

The World War II Years: UAlbany's Greatest Generation

By Martha Gershun



The attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into World War II stunned students at the New York State College for Teachers and changed their lives forever.

The Class of 1944 in the fall of 1940. By 1943, there were few men at the New York State College for Teachers.

Sarah Beard, B.S.'42, was reading the Sunday newspaper in her room at Pierce Hall when she heard about the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor Dec. 7, 1941. Arthur Collins, B.A.'48, was listening to his radio in the new men's dormitory, Sayles Hall. Helen Brucker Martin, B.A.'44, was at her sorority house. Her classmate Eunice Whittlesey was in the family car on her way back to campus.

"I remember it so well. Everybody was shocked," recalls Beard, then a senior majoring in commercial education. She is now 83 and living in retirement in Falls Church, Va.

The attack on Pearl Harbor and America's entry into World War II were life-changing experiences for the 1,250 students at the New York State College for

Teachers, UAlbany's predecessor institution. The college itself also changed forever.

Collins, now 80, was drafted immediately after he turned 18, in the spring of his sophomore year. Bernard Arbit, B.A.'42, tried to enlist immediately after Pearl Harbor, but was told to return to campus and wait. He was drafted in February of 1942. Patricia Latimer Goddu, B.A.'44, who was president of the Student Association as a senior, joined the Women's Army Air Corps (WACs) after her June graduation. By the Fourth of July, she said, she was on a ship heading to London, where she worked as a clerk. She was later sent to Paris, where she met her husband. She mustered out of the service three years later as a staff sergeant. "It was a wonderful adventure," recalls Goddu, who now lives in Westminster, Colo.

*Photos courtesy of M.E. Grenander
Department of Special Collections and
Archives, University Libraries*



“It wasn’t the typical college atmosphere anymore,” concurs Eunice Whittlesey, of Scotia, N.Y. “It was kind of a jolt to find ourselves pretty much alone (with no men).”

Above: School organizations, such as Myskania in 1944-45, were dominated by women.
Left: Patricia Latimer Goddu, B.A. '44, joined the Women's Army Air Corps after her June graduation.

Before Pearl Harbor, students at the College for Teachers were aware of the war, but didn't view it as affecting their lives much. *The State College News* published articles about events in Europe, and about alumni who had volunteered to fight. In September 1941, the college learned of its first war casualty, Alfred Trehanon, Class of '38, who was killed when his parachute failed to open. In all, an estimated 1,700 alumni and students served in World War II. Nineteen gave their lives, according to University archives.

The draft had begun in the fall of 1940, and a poll taken in October of that year found that two-thirds of the student body supported it. Yet the great majority of students opposed America's entry into the "European War."



Ambulance donated by students

After Pearl Harbor, everything changed: the mood on campus, the student body, student activities, even the food the students ate, since meat and other staples were rationed.

"I think I was hungry for four years, there was such a scarcity of food due to rationing," recalls Priscilla Ewing, B.S.'46, with a chuckle. "We only had meat once a week, on Sunday." Ewing, a retired business education teacher in Scarborough in Westchester County, worked three part-time jobs to make ends meet. While things sometimes seemed bleak, riding the trolley was a wonderful alternative to cars and gas rationing, she said. "We'd hop on the trolley at Madison and go all over

"[College for Teachers President John] Sayles Urges Total Cooperation with Roosevelt for Defense." Within a short time a practice blackout had been conducted, and classes were being offered in first aid, air raid precautions, home nursing and signaling. The college hosted a training camp for draftees, and students substituted blood and clothing drives for the usual fraternity and sorority activities. A 1944 campaign bought an ambulance for the war effort.

The blackouts and curfew were strict. "We had to be in by 10. If we were late, we could be campused for a month," recalls Joy Ford, B.S.'47, of Glenmont, N.Y.



Arthur Collins

“Many of the old traditions of campus life seemed silly, and there was a kind of friction between the veterans and the regular students. We came back much more disciplined, and with a new slant on science, including atomic energy.”

the city for five cents.”

Marianne Adams, B.A.'45, M.A.'46, was a 17-year-old freshman living at home and commuting to classes at the college when America entered the war. By the middle of her sophomore year, she said, almost all the men had been drafted or had enlisted. "It turned into a women's college, in essence," said Adams, whose class is celebrating its 60th reunion this spring. "I think we probably studied a lot more — there were no distractions." Now 81, Adams is a retired public school administrator in San Diego, Calif.

The College for Teachers responded to the war effort in a number of ways. As the *State College News* reported Dec. 12, 1941, just a few days after Pearl Harbor,

By 1943, there were few men at the College for Teachers. Faculty member Louis Jones wrote a series of letters in the *State College News* describing life on campus. In October 1943 he reported that there were only "65 men left on campus, mostly freshmen under 18."

"This was a women's college" during those years, says Barbara "B. J." Schoonmaker Chase, B.A.'48, a retired Girl Scout Council executive from Fishkill, N.Y. "It wasn't the typical college atmosphere anymore," concurs Eunice Whittlesey, of Scotia, N.Y. "It was kind of a jolt to find ourselves pretty much alone (with no men)." (In 2001, Whittlesey and Helen Martin, who have been friends since their days at the College for Teachers, spearheaded the Veterans Project. It lists the names of more than 3,000 alumni, stu-

The Greatest Generation Endowment

In 2003, at its 55th reunion, members of the Class of 1948 were inspired to create a special fund to celebrate their experiences at the New York State College for Teachers, as UAlbany was then known. "It was a way to memorialize the wonderful people we lived and studied with from 1940 to 1949," says B.J. Schoonmaker Chase, B.A.'48. The inspiration for the fund came from her classmate, Helen Kisiel Schick of West Islip, N.Y., who made a substantial gift to the University Libraries in memory of her husband, Walter Schick, also Class of '48.

Others in the Class of '48 also wanted to honor Walt.

And so the "Greatest Generation Fund for the University Libraries: An Endowment to Preserve and Enhance the University Libraries' Arts and Sciences Collection" was created. It now stands at \$78,000, thanks to alumni contributions of cash, planned gifts such as annuities and bequests, stocks and real estate. The endowment will be used to purchase books and materials (paper and electronic publications) in arts and sciences collections. The goal is to raise \$100,000 by the end of 2005.

For information, please call Roberta Armstrong at 518-442-3540, or e-mail her at rmstrong@uamail.albany.edu.

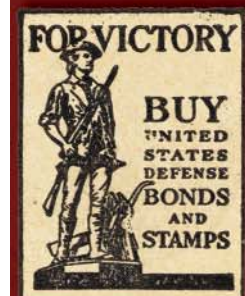


Image from *State College News* of Oct. 13, 1944 featuring Defense Bonds and stamps. (Newspaper courtesy of Marianne Adams, B.A.'45, M.A.'46)

The Campaign for the Downtown Campus: Preserving “This Beautiful Academic Environment”

When Judy Koblitz Madnick, B.S.'65, M.S.'66, first set foot on the former New York State College for Teachers campus, she probably didn't realize she would spend the next 11 years there. She attended the Milne School, the University-run high school where undergraduates did their student teaching, and therefore first saw the campus when she was in the seventh grade. “I always felt very comfortable there. I particularly enjoyed the old ‘comfortable’ buildings and the closeness students and faculty felt on the relatively small campus,” Madnick recalls.

In the years since she earned her undergraduate and graduate degrees there, what is now the University at Albany's downtown campus has changed very little. But with time and technology marching on, the property — whose buildings date from the early to mid-1900s — needs some work. So, through the Campaign for the Downtown Campus, Madnick and other alumni have volunteered to help raise \$10 million by fall of 2008 for renovations to Hawley, Husted, Page, Draper, Milne and Richardson halls.

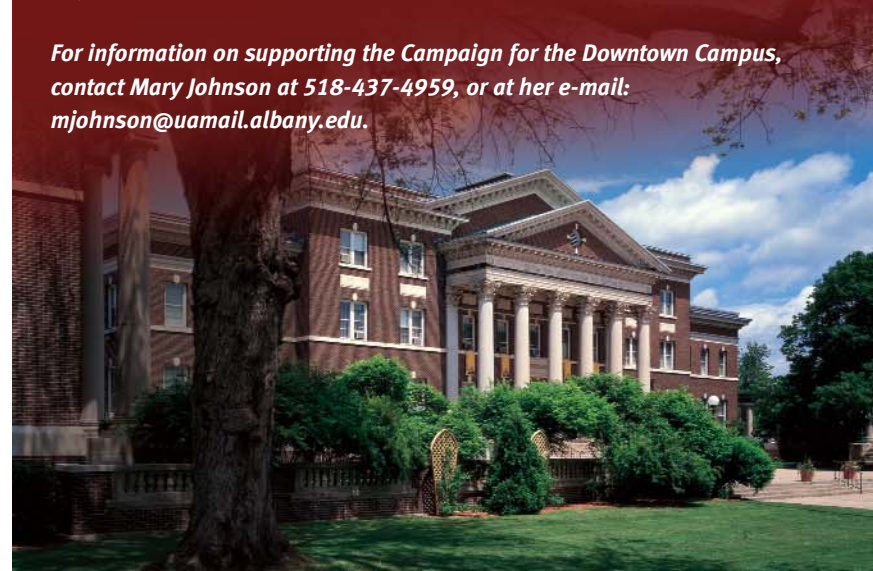
New York State has pledged \$15 million toward the effort, which will run the gamut from detecting and repairing leaky roofs to improving heating and air conditioning systems, handicapped access and security. The University also plans technology upgrades for classrooms and offices, along with space for student lounges.

At Page Hall, a new audiovisual system is being installed; lighting, seating capacity and structural soundness will also be enhanced. A complete rehabilitation will transform Husted Hall into a state-of-the-art classroom facility. With no major exterior changes planned, the campus's historic character will be preserved.

By January 31, 2005, the downtown campus campaign had realized \$105,265 toward its goal. A number of alumni have joined the effort; in fact, some classes have designated their UAlbany Fund gifts to the campaign.

Madnick, whose Class of 1965 is donating its Reunion Project funds to the campaign, is proud to be part of the effort. “The downtown campus continues to provide excellent educational opportunities and is, at the same time, rich with history,” says the Albany resident. “It would be a shame not to preserve this beautiful academic environment.”

For information on supporting the Campaign for the Downtown Campus, contact Mary Johnson at 518-437-4959, or at her e-mail: mjohnson@uamail.albany.edu.



dents and faculty who have served in the military since UAlbany's founding in 1844.)

Many of the women who remained on campus stepped up to new responsibilities. Organizations such as the College Association and Myskania were dominated by women, who experienced a solidarity that sustained them even after they graduated, got married, and pursued their teaching careers. “We were the girls who became women together during the war,” remembers Chase.

After the war, the G.I. Bill enabled veterans to return to college. By 1946 there was an acute housing shortage at the College for Teachers, which embarked on a major building program. The returning flood of veterans changed campus life in other ways, too. The veterans “were more mature, sophisticated, worldly,” says Chase. “They took over the campus when they returned.”

Generally, the returning vets wanted to concentrate on their studies, and didn't seem to want to dwell on their war experiences.

“Many of the old traditions of campus life seemed silly, and there was a kind of friction between the veterans and the regular students. We came back much more disciplined, and with a new slant on science, including atomic energy,” remembers Collins, who retired from the UAlbany English faculty in 1985. He remains a member of the Alumni Association Board.

According to Joy Ford, the vets were not interested in talking about their experiences. “I think they wanted to forget about the war,” she says. ■

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