CHAPTER SIX

Part III: Student Life

Industrial War Work

Female students were as eager as the male students to participate in the war effort and a number of them chose to work in dangerous war related industries. For example, Velda McHenry and her twin sister Veida worked on the manufacture of hand grenades for Federal Laboratories, a munitions factory located near the campus. Their first choice was to join the WAVES, but their father insisted they finish school. Instead, they became Rosie the Riveters and worked in the munitions plant.

In that plant, where all the supervisors were men and all the workers female, the sisters practiced as early type of job sharing, though they did not share the arrangement with their work supervisors. Going to school part-time, they worked full-time at night, but shared a single job, assuming the identity of one of them. One night one would work and the next the other would come in.

Finally, because one of the other women noticed they were not the same person (the male supervisors never did) and because their grades were not as good as they might be and their father put pressure on them to quit, they resigned and became full-time students.

Wartime Shortages and Campus Dining

Lives, and certainly diets, were altered as rationing limited the availability of food items from sugar and coffee to butter and even canned goods. Feeding
hundreds of students on campus under such circumstances was a formidable task.

The person responsible for feeding the students during this difficult time was the colorful Olive K. Folger, also known as Ma Folger. Folger began working as a dietitian at ISTC in 1934. She had some training in dietetics from Simmons College, and was working on a degree in Home Economics at ISTC during the war. Unlike modern food service workers, students remembered that her dog was always by her side in the kitchen.

She had her hands full trying to run the kitchens during the war with everything in short supply. In articles in the Penn, Folger expressed a no nonsense attitude which allowed her to cope. When speaking of students’ complaints about the nature and quality of the food served, Folger reported:

“If the students would eat what I serve they would be fed nutritionally. What I serve is good for them – students shouldn’t be so picky” Penn March 22, 1943.

Food was not the only thing in short supply. She also had trouble keeping kitchen laborers, which were generally male and therefore in short supply because of the war. As early as September of 1942 the use of the dining room had to be cut down because of a lack of help. For the rest of the war school authorities made frequent calls for students to work in the dining halls, even resorting to threats of requiring it of all students if paid workers could not be found.

Luckily, the Home Economics Club came to the rescue of the school, offering to cater events and making possible social activities that
might otherwise have been cancelled. The Home Economics club donated the proceeds of their work to the war effort.

**Not Even a Draft Dodger in Sight**

From a high of 449 in 1940, the number of males continued to fall during the war years to a low of 42 in 1944. A definite turning point was in February of 1943, when army reservists got their call to active duty. By the summer of 1943, a *Penn* reporter wrote “what is so rare as a day in June? A man on Indiana’s campus. With a 20 to 1 ratio, we have practically become a female seminary where the old rules are outdated. (*Penn* July 20, 43)

Another article entitled “Indiana Girls Take Over” reported that:

“42% of American women are working! Because of world conditions it has become necessary for women to... devote more time to aid in alleviating the shortage of manpower. Every day women are given positions of greater responsibility and importance than ever before in history. Indiana is no exception. It is up to the women students to see that Indiana continues to be an active college. The added responsibilities that fall upon our shoulders should be met with determination to carry through.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>1440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>1040</td>
<td>1448</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
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<td>1205</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>782</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1945</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
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</table>

In the last years of the war when the number of men fell dramatically, female students really did take over. In those years some activities were cancelled, but to a large extent things went on as before, though with women filling roles that had been filled by males. With the increase in female power, a loosening of restrictions on women’s behavior took place, though equality between the genders was still far off.
Proms, dances, and other college events were cancelled or modified to smaller affairs. In 1943-44, the annual Homecoming celebration was cancelled for the duration of the war. In 1943, intercollegiate men’s sports were cancelled due to lack of players. In the absence of men’s sports, intramurals for female students were continued, and even got a section of the sports page. In the “Fems in Shorts” columns, the activities of female athletes in hockey, volleyball, fencing, swimming and basketball were discussed.

An article on basketball remarked on the ferocity of the female players, “Ever see the girls play basketball? Sometimes play gets so rough that you wonder if it’s not football they are playing the way they fight over possession of the ball and hit the floor every other play. It is a miracle they are not out with injuries.” (Penn March 9, 1943)

Women who had not been in the workforce on campus or in the community were called upon to fill the vacancies left by men joining the service or in war industries. When Mrs. Margaret Bieghler’s husband joined the forces, she taught his classes for the rest of the war. Dr. Uhler went to the faculty and asked them if any of their wives were teachers and might be able to take teaching jobs in the community where teachers were desperately short due to the war.

Entertainment too was feminized. For example, instead of the traditional male or mixed orchestra, Ann Carlisle and her all-girl orchestra, the Indiana Cinderella, entertained the campus in long black evening dresses, In March of 1945, The Swan, a play originally designed to include actors of both genders, was put on with an all female cast. The production
delighted audiences who quickly forgot that there were women playing men’s roles.

With male students gone, female students began to take more of the math and science courses in the secondary school major, just as Dean Kimball had suggested. Between 1940 and 1946, the number of female majors in Secondary Education rose from 79 to 241.

**Leadership Positions**

With most male students out of the picture, women were elected to almost all of the significant student leadership positions on campus in 1943-45. In the spring of 1943, Phyllis Hutchinson was elected the first female president of the Student Council. For the rest of the war, women led Student Council with Grechen Gardner elected president in the spring of 1945 and Hope Applegath in the fall of that year.

Women also took over the operation of the *Penn* and the *Oak*. In 1943, the *Penn* editor was Josephine Rich, and Dorothy Cox and Lucille Rocky served as assistant editors. Once again, as in World War I, women were elected editors of the yearbook for the last three years of the war.

Leadership positions and playing active roles in the war effort was joined with an easing of restrictions on female student life. In the fall of 1943, *the Penn* reported that a group of female students in the dormitory volunteered to govern their hall without a teacher.

Another change that was suggested, and successfully obtained during the period, was a woman’s right to smoke on campus. Even before the mass exodus of men from the campus there had been discussion of the issue of women smoking on campus.

In 1941, letters to the editor addressed the need for a lounging room for female students to “bull, read, play bridge, and SMOKE.” Men had two basement rooms where they could smoke. The writer continued, “It would seem to me that our
school should keep up with the modern trend that such a room is a necessity. I know of no school in this Pittsburgh area that hasn’t already provided such a room for the girls in their student body.” The author, who signed his name “Democratic Don,” asked “why couldn’t they have it?” A female writer followed up his comments with the question “Now that we have more space, what is there to prevent it?” and “Indiana prides itself on progressiveness, consideration for its students, and on its student government. These are reasons enough that women should have this one thing they wish – a smoking room.” (Penn October 28, 1941)

In January of 1944, the women’s smoking room, called “the Den” was opened. The room was decorated by female students and was their responsibility. They were warned that if they did not keep it clean and empty ash trays the authorities would take it away.

But strict rules for female student dress and deportment continued. In January of 1943, female students were reminded “that slacks are not to be worn to classes or on the business streets. Let the defense workers have their uniforms.” Other prohibited hairstyles, clothing and accessories were also cited. “No slacks or snowsuits on main corridor, no boots or socks, bandanas on heads at dinners, saddle shoes, and moccasins also not permitted. (1944)

While photographs show female students participating in flight training wearing slacks, even they could not be assured they would not be reprimanded for wearing them. Billie McGrain Kline, who qualified and took the flight
training, recalled a confrontation with Dean Kimball when Kline had worn slacks to flight training. Kimball told her in no uncertain terms that slacks were not allowed, whether she was in flight training or not.

**GI Bill of Rights**

In the summer of 1944, the federal government enacted the GI Bill, or the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. This transformational legislation offered honorably discharged veterans tuition and stipends and opened the halls of higher education institutions as never before. In the next years, returning veterans, most of them male, would come in such large numbers that for the first time in nearly half a century male students would nearly equal those of female students.

**Summary**

Between 1941 and 1945, female ISTC college students supported the war in myriad ways and worked to acquire skills that would allow them to play active roles in support of the war and in the post-war world. From raising money for the war effort, to working in munitions plants making hand grenades, to offering classes in a variety of war coping topics, they had served as community leaders and aided the national defense. With the school almost devoid of male students, the female students moved into traditionally male disciplines and took leadership roles in campus organizations from the Student Council to editorships of the Penn and the OAK.

When the war was over, the *Penn* declared:

“All of these things add and build to the character of today’s college girl. She’s really A-1 ... I say the fellows will have to go some to keep up with the “college girl.”