

--- About the meeting of May 15th, the Architecture and Rationale for Expansion, which several faculty members and about a dozen students attended. Mr. Pearson noted that it has always been the faculty that has perpetuated the Bennington 'idea' in the course of development; and that's reasonable. But during the discussion with the architect, Edward Barnes, up jumped that word "isolation" they keep telling us we want. It's a good word, in line with the old Bennington belief in the integrity of the individual. However, the idea of 'isolation' is inappropriate as the formative concept for the layout of the new campus. There's plenty of room for introspection and there'll be plenty left with another hundred girls on the same plot.

The "privacy motif which helps one to put up with the tensions created by the institution" is a psychological dimension that gets twisted out of proportion in physical terms. Things don't grow right in a vacuum; healthy perspective does not come from being set apart. The tensions we've seen living here have grown in proportion to the amount of isolation.

Privacy we want; but it isn't determined by the distance between people and their activities. We're here because we believe that being in an educational environment can be edifying. We don't understand the comment in the Galley of May 21st that: "This is not a New England lobstering community, but one where individual students become educated people". Education is a continuing process --- a thing of communication that goes on in and outside the classroom. To be "educated" is a side effect of community. Development comes with extended awareness of ideas, activities, even people.

WE WANT TO CREATE OUR OWN LIVING-LEARNING RELATIONSHIPS, to open out, and that can't happen without the element of CHOICE (as opposed to enclosure). We think that the position of the new houses promote this distribution of activities and circulation of people, their ideas and interests --- from which we can define our own relationships.

Hasn't the big blank issue lately been that perhaps the college is cultivating indifferent vegetables? That the "footprints in the snow" lead to Commons instead of other houses suggests the positive value of about a hundred more girls (which means the same percentage of weekend signouts, and more teachers and courses to be offered). University dorms illustrate the fact that Bennington rooms are special. As it is, students aren't encouraged by the pattern of things to visit other rooms much. Rooms are projections of personal interests and involvement. Everyone here has much to communicate, that only begins to show in Commons conversation. We become aware of things we might not learn about in other kinds of communities, just by knowing those involved in Drama, or Dance, or Art, etc.; and those categories now represent too much of an ingrown sociology, that could be balanced by a more hybrid living situation.

There is one point that should be emphasized; the proposed houses will be constructed over a long period. After the first two (the end ones across from Bingham and Franklin) have been lived in, there will be an evaluation of the educational merit of additional students and faculty. Enrollment on the present site will never exceed 600. If, in the remote future, the decision is made to take on more students, another nucleus will be developed, and probably in the meadow proposed by the Galley. But that's quite a different thing from two scant groups of 300 girls.

We don't think the meadow location would be "more aesthetically pleasing than the present proposal", because it would no longer be a meadow. The open spaces are "used" as they should be: for private, peaceful walks or Botany trips. Besides, it's just nice to know the open spaces are there.

Although we disagree with the Galley about the location of the proposed buildings, we were glad to see a suggestion that came with it regarding the design of the buildings themselves. How "the theme given by the crossbar which forms the H of the Barn" relates to the "way that students function" isn't clear to us though. We contend that these houses won't cramp individuality. They are no closer to each other than the old ones. They are designed with privacy in mind --- that is, in the sense of peace. The intimate courtyard spaces between buildings have



continued --- Galley -- 23 May 1965

been retained in amongst the new ones. There are no overhead noises to consider, yet the design maintains the high feeling of comfortable two story houses. The vistas from the old houses won't be violated, because of the incline of the new ones. There is a generous ratio of singles to doubles. Windows open on opposite sides of each room, and each house has an extra-private roof for sunning. The drawings may make the rooms look long and narrow --- but they are longer, and wider and higher than the old ones (which incidentally, will still be available). This is not to suggest that the proposed plans are at a final design stage. They are still open to suggestions, ideas, points of view. Students should let on how they like to live, as they know the inside story! But all those remarks about "chicken houses" (scratched on the yellow suggestion slips in the library) wasn't giving the architect positive criticism to go on. Nobody on the outside is imposing change: it came naturally, as Mr. Pearson explained at the meeting. And it's curious to think anyone is using terms of "propaganda"; the architect hasn't anything to gain by swaying anyone to his design. An architect designing for a community is by necessity a coordinator, not a jazz musician that can tell his listeners to like it or leave it. Coordination of our varied ideas about living-learning relationships with economic and physical considerations --- that doesn't imply compromise --- that means possibility, if we have anything positive to grow on.

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