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 College, just south of Geneva, N.Y. on Seneca Lake. 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**

“Champlain College News” (Per 13/1/1), continued by *The Champlainer* (Per 13/1/3-13/1/9)


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


**77.1 Benjamin F. Feinberg Collection**

Champlain College, Series A, Box 4 and Series E, Box 1, Item 18

Plattsburgh Military Airport Correspondence, 1940-41, Series A, Box 16, Item 20

Photographs, Series G, Photographs 247-253
Container List

This collection is housed in three Hollinger boxes.

Box 1
1/1
- ACUNY Bylaws
- Champlain College Administration

1/2
Academic Council Meetings and Memorandums

1/3
ACUNY Faculty Information Bulletins, #1 (September 1946) - #35 (April 1949)

1/4
- ACUNY Establishment
- Evaluation Reports
- Champlain College/State University

1/5
Invitations

1/6
Correspondence

1/7
College Events

1/8
ITK Materials (I Tappa Keg)

1/9
Sigma Omicron Sigma Fraternity

1/10
- “The Champlain Review” newsletter
- “SAM” by Peanuts (cartoons)

1/11
- Commencement
- Student Information

1/12
Champlain College Pictorial Magazines and Promotional Materials

1/13
College Closings
- Mohawk
- Sampson
- Champlain

1/14
Miscellaneous

1/15
CCAA—Champlain College Alumni Association
- “Champlain Alumnus” newsletter
- Reunions
1/16 Newspaper and Periodical Articles

1/17 Champlain College Pennant

1/18 Posters

**Box 2**

2/1 College Catalogs

**Box 3**

3/1 1949 Champlain College drinking mug; ITK (I Tappa Keg) logo