

Guide to the Champlain College Collection

86.6

Special Collections
Benjamin F. Feinberg Library
Plattsburgh State University College
Plattsburgh, N. Y. 12901

By:
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Introduction

Champlain College opened on September 23, 1946, on the site of the former Plattsburgh Barracks. It was one of three colleges chartered under the Associated Colleges of Upper New York (ACUNY) to accommodate returning Second World War veterans. The others were Mohawk in Utica and Sampson in Syracuse. Under the newly-created GI bill, the federal and state governments shared the expense of housing and educating the veteran students.

The non-discrimination policy of both the GI bill and ACUNY assured that no student would be excluded because of their race, sex, or economic condition. Although the overwhelming majority were veterans, Champlain actively recruited male and female students from local areas and as far away as New York City.

Champlain College enrolled 1800 students in its first semester and graduated 300 in its first commencement in 1950. Although initially it had been created as a two-year temporary transfer institution, in 1950 the college became one of two liberal arts colleges to expand under the newly-created State University of New York (SUNY) system. The other was Harpur College in Endicott. In 1951, the "Champlain Plan" of education was inaugurated. According to this plan, freshman began with a general comprehensive course of study, followed by increasingly specialized instruction. As they progressed through the plan, they also received career guidance.

Besides receiving a modern liberal arts education, Champlain College students could participate in a broad range of extracurricular activities, clubs, and sports teams.

In the same year that Champlain College expanded, the United States Air Force began to consider Burlington, Vermont (directly across Lake Champlain) as a possible site for the installation of a new air base. By 1952, however, a Plattsburgh committee, headed by then Mayor John J. Tyrell, had persuaded the Air Force to examine locations in Plattsburgh. Three local sites were evaluated--the Municipal Airport, Point au Roche, and the former Plattsburgh Barracks property—at that time occupied by Champlain College.

Before long the Air Force announced its intention to reclaim the military property under its emergency "recapture clause." This declaration started a flurry of local debate in meetings, letters, and in the press. Two predominant factors emerged: the pro-air force base faction led by Mayor Tyrell and the opposing Citizens Committee for the continuance of Champlain College. The first group wanted an Air Force base in Plattsburgh even if it meant the college would have to close. The local committee was in favor of the base, but only if the college could be spared. This stand was strongly supported by then-New York State Assemblyman James A. Fitzpatrick and former state Senator and Judge and current chairman of the State Public Service Commission Benjamin F. Feinberg. The Committee's pamphlet, "Analysis of Three Possible Air Base Sites," caused a delay of the decision by raising safety questions concerning the former Barracks location. These included its proximity to Lake Champlain, its location near a major traffic and railroad route, and its visibility from the air. Concerns arose about the safety of local residents and the base's vulnerability to attack. Unable to overturn the Air Force's decision, however, the Committee next focused on the possible relocation of the college. Consequently, following its final commencement on June 14, 1953, Champlain College was absorbed by Harpur College, which was later renamed SUNY Binghamton.

Background Sources in Special Collections

"The Air Force at Plattsburgh." *Watertown Daily Times*. March 4, 1952. **File 48/9**

Avirett, William G. "1,000 Students Sign Thursday at Plattsburg." *New York Herald Tribune*. September 15, 1946. **File 81/7**

Bates, Edward W. "Dewey Dedicates Champlain, First Emergency College Open." *New York Herald Tribune*. September 24, 1946. **File 81/10**

"Champlain College May be Sought for Madison Barracks." *Watertown Daily Times*. March 6, 1952. **File 46/9**

"Champlain College News" (Per 13/1/1), continued by *The Champlainer* (Per 13/1/2-13/1/8)

"Champlain Now Accepts Women in 'Experiment in Co-Education'." *New York Herald Tribune*. November 3, 1946. **File 82/8**

O'Hara, Tom. "1,0007 Students at New College at Plattsburg; Champlain is One of Three G.I. Universities in N.Y." *New York Herald Tribune*. September 22, 1946. **File 82/5**

Pictorial Magazines of Champlain College. **Pam 142/8**

Program of the Seventh Conference of Vermont and New York State Historians and Folklorists. August 14-16, 1952. **OSC 9/5/1** (Oversize Clipping)

"3 North Villages Start Drive to Get Champlain College." *Watertown Daily Times*. March 6, 1952. **File 46/10**

Walmsley, Janet M.C. "Champlain College vs. the United States Air Force." *Antiquarian* 5 (Fall 1988): 18-25.

Zinser, William K. "Veterans Pleasantly Surprised by Life at Champlain College." *New York Herald Tribune*. December 8, 1946. **OSC 3/10/8** (Oversize Clipping)

77.1 Benjamin F. Feinberg Collection

Box 1, Folders 16-17: Champlain College

Box 2, Folder 1: Champlain College

Box 13, Folder 3: Plattsburgh Military Airport Correspondence, 1940-41

Contents

This collection is housed in one oversized document case and one smaller box. The document case includes invitations received by and correspondences of Champlain College President Charles Ward and President of Women, Alice K. Lewis, as well as faculty announcements, school advertising, school activity flyers, newspaper clippings, a college pennant, college rules, and material concerning the controversy with the U.S. Air Force. Box 2 contains a 1949 Champlain College mug, with the ITK (I Tappa Keg) logo.

Box 1

1/1 Announcements

1/2 Correspondence

1/3 ACUNY Faculty Information Bulletins, #2 (March 1947) - #35 (April 1949)

1/4 Laws, Meetings, Records

1/5 Invitations

1/6 College Catalogs

1/7 Brochures and Flyers

1/8 Commencement, Students

1/9 Newsletters: "Champlain College News," "the spigot"

1/10 Historical Articles

1/11 Miscellaneous

1/12 Posters

1/13 Pennant

Box 2

2/1 1949 Champlain College drinking mug; ITK (I Tappa Keg) logo