

"Chewing the food of sweet and bitter fancy" An informal guide to the gastronomic delights of York

By OAKLAND ROSS

*Nothing to do but work,
Nothing to eat but food,
Nothing to wear but clothes
To keep one from going nude.
Nothing to breathe but air,
Quick as a flash, 'tis gone;
Nowhere to fall but off,
Nowhere to stand but on.*

— Benjamin Franklin King

In Curtis Lecture Hall L, CYSF president Dale Ritch swaggers about the stage, waging his battle for student-staff-faculty control of what and how we eat.

Nearby, in the Central Square Coffee Shop, hordes of students spill their coffee across the orange table-tops and flick their cigarette ashes onto dirty plates. Sallow-faced girls in stained white uniforms wander about—cleaning, clearing and never smiling.

The huge dining halls of Founders, Vanier and Winters are silent at noon-time. Here and there, a student sits alone, reading and chewing.

In an office in the Founders kitchen, Warren Rill of Rill Food Services loosens his tie and slumps into his chair. He's losing money hand over fist, he says. He doesn't know what to do. He may have to close up shop.

ORAL TRADITION

For years, food has been the issue at York. Student elections have been fought over it; petitions have been signed protesting it; committees have been created to study it. If there is any tradition at York, you're eating it.

Versafood may be gone at last, but the ghost of gastronomic discontent lives on.

Is the food really that bad? Are the prices really that outrageous? Has anything really changed?

Excalibur dispatched several staff members to sample the new array of cafeterias and restaurants at York.

None of them was a connoisseur of fine food. But all were hungry; all were seekers after truth.

Here is their story.

Rill's Fast Foods

We don't get over to Complex I much anymore, but some of us remember it well. As we strolled beneath the archway into the courtyard of staid, cloistered Founders College, we could smell the musty bookishness in the air. Monk-like students sat on the grassy knoll in the centre of the courtyard.

We passed them by and continued through the maze of corridors leading to the Winters dining hall, now the home of Rill's Fast Foods.

One or two students were poking around in the cafeteria; the dining hall was almost empty.

Doug and I decided to split a pizza and a salad plate. The pizza was served immediately because it had been sitting for one hates to think how long in a warmer behind the counter. Garnished with pepperoni, it cost \$2.75.

The salad bar was an exotic affair: a multitude of salads and vegetable and dressings; all you could eat for only \$1.50.

Robin opted for a hamburger and "curly Q" french fries.

"Where is everybody?" we wondered as we sat down to eat. Winters dining hall, a dreary place at the best of times, is like a mausoleum when empty.

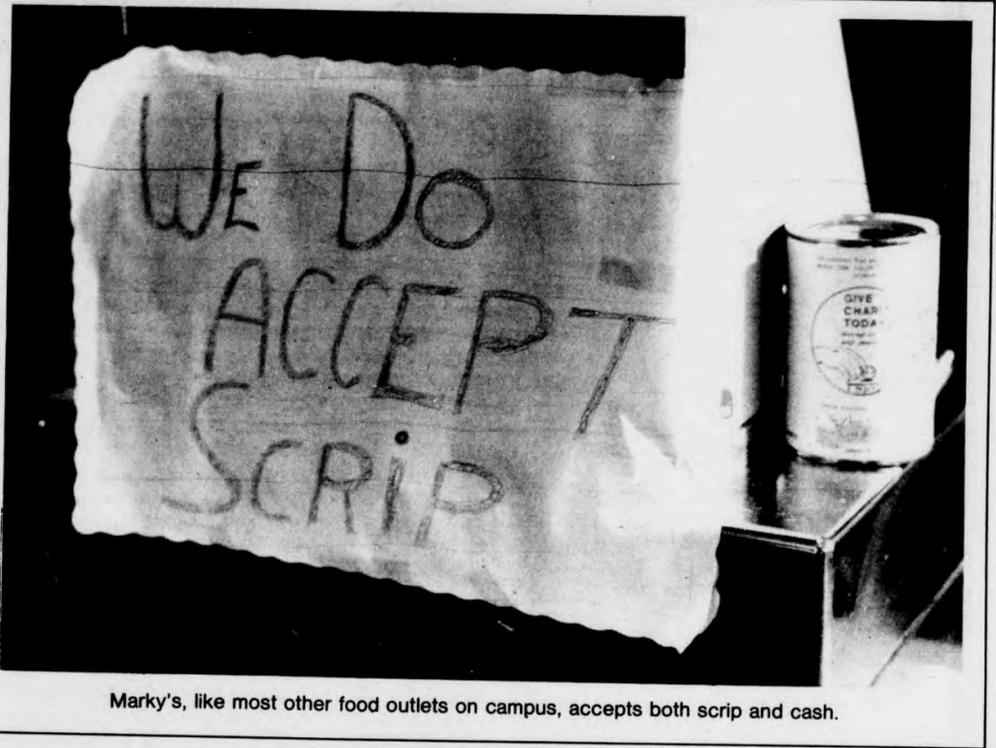
The pizza, however, was considerably better than we had expected. A tiny bit on the stale side, but the pepperoni was plentiful and the pastry was thick and light.

Robin, who considers "Mister Pizza" to be the best in Toronto, had a bite of Rill's.

"It doesn't compare with Mister Pizza," she judged. "But it's pretty good."

The salad plate was a triumph. Rill can stake his reputation on it alone. The lettuce was crisp. All the vegetables were fresh. And, since you can heap your plate, it's a great value.

Robin was slightly dubious about the hamburger. And her french fries were cold.



Marky's, like most other food outlets on campus, accepts both scrip and cash.

"It's because they're so small," she said. "They don't retain heat as well."

The kitchen and cafeteria at Rill's are clean. None of the workers stands around.

There were no ashtrays on any of the tables, but when we asked for one, it was delivered (according to Doug's watch) in 39 seconds. A small thing, perhaps, but it all adds up.

Robin commented on the way the cafeteria staff seemed to have been selected according to the type of food they served.

For example, the girl who served the Chinese food was Oriental and the man who made the pizza was Italian.

"That's very subtle," Robin said.

However, Steve Garciewitz, who mans the beer taps at Rill's Fast Foods and is an aspiring English professor, wandered over and informed us that the Italian was actually a Spaniard. So maybe it wasn't very subtle after all.

Atkinson

The former Atkinson College Coffee House is being operated this year by Alex Alexiou and George Kaitis. They've renamed it the Atkinson Dining Lounge. It's fully licensed; the tables have table cloths (in red, white or blue); and it offers both cafeteria and table service.

Like Marky's, it's expensive, but it has the widest menu on campus. That must be worth something.

Out of habit, we lined up in the cafeteria instead of treating ourselves to table service. A menu lay open on the counter beside the trays. Doug ordered one of the daily specials: "home-made beef stroganoff" with potatoes, dinner roll and choice of soup or juice. It cost him \$2.50.

Mira had spaghetti with meat sauce for \$2.00.

The company was paying, so I splurged on a "salmon steak with lemon wedge" and a side order of french fries. My bill was \$3.05, before beer.

Doug rated the stroganoff "very good, especially considering that it was served cafeteria-style and had to be kept warming at the counter."

Mira complained because the spaghetti she was finally served was actually someone else's order and had been kept sitting atop the counter for several minutes. By that time, it had grown cold.

My salmon steak was sheer delight from beginning to end.

The Atkinson Dining Lounge is very crowded, at least at lunch time. If you like law students, you'll love it there.

Commercial

Commercial Caterers Ltd. operates three food outlets on campus: the Central Square Coffee Shop, the Stong cafeteria and Le Soupcon in Stong.

As always, we approached the

Central Square coffee shop with trepidation. In the past, it was always crowded, dirty and more trouble than it was worth.

The food is noticeably better this year, and Commercial Caterers provides real china dishes. Still, it's not the sort of place one would choose to loiter in, and none of us did.

We just had time for a hamburger and french fries at the Stong cafeteria. The cashier, unfortunately, had not memorized the price list and had to yell to the kitchen to confirm the prices of the items in our order.

For some reason, that's annoying.

But both the hamburger and the french fries were perfectly okay. With a glass of milk, the bill was \$1.30.

Bing Hodinott, who manages the Commercial Caterers operations on campus, shrugged his shoulders when we asked him about the current threat of a boycott of the Central Square Coffee Shop.

"Just too busy to think about it," he said.

Le Soupcon

We had purposely saved Le Soupcon to the last. We knew that the "Food at York" booklet published earlier this fall by the York Food Services Committee had specifically promised "some new wrinkles in the onion soup" there.

Wrinkles in the onion soup? It aroused one's curiosity.

At six o'clock, Le Soupcon was almost empty. We each ordered onion soup (hold the wrinkles) and Chateaubriand Bordelaise with Canadian wild rice and broccolli Parisienne. We split two bottles of Lowenbrau four ways.

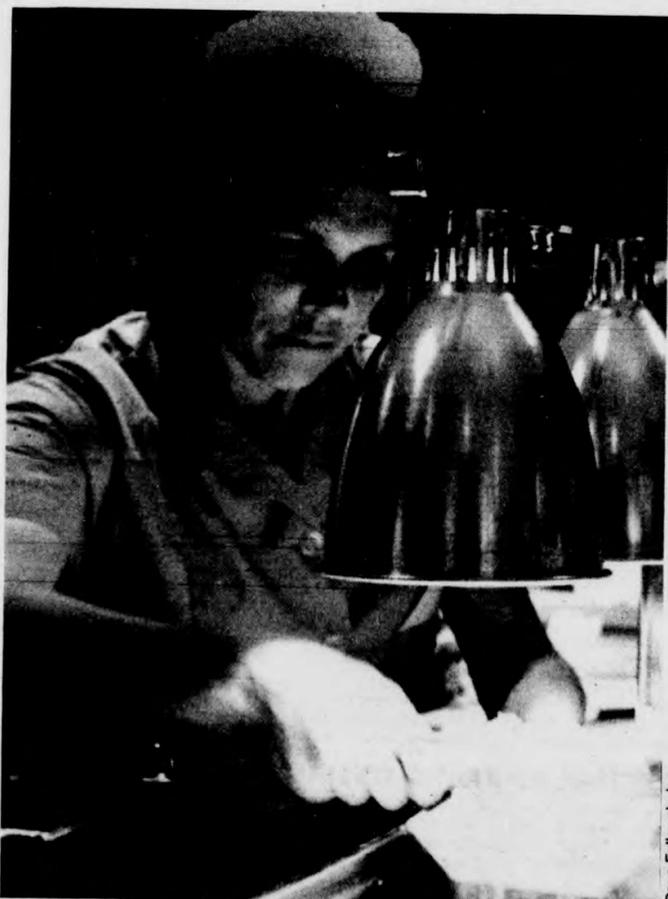
"Chateaubriand is steak," said the waitress as we ordered. A nice touch. The bill, including beer, was \$3.80 a piece.

We've heard a lot of complaints about Le Soupcon this year. Apparently, even Commercial Caterers admits that it doesn't come up to snuff.

Well, we must have hit it on a good night. It was easily the best meal on campus.

Stuffed, we lumbered from Le Soupcon and made our way back to Central Square.

The food at York seemed okay to us.



Dave Fuller photo

The food in the Central Square Coffee Shop is noticeably better this year and Commercial Caterers provides real china dishes. Nevertheless, it's crowded and noisy — a less than perfect place for a romantic tete-a-tete.

Marky's

Just upstairs and around the corner from Rill's Fast Foods is Marky's Delicatessen II. It's leased and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Azriel Karp who own another delicatessen on Bathurst Street.

We were eager to find out how "chain food" would work at York, so we hurried over for dinner.

Marky's has the largest collection of full Heinz ketchup bottles on campus — hundreds of them, stacked up behind the counter. It looks quite nice, in an Andy Warhol sort of way. In fact, the whole place has a good feeling to it: clean, bright, efficient.

Some of us weren't too big on Kosher food and played it safe by ordering corned beef sandwiches with french fries, cole slaw and a dill. Standard fare, but it was well-prepared, attractively served and cost \$2.25.

Doug had a "hot roast beef plate" for \$3.25. He liked it, but it looked like just a hamburger patty with vegetables and pretensions.

Frank, who is a great fan of Kosher food, raved about the kishka plate (two kishkas, potatoes and salad for \$2.25). The Matza ball soup, cabbage rolls and knishes were highly recommended as well.

The waitresses were friendly and helpful, if slightly on the slow side. That's understandable,