

# What's For Supper?

Food preferences and availability at the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan

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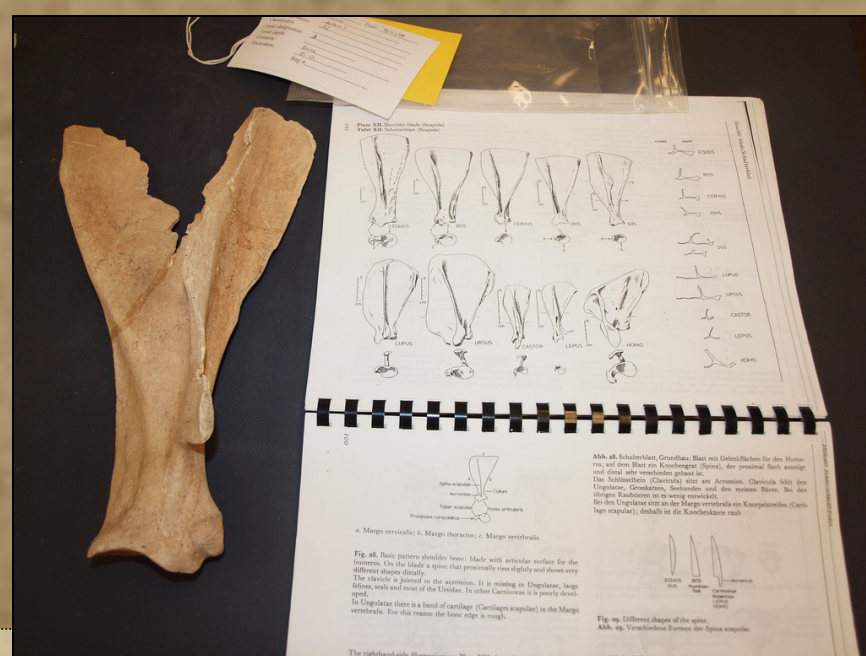
MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY



**Background:** From 1857 to 1876, the all-male student population of MSU slept, studied, and ate in the Saints' Rest dormitory, officially known as the "Boarding Hall". The dormitory burned down in the winter of 1876 and was excavated by MSU students and faculty in 2005. In 2008, Feature 125, associated with Saints' Rest, was excavated by the Campus Archaeology Program. Feature 125 yielded an assemblage of kitchen refuse--food remains, ceramics, and glass.



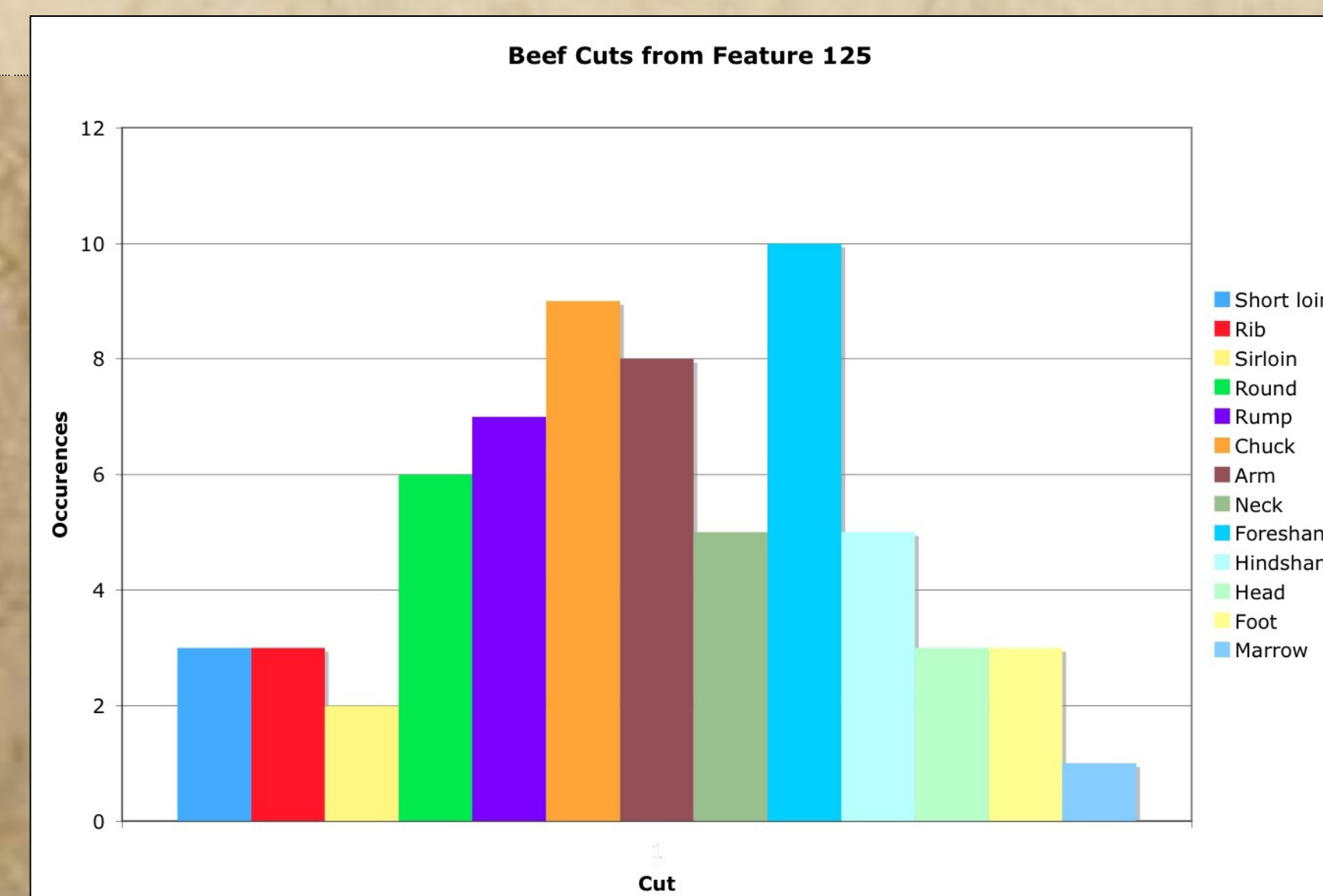
Above: Saints' Rest Dormitory with students (n.d.). Image © Michigan State University. Right: Young cow scapula. Image © MSU Campus Archaeology Program, 2011.



Saints' Rest Feature 125 excavation, 2008. Image © MSU Campus Archaeology Program, 2008.

**Methods & Data:** This research attempted to answer the following question: During this period, were students able to select preferred meats or were they limited by availability? Evidence was drawn from analysis of the faunal assemblage and historical documents from the MSU Archives. Data collected from the faunal remains included species, standard secondary cut, and approximate age at death. Historical documents showed that cattle, pigs, sheep, and chickens were kept on campus, but cuts of beef, pork, mutton, and chicken were also purchased for student consumption. Construction of a campus slaughterhouse was proposed in 1862, but the actual date of construction is currently unknown. Some faculty were skilled in butchering wild game.

**Results:** Despite evidence of other genera, results were skewed in favor of cattle because *Bos* skeletons are more durable than smaller animals and small overall bone counts indicate that there are other, yet undiscovered, trash deposits on campus. In the category of beef, no significant cut preference is apparent. Preference is shown for juvenile animals, which was expected based on common culling patterns. The role of availability is unclear without further study.



- *Bos* MNI = 12, NISP = 75
- Estimated kill population (after Wild & Nichols, 1983) for *Bos* = 50
- Age at death percentages (all genera): 27% adult, 73% juvenile

## Future Research:

Future research may incorporate data and focus on:

- ❖ Placement and construction dates of the slaughterhouse(s),
- ❖ Names and roles of individuals selecting meat for student consumption,
- ❖ Change in meat consumption patterns over time in relation to the changing gender demographic, and
- ❖ A comparative study of 19th century academic communities and other small, specialized frontier communities.