

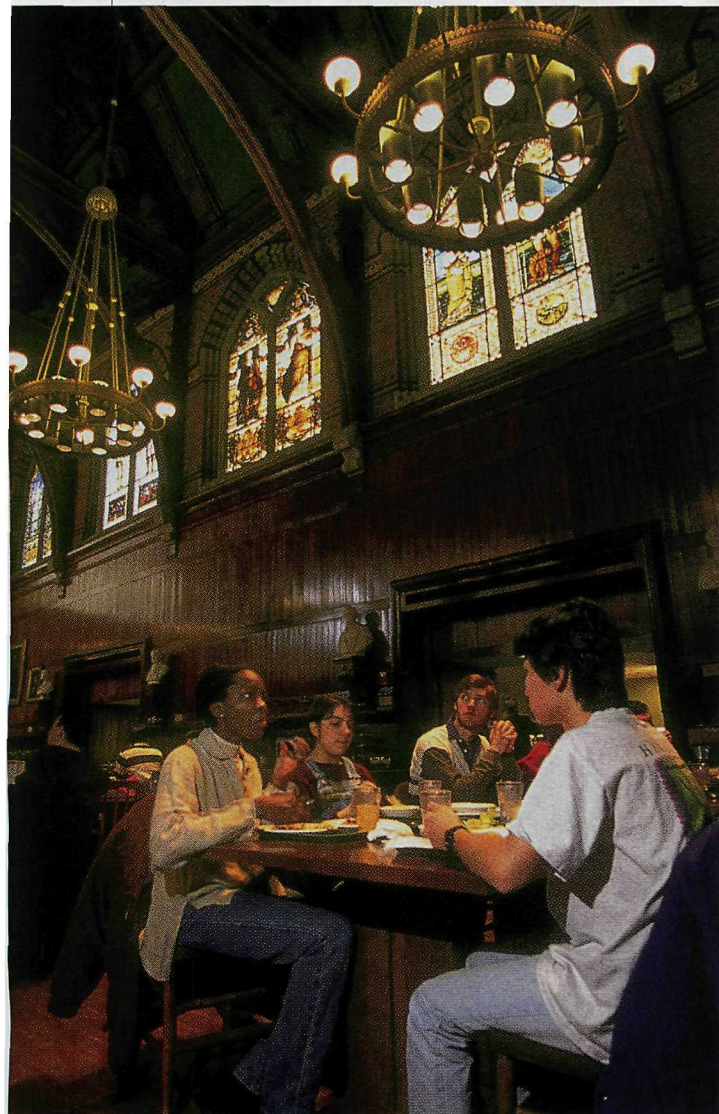
JOHN HARVARD'S JOURNAL

Changing Places, Changing Times

FROM 1874 UNTIL 1925, HARVARD undergraduates took meals in the vastness of Memorial Hall's Alumni Hall. When they departed, the place was empty most of the time; students registered, gave blood, and took examinations there, and alumni drank in the atmosphere at occasional fancy dinners. Now the grand room, splendidly refurbished and rechristened Annenberg Hall, again resounds with undergraduate imbibition and mastication. Freshmen took possession of the place in late January. Their former commons, the Harvard Union, is in the hands of the remodelers (see page 74).

Dean of the College Harry Lewis and dean of freshmen Elizabeth Studley Nathans cordially invited the class of '99 to an official inaugural dinner, "Celebrating a Renaissance," in Annenberg Hall on February 8. A handsome keepsake for the occasion, printed by the University publisher, listed the names of all 1,600 members of the class, presented a history of Memorial Hall, and gave the menu for dinner. The cafeteria-style feasting began with local favorites harvest barley soup or clam chowder; progressed

**Makeover: from Alumni Hall to
Annenberg Hall . . .**



... where first-years lunched on the first full day of food-service operations, January 29. The refurbished hall's new name honors the late Roger Annenberg '62.

to Chinese noodle salad; peaked with stuffed breast of chicken or prime rib or salmon filet with pineapple cilantro salsa, or a mixed grill of vegetables, pasta, and seitan, each with healthful "accompaniments"; and subsided with assorted mini pastries. Because the entire class cannot fit into the room at once, big though it be, seating ran from 5 to 7:30 P.M.

The keepsake distributed at the dinner also reproduced a Memorial Hall menu from the early 1900s. That offered a choice of four soups (including green turtle); four kinds of fish (plus oysters or clams); 12 broiled items (among them mutton chops, stewed kidneys in wine sauce, tripe, sweet-

bread, and pigs' feet); game in abundance (with prairie chicken, reed birds, canvas-back duck, quail, partridge, or Lake Erie teal). Also cold dishes: beef tongues and lamb tongues. Vegetables aplenty. And for dessert, fruit in quantity, pies in variety, lemon ice cream, and assorted nuts.

Of course, waiters served these delicacies and cleaned up afterwards.

Concerning the Union, Disunion

THE FRESHMEN HAVE had their last supper in the Harvard Union. On January 29 the Great Hall, where students dined for decades, was empty. But not for long. Construction work began in early February on a \$23-million makeover of the Union, which will become the core of a new humanities complex.

A group of alumni and others raised a last-minute hue and cry about the planned changes to the Great Hall, calling it an architectural treasure that ought to be preserved intact. "*Archicide* may not be a word," says H.A. Crosby Forbes '50, Ph.D. '61, secretary of the Committee

to Save the Great Hall of the Freshman Union, "but that's what this remodeling will be, an act comparable to homicide. It will destroy that room."

The plan is to divide the hall into two large parlors. A prominent stone staircase within the hall between the parlors will connect all five floors of the building. The barrel-vaulted ceiling will go (except for a small piece that will be removed and later set into a wall on an upper floor). In part of the recovered space, architects have positioned a partial floor of offices, with two full floors of offices above. In some places, the present height of the hall will be retained. Much of the room's original paneling and

the two lavishly scaled fireplaces will be retained. So will one of the antler chandeliers, said to be the gift of President Theodore Roosevelt, A.B. 1880, LL.D. '02. So will the John Singer Sargent portrait of Major Henry Lee Higginson, A.M. (hon.) 1882, who gave Harvard \$150,000 at the turn of the century to build the Union.

"The Union project will result in a remarkably beautiful interior that will work very well," says Philip Parsons, member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for physical planning. "The architects, Goody, Clancy & Associates, have created the right kind of relationships between office spaces—which must be quiet, private, and well lit—and spaces in which people may mingle. The building will be not just functional, but will bring much aesthetic pleasure to its users."

The fuss erupted strenuously in January. "We want to ask, what responsibility does Harvard have for its historically important buildings to the community and the nation," said Forbes, "and will it share information with and receive input from an oversight group?" He was nervous about getting answers to these questions because of the abrupt demolition of Carey Cage on the day after Thanksgiving ("Brevia," January-February, page 69). "If Harvard starts ripping up the Great Hall ahead of schedule to avoid conversation," said Forbes, "there's going to be hell to pay."

President Neil L. Rudenstine was out of the country for two weeks in January, but he and Jeremy Knowles, dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, met with five members of the alumni committee on February 5. "We agreed to disagree," said Forbes. Said Rudenstine, "We understand and share the concerns about preservation, and we've tried to take them carefully into account in this project as well as in others. But a balance needs to be struck between past and future, and the project as planned offers a good solution to the challenge of reconciling different aims. It's sensitive to the historic fabric of the building, and it will make productive new use of the space for important academic purposes." Rudenstine added that Harvard "would remain open to a wide range of views whenever similar projects are planned in the future."

The humanities-center project has been in the planning stage for eight years. As re-



A last meal at the Union. The barrel-vaulted ceiling is a goner.

ported in the January-February 1995 issue of this magazine ("In Union, Strength for Humanities," page 65), a complex of buildings just to the east of the Yard, including the Union, Burr Hall, and Warren House, will shelter a dozen departments and programs now scattered throughout the campus. Boylston Hall, by Widener Library, will be remodeled when work on the Union complex is completed and will house five humanities departments. Then, for the first time, every professor in the humanities will have an office.

After extensive interviews with faculty members during the planning process, says Parsons, no appropriate new use could be imagined for the Great Hall. It is a 90-foot room with carved paneling and a 30-foot-high barrel-vaulted plaster ceiling adorned with rosettes and "H"s intertwined with garlands (a ceiling at which generations of freshmen, armed with knives as catapults,

students not flush enough to join a Gold Coast club. When the building, designed by McKim, Mead and White, opened in 1902, students dined in rooms adjacent to the Great Hall, which at that time was indeed called the living room. (It became a dining room for freshmen in 1930.) What Henry James called a "great, grave, noble hall" occupies, Parsons estimates, between 20 and 25 percent of the Union's cubic volume. If it were left unaltered, as a living room today, it would require an awful lot of living to justify its size. More likely, Parsons says, it would be "a dark, heavy space that people wouldn't want to be in."



At the Union, reflections in Le Baron Russell Briggs. He was dean of the College when the Union opened. He went on to serve simultaneously and for more than 20 years as dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Boylston professor of rhetoric and oratory, and president of Radcliffe.

launched butter pats; the trick was to position the pats on edge; if the pats were shot flat, wind resistance slowed them, and they failed to reach their mark). It made a magnificent dining hall. As a classroom it would offer bad acoustics and would be often empty, a dead space at the heart of what is hoped will be a vibrant academic enterprise.

How would it be as a baronial living room, where people could read the newspaper and converse in hushed tones? Major Higginson wanted to provide a congenial gathering place for

students not flush enough to join a Gold Coast club. When the building, designed by McKim, Mead and White, opened in 1902, students dined in rooms adjacent to the Great Hall, which at that time was indeed called the living room. (It became a dining room for freshmen in 1930.) What Henry James called a "great, grave, noble hall" occupies, Parsons estimates, between 20 and 25 percent of the Union's cubic volume. If it were left unaltered, as a living room today, it would require an awful lot of living to justify its size. More likely, Parsons says, it would be "a dark, heavy space that people wouldn't want to be in."

The *Harvard Crimson*, in an editorial, called alumni objection to the plan "hyperbolic and misguided....The issue at hand is simply a misunderstanding between those who value the past and those who value the future." Architectural historian Leland Roth, on the other hand, told

the *Boston Globe* that he supposed Harvard's adaptive reuse plan for the Union "is well-intentioned, but it's very much like what the Goths and the Vandals did to Rome."

Tweed Roosevelt '64, chair of the committee to save the hall, sent a letter to some hundred alumni he thought likely to regret the proposed "demolition," urging them to protest in writing to President Rudenstine. Few alumni are aware of the planned "irreversible changes that will destroy the Great Hall," Roosevelt wrote. "Concerned friends of Harvard must insist that key elements of the University's history and traditions—those things that make Harvard unique—shall not be swept away."

After this magazine published, more than a year ago, a floor plan and artist's rendering showing how the hall would look after remodeling, three letters to the editor strenuously objecting to the scheme appeared in these pages, in the March-April 1995 and July-August 1995 issues. (In his letter, architectural historian Daniel D. Reiff '63, Ph.D. '70, referred to "planned barbarism.") Renovation architects John Clancy and Joan Goody, M.Arch. '60, writing with Faculty Planning Committee chair Christoph Wolff, defended the plan in a letter, commenting, "Few buildings—even our greatest architectural icons—remain untouched from generation to generation. The potential of remaining under-used is the most serious threat to any building's integrity."

"The committee that I and 60 others are now on will not disappear," says Forbes. "We will be an oversight group, independent of the University, concerned with Harvard's architecture. We will make a formidable effort to keep the alumni awake. Our slogan will be, 'Never Again.'"

Fiscal Affairs

LIKE THAT OTHER big bureaucracy, in Washington, D.C., Harvard has been struggling to balance its budget. According to the most recent *Financial Report to the Board of Overseers of Harvard College*, prepared by Allen J. Proctor, vice president for finance, and D. Ronald Daniel, treasurer, the Massachusetts crowd is making more headway. In the fiscal year ended June 30, 1995, the University's income rose a robust 6.5 percent (nearly \$90 million) and expenses 5.7 percent (less than \$80 million). So the