An 1802 Petition on Dining at Yale College

To the President of Yale College.

Sir, 

Aware of the important purposes for which the Commons were originally designed, and convinced of the salutary consequences of which they might still be possessed, we cannot but regret the degenerate perversion of so valuable an institution. With these thoughts, and with the perspicacity that the President is cognizant of the conduct of those employed in the Hall, we beg leave respectfully to demonstrate 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 pecuniary reward, they have appropriated to the use of individuals.

3° They have continually harboured the low
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

[4]
Petition regarding Commons, page 2, circa 1800-1801, Bates Family Papers (MS 65), Box 1, folder 5

The “Commons” in question in the petition was the first separately standing Commons building on Yale’s Old
Campus. It was built in 1782 as a dining hall, or Commons, and designed by Jeremiah Atwater. It’s location was
behind South Middle College (today’s Connecticut Hall) and behind the Chapel Street location where Street Hall
was eventually constructed in 1864, approximately in the present location of the southern end of McClellan Hall. It
served as the dining commons for Yale College students until 1820, when a larger Commons building was
constructed nearby. From 1820-1888 the building was used as a chemical laboratory and known as the Old
Laboratory [5], and from 1885-1887 also served as the first home for the Yale Cooperative Society [6] (which after
1893 became the Yale Cooperative Corporation). The building was demolished in 1888, contemporaneously with
the construction of the new Kent Chemical Laboratory [7] building across High St. from the Old Library (now Dwight
Hall) at the corner of Library St. (on a site now occupied by Jonathan Edwards College).

And what of the four members of the Class of 1802 selected by their classmates to petition the Yale College
president seeking some kind of redress for the perceived abuses of the Commons staff?

- **Isaac Chapman Bates** [8] (January 23, 1779-March 16, 1845) practiced law in Northampton,
  Massachusetts, and later served in the U.S. House of Representatives (1827-1835) and the U.S. Senate
  (1841-1845) representing Massachusetts.
- **Jeremiah F. Evarts** [9] (February 3, 1781-May 10, 1831) also was a lawyer, served for many years as
treasurer then secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He was one of the
leading opponents of Indian removal, and engaged in lobbying efforts attempting unsuccessfully to defeat
the Indian Removal Act of 1830.
- Junius Smith (1780-1853) also practiced law, and later in his life was a determined supporter of efforts to
  build a fleet of transatlantic steam ships [10].
