sketches and vignettes of old-time Rhode Island and Rhode Islanders that are broadcast weekly and then printed in this form are selected from local historical records which are full of the picturesque, romantic, and adventurous. In the hope that these glimpses into the lives, customs, and environment of our progenitors may be both revealing and inspirational to young and old, this booklet is presented with the compliments of

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