

A 100-year-old SU student handbook provides a glimpse back in time to when salt was for throwing, canes were a privilege, and Steele Hall was brand new

Student Life a Century Ago

BY JAY COX

Open the worn, brown leather cover of the century-old *Syracuse University Handbook* and you notice the name C.A. Duvall penciled on the first page. Venture further and you begin to get an idea of what student life was like for Duvall and the rest of the freshman class in 1898-99. They enjoyed traditions like being pelted with salt, played sports on the University oval, strummed mandolins, and occasionally got rowdy at gatherings known as "lits." Rooms were rented for \$3.50 to \$5 a week, and advertisements touted such claims as "Our coal is just as good as E.I. Rice's." The City of Syracuse, known as the "convention city" according to the handbook, was "approached from all directions by great railways." The University had 4 colleges, 6 campus buildings, 110 faculty members, 1,200 students, and a worth of about \$1.8 million. "It never has had an epidemic or fatal accident," the handbook boasts. "The location for healthfulness and beauty of scenery is unsurpassed."

Duvall's hand-jotted notes reveal what any freshman's concerns might be: class assignments, Aristotle, prohibition, writing tips, *A Tale of Two Cities*, groceries, and directions to a sporting goods store. The handbook, published by the University's Christian associations, is one of two from that year now in the SU archives collection (the other was recently donated by Bernice Lazarus Ehrensall '48). "This handbook provides a historical understanding of the rules and regulations back then—what was expected of the students," says University Archivist Ed Galvin. "There are two values to a handbook like this—the information it contains, and its inherent value as an artifact. You don't see leather-bound student handbooks created anymore."

Nor, for that matter, would you see new arrivals advised against such acts as carrying canes before the annual freshman-sophomore football game, starting the college song (a privilege strictly reserved for upperclassmen), or lingering in the classroom after the first bell rings—even if the professor is still talking. The handbook also warns: "Not to conclude that the University can't get along without you. It can."

Archival photos courtesy of Syracuse University Archives



Freshmen were targeted from day one. "There was a strong notion that you learned your place within a hierarchy developed by the students," says School of Education professor Joan Burstyn, an expert on the history of higher education. "There was a power structure set up, and freshmen were at the bottom of the pecking order." An editorial in the *Syracuse University Forum* likened the average freshman to a platypus: "And yet despite his peculiarities, who does not love the freshman for his childish simplicity and ignorance, his proneness to believe everything he hears, and his supreme confidence that if the affairs of the University were managed according to his plan the millennium would arrive about the week after next?"

In September 1898 Chancellor James Roscoe Day, an imposing man and influential Methodist minister, greeted 500 freshmen, the largest entering class in SU history at that time. "We are here as a body of ladies and gentlemen to engage in mighty work. We are here to be earnest, sober, industrious, and faithful, with years of womanhood and manhood before us," Day told the class. The Chancellor also mentioned the songs and customs of college life as carrying "no moral defect," but warned students to conduct themselves properly in town and avoid disturbances and the destruction of property. "You are here, not for fraternities, not for social life and not for athletics, but for college," he said. "The world demands the scholar.... Choose scholarship in preference to everything else in the world but character."

Shortly after Day's address at opening exercises, one of the University's grand traditions took place—the salt rush. In SU's early days, there were all sorts of rushes among the classes—salt, snow, flour, even canes. The salt rush was originally held in the chapel, but its raucous nature ultimately landed it outdoors. Sophomores stood on the hilltop behind Crouse College and hurled salt at freshmen as they charged up the hill. "The sophomores met the freshmen with a tremendous volley of salt, but the youngsters quickly organized and rushed the sophs all over the field," the *Forum* reported. "The freshmen easily had the best of it, for the first time in years, and were correspondingly jubilant." Unfortunately for the freshmen, the jubilation was short-lived. A few weeks later they tied the sophomores, 0-0, in the annual football game between the two classes. Without a win, they were denied the right to carry canes on campus.

Dapper fashion statements aside, the freshmen had plenty to look forward to that year. Higher education, like the country itself, was expanding. The United States had just won the Spanish-American War and was polishing its image as a

world leader; the Progressive Era was under way and optimism was the prevailing attitude as new inventions, enterprises, and opportunities cropped up. "Compared with the years before the 1890s, more middle-class families thought about sending their kids to college," Burstyn says. "Colleges began to get larger, and there was the idea of alumni being loyal to their university and beginning to give money." Sports gained in popularity, new disciplines emerged, and faculty

members started getting involved in research, Burstyn says. "Once you had the notion of the creation of knowledge, there was development in the empirical sciences, and scientific experiments started going on."

Syracuse University's progress mirrored these developments. During the 1898-99 academic year, the University:

- opened the doors of the Esther Baker Steele Hall of Physics on campus, and founded the University Block, which housed the College of Law, downtown;

- introduced numerous new courses in subjects like pedagogy, botany, numis-

matics, and magazine illustration;

- entered talks to extend the city's streetcar service up the Hill to ease the waiting and hiking during brutish weather; and
- launched a three-year, \$2 million endowment campaign to carry the University into the 20th century.

The University acquired all kinds of newfangled machinery for Steele Hall, including a streetcar motor and a precision lathe "with such multiple and delicate adjustments that a watch can be made upon it," according to the *Forum*. By year's end, Day declared that the physics department equipment, which could have fit in a "small cupboard" a few years earlier, was now unmatched in New York State. Experiments in wireless telegraphy were conducted, and there was an active



The salt rush, one of the University's earliest traditions, gave the sophomores a chance to "season" the freshmen with salt as they charged up the hill behind Crouse College.



The Esther Baker Steele Hall of Physics was officially opened in 1898 and was equipped with such machinery as a streetcar motor.

interest in astronomy and other sciences. "No university in the state has better facilities for giving instruction or does better work in every branch than Syracuse," Day said.

The University's athletic programs, which included football, baseball, basketball (all spelled as two words back then), track, and tennis, were also burgeoning. Some alumni attacked the football program for its weak schedule, but the team posted an 8-3 record and was called the best yet in the program's short history. The SU Navy was established for rowing enthusiasts, golf was gathering followers, and fencing was introduced. "The fact that the women have donned their gymnasium suits and enjoy making vicious thrusts at each other as keenly as the men do is an extremely convincing proof that the sport is popular," the *Forum* noted.

Along with freshmen, women met an enormous amount of scrutiny. They rarely attended events without chaperons. And while many viewed their presence as adding a touch of civility to campus life, they were often made scapegoats when men turned rambunctious at social functions. In those days, everyone roomed off-campus, but concern for women's living arrangements probably prompted the University to open Winchell Hall, the first campus dormitory, for women in 1900. In an effort to bring women together, the University's Women's League was created in 1898. According to the handbook, the league's purpose was to "make the women of the different colleges acquainted with each other, to bring the women students into contact with the faculty, and to aid in every way possible the women of the entering class." School of Education doctoral student Denise Deppoliti '71, G'77, who researched the Women's

League as part of her graduate work, says it eventually encompassed everything from sports and living regulations for women to the suffrage and temperance movements. "The league was an umbrella organization for all women's activities," Deppoliti says. "In fact, unless they belonged to the league, they weren't able to participate in activities."

James Roscoe Day, an influential Methodist minister, became the University's fourth Chancellor in 1894 and guided SU for 28 years.



One recreational outlet for women on campus was basketball. This photo of the women's basketball team appeared in the 1899 *Onondagan*.

Women were encouraged to join the local chapter of the Young Women's College Settlement at the Christadora Home in New York City. "Within the past year, substantial contributions of clothing, books, papers, etc., and money have been forwarded to the Home," the handbook says. "Delegates from this chapter visit the Home at different times during the college

year. Thus the chapter is kept informed of the needs of those for whose welfare it is working."

Such service reflected the strong presence of Christian fellowship on the Methodist-endowed campus. Students were expected to attend chapel daily and were encouraged to affiliate themselves with a local church. "Students make a serious mistake in roaming about from church to church and settling nowhere," the handbook warns. "Such attendance is not conducive to the most stable Christian character." The YMCA and YWCA offered Bible study and prayer meetings and supported

"two of the famine orphans of India," according to the handbook. For those considering missionary work, there was the nine-year-old Student Volunteer Band, which was part of a worldwide movement that sent missionaries to South Africa, China, Australia, India, and Japan.

The University was home to numerous social and academic organizations—fraternities and sororities; literary societies (whose lively "lits" were known to be boisterous gatherings) such as the James Russell Lowell Literary Society and the Hawthorne; the Classical, Philosophical, and Science clubs; the Press Club; the Symphony Orchestra; and the Glee, Banjo, and Mandolin clubs.

That October, the University Roosevelt Club marched downtown to the Yates Hotel to madly cheer for Spanish-American War hero and soon-to-be governor Teddy Roosevelt, who was celebrating his 40th birthday. According to the *Forum*, the Rough Rider, slouch hat atop head, stepped to a window and responded: "It wouldn't take much of that kind of noise to make me dead sure there are some among you who play football and there were a lot of football men with me in Cuba. They were splendid soldiers. The kind of spirit they showed tells. It shows manliness and courage. I want to say, too, that I like to see university men, college men, take an interest in politics, and hence I like to see you here."

While good-spirited enthusiasm marked many an event like the Roosevelt visit, one year-end campus activity was not to be missed, especially by the freshmen: Moving Up Day. "It is the time when the three lower classes move up one row of seats in chapel and the seniors return to the freshman row," the *Forum*

reported. "By this movement freshmen cease to be fresh and are considered sophomores." On that Friday morning in spring 1899, the freshmen gathered with "tin horns and devils' fiddles" and paraded to the chapel. After moving up, they stoked a big bonfire in front of the library (now the Tolley Administration Building), played music, and burned the Class of 1903 in effigy. A couple weeks later, the seniors stepped out into the world with parting advice from Chancellor Day. Known as one of the country's leading pulpit orators, Day delivered a baccalaureate sermon that was "one of the most, if not the most, powerful, eloquent, profound and inspiring discourses ever delivered in Syracuse," the *Forum* reported.

"You are coming to a large age, the mightiest men ever have known," Day told the graduates. "Come with large ideas. If you find it larger than your notions do not try to dwarf things to your small views, but widen your horizon by

thought and study and experience and interpret worthily the movements of the Divine Providence—in your nation, for instance, by tremendous events.... The discovery of the practical uses of steam, of lightning, the possibility of the conquest of space and time have made necessary the massing of large capital and called for executive brains not exceeded by the headship of nations. All of this belongs to the age, is of its proportions. It can no more be stayed than can the rising of the tides of the sea or the courses of the stars.

"Educated in this great age you are to go forth in sympathy with its spirit and with a largeness of appreciation worthy of its grand movements. You are to carry to it your training and culture.... You will best vindicate your alma mater and honor your instruction here if you be apt, strong, clear-brained students in the world into which we send you with our blessing."

A practical guide

FOR STUDENTS WITH QUESTIONS

TRIVIA TIME: What nugget of Syracuse University history appears on its own page in both the 1898-99 and the 1998-99 student handbooks?

HINT: 19th-century mascot Bill Orange and 20th-century mascot Otto the Orange could perform a duet of it.

ANSWER: The *Alma Mater*, or the *Song of Syracuse*, as it was first known when penned by Junius W. Stevens in 1893.

While knowing the *Alma Mater* is certainly a necessity, it's a mere snippet of the material packed into the 1998-99 *Syracuse University Student Handbook*. Like its predecessor of a century ago, today's handbook is a valuable aid for newcomers acquainting themselves with campus life. Published by the Office of Student Programs, it provides basic campus information and contacts, including e-mail and web addresses, an alphabetically arranged help guide, and a section on student rights and responsibilities. "It's an excellent resource," says student programs director Charles Merrihew, who serves as the handbook's editor and oversees its production. "I don't suppose students sit up at night reading it, but it can answer specific questions or at least jump-start them in the right direction."

Beginning each fall, Merrihew works with a team of students on updating and revising the handbook, which is sent to press the following summer. Additions to

this year's handbook include the University's new policies on computing and electronic communication, and alcohol and other drugs. For the third year, the handbook is posted on the web (<http://students.syr.edu/handbook/>). Each year, Merrihew and the students weave a different theme throughout the publication, such as fun facts or questions and answers about SU. This year's theme is architectural diversity.

Cover designers Cheryl Hock '98 and Kate Berten '99 combed the campus, photographing pieces of architecture and other items to represent letters of the alphabet. Each letter—with an accompanying historical nugget or fact connecting it to the University—was used on the cover and as a section head in the A-Z help guide. The guide traverses territory from art galleries and places to shop to parking and internships. "We looked for letters wherever we could and wanted to rep-

resent the diversity of the schools and colleges," Berten says. "There were a few tough ones and it took longer than we anticipated, but it was fun."

They found the "C," for example, in a sample of calcite in the lobby of the Heroy Geology Laboratory, and the "D" came from a detail of a sculpture in the College of Nursing. Berten, a communications design major in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, remembers walking up the hill from the Schine Student Center and looking at the Hall of Languages. "The 'I' was right there on the east side of the building," she says. "Now I look at campus as a series of letters."

Kelly Brennan '99, an advertising major in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, worked as an editor on the project. She says it was a good learning experience that increased her knowledge of campus. "Before, I would occasionally look at the handbook to try to find something," she says. "After working on it, I know where to tell people to go. If you use it, you'll know who to contact, and there are great ideas for things to do if you're not from around here." —Jay Cox

