

# Taft

B U L L E T I N

from  
**Goodhue**  
to **Gund:**  
BUILDING FOR THE SECOND CENTURY







# Serving up space at the heart of the school

A comprehensive renovation of the entire west wing of HDT, the school's most historic building, addresses a score of school needs, from handicap accessibility to LEED certification and, of course, more room for the community to come together at mealtimes.

*By Julie Reiff*

## west dining hall

Keeping the dining hall at the heart of the campus presents a few challenges, but to move it would have changed the whole culture of the school. The renovations actually extend Main Hall all the way to Mac House circle, better connecting the west side of campus to the original buildings. GUND PARTNERSHIP

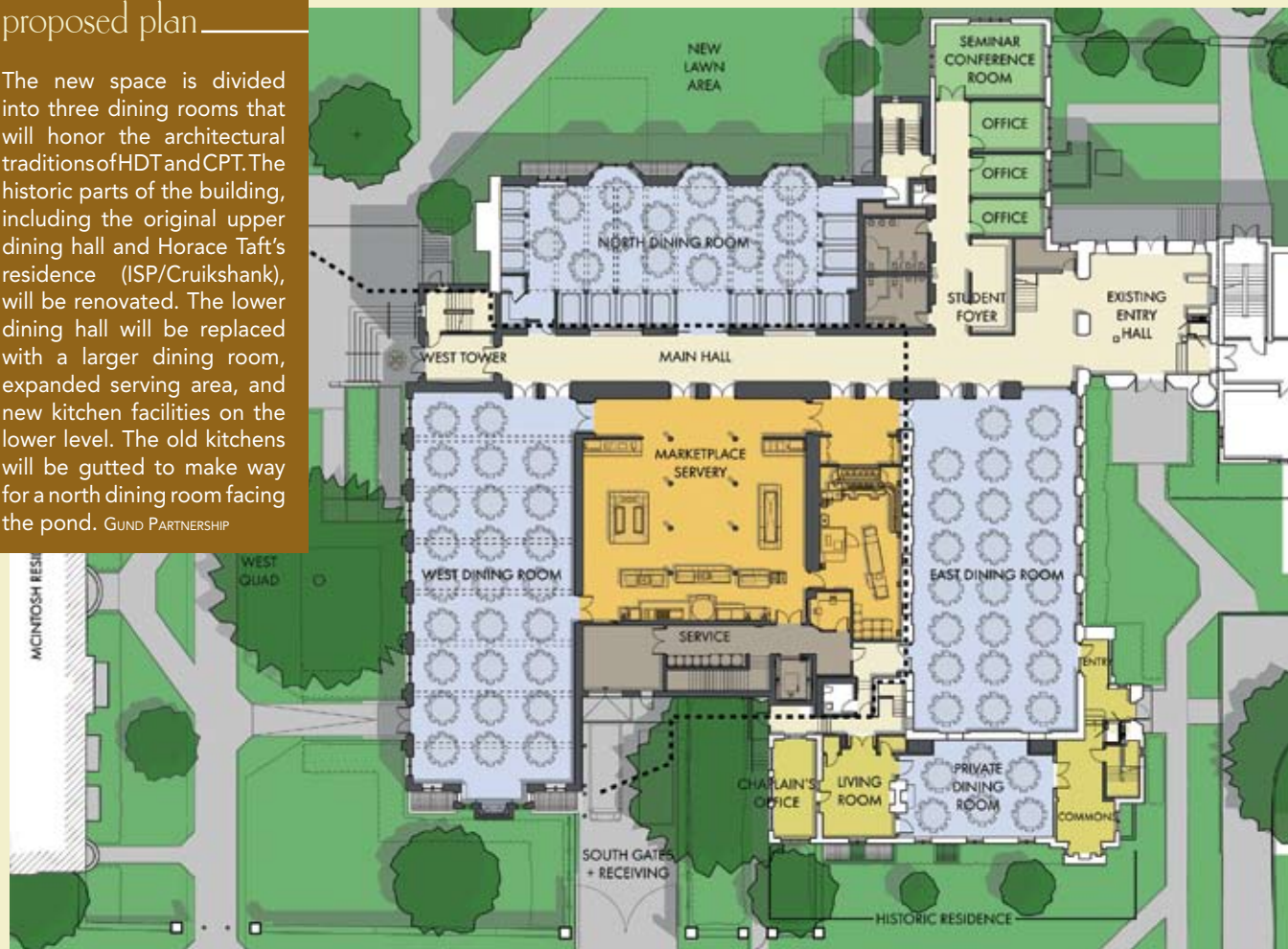
Whether you donned a white jacket at 7 in the morning to wait tables at breakfast with Paul Cruikshank, ate lunch directly from segmented trays in the '80s, spent weeks decorating the space for the winter formal in the '90s, or remember the first night you were assigned to the headmaster's table for sit-down dinner, chances are you spent a fair amount of your Taft career in the dining hall. And, although the ways the school community uses the space have changed over the years, the dining hall itself is much the same as it was in 1959, when the lower dining hall was added. In fact, the upper dining hall has changed little since it first opened in 1914.

Few places are more central to any family or community than where we eat. For generations, Taft students wound their way along the serpentine corridor from Bingham to the dining hall for sit-down dinner each night. Although the tradition of a seated meal still exists, younger alumni may have other memories of the dining hall—of dancing to Toots and the Maytals on a Saturday night, taking a French final or coming together with their team at the end of the season for the sports banquet.

So when it became clear that the dining hall and kitchen no longer met the needs of the modern school, the trustees began an intensive, collaborative dialogue, probably some time in the late '70s, and out of it, a vision for a new space emerged—but they were also steadfast. The dining hall must remain at the heart of the school.

## proposed plan

The new space is divided into three dining rooms that will honor the architectural traditions of HDT and CPT. The historic parts of the building, including the original upper dining hall and Horace Taft's residence (ISP/Cruikshank), will be renovated. The lower dining hall will be replaced with a larger dining room, expanded serving area, and new kitchen facilities on the lower level. The old kitchens will be gutted to make way for a north dining room facing the pond. GUND PARTNERSHIP



When Horace Taft started his school, he rented a house in Pelham Manor, New York. When he moved to Watertown three years later, he bought a Civil War-era hotel that better fit the needs of his growing school. But still he dreamed of building a new campus, and when it came time to assemble bricks and mortar, he called on renowned architect Bertram Goodhue.

In 1910, Goodhue summarized his recent work in a letter, saying, "...church architect I am and must remain, for practically all my work is made up of churches, or is at least ecclesiastical in character. There are two pleasant exceptions, however, to this rule, West Point...and the school for Horace Taft, esq., which is designed and will be accomplished in two or three years."

The "new school building," what we know today as Horace Dutton Taft Hall or HDT, would house boys' rooms upstairs, and on the main levels, a library, classrooms, laboratories, faculty offices, an assembly room, and a dining hall—the same dining hall Taft students gather in today.

"Goodhue believed that 'beyond all architecture, there must be an ideal.' In that sense, he and all teachers are alike," says Headmaster Willy MacMullen '78. "What he built and what we will build are all about the seeking of the ideal, the oldest and most romantic of yearnings. Teachers and archi-

ects are romantics both, their work an expression of the faith that in their hands their materials can endure forever. With HDT, he helped embody the culture of this place.

"This is not just a renovation of the dining hall," MacMullen explains. "This is a historic and comprehensive transformation of the entire west end of the HDT building that meets many critical school needs: new dining facility which will be able to seat the entire school at a sit-down dinner in a stunning space, a new servery which addresses modern eating habits, several new offices and classrooms, the relocation of the loading dock and a safe pedestrian-only quad in front of Mac House, complete ADA compliance including bathrooms and entrances, renovation of the old headmaster's quarters, the creation of a LEED certified environmentally sound building, and a refurbishing of the dining hall lobby. But nothing was more important to the board and the school than preserving the centrality of the dining experience.

"While a stand-alone building might have been easier, there was unanimity in the belief that much of what defines the Taft experience is the location of the dining hall, on the axis of the Main Hall, central on the campus. If our school is a village, with Bingham as our town hall, the Main Hall our

## the wish list

- ◆ Increased space for dining in order to seat the entire community
- ◆ A space that is flexible enough for buffet meals, formal sit-down dinners, banquets, special events, class dinners and all-school celebrations
- ◆ An expanded, modernized and more attractive marketplace-style serving area that allows for contemporary dietary habits and improved traffic flow
- ◆ A more efficient, functional and attractive kitchen
- ◆ An improved dining experience—with smaller, round tables, better lighting and increased views
- ◆ Relocated loading dock (which in its current location is noisy, unsightly and dangerous), thereby creating a pedestrian courtyard in front of McIntosh House
- ◆ ADA compliant bathrooms at the west end of HDT and bringing the building into life safety and fire code compliance
- ◆ A modern recycling facility and environmentally sensitive, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified building
- ◆ Historic renovation of the adjacent first floor of Mr. Taft's quarters

Nothing was more important to the school than preserving the centrality of the dining experience.

## by the numbers

**135**=size of the school in 1912 when Horace Taft broke ground on his "new building," which included the current upper dining hall: 123 students and 12 faculty

**391**=school in 1959 when the Armstrong (lower) Dining Hall was added: 348 students and 43 teachers

**558**=school in the fall of 1971, with the addition of 82 girls: to 498 students and 60 faculty

**694**=school in 2008: 577 students and 117 faculty

main street, and the dining hall our village commons or public house, then we have to break bread here, in the heart of it all. This mandate, more vital than all others, says essentially all you need to know about the culture of Taft."

The board of trustees met with a number of architects, but in the end selected the Gund Partnership, who created the Ivy Kwok Wu Science and Mathematics Center (1997) and the Odden Arena (2001).

"This plan by Gund finally conquered all the challenges," says board member Hank Brauer '74, who heads the Campus Planning Committee. "We needed to meet the needs of various constituencies, and be respectful of the historic presence, while still providing a modern eatery."

The new plan identifies the pond as the center of the school today, removes delivery trucks from McIntosh House Circle and creates a new pedestrian-friendly quad. It also continues the flow of Main Hall all the way through the building and better connects HDT to the west side of the campus.

"No one really wanted a stand-alone dining hall; it's not how this campus works," adds Brauer. "Taft is really unique that way. This is the only place where the community gathers three times every day, which allows you to see a lot of people,



Horace Dutton Taft Hall, designed by renowned architect Bertram Goodhue, under construction in 1912–13, proved to be a seminal space, and every building on campus since has carried on an architectural dialogue with it. Note the kitchen wing on the right and the view from Headmaster's Circle, inset. LESLIE D. MANNING ARCHIVES

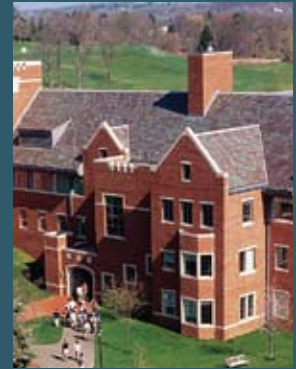
and that's vital to the school's culture. Gund has listened well. They've always been excited about Taft. We made sure they sat in the Harley Roberts Room and got a sense of the place. There has been an incredible amount of collaboration—food service, tech issues and different specialties to deal with.”

“One of our objectives, the key thing really, was to accommodate the number of people the school now needs to and still feel comfortable,” says John Prokos, a principal with Gund Partnership. “We knew we had to do something to take advantage of the view and also improve the exterior of the rear of the building. We use the continuation of Main Hall to unite the three dining spaces, but each will feel unique.

“Few prep schools around the country have such a beautiful campus,” Prokos adds. “The dining hall didn't live up to it, nor was it really functional anymore. There is a historic route across campus from Bingham to the dining hall; these are some spectacular spaces. So we needed to honor that tradition, that excellence and the people who came before.

“New, larger windows in the East [upper] Dining Room will let in more light,” he explains. “The new marketplace-style servery is bigger by fivefold; it will be attractive and more efficient. The West Dining Hall will have a vaulted ceiling; the North Dining Hall will have booths. Students can have breakfast in one, lunch in another and dinner in the third, if they like.”

“If our school is a village, with Bingham as our town hall, the Main Hall our main street, and the dining hall our village commons or public house, then we have to break bread here, in the heart of it all.”



## Gund partnership

Architect Graham Gund's work is already part of the campus vocabulary, with the design of Lady Ivy Kwok Wu Science and Mathematics Center (1997) and the Odden Arena (2001). Among his other notable designs are the Folger Shakespeare Library's Lansburg Theater in Washington, D.C., historic redevelopment of Bullfinch Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as well as work on many college campuses, including Kenyon and Harvard.

## a movable feast

Renovating and expanding the school's dining facilities in the same location requires some complicated timing and shuffling. Here's a look at how the project will unfold.

### phase 1

Summer 2008  
through spring 2009

- ◆ Renovation of Jigger Shop and student union to temporary dining hall
- ◆ Demolition of lower dining room and loading dock
- ◆ Construction of new kitchen and loading dock
- ◆ Construction of new West Dining Hall and new “marketplace-style” serving area (students will dine in upper dining hall and expanded Jigger Shop)

### phase 2

Summer 2009

- ◆ Renovation of upper or East Dining Hall (adds larger windows on east wall and removes outside hallway)
- ◆ Construction new courtyard between West Dining Hall and Mac House

### phase 3

Summer and fall 2009

- ◆ Renovation of former kitchen area into North Dining Hall (includes three bay windows facing the pond and booths along three walls for more intimate dining)



“How many discussions take place around the breakfast or dinner table?” asks Brauer. “Think about all the good things that happen there. The kitchen is the central point in any home, an important space and that’s true at Taft as well. Renovating this space well will give us the biggest bang for the buck, and we shouldn’t be afraid of it.”

“We’re working hard to recall the historic parts of the campus and its original gothic architecture,” Prokos adds. Through stained glass in the windows that line the hall, or in the plastered beams or light fixtures that are reminiscent of the original library or the old study hall, the new and newly renovated will communicate with what is already there in other parts of the building. This was a chance for us to enhance an already beautiful campus.”

As the construction of Horace Dutton Taft Hall (and the upper dining hall) neared completion in 1913, the *Taft Annual* wrote, “Amidst all the joy and excitement of moving into the

new surroundings, the closing of the second era in the history [the years in the Warren House] comes not without a certain touch of sadness. The two buildings, under whose roofs the present reputation of the school was formed, will always be a strong proof of the fact that personality, above all else, makes a school. It only remains to be seen what the future will bring with its additional asset of perfect equipment, added to the school spirit.”

“This moment feels to me so like the one Horace Taft faced almost a century ago,” MacMullen says, “when he took a deep breath and hired one the nation’s greatest architects to create for him a school. Constructing the ‘HDT’ building set the course for the school; it was a bold and visionary act, and it ensured that the school would thrive in the future. And today we find ourselves in a similar moment—and it is incredibly exciting to think of how we are building once again for the next century.” 🏰

The new north dining hall, with bay-window views of the pond, replaces the former kitchen area, adding much needed dining space and reorienting the focus away from the road. Note the new tower on the right that marks the new entrance to the Main Hall.

GUND PARTNERSHIP

