An 1802 Petition on Dining at Yale College

To the President of Yale College,

Sir,

Sensible of the important purposes for which the Commons were originally designated, and convinced of the salutary consequences of which they might serve to promote, we cannot but regret the inexpedient practice of so valuable an institution.

With these considerations, and with the persuasion that the President is cognizant of the conduct of those employed in the Hall, we beg leave respectfully to denominate, and submit to his consideration the following facts:

1. We have satisfactory proof that they have unwarrantably converted to their own use sundry articles belonging to the kitchen.

2. They have served up a part of our provision in a most palatable manner, which, for a reasonable reward, they have appropriated to the use of individuals.

3. They have continually harboured the low
In a December 1995 “Old Yale” column from the Yale Alumni Magazine [2], Chief Research Archivist Judy Schiff traces the history of dissatisfaction with dining facilities, service, and fare all the way back to the opening of the first Yale College building in New Haven in 1718. Sometime in 1800-1801, more than two and a half decades before the infamous Bread and Butter Rebellion of 1828, four members of the Class of 1802 sent a petition to Yale President Timothy Dwight protesting against the immoral and wicked behavior of the kitchen staff. The petition survives in Box 1, folder 5 of the Bates Family Papers (MS 65) [3] in Manuscripts and Archives. Herewith the text of the petition:

To the President of Yale College.

Sir,

Sensible of the important purposes for which the Commons was originally designed, and convinced of the salutary consequences of which they might still be productive, we cannot but regret the unfortunate perversion of so valuable an institution.

With these impressions, and with the presumption that the President is ignorant of the conduct of those employed in the Hall, we beg leave respectfully to remonstrate, and submit to his consideration the following facts:

- 1st. We have satisfactory proof that they have unwarrantably converted to their own use sundry articles belonging to the kitchen.
- 2d. They have served up a part of our provision, in a more palatable manner, which, for a pecuniary reward, they have appropriated to the use of individuals.
- 3d. They have continually harboured the low, riotous, and immoral inhabitants of this town.
4th. They are destitute of cleanliness.
5th. By deserting the hall, for the purpose of prosecuting their own private, they have shamefully neglected the duties of their occupation.
6th. They have in the presence of the more young and inexperienced students, traduced the character of the Authority.
7th. They admit into the hall, to the exclusion of others, those who will furnish them with spiritous liquors.
8th. They have appropriated to their own use much more than an equitable portion of the better provisions provided by the steward.
9th. They are notorious for excessive drinking.
10th. They are openly profane.
11th. They constantly violate the sabbath, by admitting into their company disreputable persons, and by diverting themselves with ludicrous and improper amusements.

It is therefore the unanimous request of the Junior Class that for these and many other improprieties, the President would take into consideration the conduct of the Cooks and make such regulations as he shall think proper.

Isaac C. Bates, Wm. F. Brainard, Jeremiah Evarts, Junius Smith, Committee in behalf of the Class
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[5] http://images.library.yale.edu/madid/oneItem.aspx?id=1771585&amp;q=old%20laboratory&amp;q1=&amp;q2=&amp;qc1=&amp;qc2=&amp;qf1=&amp;qf2=&amp;qn=&amp;qo=&amp;qm=&amp;qs=&amp;sid=&amp;qx=
[7] http://images.library.yale.edu/madid/oneItem.aspx?id=1772593&amp;q=kent%20chemical%20laboratory&amp;q1=&amp;q2=&amp;qc1=&amp;qc2=&amp;qf1=&amp;qf2=&amp;qn=&amp;qo=&amp;qm=&amp;qs=&amp;sid=&amp;qx=