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Christopher Hickey

Western Michigan University, agricola73@aol.com

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College Campus and Campus Martius: Antebellum Michigan Education and Cultural Self-Identity

By Christopher P. Hickey

Introduction

The antebellum educational landscape in Michigan, as well as the entire Midwest, differed greatly from that of the Northeast and in the South. In Michigan, private colleges were in bloom and located mostly in small towns. While access to Eastern and Southern colleges were exclusive, access to Michigan colleges was inclusive. It was indicative of the progressively minded people who lived there. In the spirit of reform, the drive for equalizing education was pronounced. Abolitionist currents also ran strong, and coeducation of men and women was becoming common.

Michigan educators of the antebellum era shared common goals. Nominally, it was to prepare the young for society by conforming individual choices to social norms. Through academic instruction, moral training, and physical exercise institutions molded a young man's mind, soul, and body to fit into the society he belonged. Yet there was a higher purpose; by indoctrinating the young, educators were transmitting the community's values and cultural self-identity to the world. Small town educational institutions not only taught the local youths, but attracted students from different towns and regions. Nor did the graduating students stay, migrating to other regions of the country carrying local cultural ideas with them. The antebellum education was a marker for the society in which the institution belonged. Weaving these two purposes together, educational systems were attempting to make men for society.

The following examines the educational experiences of antebellum Michigan students them. Educational systems in antebellum Michigan were markers and propagators of cultural self-identity for the community they belonged. The relationship between institutions and communities were reciprocal in nature; the fortunes of one depended on the other. Colleges and

their communities, though initially separate in goal and custom, became increasingly bound through shared self-identity. Communities used these educational institutions not only to restate and promote existing social values and norms, but also as vehicles for reform. The values and self-identity were reflected in what these institutions taught. Instruction was utilitarian in nature, with the goal of making useful and skillful citizens, thereby improving society at large in the spirit of civic virtue.

Michigan educational institutions and their surrounding communities were reciprocal in nature. While communities used colleges as vehicles for promoting self-identity, the colleges used communities to drive reform. Michigan colleges, responding to social demand, were created to provide young men with a firm moral and utilitarian education. Reform-minded colleges provided students with pragmatic skillsets to be useful and succeed in society, but also imbued them with egalitarianism, social empathy, and self-control. Understanding these traits, and how they were taught, is key to understanding progressive activism. Many students in the University of Michigan aspired to be lawyers or doctors, while others in town colleges studied to be ministers or teachers. While those in the Agricultural College learned to be educated farmers, others in the Normal College desired vocational training. Regardless of professional aspiration, all were educated in the spirit of progress and social mobility, though stamped with the unique self-identity of the community to which the college belonged.

But education in self-identity was not limited to the collegiate. Although mandatory militia service ended before war with Mexico, private militia groups expanded in Michigan during the 1850s. Militia companies, like colleges, were expressions of local pride that could be displayed to other communities. However, it also served as an educational system. The physical education movement was waning, creating a gap in educational needs for many. The expansion

of the militia served to fill this gap for young men. But Michigan communities were not embracing militarism—even if military service was increasingly popular, most young men did not participate nor did it become a part of campus life.

Michigan's educational ideals were vastly different in scope and specific purpose than those of New England and the South. With this in mind, the focus of this thesis is confined to Michigan. In the first part, it examines eight individual colleges in Michigan—Albion, Adrian, Hillsdale, Kalamazoo, Michigan Normal, Olivet, University of Michigan, and Agricultural Colleges. While each shared common trait, they also retained a uniqueness of character that reflected the values of both the founders and the town in which the colleges were located.

This uniqueness of community has been preserved in personal correspondence and institutional records. The records of individuals provide a window into how education was experienced and interpreted by the students. They include letters, diaries, and the papers of students and faculty. Institutional records not only supply valuable historical information, but also shed light on educational methods and practices and the reasons for them. They include college faculty minutes, catalogues, pamphlets, recitation publications, literary society magazines, and institutional correspondence. Lastly, newspapers provide historical context through the lens of public opinion. Both the Kalamazoo College Archives and Hillsdale College Archives provided a wealth of personal correspondence, diaries, and institutional records for their antebellum students. The Bentley Historical Library in Ann Arbor was the most extensive, with personal papers, institutional records, newspapers, and rare manuscripts from all over the region. Other archives augmented research, such as Olivet, Eastern Michigan University, Adrian, Albion, and the Kalamazoo Valley Historical Museum. In examining and assembling disparate pieces of information, a much larger picture emerges.

Historiography of Antebellum Michigan Education

The historiography of antebellum Michigan and Midwestern education is sparse. In the early twentieth century, historian Donald Tewkesbury argued that instability, inefficiency, and provincialism hamstrung early educational efforts of the state, causing a four-fifths failure rate. He concluded that this failure negated the importance of antebellum education in the later twentieth century. Tewkesbury's thesis had lasting effect.¹ In the 1950s and 60s, historian Richard Hofstadter published a series of studies using Tewkesbury's paradigm as a premise. Hofstadter concluded, overall, that antebellum colleges were feckless, weakly-founded institutions obsessed with reform, and provided a useless education to students. The central weakness of Tewkesbury's argument is that many colleges simply moved, changed names, or otherwise reinvented themselves; all of which describe Hillsdale. While the major weakness to Hofstadter's approach was relying on Tewkesbury's method, his argument was also predicated on strong biases against the reform movements of his own time.²

Historian Kenneth Wheeler departed from previous studies, and re-examined antebellum Midwestern colleges. Using primary evidence found in college archives, Wheeler's intent was to demonstrate the variations between the Midwest and the rest of the nation through its educational system. He concluded that colleges, and the societies where they were located, had a reciprocal relationship that reflected shared values. Not only were colleges driving change in the

¹ Donald G. Tewkesbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War: With Particular Reference to the Religious Influences Bearing Upon the College Movement*, (NY: Archon Books, 1965).

² Richard Hofstadter and C. DeWitt Hardy, *The Development and Scope of Higher Education in the United States*, NY: Columbia University Press, 1955; see also *American Higher Education: A Documentary History*, 2 vols., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

community, the community drove change in the college. Both acted as catalysts to each other, accelerating ideas of progress and reform. According to Wheeler, parents sent their boys and girls to college to make them into useful members of society.³

The College and Community

In understanding self-identity of the individual student, it is vital to first understand how college and community identities were linked. Relationships between college and community were reciprocal in nature, and the values of colleges and communities needed to correspond and complement each other. Many of the first Michigan rural colleges were founded by religiously minded colonists who were themselves educated elsewhere. One such founder was John Shipherd, who founded Olivet College. Shipherd was a firm believer in egalitarianism, and that education should not be the province of the wealthy. Like Johnny Appleseed, the Presbyterian minister planted seeds throughout in the Midwest, previously founding Oberlin and LaGrange Colleges. In 1844 he and thirty-eight colonists purchased land in Michigan to build another school. Although he died later that year, the college prospered. The college not only drew students, it also drew settlers. Soon, a town soon grew up around the campus. Olivet, now the nucleus of a town, received its charter in 1858.⁴

If the founding of Olivet College created a community around it, it was usually the other way around. Desiring to establish their own, existing towns gathered resources and focused efforts to draw a college to them. Spring Arbor campaigned and raised money for ten years to found a college. The initial driving force was Elijah Pilcher, who had been a Methodist minister

³ Kenneth Wheeler, "The Antebellum College in the Old Northwest: Higher Education and the Defining of the Midwest" (PhD. diss., Ohio State University, 1999).

⁴ Wheeler, "The Antebellum College," 87-88.

in Ohio and wanted to build a seminary. The townspeople enthusiastically supported the measure, and donated what monies and materials they could. But after courting prosperous backers in the town, Pilcher delayed construction when he realized nearby towns held more promise. Eventually, the seminary moved to Albion in 1839. The town did not give up, gathered more resources, and campaigned for another college. In 1844, the Free Will Baptists accepted money and a tract of land from Spring Arbor residents, agreeing to establish the Michigan Central College. David Graham, educated at Oberlin, was its only teacher. As the college grew, Edmund Fairfield replaced Graham, who expanded the college.

A major reason Michigan desired colleges was the cultural benefits colleges bring to a community. While churches still served as the spiritual center of the community, the town college served as its intellectual and cultural nucleus. The college often hosted public lectures or social events, such as dances, for the community. Some of these served partly as matchmaking events between the sexes. Rienzi Loud wrote of attending a campus festival open to the public, which he referred to as a “Qacible” (sociable), and then returned home wondering if a certain female student he danced with liked him or not.⁵

The education of students was a community affair, and all residents were interested parties. Exams were advertised as public events, requiring the student to recite either his or her own composition, or one that they had memorized. These recitations were later published either separately, in newspapers, or in literary society magazines.⁶ Most town colleges also served as sort of a high school, with youths taught by student-teachers.⁷ The college propagated and

⁵ Rienzi Loud, May 24th, 1861, diary entry, box 110, Loud Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

⁶ Newspapers frequently listed these recitations by author, title, and a brief description of both the subject and an evaluation of their performance. Kalamazoo College Archives contain dozens of ticket stubs to these events, while Hillsdale published the recitations in their literary magazines.

⁷Some colleges, such as Hillsdale, listed preparatory students in their catalogues, while others such as Kalamazoo College did not. Adrienne Lee Hartl, “The Effect of the Civil War on Kalamazoo

restated social values by hosting public events and inserting day-to-day education into the public domain. Rural communities in Michigan valued education because it enabled citizens, via an institution, to formally invest their values into the young through a communal experience.

Conflict also demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between college and community. If the college was not espousing the values of the community, friction and protest arose. In 1858, President Henry Tappan of University of Michigan in Ann Arbor gave a public lecture on the Prussian educational system which he so admired. Always one to practice what he preached, Tappan tried to insert Prussian models into the curriculum. He pushed for science in lieu of classical training, and instilled more regimentation and organization into campus life. James Kidd, who was a student there at the time, admirably referred to him as “Chancellor Tappan.”⁸ But Charles Taylor, a member of the Board of Regents and life-long resident, protested in the newspapers. “Pres. Tappan, with his Prussian battalions, is storming the halls of the University.” Clear that values were being violated, he equated Prussian influence with an invading army that must be repelled. “The (hierarchical) methods of the Prussians, with their autocratic ways, assault our spirit of equality, free speech, and opportunity.”⁹ Tappan seemed to have backed pedaled for a time, but by the summer of 1863, he was removed from office. The Board of Regents did not elaborate the reasons to the public, and only cited “personal frictions with the Board” and Tappan’s “flawed Christian character.”¹⁰ Through conflict, the episode in 1858 underscores how communities saw their colleges as paragons of social values.

College,” in *Michigan Institutions of Higher Education in the Civil War*, ed. Willis F. Dunbar, (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Civil War Centennial Observance Commission, 1964), 34-52.

⁸ “The Prussian Educational System,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 28th, 1858; the term was a double edged sword; while most students used it as a term of endearment and respect, many residents in Ann Arbor used it with derision and contempt. James Kidd, *Personal Recollections of a Cavalryman: With Custer’s Michigan Brigade in the Civil War*, (Ionia, MI: Sentinel Printing Co., 1908), 10.

⁹ “On President Tappan’s Late Speech,” *Detroit Free Press*, November 25th, 1858.

¹⁰ “More on the Removal of the President,” *Detroit Free Press*, August 25th, 1863.

Detroit and Ann Arbor newspapers were filled with the sayings and doings of President Tappan and the faculty, and were quick to criticize them if their opinions or conduct conflicted with the values of the reading public. One letter writer, for example, asked a loaded question to the editor of the *Detroit Free Press*. He asked if Professor Henry L. Treadway had been secretly dealing in spirits, as the barrels outside of taverns in Detroit were marked “HLT.” Although drinking certainly took place, there were over one hundred drinking establishments in Detroit in 1850, it was forbidden in school regulations for both students and faculty.¹¹ While the author may have had an ulterior motive by implying Professor Treadway was either a drunkard, dealer, or both, this episode again indicates citizens of the community felt the college represented their values. Additionally, since the college was responsible for educating the young, parents demanded their children not be subjected to the influence of vice. Citizens often acted as watchmen, keeping an eye on the doings and sayings of the college faculty. Ann Arbor was no Prussian barracks or drinking hall, but a place where the egalitarian spirit could flourish through proper moral discipline.

College presidents in Michigan often had turbulent relationships with their communities, and some fell victim to scandal. In November 1863, President J. A. B. Stone of Kalamazoo College was removed from office. It was rumored that he had an improper relationship with a female student, impregnating her and sending her to Canada. Although these rumors were unfounded, it was enough for the Board of Regents to dismiss Stone. But it caused a backlash within the community and the students. While engaging in a protest against Stone’s removal, six of the students were expelled. Eventually, most of the other students left, almost causing the college to close its doors. It would not be until the late 1870s that Kalamazoo College would

¹¹ “Letter to Editor,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 19th, 1860.

once again fill its classrooms.¹² But the effect on the town was immediate. Kalamazoo College hosted a preparatory school taught by student teachers, which served the community as a high school. Seventeen year-old Spencer McOmber found himself without a teacher, so he joined the cavalry that month. Most of his fellow students left as well.¹³ The dismissal of a college president had a rippling effect on the community, and nearly brought the educational system down altogether.

1863 was a bad year for presidents. Already mentioned was President Tappan's removal in the summer. President Sinex of Adrian College was removed earlier that year without fanfare. President Asa Mahan of Albion was also removed. President E. B. Fairfield of Hillsdale was replaced by his friend and colleague, Ransom Dunn.¹⁴ Historian Willis Dunbar concluded that these dismissals were unrelated to each other, and unrelated to the war.¹⁵ The evidence, or lack thereof, seems to support the former. But whatever the reasons these presidents were removed, the fact that all occurred within a short time period at the height of the war is more than coincidental. Broadly speaking, the Civil War, by 1863, was touching the Northern home front for the first time and causing a measure of upheaval. The shaken foundations of communities must have, in some way, shaken the foundations of the college. The reciprocal relationship

¹² The account of the expulsions is covered later in the paper. President J. A. B. and Lucinda Stone founded Kalamazoo College in 1842, and they received their charter in 1858. The sources for Stone's dismissal are hardly discussed in Lucinda Stone's recollections, and the faculty minutes only discuss the upheaval caused by it. But historian Adrienne Hartl was able to uncover the scandal through private letters of former students. It is was the belief of Lucinda Stone, the students, and Hartl that the charge was an erroneous attempt by the Board of regents to remove J. A. B. Stone by framing him. See Hartl, "Kalamazoo College," 34-52.

¹³ Spencer McOmber, letter to mother, December 12th, 1863, Spencer McOmber papers, *Kalamazoo Valley Museum*.

¹⁴ "Introducing President Dunn," *Detroit Free Press*, August 1st, 1863.

¹⁵ Willis Dunbar, "Introduction," *Michigan Institutes of Higher Education in the Civil War*, ed. Willis Dunbar, (Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan Civil War Observance Commission, 1964), 5-12.

between community and college has already been demonstrated. The health of the community directly influenced the health of the college, and vice versa.

The College and the Utility of Education

The growth of colleges reflected the social attributes of Michigan. According to Kenneth Wheeler, action-orientated Midwesterners “showed an exaggerated desire to do things at once, to build colleges, or to change existing ways.”¹⁶ When parents sent their children to college, they expected them to be made into useful citizens. This concept had a blended meaning, an admixture of utilitarian pragmatism interspersed with layered civic and religious principles. A prime example was the multi-faceted role colleges played not only in higher education, but primary education as well. Rural colleges primarily trained ministers and teachers, but did not confine this education to the college classroom. Although it again demonstrates the reciprocal relationship between college and community, it also demonstrates the interrelationship of communities in the region. Students were not only parceled out to the local community as primary school teachers, but were sent far and wide, sometimes to different states. In some ways, it was an internship program without the benefits of mentorship. Entirely on their own with little support, not all could readily master it. But it did provide valuable practical experience, and helped winnow out the unfit. The practice was also instrumental in the democratization of education outside of colleges, providing schoolhouses with teachers in every town, village, and hamlet in the Midwest. By providing teachers to staff primary schools, Michigan colleges were reflecting the dual nature of utility and egalitarian civic virtue. Not only would it assist in the education of teachers, it would assist in the education of all.

¹⁶ Wheeler, “The Antebellum College,” 20.

This dual approach was made possible by the demographics of the student population. Students often hailed from other parts of the state and stayed in the dormitory when classes were in session. Others were from different parts of the country and were not tied locally. Dozens or even hundreds of students of this nature living together on campus created a unique community within a community with their own identity. But this did not insulate them from the town nor sever ties from whence they came. They were training for their future roles in a profession, namely ministers or teachers, and the community and region around them provided opportunity for practical experience. But faculty and students also felt civic obligation.

Rienzi Loud, student at Adrian College, was also a schoolteacher at a primary school. With a class of over thirty boys, Loud discussed the difficulties of balancing his own studies and teaching children. His goal was to be an attorney. But pecuniary difficulties and poor study habits hampered his efforts to attend law school. For him, the remedy was to work harder in both his studies and teaching.¹⁷ But Loud salved his own difficulties through obligation towards his students. By “ensuring (their) proper study habits, which, in good time, would ensure further opportunity,” Loud believed, they would “cast off the shackles of brutal civilization.” What civilization Loud was referring to is unclear; with a classical training he may be alluding to ancient tradition. More likely he meant the South. Even with these civic-minded goals, Loud still had difficulty with some of the more unruly students. On one occasion, his charges ran out of the classroom into the street to see a circus train. On another, a large boy threw a slate at him challenging a fight. But Loud, like most Michigan college students, was imbued with a non-violent approach to problems. He simply closed the school for the remainder of the day, and then returned the next.¹⁸

¹⁷ Rienzi Loud, diary entry, March 10th, 1861, Rienzi Loud Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

¹⁸ Ibid.

It did not always work out as well. Two other teachers, Hillsdale students and brothers Newell and Francis Dunn, could never gain control their classes. Unruly boys vied with them for mastery of classrooms, and fights between students were common. Like Rienzi Loud, the Dunn brothers believed in sparing the rod and eschewed corporal punishment. After short stints as failed teachers, they left for other pursuits.¹⁹ One side, practical experience caused many to reevaluate their career choices, on another it served to winnow out the unfit.

Students not only provided teachers for the local community, but for the region as well. John Rodgers was more successful, and while student at Michigan Central College in 1854, left for Kentucky to teach. Unsatisfied with the dilapidated schoolhouses and backwards children, he removed to Ohio. There, he found more traction with his students and fitted better with the populace.²⁰ Colleges not only spearheaded primary education locally, they spearheaded it regionally.

Detroit, the only real city in Michigan, created their public school system in the 1840s, with nineteen high schools by the 1860s.²¹ But for the town, education was the responsibility of the college, not government. So the practice had a dual purpose; while it benefited the college student, it also benefited the community and the region as a whole. It spread education in the spirit of egalitarian reform. The placement of schoolteachers by colleges again shows the mutual relationship between college and community, and the expected roles the college should play in that relationship. But most of all, it indicates how colleges and communities anticipated and

¹⁹Newell Dunn, Diary Entry, December 1st, 1859, Box 2, Dunn Family Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

²⁰ Kenneth Wheeler calls this the “hybridization of the Midwest, noting that newcomers melded into their communities, leaving their cultural origins behind. “The Antebellum College,” 234-5.

²¹ “The Public Schools of Detroit—History and Plan of Their Organization,” *Detroit Free Press* February 20, 1864.

embraced the changing utility of education. Education was meant to make useful members of society. They, in turn, would foster reform to make society more useful to itself.

The College and the Egalitarian Spirit

Egalitarianism in Michigan was not an impulse *ex nihilo*, but deeply rooted in Christian morality, political ideology, and practical experience. These things were not disparate. Rather, they were like layered bedrock on which the community sat. At the same time, these roots were not dead tenets, but part of the living community and day-to-day life. The goal of education, to instill social values and restate communal self-identity, has already been shown. The purpose of this section is not to uncover roots in depth, but to demonstrate how those roots affected education. It examines the policies of colleges and what they taught students. Michigan colleges tended to synthesize their curriculum. While mathematics and scientific principles were included, religion and classical literature remained central. This section argues that studying classical models reflected how they viewed democracy and the roles of individual citizens. The rules and regulations of colleges were designed not only to build moral character and maintain order on campus, but also to instill self-control and temper ambition. Ambition was the yin-yang of its day. A major topic in education, students were taught to avoid its pitfalls, while at the same time harnessing it for the common good.

Perhaps most importantly, this section examines coeducation, its purposes, and its effect on the community. Educating men and women together was cross-purposed; while women could receive much the same education as men, the men would be tempered by the softening effects of women. Lastly, it examines how students interpreted their experience in the Civil War through

the lens of their education. In doing so, the importance of those values and identities, and what they are, become apparent.

Colleges were mostly, but not always, religiously affiliated. Hillsdale College, founded by Free Will Baptists, and was built on elevated ground in the center of town. Echoing Puritan John Winthrop, it was described by its founder as “the college upon a hill.”²² Kalamazoo, Albion, and Adrian Colleges were also built on prominent hills near or in the middle of town. The preamble for the Kalamazoo College catalogue emphasized “instilling notions of Christian virtue and morality” into both its male and female students.²³ Hillsdale required all students to attend daily prayers in the chapel. But for the Sabbath, it also emphasized religious freedom by dictating a student must “attend some place of worship,” meaning they had a choice what religion to follow.²⁴ Most colleges had similar edicts. University of Michigan and Kalamazoo College required a student to attend daily prayers in the college chapel. The rural Michigan college provided an opportunity for the farmer’s son to gain an education endowed with a firm Christian foundation, and reflected strong religious roots.

Although universities such as Harvard and Princeton had long histories, the small town college was new. The University of Michigan was the oldest in Michigan, founded in 1817. Small town colleges, such as Hillsdale, Adrian, Albion, Olivet, and Kalamazoo, were new entities founded during the 1840s and 50s and were built with egalitarian principles and an impatient desire to reform society overnight. Historian Daniel Boorstin, in *The Americans*, called them “Booster Colleges.”²⁵ Although anachronistic, the term reflected accurately the egalitarian

²² Edmund Burke Fairfield and Ransom Dunn, “Lives of the Founders and Builders of Hillsdale College,” *Hillsdale Advance*, September 23rd, 1885, 309.

²³ *Catalogue of Officers and Students of Kalamazoo College 1859-60*, (Detroit, MI: O. S. Gully Book and Job Printer, 1860), 13.

²⁴ *Hillsdale Catalogue*, 33.

²⁵ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience*, (NY: Vintage Books, 1964), 478.

spirit of the people who built them. An individual or community could boost themselves up, and construct their own ideal society with a level playing field. Liberal education, for the first time, was accessible to the farmer's son or daughter.

L. R. Fiske founded Michigan Agricultural College in 1855 to bridge the gap between the "educated class" and the "laboring class." In his address to the state legislature, he expressed his concern that seven-eighths of the population were "deemed unworthy of mental cultivation, while the smaller fraction...have been deemed worthy of the highest advantages of education." Fiske's larger goal was to not only to create the educated farmer, but the educated shop keeper and laborer as well. This fitted with the growing rift between northern and southern values, as he compared his new institution with the "unproductiveness of the slave states."²⁶

Michiganders were also aware of appearances, and wary of it. Lorette Hadley, student at Hillsdale, recorded in her journal an encounter with a Lieutenant on furlough who took pains to inform her he thought of himself no better than the enlisted man. "While I agree with his sentiments, I doubt his genuineness, and it was too bad he was drunk."²⁷ The Lieutenant, after drinking a bit much, may have been trying to impress the ladies with the rhetoric of egalitarianism. Or, perhaps, he was truthful and believed what he said. But the fact that Hadley felt skeptical of the Lieutenant indicates that there was such a thing as deliberately faking it, ironically trying to impress upon others they were genuine.

But more often, while the sentiment was real, the rhetoric of egalitarianism masked underlying ambition. Adrian College student Rienzi Loud wrote repeatedly in his diary his intense desire to rise in society and become a "most learned" lawyer. He was clear in his desire

²⁶ L. R. Fiske, *An Address on the Condition and Office of the Agricultural College of the State of Michigan; Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, January 14th, 1861*, (Lansing, MI: Hosmer & Knorr, 1861), 35-46.

²⁷ Lorette Hadley, Diary Entry, January 17th, 1864, Hadley-LaFleur Papers, Hillsdale College Archives.

to be accorded a higher place in society, to be held in deference. “I am burning with desire to be situated...in a place of high regard.” He also wrote, often in the same paragraphs, the rhetoric of egalitarianism. “Unlike those in southern skies, we men of the North are all worth the same.”²⁸ Writing in June of 1861, perhaps he was moved by secession. But the fact he can go on, page after page, interweaving egalitarian rhetoric and his ambition speak volumes. Loud not only believed in egalitarian ideals, but also the inequality of stratification because it could benefit him. It is not as hypocritical as it sounds. This dichotomy of polar opposites was quite common. Men wanted to rise in society, but also thought others should have the same opportunity. When one does succeed, the success was not by privileged birth but through one’s own efforts. Loud emphasized the value of hard work in his journal, “if only I work harder, I can overcome my difficulties.”²⁹ He linked social advancement with determined effort. But they seemed to truly believe in what they preached—every man was worth the same.

Egalitarian values reflected the liberalist ideals in rural colleges. Many of them accepted women students, and—nominally at least—black students. Hillsdale, Kalamazoo, Adrian, Michigan Agricultural, and Olivet Colleges were co-ed. Historian Willis F. Dunbar, in his edited study of Civil War era Michigan colleges, concluded that although men and women were separated to a certain degree, they most likely attended classes together.³⁰ The course curriculum of Hillsdale and diary entries of Lorette Hadley make clear that men and women were studying the same material.³¹ The Agricultural College expected the same manual labor from both male and female students.³² But liberalist ideals were not always reflected in practice. Hillsdale, Kalamazoo, and Adrian Colleges all list their “Female Department” as separate from the male

²⁸ Loud, diary entry, June 13th and July 23rd, 1861, Loud Papers, Bentley Historical Library.

²⁹ Ibid., May 12th, 1861.

³⁰ Dunbar, “Introduction,” 7.

³¹ Hadley, diary entry, June 21st, 1863, Hadley-LaFleur Papers, Hillsdale College Archives.

³² Fiske, *Address*, 67.

student body. Graduating males received a degree in a bachelor of arts or sciences, while the graduating female received something equating a certificate of completion. Although men and women lived in separate quarters, they often lived in the same dormitory and must have interacted frequently.³³ President J. A. B. Stone of Kalamazoo College explained the benefits of co-ed education, that “by bringing the two sexes in contact this way,” both young men and women could “realize advantages of a social, refining, emulatory nature which the exclusive system has always been found to lack.”³⁴

While there was indeed a demand for female education and parity, there may be an ulterior motive in the co-ed college. The interaction between young men and women, even if somewhat unequal, helped temper and mold ambitious young men. If republican mothers had raised republican boys, young republican women, through the softening effects of their femininity, could help educate young republican men. “True manliness,” historian Lorien Foote argues, “combined ‘soft’ virtues of womanhood with ‘hard’ virtues of manliness. The highest compliment was to describe such a man as ‘brave and tender-hearted’ or as possessing a ‘tough moral fibre and delicacy.’”³⁵ For many rural colleges, this dichotomy was best obtained through social interaction with the fairer sex.

Social interaction did not lead to parity in the eyes of male students. Andrew Newton Buck attended Hillsdale College with female students, and later served in the Union Army. Lying in a hospital bed with the measles with several of his fellows, they drafted and enacted, with all due process and proper rules of procedure, an “address from young men of 1862 to 1962.” The first question for their future fellows was about women. “What became of Women’s

³³Hadley, Diary Entry, June 21st, 1863, Hadley-LaFleur Papers, Hillsdale College Archives.

³⁴“Kalamazoo Colleges,” *Michigan Farmer*, December 10th, 1859.

³⁵ Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs, Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army*, (NY: New York University Press, 2010), 56-57.

Rights?” It seemed women’s rights fell into line with science fiction, as they wondered if man had ever “called to their aid a swift flying comet and take a trip to the planets” or invented “anything beyond railroads and telegraphs lines.” But they could not keep their minds off future women, and were perhaps just as mysterious in 1962 as 1862. “I suppose the ladies have their own way as they’ve always had.” Not understanding the mysterious female, they superimposed female thoughts with “women of both 62s would exclaim in the same breath, ‘why, how you dress!’”³⁶ Buck and his chums wondered about gender roles, and equated its change with science fiction. They felt that while women may someday be legally equal to men, far away in the future, women would still be as frivolous and mysterious as in Buck’s time. The egalitarian man should be morally courageous and gentle simultaneously, but he was no woman.

While rural co-ed colleges embraced feminization, if not female equality, more cosmopolitan institutions resisted both as a threat. Normal College in Ypsilanti and University of Michigan were exclusively male. University of Michigan students wanted to keep it that way. In 1859, the Board of Regents discussed admitting women after four of students from Lansing Female College petitioned to attend. This raised the ire of the all-male student body, who passed their own resolutions in protest. The Board backtracked stating they were never seriously considering the issue. A newspaper article explained that this feminine threat was unwarranted, because even if the “doors of the University were thrown open for the reception of both sexes,” less than a dozen would actually matriculate. It seemed every year a handful of women made such petitions in order to “create a breeze of change” rather than actually attempting a feminist

³⁶ Andrew Newton Buck, letter to Fred, October 16th, 1862, Buck Family Papers, Bentley Historical Society.

coup of the University of Michigan. The University of Michigan remained a bastion of masculine identity until 1870.³⁷

Instilling republican virtue was a hallmark of most institutions. While the University of Michigan contained three schools of medicine, law, and literature, the town colleges combined courses into synthesized liberal education. An emphasis on classics, the students were fed a steady diet of Latin, Greek, and ancient history. There was good reason to teach Demosthenes and Cicero. Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the 1830s, explained that for a democracy, classical traditions were “useful to the literature of a people,” but not “appropriate to its social and political needs.”³⁸ His opinion had influence. The 1828 Yale Convention attempted to eliminate classical training from college curriculums. The practical and rigid methods of German universities were drawing away many American students. However, rural colleges resisted and the classical curriculum remained the centerpiece of rural college education until after the Civil War.³⁹

The classical tradition was connected to how rural Americans viewed society and politics. Looking to ancient models, they understood how precarious the American democracy’s foundations were.⁴⁰ Did not the Roman Republic collapse through the unchecked ambitions of powerful men? Studying the classics was very important in the minds of nineteenth century Michiganders, and absolutely vital to the preservation of democracy and personal freedom. So it

³⁷ Foote, *Gentlemen and the Roughs*, 56-57.

³⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, eds. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). 451.

³⁹ Michael S. Pak, "The Yale Report of 1828: A New Reading and New Implications," *History of Education Quarterly* (2008) vol. 48 #1, 30-57. Rural views can be contrasted to more slightly more urban institutions such as the University of Michigan. Note the aforementioned President Tappan, who was a great admirer of the Prussian educational system, and publically promoted it through lectures. “Public Lecturers Abroad,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 27th, 1859.

⁴⁰ Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, and Salvatore Settis, *The Classical Tradition*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 377.

was also for the individual—on whose shoulders responsibility for preservation of the Republic lie. Just as the citizens of Athens were required to attend and vote in the assembly, so too must an American citizen participate in the political process. Political rallies and stump speaking were common in Michigan. Diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts are filled with descriptions and opinions of political debates.⁴¹ While campaigning for Republican presidential candidate John C. Fremont, Abraham Lincoln gave one of his first political speeches at Bronson Park in Kalamazoo in 1856.⁴² Femininity was no barrier to these rallies and speeches. Lorette Hadley recorded in her journal an itinerary across the state, visiting one political rally after another.⁴³ Essentially, participating in the political process, even if only at the local level, was extremely important for the preservation of democracy. No better example could be found than their classical fore bearers.

Colleges and Tempered Ambition

With the religious, philosophical, political, and historical context in mind, it is proper to discuss how it influenced ideas of self-control and ambition. Rules and regulations of colleges were designed to not only enforce order and regulate behavior, it also defined it. Additionally, rules had a larger goal. They mirrored how colleges saw themselves, and their role in educating the young. Of primary import were two traits: self-control and ambition. While self-control must be taught and nurtured, ambition was a neutral but a potentially dangerous trait all men possessed. Going hand in hand, self-control was taught through regulation and enforcement of rules to temper ambition, and redirect its energy towards the common good.

⁴¹ All letters and diaries are from Michigan college students, their friends and family, or college faculty.

⁴² Abraham Lincoln, “Speech at Kalamazoo, Michigan, August 27th, 1856,” *Mr. Lincoln and Freedom: Pre-War*, Mrlincolnandfreedom.org, accessed December 28th, 2014.

⁴³ Hadley, diary dentry, May 14th, 1864, Hadley-LaFluer Papers, Hillsdale College Archives.

There were many rules governing a student's moral conduct. In the faculty minutes of Kalamazoo College for 1857, student Marvin Lawrence caused a scandal equivalent to selling drugs on a modern campus and was "suspended for bringing cards into the institution & enticing others to play." Later that year Kalamazoo College began cracking down on lesser offenses for six month period, particularly "smoking in the building." Unlike card playing, smoking merited a simple misdemeanor, a "violation of...cleanliness and good order."⁴⁴ As most colleges advertised, the purpose of these rules were to "instill proper moral virtue."⁴⁵ Although smoking was forbidden to promote cleanliness and healthy habits, games of chance were timewasting pursuits of the idle. In a society that greatly valued the ethics of hard work and self-fulfillment, idleness was considered a great sin. Yet these games had a luring effect. In enforcing harsh rules against them, students were being molded in the ethics of hard work and self-control.

As historian Steven Watts points out, ideas of self-restraint were rooted in Jeffersonian Republicanism. In a burgeoning economy of liberal capitalism, where any man could make it in a dog-eat-dog world, it salved feelings of guilt and self-doubt. Harmonizing ambition with moral purpose, it was designed for "a society of self-made individualism, a bourgeois culture of self-control, and politics of liberalism."⁴⁶ Card playing, other games of chance, consuming spirits, and smoking were only some of the activities forbidden, and seemed to be as much about maintaining "good order" as instilling moral restraint. However, order and self-restraint often go hand in hand. The rules were designed to aggregate individual choices into social choices, and

⁴⁴ *Kalamazoo College Faculty Minutes*, February 9th, 1857 to March 1st, 1858, Kalamazoo College Archives.

⁴⁵ The catalogues for Kalamazoo, Hillsdale, University of Michigan, Adrian, Albion, and Normal Colleges all use similar phrases.

⁴⁶ Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal Capitalism, 1790-1820*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 321.

redirect behavior towards social norms. In other words, rules were meant to make social norms instinctive in the individual through conditioning.

But rules had a larger purpose, reflecting both civic virtue and egalitarianism. They were meant to temper ambition, and redirect it towards the common good. University of Michigan in Ann Arbor had a similar myriad of rules governing conduct, which forbade not only “card playing, gambling, gaming, and drinking,” but also “military parades, fireworks, balls or parties...without the approval of proper faculty.”⁴⁷ While the rules against “vices” have already been discussed, those regulating social gatherings had a different purpose. It could be argued that they were to restrict distracting and physically (fireworks) or morally (women, drink) destructive parties; magnets to rowdy and questionable behavior. But the key phrase is “military parades.” The influence of the militia on college campus will be discussed later, but the importance of this rule is not merely connected to the militia. It is meant to temper ambition. It was a time when a young college student could, with enough brains, money, and charisma, form his own militia company. Any group of men, especially an armed one, could disorder or even tumble the fragile existing order. Even worse, it endangered the cherished and carefully nourished autonomy of Midwestern peoples. Unchecked ambition led not only to the perdition of the individual, but the perdition of society.

In November 1863, less than a week after J. A. B. Stone was forcibly removed from the office of President of Kalamazoo College, a faculty member recorded that six students were dismissed for “persistent violation of government by-laws of college.” One of them was a twenty-six year old student named Edwin Easton Bullock. Although Bullock pleaded his case before the Board the next day, it was to no avail.⁴⁸ This incident may have been related to

⁴⁷ *University of Michigan Rules and Regulations for Students, 1859*, Bentley Historical Library.

⁴⁸ *Kalamazoo College Faculty Minutes*, November 18th, 1863, Kalamazoo College Archives.

President Stone's dismissal, as he was very popular with the students, but it remains unclear. What is clear is that up to that time, very few students had ever been expelled from Kalamazoo College, let alone six at once. After Stone's dismissal, with the community and students in protest, the Board of Regents and faculty at Kalamazoo College were seriously shaken. Institutions in Michigan, unlike in other regions, were new and on uncertain ground. This, perhaps, resulted in the draconian measure of mass expulsion. Michigan, like the rest of the Midwest, was a new and experimental society. The uncertain ground on which Kalamazoo College was built was the same ground all Michigan institutions were. In a society of individualism, self-control and tempered ambition were the glues that held it together.

As stated, rules were meant to make social norms instinctive. When Michigan college students left for the Civil War, they encountered different norms. For Edwin Bullock, the "by-laws" he and his friends had broken remains unknown. But he clearly remained morally righteous, and like the faculty, felt a need to judge others falling short of the standard. He enlisted in the Army the next month, and after observing his fellow soldiers "swearing and card playing (with) little or no appearance of religion," he wrote "the wickedness of the soldiers is terrible. The hearts of men seem to be fully set in them to do evil." He also worried about their souls. After a man died of smallpox, he noted there was "no evidence he was a Christian."⁴⁹ As historian Lorien Foote might say, a gentleman found himself among the roughs.

Another gentleman among roughs was Andrew Newton Buck, who had been a student at Hillsdale, and also worried about men's souls. After two men died of smallpox, and Buck having the disease himself, he noted "no evidence they were Christian." He explained how tragic this was, as "it is bad enough dying away from home...but it is nothing compared with dying without

⁴⁹ Edwin Easton Bullock, diary entry, January 2nd to February 23rd, 1864, Edwin Bullock Papers, Kalamazoo College Archives.

having secured a home in Heaven.”⁵⁰ Although both Bullock and Buck judged the behavior of their fellow soldiers through the lens of Christianity, they were responding to the social norms they brought with them.

One major element in combating vice was redirecting minds towards the common good. The Michigan child, from an early age, was imbued in the ideals of civic virtue. George Washington and other revolutionary heroes were presented as exemplars of duty and selfless sacrifice. He was also taught to participate in the political process, just as political itinerants who travelled across the farm-scape to their town, and local politicians gave stump speeches and presented debates on local and national issues. Lorien Foote explains that, from an early age, boys were taught that “the Republic would fail if men were given to vice. One must set aside selfishness for the common good.”⁵¹ Although there were many sorts of vice, the most dangerous was selfish ambition.

However, ambition itself was not evil. God had given ambition to all men; it was up to men how to use it. All such endowments were neutral, the lesson was about control. James Cadman, as a student at Kalamazoo College in 1861, wrote a term paper titled simply “Ambition.” According to Cadman, God endowed men with two principles, and it was up to men how to use them. The first was reverence to God. “Deeply implanted in (man’s) breast is reverence for a Supreme Being. This...rightly guided will bring him back to God. Misdirected, he bows to sticks and stones.” Being neutral, one could choose how to use their passion for God. He then leads into his main argument, ambition as the second principle. “Another moving principle is Ambition. This passion, which may be defined in general terms, ‘a desire for preferment.’” Men wanted status over other men because God had implanted it within them, and

⁵⁰ Andrew Newton Buck, letter to Emma, February 11th, 1862, Andrew N. Buck Papers, Hillsdale College Archives.

⁵¹ Foote, *Gentlemen and the Roughts*, 17-40.

ambition was stamped in the character of all. Ambition, fraught with pitfalls, led many men to ruin. But Cadman argued that ambition could be used for the great benefit of society, if properly harnessed.⁵²

College students were being trained to think of a higher purpose—the common good. Thus ambition must be checked and harnessed early on in the educational process. Cadman explained that ambition is double-edged sword, a weapon used for either good or ill. One—particularly love of money and status—was self-serving and led only to folly and separation from God. But that same ambition could also be used for noble purposes and prove useful in the present conflict. “This motive will assemble the people when the country cries ‘To Arms to arms!!’ What a noble example of true ambition do we find in our volunteer soldier. He, rather than see his country wronged...submits himself to every privation of the cause, and on the field of battle lay down his life at a moment’s warning.”⁵³ With the advent of war, ambition for the common good went hand-in-hand with soldier’s duty and noble self-sacrifice.

Linking noble sacrifice with tempered ambition gave the gentleman a type of moral armor which would prove useful in the coming conflict. Although not shielding him from bullets, it did bolster him against fear and rationalized suffering. It also provided him with a higher purpose that transcended patriotic tropes. Much like the militia, colleges were training soldiers for society. Alfred Ryder, after enlisting with his fellow Michigan Normal College students in 1861, starts his journal prophetically: “Though I may be killed I hope this book will be kept.” Ryder was later seriously wounded in 1863. Shot through the lung, he seesawed between life and death for three weeks in a hospital near the battlefield. Shortly before dying, he wrote a lengthy

⁵² James Cadman, “Ambition,” September 23rd 1861, James Cadman Papers, Kalamazoo College Archives.

⁵³ Ibid.

poem, adapted from poet Barry Cornwall's "A Petition to Time."⁵⁴ "Touch us gently Time. We are not proud or soaring wings. Our ambition, our content, lies in simple things, humble voyagers are we. Our lives on an unsounded sea seeking only some calm clime. Touch us gently Time." The elegy goes on, in a somber chanting rhythm, for close to twenty pages. Much of his writing indicated that dying was a catharsis, a purification from vice. "Our suffering purifies us of the wickedness of the world." Ryder, like many of his fellow soldiers, felt helpless in the face of danger and suffering and became obsessed with death and the afterlife. Their only recourse was a firm belief that God controlled all things, as they were drifting helplessly on "an unsounded sea." Unchecked ambition was the folly of men, all things were in the hands of God in the end.

The Michigan college student was a product of his community and college. The values instilled in them would manifest in different ways through individual experience as the war began to affect, or even dominate, the lives of everyone. However, there was another phenomenon that received little attention from historians—the rise of martial interest in Michigan during the late 1850s. If the college prepared young men to be responsible, restrained Christian men of the republic, military service trained him to be tough and physically courageous.

The School of the Soldier

Initially, Midwestern colleges, particularly those that trained ministers, incorporated physical exercise or manual labor into the curriculum. In part, this was much of a much wider movement in the United States to promote the healthful benefits of hard work. It would also

⁵⁴ Barry Cornwall, "A Petition to Time," Thomas Humphry Ward, ed. *The English Poets. 1880–1918, Vol. IV. The Nineteenth Century: Wordsworth to Rossetti*, Bartleby.com, accessed January 27th, 2015.

remove the stigma of the effeminate preacher, who was dependent on his flock and society. Men of God should be as vigorous in body as they were in faith. Circuit riders and itinerant preachers also needed solid constitutions to endure long journeys. But, by the 1840s, the movement waned. As preachers settled into permanent abodes, Michigan college founders failed to see justification for the start-up costs of physical education. It was still popular in some circles, such as with the Agricultural College, who demanded four hours of manual labor daily. In addition to both practical and healthful benefits, the purpose was financial. The farms on campus were real working farms, whose produce would be sold on the market to budget the school. Agricultural students, while attending for free, had to work their way through college. But for most colleges in Michigan, regimens of physical exercise or manual labor were never incorporated.

But there was need for physical education, or at least a need was being created. In early November 1858 the *Detroit Free Press* reprinted an article published by Nathaniel P. Banks, Governor of Massachusetts. “The School of the Soldier has still stronger claims upon the public as a means of rational amusement and manly exercise. There is nothing in which our people are more deficient. Recreation and exercise are as essential to a man as laws and governments.” Banks went on to argue that the manly arts found in other nations, such as the “pleasure of the hunt or the sport of the field,” were little respected and almost nonexistent in America. American manhood, he insisted, worked too hard and played too little. In England, for example, weavers were short in stature and had a “diminished strength of arm.” In America, boys were raised from infancy to work a trade or at a farm, which “absorb the best years of our existence.” Banks listed other trades and professions, and noted that “no pursuit...brings into action all the physical powers of a man.” In Bank’s view, the American was becoming weak in body and spirit because he did not play in manly games. This weakness was then passed down to descendants, thus

dangerously weakening the race and the nation. But Banks had a solution. The remedy “can be found for all, if properly conducted, in the school of the soldier.” Banks then listed the many physical benefits of military training, “every element of physical strength, the chest, the lungs, the limbs, the voice, receive new powers.” It also improved bearing, poise, and discipline for young gentlemen, as one who “wears the mien of one that has been taught that it is equally pleasant to command or obey.” He would carry with him not the “awkward strut of a recruit” nor the “sidelong movement of a half-developed man,” but the “easy, graceful and natural swing of a gentlemen that suffers from no deficiency of physical power.” The school of the soldier would leave its deepest impact on impressionable young men who need it most. “A correct physical training of the young men of any state is a public advantage,” he concluded, “after surveying our schools and colleges, our public and private institutions where the personal habits of our young men are formed, I know of none which presents so many salutary opportunities for the development of physical power, as the school for the soldier.”⁵⁵

Here the value of military training was tied directly to education. The value of military training was to enhance the masculine ideal, and, according to Banks, should be taught to young men in schools and colleges throughout the nation. Nathaniel Banks, a Massachusetts politician, was vigorously pursuing the 1860 Republican ticket. In this article, he was speaking to the entire nation as any presidential hopeful would. Renewed interest in the virtues of soldierly honor and courage was not merely confined to the South, and seemed to be rising like a phoenix in the North in the late 1850s. But things were not what they seemed. But first, the history of the militia in Michigan must be understood.

The idea of the citizen-soldier had for long been an intrinsic part of the American experience during the colonial era and early Republic. The militia served an important role in the

⁵⁵ N. P. Banks, “The School of the Soldier,” November 2nd, 1858, *Detroit Free Press*.

colonies; warding off Indian attack, checking the Spanish and French with the help of British regulars, and—at least in the South after 1800—as a stalwart against slave revolt. The Revolution lived on in collective memory as being won by the minuteman and citizen soldier, although victory was achieved only through the efforts of an experienced regular army. With independence, the fledgling United States Government—fearing professional armies—kept a miniscule force of regulars with legal provisions for a larger militia. After hundreds of regulars were destroyed by Indians at the Battle of Wabash in Ohio in 1791, Congress saw the need for revitalizing the militia system. In 1792, the first of the Militia Acts were born, which mandated state militias that could be called by the President during times of emergency. It was none too soon—the first test of this system was in putting down the Whisky Rebellion two years later. The Second Militia Act of 1792 was all inclusive. “Every free able-bodied male citizen” between the ages of 18 and 45 were conscripted to serve in local militia companies. For the next fifty years, this system stood.⁵⁶

The Michigan militia had its own history. After achieving organized territorial status in 1805, Governor William Hull enacted the territory’s first militia law modeled on and in compliance with the Federal law. Although every “free born white male” between 18 and 45 was required to serve in the militia, units existed only on paper until 1812. Militiamen from Michigan saw limited service in both the War of 1812 and the Blackhawk War, and nearly went to war with neighboring Ohio during the Toledo War before the matter was resolved with statehood in 1837. The “Patriot’s War” in the following year saw ad hoc militia groups—from both Michigan and Canada and of Irish descent—attempting to annex a portion of Canada to the United States.

⁵⁶ Also known as “St. Clair’s Defeat.” Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795*, Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985. See also “Laws of the United States, Published by Authority, Second Congress,” June 2nd, 1792, *Columbian Sentinel*.

Michigan was growing, and was its militia. In 1840, the United States had 1.7 million men enrolled in the militia. By 1850, it was 1.9 million—60,000 in Michigan alone. But this does not mean that two million men throughout the country were mustering once a year, in fact, far from it. The increase of 200,000 men between 1840 and 1850 showed that states were probably automatically enrolling the names of men as they turned 18. The militia was really a paper tiger—that is to say, it existed mostly on paper. Although there was a one dollar fine (which increased with rank) for not showing up for the yearly drill, most simply ignored the fine.⁵⁷

There were musters, but they seemed laughable or even embarrassing to some observers. Newspapersmen wrote derogatory accounts describing drunken men carrying broomsticks in the ragged clothes they came in, being drilled by a fancily dressed officer wearing a plumed hat and oblivious to the appearance of a charade.⁵⁸ There was at least one petition in front of the state legislature to end the farce in 1845, and editors wrote columns advocating its abolition.⁵⁹ The petitioner and editors must not have been the only ones, because by 1846, the legislature ended mandatory drill and reverted to an almost skeletal force.⁶⁰ Although a regiment of Michigan militiamen served in the war with Mexico, the militia reached its lowest point by the early 1850s.⁶¹

⁵⁷ J. R. Pojnsett and R. M. T. Hunter, “Congressional Documents: Militia of the United States,” May 7th, 1840, *Army and Navy Chronicle (1835-1842), American Periodicals*, 10-19; “Militia in the United States,” October 5th, 1850, *Spirit of the Times: A Chronicle of the Turf, Agriculture, Field Sports, Literature, and the Stage, American Periodicals*, 387.

⁵⁸ “The Militia,” *Peace Advocate*, October 27th, 1840, Buffalo, NY.

⁵⁹ “Mr. Howell...praying that the militia musters might be abolished.” “Legislature of Michigan,” *Detroit Free Press*, January 21st, 1845. “It is really hoped that the legislature (will) abolish militia musters.” “Militia Musters,” *Detroit Free Press*, February 19th, 1845.

⁶⁰ Barnett and Rosentreter, *Michigan’s Early Military Forces*, 27.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

But it did not die. In fact, the militia and interest in the military not only remained strong with many men, but was increasing during the 1840s. Where the “mandatory” element of military service ended, the “voluntary” element began. Adrian maintained its own local company and armory since the late 1830s, and hosted the very first encampment in 1843.⁶² Detroit had at least three militia companies during the same period. Officers were regularly appointed by the state throughout the forties and fifties, and some of them actively encouraged enthusiasm in military affairs. One, Dwight A. Woodbury of Adrian, became a prominent militia officer and regularly lobbied the state legislature in Lansing wearing a splendid uniform. Woodbury and others had fought long to keep the militia alive.⁶³

However, the state would once again take control. Interest in the military was spreading rapidly, and independent militia companies began to spawn on their own. The same month the *Detroit Free Press* printed Nathaniel Bank’s ode to the benefits of martial training in 1858, several prominent Michiganders gathered in Kalamazoo to discuss rising interest in military service. Militia companies, during this time, were voluntary affairs and privately funded, and can be considered a sort of social club. The committee noted that the number of independent militia companies had risen to thirty-three in different townships throughout the state. They concluded that because martial interest had dramatically increased over the past several years, it was time for the state legislature to act. Early the next year the state appropriated \$3000 to fund these militia companies.⁶⁴ Perhaps the militia was proving to be an untamed beast, and the state took care to control it and capitalize on the enthusiasm.

⁶² John I. Knapp and R. I. Bonner, *Illustrated History and Biographical Record of Lenawee County, Michigan*, (Adrian, MI: The Times Printing Company, 1903). 37.

⁶³ Barnett and Rosentreter, *Michigan’s Early Military Forces*, 138.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 177.

The militia expanded rapidly. By the beginning of 1860, four regiments of militia had already been formed. These regiments consisted of separate local militia companies, such as the Detroit Light Guards, the Hillsdale Light Infantry, the Adrian Guards, the Jackson Grays, and the Hudson Light Artillery. These regiments were commanded and staffed with elected from the local community, and commanders were required to recruit their own soldiers.⁶⁵ When Jackson built a new armory, they held a grand festival known as an encampment. Hundreds of militiamen throughout the state came. They set up tents, marched around in tight formations, and showed off their uniforms.⁶⁶ By this time, encampments were becoming common in Michigan and took place several times a year. Militia companies were becoming an extension of community pride. While Jackson residents contributed money and resources for the armory, most towns at least funded their own company. They supplied them with unique uniforms, weapons if they could obtain them, and provided public space for them to drill and hold meetings. By the late 1850s, militia companies were increasingly part of the community identity.

Militia festivals and encampments were nominally intended to train the citizen soldiers, but seemed more to provide a display of pageantry, uniformed drill, martial skill, and community pride to enthusiastic spectators. Companies would compete with each other in drill, appearance, and military bearing. Elmer Ellsworth, with his crack Zouave drill team from Chicago, visited Adrian in 1858 and competed with the local company.⁶⁷ Militia companies came from all over the state, or from other states, to display their skills and uniforms. Michigan usually boasted hundreds of militiamen attending encampments, but farther east they became much larger, with

⁶⁵ "The Militia," July 13th, 1850, *United Service Journal: Devoted to the Army, Navy, and Militia of the United States*, 33.

⁶⁶ "The Encampment," July 15th, 1857, *Detroit Free Press*.

⁶⁷ "The Military Encampment at Adrian," July 6th, 1860, *Detroit Free Press*.

one in Pennsylvania numbering some thirty thousand.⁶⁸ At first the gatherings were annual events in the warm months, but increased in frequency throughout the year, even in cold weather. A military festival was held at Hillsdale, near the campus, during the winter of 1858 with troops coming as far away as Toledo, Ohio. At another encampment, held in October 1859, a reporter noted, that despite the “cold, drizzling storm of snow, hail and rain” that had set in the night before, the militiamen “were not fairweather soldiers.”⁶⁹ Encampments were statewide events, and served to manifest community pride to other communities. It also served to bind communities together through culture sharing and friendly competition. In this way, community identity was now becoming state identity.

Unlike their early predecessors, the new militia companies contained many younger men, as young as sixteen. During an 1859 encampment in Jackson, a reporter noted the uniforms, appearance, and parading skill of each company, almost as if they were marching past in review for the reader’s eyes. Each company wore their own brand of uniform. The company from Hillsdale donned plumed shakos, and Adrian wore Napoleonic bicorne hats with ostrich feathers attached by a trefoil-shaped brooch. One company “of forty muskets” from Detroit wearing a “very neat uniform...with black roundabouts and fatigue hats,” were all “young men of an age averaging, we should judge by appearances, between sixteen and nineteen.”⁷⁰ Unlike the previous system, schoolboys were filling the ranks. In fact, almost the entire militia system in Michigan consisted of them. The militia, like colleges, served to restate and propagate cultural identity. But also like colleges, the militia was becoming another form of education for young men. The militia was now educating the young in traits they felt wanting, giving them an experience that no college could give them. They were getting a physical education, developing

⁶⁸ “Military News,” *Detroit Free Press*, May 15th, 1860.

⁶⁹ “The Military Review,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 27th, 1859.

⁷⁰ “The State Military Encampment,” *Detroit Free Press*, September 1st, 1860.

the “full powers of a man” like Bank’s ideal. But they were getting something else that no college could provide adequately. They were getting romantic adventure.

Another reporter, at an encampment at “Campus Martius” in Detroit in 1860, was reminded of his own romantic imagination as a boy. After describing the neat rows of tents, stacked muskets and spiked flags, he gushed that the martial appearance reminded him of “distant localities seen with childhood’s wondering eyes, and retained in memory as among the most perfect and edifying sights pertaining to this mundane sphere.” Michigan became the stuff of romantic legend, and the effect on impressionable children would be catatonic; “so attractive to infancy and early youth is everything belonging to the soldiery bearing and the glowing colors of martial display.”⁷¹

Military encampments, for both the public and militiamen, became the stuff of the romantic historical and literary tradition. One could see, here in Michigan before his very eyes, a Waterloo, a Cannae, an Agincourt, Tennyson’s *Charge of the Light Brigade* come to life. The effect must have been thrilling and spell-binding. Historical tradition and martial values seemed hand-in-hand. Detroit had set aside a public park and renamed it Campus Martius, after the field where ancient Roman citizen-soldiers would gather for training or before marching off to war.⁷² Jackson, Adrian, and Hillsdale had similar public spaces set aside after 1858.⁷³

But these were also stages for the theater of the public. The pageantry of marching soldiers was a sight to behold, but not a siren call to most young men. Like a spectator sport, the encampments enthralled the townspeople.

The connection between college campuses and militia before the war is not entirely clear, but there was some connection. Southern colleges, not to mention over one hundred of which

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² “Meeting at Campus Martius,” *Detroit Free Press*, October 12th, 1858.

⁷³ Ibid.

were military academies, had at very least established a military department as part of the curriculum.⁷⁴ With Michigan colleges, this does not seem to be the case prior to 1861. But there was indeed student involvement with the militia, or at least enthusiasm with the military. The *Rules and Regulations* of the University of Michigan from 1859 forbade “military parades” at commencements without permission.⁷⁵ One University of Michigan student, James Kidd, had an unexcused absence from class when he was at a militia drill.⁷⁶ Another University of Michigan student, Elon Farnsworth, left campus in 1858 to assist in putting down the Mormon Rebellion.⁷⁷

College library logs had long noted books such as *History of Ancient Rome* or *Xenophon’s March* being checked out, but books of more recent military history appeared. *Military Heroes of the Revolution and Military Heroes of the War of 1812* by Charles Peterson appeared in 1858. *The Life of Washington* (1860) focused on Washington’s military skill, and that military skill was proving important. *The Manual for Volunteers: Instruction for the Formation of Volunteer Rifle Corps* (1859), *Soldiers and their Science* (1858), *Progress of the Art of War* (1858), and *Rifle Volunteers: How to Organize and Drill Them* (1859) were becoming part of college libraries.⁷⁸ Enthusiasm for military education was found not just at colleges, but throughout the nation. The *Antheneum*, a national book reviewer, opined that *Rifle Volunteers* would be quite acceptable, “now that the spirit of militia glory is alive.”⁷⁹ The

⁷⁴ Rod Andrew, *Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition, 1839-1915*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 12.

⁷⁵ *Rules and Regulations*, 19.

⁷⁶ Kidd, *Personal Recollections*, 17.

⁷⁷ Jack Dempsey, *Michigan in the Civil War: A Great and Bloody Sacrifice*, (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 95.

⁷⁸ Titles derived from the library logs of University of Michigan at Bentley Historical Library and the Kalamazoo College Archives.

⁷⁹ “Review of Rifle Volunteers,” *Antheneum*, 14 May 1859, 30.

romantic military life also sparked the imagination, with such tales as *The Cavaliers of Fortune* (1859) or *Second to None: A Military Romance* (1860) in wide publication.⁸⁰

But with this enthusiasm for military service, few young men actually participated. At no time did the militia, prior to 1861, rise above more than three or four thousand, although Michigan's 1860 military age population numbered over 180,000. While encampments saw hundreds of young men marching around in splendid uniforms, they were gawked at by thousands.

Still, the connection between martial virtue and education of young men was established. Nathaniel Banks advocated for military training in colleges to bring young men to the "full physical powers of manhood," and many students themselves were showing active enthusiasm for the uniform and sought to gain military skill. The pageantry and regalia of military encampments, echoing romantic legend of faded glory, were proving a siren call to the many young men in Michigan. Most militiamen were young men in their teens. The militia filled a gap in what some student age males felt was their education. The militia, too, was a form of education. It was linked to forming notions of manly rites of passage and individual self-identity in every town under the guise of military parades, gaudy uniforms, and an imagined glorious past.

More importantly, the militia was increasingly tied to community self-identity. Towns could essentially fund their own militia company and advertise them to the other communities. With communal pride, they dressed them in unique, fancy uniforms, gave them old rifles and put them on display. The militia was not indicative of militarism, it was indicative of shared communal life in Michigan.

⁸⁰ *University of Michigan Library Catalogue, 1860*, Bentley Historical Library.

Conclusion

The explosive growth of antebellum colleges in Michigan was a result of the ebb and flow of experimental social systems. While the layered values of most Michiganders provided a solid foundation to build their institutions on, the institutions themselves had not yet been fully defined. In fact, education itself had not yet been defined, as each college retained a unique, though reciprocal, relationship with its community. Towns fought hard to lure educational systems in the 1840s, and then later funded militia companies in the 1850s. Both serve as signposts of community self-identity, and both transmit that identity onto the young. Both are also evident of changing educational needs.

The relationship has been examined between educational institutions and the communities who built them. Colleges and communities had a reciprocal relationship—the fortunes of one determined the fortunes of the other. Educational systems in Michigan served as repositories of local and regional culture, and then transmitted that culture—that self-identity—to their young. Furthermore, colleges did not just restate and instill cultural self-identity. By providing teachers to small schoolhouses far and wide, colleges were agents of wide-ranging regional and national reform.

Understanding the educational systems of a society is the key to understanding cultural values and self-identity. Michigan colleges were utilitarian in philosophy, and taught their students to be pragmatic and useful. Parents in the Midwest greatly desired their children to become useful citizens. Colleges, by sending out student-teachers, were practicing what they preached. Colleges also instilled egalitarian values onto its students, and important facet of self-identity. Women played an enormous part in colleges, and their very acceptance underscores a true belief in that all men—and sometimes women—were the same. But it also predicated a

deeper desire to temper ambition through rules and regimentation. Lastly, the rising militia in the 1850s was but another means of education and self-identity. Towns clothed and equipped their own militiamen and sent them off to compete with other militia groups. Militia groups became yet one more vehicle for maintaining and manifesting cultural self-identity. It had, like the college, an educational role, and served to fill the gap made by the dearth of physical fitness. The militia was young, just school-age boys, in fact younger than the college students.

One historian said that the Midwestern collegiate effort in the antebellum years was “feckless” and “stillborn” and “had little impact on the higher education movement.”⁸¹ Yet Michigan colleges were not feckless, and remain to this day in almost identical form. The Midwest, before the Civil War, was a breeding ground for the reform that made any such later movement possible. By defining their institutions as not only monuments to their self-identity, and transmitting those beliefs far and wide, Michigan colleges were agents for the sweeping reforms just over the horizon.

⁸¹ Hofstadter and Hardy, *Higher Education in the United States*, 47.

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