

Privileged Scholars or Patriotic Soldiers?: Middlebury College Students and the Civil War, A Comparison of the Town and the College

On a hot and humid afternoon in June, 1914, former President of Middlebury College Ezra Brainerd addressed the crowd gathered for the school's 114th commencement. "The wave of patriotism that swept over the Northern States, when on April 12, 1861 our flag was first fired on at Fort Sumter was wonderful; difficult of comprehension by those who did not actually witness it. And nowhere was it more intense than among the students of Middlebury College," he declared.¹ Since graduating as a member of the class of 1864, Brainerd had spent most of his adult life in the service of the College. However, Brainerd did not mention that a significant portion of the student body, himself included, remained at Middlebury for the duration of the war. Furthermore, proportionately far fewer Middlebury students than townsmen answered Lincoln's first call for troops. What then, became of this "wave of patriotism" that Brainerd remembered at Middlebury?

The history of the town of Middlebury and Middlebury College during the Civil War is a complex and interwoven tale. Its first chapter, as Brainerd suggests, began with the sound of cannon fire raining down on Fort Sumter. Patriotism ran rampant amongst both College students and townspeople.² Yet when the town's militia, 47 men strong, marched off to the front with the First Vermont Regiment in May of 1861, only two students from the College were among their ranks.³ Although the student body was only

¹Ezra Brainerd, "Fifty years at Middlebury College" (speech given at Middlebury College's 114th annual commencement in Middlebury, VT June 1914), Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury.

²"Unfurling of the Stars and Stripes," *Middlebury Register*, 24 April 1861.

³Theodore S. Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers and Lists of Vermonters who Served in the Army and Navy of the United States During the War of the Rebellion, 1861-66*, (Montpelier: Press of the Watchman Publishing Co., 1892; reprint), 1-26.

94 strong at the time, this was still a disproportionately small response. It seemed to contradict the patriotism and romanticism with which so many students viewed the conflict.

Key events unfolded in the summer of 1861 which changed the face of the war for both the College and the Middlebury community as a whole. The death of one of the two students who left with the First Vermont triggered a shift towards a more somber and serious perspective.⁴ With the prolonged existence of the rebellion becoming evident, it was with this mind set that many of Middlebury's young men left for the front. Those who remained had no burning desire to enlist, and they made active efforts to avoid army service. Yet this phenomenon was by no means unique, and all across the North men took advantage of the exemption options offered to them by the draft.⁵ At Middlebury College, those who did remain behind made efforts to reconcile this decision by hiring substitutes and supporting the army.

By war's end, the initial disparity seen in the First Vermont Regiment between students and town residents was reversed. Almost 30% of Middlebury students who had attended the College at some point during the war served in the army, whereas 26% of townsmen eligible for service had done so.⁶ Though Brainerd himself may not have served, he had ample reason to be proud of his classmates and his alma mater.

⁴"Obsequies of Ensign Henry W. Bennett," *Middlebury Register*, 10 July 1861.

⁵James M McPherson, *The Illustrated Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 520.

⁶*Catalogue of Middlebury College, 1860-1865*, Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT; Class of 1898, *Souvenir of the Class of 1898*, Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT; *Dedication of the Honor Rolls Monument*, Middlebury, 1925, Vermont Collection, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT; Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860; Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864) Available online: <<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1860a-01.pdf>>.

Despite the considerable amount of scholarly attention given to the home front during the Civil War, relatively little work has been done examining enlistment patterns at the community level. In addition, while studies by Civil War authorities such as James McPherson have provided substantial insight into soldier's motives for fighting, much less is known about the motives of those men who avoided military service.⁷ As 65% of eligible aged white men in the North did not serve in the armed forces during the war, the reasons behind this majority warrant further investigation.⁸ Only a small number of studies focus on the impact of the war and enlistment patterns in New England towns, and fewer still compare those who enlisted with those who did not. The first to do so was W. J. Rorabaugh's work examining enlistments in Concord, Massachusetts. Rorabaugh found that while age was the strongest predictor of military service, the differences in enlistment between different socioeconomic groups also varied "dramatically."⁹

These findings differed from those of Thomas Kemp, whose study of two New Hampshire towns found age as the only significant factor influencing enlistment patterns.¹⁰ Likewise, Maris Vinovskis' investigation of Newburyport, Massachusetts

The College Catalogues of 1860 to 1865 show a total of 180 students from the classes of 1861-1868 who attended Middlebury at some point during the Civil War. The *Souvenir of the Class of 1898* lists 52 men from these classes who served, 53 when Frank Butterfield '63 who was forgotten from the list is included. From these numbers the figure of 29.4% is derived. It is worth noting that the five men from the classes of 1866, 1867, and 1868 who did serve did so *before* coming to Middlebury.

The pamphlet from the dedication of the war monument in Middlebury lists 256 men who served in the Civil War. The *Census of 1860* counted 1363 men in the town, of which approximately 1,000 would have been eligible to serve at some point during the war. From these numbers the figure 26% is derived. There was some overlap, as two students who served were also town residents, and were thus counted in both figures. However, this has a negligible effect on the data.

⁷Peter Parish, "The Will to Fight and the Will to Write: Some Recent Books on the American Civil War," *Journal of American Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 304.

⁸James McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire* (New York: Knopf, 1982). 181.

⁹W. J. Rorabaugh, "Who Fought for the North in the Civil War? Concord, Massachusetts, Enlistments," *The Journal of American History* 73, no. 3 (1986): 701.

¹⁰Thomas Kemp, "Community and War," published in *Toward a Social History of the American Civil War*, ed., Maris Vinovskis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 31-77. Kemp's study focuses on the comparison of Claremont and Newport New Hampshire, both towns similar in size and economy to Middlebury. He found that in these towns, issues such as class, occupation, and immigration

found age followed by ethnicity to be the two strongest influences on enlistment patterns. Though he did not find any clear connections between socio-economic status and enlistment, high-school education was the third strongest predictor of enlistment among Newburyport's men. According to Vinovskis, one out of every five former high school students in Newburyport enlisted in the armed forces, whereas one out of every three who never attended high school did so.¹¹

Vinovskis's work indicates that an individual's level of education influenced his likelihood of enlistment. However, unlike Middlebury, Newburyport was not a college town. Vinovskis's study thus cannot address the question of how a *college* education may have affected enlistment patterns. In addition, all of these works rely heavily on statistical analysis in explaining enlistment patterns over the course of the war. Though this is certainly an essential part of understanding the wartime experience in these towns, qualitative factors must be kept in mind as well. Given the war's tremendous cost and four year duration, local events and their emotional impact on the community deserve attention in understanding enlistment trends. Though Amber Vaill's study of the draft in Palmer, Massachusetts is a step in this direction, her explicit focus on the draft

status had little to no impact on men's enlistment and draft patterns. He also found several other trends similar to those seen in this study. In both cases, the almost giddy patriotism with which the war was greeted inevitably faded in the face of its growing magnitude. Kemp also shows how hard ordinary citizens worked to avoid the draft, and the towns he examines go to lengths beyond that which Middlebury did in order to do so.

¹¹Maris A. Vinovskis, "Have Social Historians Lost the Civil War? Some Preliminary Demographic Speculations," *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 1 (1989): 48. Vinovskis credits the difference between his and Rorabough's conclusion to the use of a more sophisticated statistical technique known as multiple classification analysis, which "permits assessment of the relationship between each independent variable and whether or not someone from Newburyport enlisted."

understandably provides no insight into the motivations of men who enlisted voluntarily.¹²

This paper aims to make use of both statistical and qualitative evidence in understanding the impact of the Civil War on Middlebury as well as the differences in enlistment patterns between College students and ordinary townspeople. Because of its high level of education and socioeconomic status, Middlebury College's student body formed a distinct group within the community that set the town apart from those examined in previous works. In addition, historical accounts of Middlebury and its peer institutions during the war focus primarily on those students who put aside their studies to head for the front. They make little mention of those students who chose to stay in school during the war.¹³ The majority of students, however, did just that.

In examining this phenomenon, two questions arise. First, why did these students who spoke so eloquently of patriotism and duty not immediately go off and fight? Second, by what means did they avoid service, especially as the call for men became more critical as the war progressed? The answers to these two questions are interconnected and relate to the relative affluence of the student body, the transition between different core groups of students as the war progressed, and the intricacies of the draft process. They are also heavily influenced by chronology and shift significantly over the course of the war. Most importantly, the trends seen among Middlebury's students

¹²Amber L. Vaill, "The Civil War Draft in Palmer: Reaction in a Small Town," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 33, no. 2 (2005): 97.

¹³David M. Stameshkin, *The Town's College, Middlebury College, 1800-1915* (Middlebury: Middlebury College Press, 1985). Stameshkin's work is the best general history of Middlebury College written to date. However, its discussion of Middlebury during the Civil War is brief and looks at the war primarily in the context of larger trends in the College's history. There were a number of institutions comparable to Middlebury scattered about New England at the time, for an interesting look at Amherst College, see J. M. Opal, "The Making of the Victorian Campus: Teacher and Student at Amherst College, 1850-1880," *History of Education Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2002): 354.

were not unique, but were closely correlated with the town's residents and in that regard with all Vermonters.

The attack on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861 was accompanied by a flurry of activity in the town and at the College. On Monday, April 22nd a crowd more than five hundred strong gathered for a patriotic rally outside the Chapel at Middlebury College. Upon unfurling “to a brisk breeze the flag which had been procured for the occasion,” “the vast throng gave three deadening cheers.”¹⁴ The faculty of the College and members of each class gave speeches and fired off salutes, while the College's vocal quintet led the singing of the Marseilles. The event's final speaker “expressed confidence in the willingness of the students to be soldiers,” and the article concluded that “the officers and students of the college and the surrounding people, have renewed their pledges of fidelity to their country, and have expressed their determination to live, and, if need be, die, under the Stars and Stripes.”¹⁵ Middlebury's patriotism was by no means lacking.¹⁶

This patriotism persisted for weeks to come. On May 1st, the Middlebury Register wrote, “The military ardor of our people continues unabated. Though there may be no increase of outward demonstration the fire of patriotism is seizing every element of society and the determination is that any call the government may make shall be responded to without delay.” Such ardor persisted not just in town, but at the College as well. “It was poor time for study, but the professors were lenient, as they were greatly interested as were the students,” recalled D. K. Simonds, a member of the class of 1862, “A military company was quickly formed with almost all the students as

¹⁴“Unfurling of the Stars and Stripes,” *Middlebury Register*, 24 April 1861.

¹⁵“Unfurling of the Stars and Stripes,” *Middlebury Register*, 24 April 1861.

¹⁶“Unfurling of the Stars and Stripes,” *Middlebury Register*, 24 April 1861.

members...recreation hours were mostly spent in drill.”¹⁷ In their history of Middlebury College and the Civil War, the class of 1898 wrote, “the remainder of that college year was full of military activity; war meetings were frequently held, where war speeches were ardent and war songs were enthusiastically received. A company was organized among students comprising nearly every member of the student body.”¹⁸

Known as the Middlebury College Guards, the actions of this company indicate the lighthearted perspective which many students initially took to the war. A weekend training exercise for the College Guards was described this way by the town paper: “Fired with a desire for ‘gallant deeds and daring high’ they started for a foray into the border state of New York. Of course it would have been unsafe to divulge their plan of operation, lest the enemy’s spies should get knowledge of it...The campaign was brilliant and successful. They first made an assault upon Old Ti Fort, which they took and held all night. In the morning they passed on to Lake George, of which they gained possession without resistance...”¹⁹ The author wrote in conclusion, “We are pained to learn that the leader of the party was *taken* by a young lady in Shoreham village, who met them on the side walk and presented him a beautiful rosette.”²⁰ The article was jocular in tone, yet positive, and did not demonstrate disapproval on behalf of the author for the College Guards’ actions.

While Middlebury’s students were busy playing soldier, Middlebury’s residents were actually enlisting in the army. All across Vermont, towns responded to Lincoln’s

¹⁷D. K. Simonds, “The Class of 1862,” *Undergraduate*, July 1898, 6, Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT

¹⁸Class of 1898, *Souvenir of the Class of 1898*, Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT.

¹⁹“A Short but Brilliant Campaign,” *Middlebury Register*, 5 May 1861.

²⁰“A Short but Brilliant Campaign,” *Middlebury Register*, 5 May 1861.

call for 75,000 troops, and Middlebury was no exception. Of the ten militia companies chosen for the First Vermont Volunteer Regiment, Company I came from Middlebury. Though together both townspeople and students showed an abundance of patriotism and support for the Union, the initial numbers of enlistment show a substantial disparity. Amidst the patriotic fervor at the onset of the war, the students of Middlebury College were, for the most part, engaged in political discourse and whimsical training exercises, whereas the actual dirty work of enlistment was done by the townspeople. Forty-seven Middlebury men volunteered for a three month tour with the First Vermont along with two students, Henry Bennett '64 and Dexter Boyden '63.²¹ Bennett, himself a Middlebury native, likely felt a closer connection to the townspeople than most other students. While proportionately the disparity between enlistment figures for the town and enlistment figures for the College is less than it reads literally, it remains significant. These two students made up just over 2% of the College's student body, whereas those men volunteering from the town made up almost 5% of Middlebury's eligible men.²²

Middlebury students' low initial enlistment numbers in spite of their fiery rhetoric and their enthusiasm for playing soldier may at first glance seem like cowardice. In reality, however, it represented their expectations that the war would be both brief and straightforward. In its June article on the College Guards, the Middlebury Register concluded that, "certainly no heart is better filled with patriotic fire than these and none

²¹Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 19, 23.

²²*Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1860, Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT; Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*; Bureau of the Census, *Census of 1860*. The figure of 2% is derived from the Middlebury Catalogue published in the fall of 1860, which lists a total of 92 students enrolled that fall. The percentage of townsfolk who enlisted is based on the census of 1860, which counted 1363 white males in Middlebury. However, this includes both children and the elderly, neither of whom were eligible to serve. Without taking this into account, 3.5% of males served in the 1st Vermont. However, by approximating the number of eligible men at 1000, a figure of 4.8% or ~5% is arrived at.

are better able to vindicate the cause of their country – with tongue, pen, and *sword*.”²³ It was exactly those two points which the author chose not to emphasize which set Middlebury’s students apart from the rest of the town. The Middlebury student’s talent with both tongue and pen gave them the skills to hold rallies like that described on April 22nd, to sing patriotic songs encouraging enlistments, to whip up a patriotic fervor with grand oratory beyond the means of the average farmer. Simonds recalled that the College’s glee club “sang nothing but patriotic airs and frequently attended war meetings in Middlebury and neighboring towns to encourage enlistments.”²⁴ This enabled students to feel as if they were helping the war effort even though they themselves were not enlisting.

Many also anticipated that the war would not last through the year. Lincoln initially called for 75,000 men for just three months’ service. As the Class of 1898 wrote in their account of Middlebury during the Civil War, “at that time many thought that this small number of men could suppress the rebellion in that brief time”²⁵ With potential soldiers in ample supply and the war expected to be so short-lived, there were few incentives for Middlebury students to put aside their education and join the army. Attending college was a privilege few men of the day were fortunate enough to have; it was not something to be cast aside lightly, no matter how sensational the war’s events may have seemed. Though both the townspeople of Middlebury and the College’s students shared expectations about the short duration of the war, it was this factor that set

²³“College Guard,” *Middlebury Register*, 12 June 1861.

²⁴Simonds, “The Class of 1862,” *Undergraduate*, July 1898, 6, Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury, VT.

²⁵Class of 1898, *Souvenir of the Class of 1898*.

the students apart. Thus it is not surprising that at the war's onset, fewer students from the College enlisted than from the town.

This attitude, a combination of romanticism, jubilant patriotism, and academic obligation, characterized Middlebury students during the first phase of the war. Two key events during the summer of 1861, however, triggered an end to this phase. The first was the death of Henry Bennett in late June, and the second was the First Battle of Bull Run on July 21. At the rally on April 22, 1861, the final speaker urged students to await further developments in the war before enlisting. Yet he noted that, "it was difficult for him to reply to that member of the college who had said that it would be no worse for him to shed his own blood in defense of the stars and stripes than for any other."²⁶ He was talking about Henry Bennett '64, one of two Middlebury students to enlist in the First Vermont. On June 26th, word reached Middlebury that Bennett had died of disease at Fortress Monroe, Virginia. As one of only six men to die out of the entire regiment of 781 and the only one from Middlebury, Bennett's death clearly had a deep impact on both the town and the student body.²⁷ In every speech and article written about Middlebury and the Civil War, his name comes up.

This persistent presence attests both to the historical significance Bennett held as the first Middlebury student and town resident to die in the Civil War, as well as the emotional impact his death had on these communities. In his commencement address of 1865, President Labaree recalled, "Sad and sorrowful is the record of our noble band of heroes. Bennett was the first to offer himself on the altar of his country, and the first to

²⁶"Unfurling of the Stars and Stripes," *Middlebury Register*, 24 April 1861.

²⁷Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 19.

seal his devotion with his life.”²⁸ Fifty years later, President Brainerd went into even greater detail, recalling how by way of alphabetical seating, he spent two terms side by side with Bennett in the classroom. Bennett was a quiet student, and Brainerd remembered, “How startled his classmates were when they learned that he had decided to respond to President Lincoln’s call for 75,000 volunteers for three months. Some tried to dissuade him; he said but little in reply, hardly more than this: ‘I think I ought to go.’”²⁹ The quiet nature of Bennett’s personality must have made both his initial enlistment and subsequent death all the more difficult to bear. Even in his eulogy Reverend Dayton described him as “meek and unassuming, but devoted and exemplary.”³⁰ For an entire week, all members of the freshman class wore crape upon their left arm to honor their classmate who “died a martyr in his country’s cause.”³¹

On Tuesday, July 2nd Bennett’s body arrived by train in Middlebury. Students from the College, arranged in order of classes, escorted the body to a local home. The following afternoon it was moved to the Methodist Church for the funeral service, which was attended by both the students of the College, Bennett’s family, and a large number of townspeople. Afterwards, the crowd marched east to the cemetery. On their arrival, the Middlebury Register reported, “they parted columns right and left, and the hearse, decorated with the ‘stars and stripes’ was borne slowly down the lines, followed by the chief mourners. The Freshman class attended at the grave, and after chanting a funeral dirge to their departed brother, deposited all that was mortal of the ‘faithful’ student and

²⁸Benjamin Labaree, “25th Anniversary Speech” (speech given at Middlebury College’s 65th annual commencement in Middlebury, VT August 1865), Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury.

²⁹Brainerd, “Fifty Years at Middlebury College.”

³⁰“Obsequies of Ensign Henry W. Bennett,” *Middlebury Register*, 10 July 1861.

³¹“Home Items,” *Middlebury Register*, 3 July 1861. Crape is a crisp and elastic black silk fabric regularly used in mourning dress.

brave soldier in its narrow and silent resting place.”³² His loss would not be one the student body took lightly.

Historians often argue that young men went off to fight in the Civil War for the thrill and adventure that the army promised. Though in many cases this was true, the death of Bennett was a strong reminder to both Middlebury students and townspeople that war was a very real and dangerous thing. It is hard to picture a more stunning rebuke to romanticized images of running off to fight the rebels than his death and funeral. If youth, intelligence, and patriotism could not protect a soldier from the rigors of army life, then what could? Bennett had not been killed in battle, struck down amidst some heroic charge against the Confederate menace. Bedridden and weak, he died of typhoid fever in the Fortress Monroe hospital.³³ The gravity of his death had a strong impact both on the town and the College, and it made clear to other young men that enlistment was a serious matter, quite literally one of life and death.

From this point on, both personal accounts and the *Middlebury Register* gave mention time and again to the solemn and dutiful nature with which students chose to serve. In the fall of 1861 the *Middlebury Register* wrote, “Since last term several of the most promising young men in College have left to enter the army. In every instance, so far as we can learn they go from a sense of duty only. There is a deep but unobtrusive feeling of that kind pervading the whole college.”³⁴ Gone were the lighthearted articles of students traipsing through the countryside playing soldier; the gravity of the endeavor had become evident.

³²“Obsequies of Ensign Henry W. Bennett,” *Middlebury Register*, 10 July 1861.

³³“Home Items,” *Middlebury Register*, 3 July 1861.

³⁴“Adieu to Classmates,” *Middlebury Register*, 2 Oct 1861.

The same can be seen in President Labaree's commencement speech from August 1865. "It was not the hope of a little romantic pastime, nor a temporary outburst of enthusiasm, that drew them from classical halls to the stern conflicts of the battle-field, and to the no less fatal malaria of the camps," he recalled, "a higher and nobler motive impelled them to the field."³⁵ Though Bennett's death and the realization that the war would not end quickly gave these men pause before enlisting, many still chose to do so. Bennett's death made students think more seriously about what it meant to enlist, but it did not go so far as to scare them away from military service entirely. To the contrary, as Brainerd observed, many students were inspired by Bennett's example of "noble self-sacrifice" and they patriotically went forth to do their duty fully aware of the dangers it entailed.³⁶

As the fall of 1861 drew near, it became clear that the war was not going to be the brief and decisive act originally thought. The Confederate victory at the First Battle of Bull Run on July 21st made it evident that the South had the willingness to fight and would not crumble quickly before the Union army as many had expected.³⁷ Whereas students understood the benefits of sitting out the war if it was a short conflict, many had difficulty doing so when faced with a long and costly war. Recalling his days as a member of the class of 1865, David Newland wrote, "A goodly percentage after the first term, finding that it was not the short lived affair predicted, enlisted."³⁸ Despite the impact of Bennett's death, by the end of 1861 another seven students had left their studies

³⁵Labaree, "25th Anniversary Speech."

³⁶Brainerd, "Fifty Years at Middlebury College."

³⁷Kemp, "Community and War," 38.

³⁸David Newland, "The Class of 1865," *Undergraduate*, Jan 1891, 52, Middlebury College Archives, Middlebury College, Middlebury.

and entered the army.³⁹ Meanwhile, those men who had been in the First Vermont Regiment returned to Middlebury in August, and only a handful chose to reenlist.⁴⁰

The true patriotism of Middlebury's students was most apparent in 1862. In the fall of 1861, the College catalogue shows a grand total of 92 students. One year later that count fell to 61.⁴¹ The drop occurred for several reasons, all of which were war related. In addition to the number of students who left in the fall of 1861 and spring of 1862, an even greater number volunteered after the end of the academic year in August 1862. This included both eight members of the class of 1862, as well as thirteen students who were at least a year's study away from their Middlebury degree.⁴² In addition, while the graduating class had been twenty men strong at the start of its senior year, it was replaced by a freshman class of only fourteen.⁴³ The entire nation was swept up in the war, and there were simply fewer men for whom college took precedence.

The 62nd annual commencement in August 1862 was particularly memorable. Aldace Walker, valedictorian of the senior class, had joined the 11th Vermont Regiment several days before graduation and was in Shoreham the morning of commencement ceremonies for the election of officers. After being elected as First Lieutenant, there was hardly enough time for Bennett to borrow a uniform and ride back to Middlebury.

³⁹*Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1862; Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*. These seven were: Dexter Boyden '63, Frank Butterfield '63, Henry Herbert '63, William Proctor '63, George Bailey '64, H. Dwight Smith '64, and John Williamson '64. The "Roll of Honor" in the 1862-63 College Catalogue listed all Middlebury students and alumni from the classes of 1862-65 serving in the army at the time of publication, likely early October 1862. Enlistment dates for those men serving in Vermont regiments can be found in Peck's *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*.

⁴⁰Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 4.

⁴¹*Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1861; *Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1862.

⁴²*Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1862; Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*. The eight men from the Class of 1862 were: Fernando C. Beaman, John Rollin Converse, Henry Eaton, John Fitch, Edward Hobbs, E. Lyman Knapp, Charles C. Smith, and Aldace F. Walker. The ten additional men were: Albert Crane '63, Lewis Hemenway '63, Albert Sabin '63, F Clark '64, Edwin Higley '64, E. V. N. Hitchcock '64, Charles Lewis '64, John Mead '64, Cyrus Thomas '64, Eugene Wilber '64, Hiram French '65, Charles Newton '65, Walter Roys '65, and Riley Wright '65.

⁴³*Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1861; *Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1862.

Alphabetically the last in his class, he still had not arrived when his name was reached at the end of the ceremony. Stalling for time, the band played another piece, drawing it out for as long as possible while anxiety spread through the crowd.⁴⁴ At the time just a sophomore, President Brainerd later recalled:

Suddenly Walker appeared at the entrance of the audience room. The music abruptly ended. Walker's name was announced by President Labaree, and in blue uniform with glittering epaulettes Lieutenant Walker marched with stately strides to the stage. The applause that broke forth in the dignified old church was intense and prolonged. The speaker was frequently interrupted, and many sentences were only half heard. He soon gave up the attempt to follow his poorly committed manuscript. But he spoke with enthusiasm; his presence was impressive, it was the voice of the newly honored soldier hastening to the war; and doubtless the applause would have been as fervid had he spoken in an unknown tongue.⁴⁵

Brainerd's account paints a powerful and patriotic image, and the events of that day could not have been far from the minds of those numerous students who chose to enlist shortly thereafter.

The year 1862 represented Middlebury College at its patriotic high water mark. The majority of its student body came to the College during peacetime, and when faced by national crisis they responded differently. Though a patriotic fervor may have been present and concerns of the war were on students' minds, many students, more than half in fact, chose to continue their studies. During 1861 and 1862, the students with the strongest sense of duty and patriotic sentiments volunteered for the Army. Likewise, those incoming freshmen in 1861 and even more so in 1862, acknowledged that they were choosing college over enlistment, a decision with which they were comfortable. The result was that after 1862, the number of student enlistments dropped off

⁴⁴Brainerd, "Fifty years at Middlebury College."

⁴⁵Brainerd, "Fifty years at Middlebury College."

significantly. Though by the fall of 1862, just 18 months into the war, a total of 32 Middlebury students from the classes of 1862-1865 had enlisted, only an additional 19 would enlist from the classes of 1862-1869 at some later point in the war.⁴⁶ For the most part, after 1862 most students were content at the very least to graduate before going off to fight, if not avoid army service entirely.

In the opening stages of the war, when sufficient manpower existed to raise regiments comprised of nothing but volunteers, avoiding service was relatively easy. While pressures to enlist and “do one’s duty” certainly were present, there was no legal imperative to serve. As the war progressed, however, the demand for men became ever greater. Initially, to meet recruitment quotas, towns would offer men an enlistment bounty. Though these started out relatively small, they grew progressively greater, so that by 1863 bounties of \$1,000 were not uncommon. “Recruiting is going on with increased briskness under the stimulus of large bounties,” wrote the Middlebury Register in December 1863, “there is almost a certainty that our state will escape a draft.”⁴⁷ Despite the heavy financial burden this approach placed on town governments, residents much preferred it to a draft.⁴⁸ The very next week the Register reported that, “There is a little disposition to boast of the amount of money paid to recruits as bounty, as an indication of the degree of patriotism existing in town. This is a pleasant concept, and we do not object to the enjoyment of it by the people of any town that has come down liberally. Still, we do not think it will always bear close criticism, and in most instances

⁴⁶*Catalogue of Middlebury College, 1862; Class of 1898, Souvenir of the Class of 1898.* This figure comes from comparing the total number of students listed as in service in the fall of 1862 and the total number who served as compiled by the class of 1898.

⁴⁷“Home Matters,” *Middlebury Register*, 16 Dec 1863.

⁴⁸Middlebury Selectmen, *Report of the Town of Middlebury, 1862-1865.* The expenses of the Town of Middlebury more than tripled from 1861 to 1865, due largely to the cost of these bounties.

it was greatly stimulated, if not wholly owing, to that hateful spectre – the draft”⁴⁹ The author attributed the town’s success in meeting its enlistment quota not to patriotism or to the size of the bounty offered, but to the threat of a draft if this quota was not met.

In order to continue their studies, students had several obstacles to overcome. The first was to resist these increasingly enticing bounty offers made by the conjunction of local townships, the state government, and the Federal Government. As the Register reported in December, 1863, “Now is the *golden opportunity* for all who desire to go into the army. Many a young man will some day bitterly regret that he did not accept the \$800 or \$1000, which is now offered to him.”⁵⁰ At a time when the average annual salary of an unskilled worker was just under \$300, the size of these bounties becomes evident.⁵¹ Yet Middlebury students were not unskilled workers. They were able to afford the \$130 for College tuition, room, board, and fuel each year while depriving their family of an able bodied worker.⁵² To attend a college such as Middlebury signified at least moderate wealth and privilege. This, combined with their desire to remain at school - especially present in those classes enrolling after 1861 - made it easier for students to look past the allure of large bounties and focus on their education.

The draft posed a different set of challenges. Lincoln’s calls for troops year after year made finding new volunteers ever more difficult, regardless of how well rewarded they may have been. The Enrollment Act of 1863 was passed largely with the intent to stimulate volunteering by threat of a draft.⁵³ It created a system where all men age 20 to 45 registered or “enrolled” with the local provost marshal. Towns were assigned quotas

⁴⁹“Town Patriotism,” *Middlebury Register*, 23 Dec 1863.

⁵⁰“Home Matters,” *Middlebury Register*, 16 Dec 1863.

⁵¹McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 521.

⁵²*Catalogue of Middlebury College*, 1861.

⁵³McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 519.

proportionate to the number of men enrolled, and if this quota could not be met by volunteers, men were to be conscripted. Lincoln was to use the draft, a national process, once in 1863 and three times in 1864. Yet there were many exemption options associated with the draft that made it highly controversial. Most notably, a drafted man could pay a commutation fee of \$300, get a medical exemption, or hire a substitute to serve in their stead. This led to accusations that the draft favored the rich, yet the concept of substitution had been a long-standing tradition, and the use of a commutation fee intended to control the price for substitutes.⁵⁴ Scholars have found that the vast majority of those drafted took advantage of one of these options, and the men and students of Middlebury were no exception.⁵⁵

Many exempted themselves simply by paying the \$300 commutation fee. This was the most straightforward option, and to those students who could afford to, it presented an easy means of avoiding the draft and staying at school. At least several Middlebury students took advantage of this option. David Newland entered the College in the fall of 1861 and remained enrolled through the entirety of the war, graduating in 1865 just four months after General Lee's surrender. Under "military service" in the questionnaire sent out for the general catalogue of 1915, he wrote, "Drafted in Civil War—paid commutation \$300"⁵⁶ He had made his choice to go to College despite the war, and he had the resources and the will to continue his studies despite the draft.

⁵⁴McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 521.

⁵⁵McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 519-520. McPherson provides an interesting breakdown of national draft statistics. In total, 776,000 men had their names drawn in the four drafts. Of these, 161,000 "failed to report", 313,000 were exempted for physical or mental disabilities, or because they were the sole means of support for a dependent, 87,000 paid the commutation fee, 74,000 furnished substitutes, and 77,000 were sent home due to already filled quotas. Out of 776,000 men who had their names drawn, only 64,000 went personally into the army.

⁵⁶David Newland, completed questionnaire for the 1915 Middlebury College General Catalogue, 1910, Middlebury College Archives, Special Collections, Middlebury College, Middlebury.

Aldace Walker, the same Middlebury student who graduated with such patriotic fanfare in August of 1862, wrote to his father on July 19, 1863 about a draft list he had seen in the Rutland Herald. “The first name from Middlebury is Brainerd Kellogg, Prof.,” Walker wrote, “I would like him in my company – he would make a bully corporal. But such men will ante the \$300 of course.”⁵⁷ Walker noted that he had seen several Middlebury students as well as some of the town’s business men on the list, yet he doubted many would end up in the army. He reasoned that some would be “manifestly unable to come, and more manifestly able to pay.”⁵⁸ His comments suggest that not only were Middlebury students and faculty paying the commutation, but many business men and professionals from the town were as well.

Men also became exempt from military service if they furnished an acceptable substitute who remained in the service. While paying commutation exempted a man from only a particular draft, hiring a substitute kept him exempt indefinitely. In addition, to many people, hiring a substitute seemed a more patriotic approach than simply paying your \$300. In hiring a substitute, men felt they were still doing their duty to make sure the troop quotas were filled and that the ranks of Lincoln’s army held ample soldiers.⁵⁹

It is not surprising then that hiring substitutes was the most popular option amongst those men who stayed at Middlebury for the war’s duration. When President Labaree delivered his commencement address to the class of 1863, he praised the members of the class who had gone to war, but also noted the efforts of the students still sitting before him to fill the ranks of the Union Army. The graduating class, once

⁵⁷Aldace F. Walker, *Quite Ready to be Sent Somewhere*, ed. Tom Ledoux (Victoria: Trafford, 2002), 154.

⁵⁸Walker, *Quite Ready to be Sent Somewhere*, 154.

⁵⁹Labaree, “25th Anniversary Speech.”

numbering “nearly thirty” students, had been reduced to eleven after four long years.

“*[E]leven* who were once associated with you as classmates have listened to the claims of Patriotism and offered themselves to the service of their country,” Labaree proclaimed. He also acknowledged that of the eleven graduating that day, each “has now, or has had a representative in the army.”⁶⁰ Not only did all of these men provide for a substitute, but President Labaree considered it significant enough to make note of it in his speech. This is indicative of the positive nature in which he and many Vermonters viewed substitution. Though perhaps not as honorable and heroic as enlisting oneself, furnishing a substitute was considered in many regards as the next best thing, a way to show one’s patriotism and support the cause while remaining out of the army.

The same sentiments can be seen in an article written by Newland ’65 for the Middlebury Undergraduate, the College’s first student-run publication, in January 1891.⁶¹ Recalling his class’s experience at Middlebury, he wrote, “The class of ’65 studied through the whole period of the Civil War. Its patriotism should not be judged lacking however...None too much honor is given to those who in that time of supreme trial left their plows in the furrows – life callings and courses unfinished – to aid by the strong right arm of fierce war in keeping their country one. Others of this class served vicariously each with an *alter ego* in the field; so that nearly one half of the whole number could be counted as in service.”⁶² Once again, the connection between hiring a substitute and patriotism is made evident.

⁶⁰“Commencement Week,” *Middlebury Register*, 19 Aug 1863 (emphasis in original).

⁶¹This is the very same David Newland who was mentioned earlier as writing on his general catalogue questionnaire that he paid his \$300 commutation upon being drafted.

⁶²David Newland, “The Class of 1865,” *Undergraduate*, Jan 1891

Those who stayed behind behaved similarly to many Vermonters. An article in the Middlebury Register from November 1863 sheds light on this issue. It examined the outcome of the most recent draft in Vermont from which 948 men were procured. However, that 948 were all that came from an original 7,071 men who had their numbers drawn.⁶³ Out of these, 1,833 or just fewer than 26% paid the \$300 commutation fee and exempted themselves. An additional 630 procured substitutes, while another 2,157 were “rejected for disability” and 1,426 were exempted by previous service or other means. All told, out of the 7,071 men initially drafted, only 318 or 4.5% actually entered into the army. The additional 630 substitutes brought the total to 948.⁶⁴ These numbers were less than the national average of 8%, but not by much.⁶⁵ By this point, most men from Vermont who were eager to enlist out of patriotism, duty, a sense of adventure, or any other reason, had had ample opportunity to do so. The ever rising bounty offered for enlistment was a testament to the shrinking pool of men left on the home front who were both interested and eligible for service. By the fall of 1863, men at home had either already served in the army or had chosen to stay behind thus far. Therefore it is not surprising that these townspeople would make an effort to stay out of the army either by hiring substitutes or paying commutation. The behavior of those Middlebury students who remained at the College during the war then was not unique or self-indulgent, but rather followed a similar trend to that of the local population.

It is also worth examining with which regiments men from Middlebury College and men from the town actually served. Middlebury’s townspeople were in fact fortunate

⁶³“The Following Abstract of the Adjutant and Inspector Generals Report,” *Middlebury Register*, 4 Nov 1863.

⁶⁴“The Following Abstract of the Adjutant and Inspector Generals Report,” *Middlebury Register*, 4 Nov 1863.

⁶⁵McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 520.

that their militia regiment was amongst those picked to serve in the First Vermont Volunteers Regiment. In all, 47 men from Middlebury served in this regiment, all but one of which served in Company I.⁶⁶ Though the members of this regiment were unaware of it when they marched off to war, serving in the First Vermont would prove to be a tremendous piece of good fortune for those men involved. As the war was expected to be short-lived, their term of enlistment was only three months. While they were deployed, recruiters began traveling about the Vermont countryside raising not three-month regiments, but three-*year* regiments.⁶⁷ Thus by being in the First Vermont, these men had the double benefit of an unquestionable display of their patriotism, as well as having the shortest service commitment of any Vermont regiment raised during the war. Though many of these men would eventually reenlist, having veteran status gave them better options upon returning to the army, or it made them exempt, at least initially, from the draft.⁶⁸

In the fall of 1861, 44 men from Middlebury left with the three-year Fifth Regiment. Though there would be the occasional Middlebury man here and there in each Vermont regiment, it was not until E Company of the 14th Regiment was formed a year later that another primarily Middlebury company would be mustered into the army.⁶⁹ Amongst the 54 men from Middlebury in this company, many, but by no means all, of the same names from the First Vermont appeared. Two Middlebury alumni, both recent graduates from the class of 1862, also served in the 14th.⁷⁰ Unlike most other regiments

⁶⁶Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 1-26.

⁶⁷Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*, 27-29, 67, 106, 142.

⁶⁸McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 522.

⁶⁹Peck, *Revised Roster of Vermont Volunteers*.

⁷⁰They were John Rollin Converse and Charles C. Smith. *Middlebury Catalogue*, 1862.

Interestingly, John A. Mead class of 1864 enlisted in the 12th Vermont around the same time. Also a nine month regiment, Mead would fight with the 12th for the full nine months, was honorably discharged, and

raised during the war in Vermont, the 14th had only a nine-month term of service. Thus the two units that had the greatest representation from the town of Middlebury also happened to be two of the shortest serving. Whether or not this was an inadvertent effect of recruiting calendars and time tables or a deliberate and intelligent effort by the townspeople of Middlebury to maximize the impact of their service time is impossible to determine. However, given initial expectations about the war's length, it is hard to justify any argument for intent. Though there were a number of Middlebury residents who did serve in three-year regiments and others who reenlisted, by and large the men of Middlebury were fortunate in escaping long term military service in an ever bloodier war. The short terms of the First and Fourteenth Regiments minimized their exposure on the front, while at the same time giving them the benefits of being considered veterans.

At this point, it can be tempting to jump to conclusions about the students at Middlebury College during the war. It is easy to get the impression that they fit stereotypes of collegiate affluence, loudly voicing patriotic sentiments while remaining safely removed from the conflict by means of their wealth. Yet it must not be forgotten that many students did leave to fight or enlisted immediately after graduating. Of all those students who attended at some point during the Civil War, almost 30% spent time in the Union Army, whereas from the town roughly 26% of those men eligible to serve did so.⁷¹ Statistically, the College sent forth a greater proportion of soldiers than the town.

returned to Middlebury in the fall of 1863 for his senior year. He would later become Governor of Vermont and the benefactor of Mead Chapel, a building which remains a dominant feature on Middlebury's campus to this day.

⁷¹See note 6.

“Watchman, what of the night?” asked President Labaree in his commencement address to the class of 1865.⁷² As Middlebury College emerged from one of the darkest periods in its history, President Labaree was finishing his 25th year as President. Yet even during those troubled days of war, Labaree believed the College’s true colors had shone through. The future of the College seemed bright, and Labaree was well justified in writing his own response to the biblical passage. “Watchman, what of the night?” he again asked. “The night has departed, the morning has come – the light of the kind of day flutters its golden fringes along the Eastern horizon and gives us each promise of his early coming.”⁷³

It is easy to over simplify, to laud the patriotism of Middlebury’s students and their heroic deeds in battle. But to do so lessens our understanding of what really happened, of the impact the war had on the student body and the experience of the College. Middlebury’s patriotism, both amongst the students and the townspeople, was considerable at the war’s onset in 1861. Middlebury’s militia rushed to the front with the First Regiment, matching their patriotic ideals with action. Two students from the College were amongst their ranks, a response slightly less than proportionate yet by no means insignificant, while the rest remained behind. Yet those who stayed behind did so because they expected, as did most people, that the war would be quick and decisive. Though their romanticized views of the war fueled their patriotic spirit, they were not needed as soldiers and had few incentives to leave the College. This patriotic frenzy came to a sudden halt at the end of June, 1861 with the death of Henry Bennett.

⁷²Labaree, “25th Anniversary Speech.”

⁷³Labaree, “25th Anniversary Speech.”

Patriotism did not disappear after Bennett's death, but this classmate's passing had a marked impact on the attitude of the student body. War was not something to rush into with youthful exuberance; it was a somber and dangerous matter. Within the next year, Middlebury would see its greatest exodus of students for the war, some waiting until graduation, others not. The resolve of Middlebury's students was not lacking, and in this period the College furnished more than thirty soldiers.

The fall of 1862 began a new phase of enlistment patterns in Middlebury. By this point, the majority of those students who felt compelled to enlist had done so. Those students who remained, aware of the war's ongoing presence, chose to remain at Middlebury and continue pursuing their education. This was especially true of the freshman class, all of whom came to Middlebury acknowledging that their education was more important than service in the army. In order to avoid the draft, a number of students who enrolled between 1861 and 1865 either paid the \$300 commutation fee or hired a substitute to go in their stead. Yet this should not be construed as some patriotic rouse by wealthy and privileged college students to avoid doing their national duty. These practices were common throughout Vermont and the Union as a whole, where a far greater proportion of those men drafted exempted themselves from service rather than accept their fate and go off to fight.

Both Middlebury College and the town of Middlebury had admirable service records during the Civil War. Though responses were slightly different, both responded to the best of their abilities, and the College sent forth a substantial percentage of its students to the war effort. The fact that Middlebury College sent forth such a large percentage of students, greater proportionately than the town of Middlebury itself, is

indeed commendable. Furthermore, it suggests that despite their higher level of education, the students of Middlebury College were no less likely to fight for the Union cause than their neighbors from the town.

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