



Seth Storrs, Congregationalism, and the Founding of Middlebury College

The role of Seth Storrs in the founding of Middlebury College has not been given much attention; it is time to give him his long-due recognition.

By ROBERT L. FERM

On November 1, 2000, Middlebury College celebrated the two hundredth anniversary of its charter. During its history Middlebury College has suffered through some dark times, yet it has survived and become a thriving institution in American higher education. Debts are owed to those who had the vision for this college in Vermont's wilderness, and to those benefactors during its history who supported its existence and made survival possible.¹

The recent year-long celebration of the college's bicentennial gave primary attention to the roles of the local entrepreneur, Gamaliel Painter (1742–1819), and Timothy Dwight (1752–1817), the president of Yale College. Painter was described as the founder of the college and recognition of that is evidenced in the bestowal of a replica of Painter's walking stick to every graduate of the college at commencement and to alumni who return for their class reunions. The importance of Dwight's visit to Middlebury to confer with town officials and give his blessing to the hopes for a college in the village was noted by a group of runners who retraced Dwight's journey from New Haven, Connecticut, to Middlebury. This further look at the period of the founding has led to a different perspective on the college's origin.

This essay addresses three themes that supplement the previous historiography and focus on material not covered in earlier accounts. First: Middlebury College was founded and led by Congregationalists who resided in the town; it was not tied to a denomination because of the distinctive nature of Congregational polity. Second: The Congregation-

alism represented in Middlebury at that time was part of the school of thought known as the New Divinity. Third: Seth Storrs deserves recognition as the individual who had the idea for Middlebury College and also as one of the central benefactors in the very early years of its life.

THE TOWN'S COLLEGE

Every college that was founded by Congregationalists was a "Town's College," because of the nature of Congregational polity, i.e., their distinctive form of church government. The story of the founding of Yale College is illustrative. The charter for Yale was granted in 1701 but there was no agreement on where the college would be located. During its first fifteen years three communities vied for its physical presence: Wethersfield, Saybrook, and New Haven. Wethersfield had the students; Saybrook had the library; New Haven finally won out with the land and a building. The controversy was fierce and even led to a group from Saybrook attempting to ambush the caravan carrying books from Saybrook to New Haven; many books were destroyed. But had the final choice been Saybrook or Wethersfield, Yale would still have been the town's college and the area's college. The same is true of Dartmouth College (1769), Williams College (1793), Bowdoin College (1794), Amherst College (1825), Oberlin College (1834), Grinnell College (1847), and Pomona College (1887). In each case a group of Congregationalists got together to replicate for their town or region the example of Harvard or Yale.

The establishment of these Congregational colleges was unlike the process used by the Presbyterians at Princeton (then known as the College of New Jersey, 1746), Transylvania College (1783), Dickinson College (1783), or Allegheny College (1817). Those colleges were founded by an ecclesiastical governing body of the Presbyterian Church, namely a synod. Similarly, the Episcopal colleges—such as Columbia College (1787) and Trinity College (Hartford, 1823)—and Dutch Reformed colleges—such as Queens College (1766, later Rutgers)—and German Reformed colleges—such as Franklin College (1787, later Franklin and Marshall)—all had ecclesiastical sanction. Because of their polity structure, that is, their decentralized church organization and government, the Congregationalists were different from other denominations; they did not have a tie to a denomination and by definition were not "sectarian." The term "Town's College" can lead to the assumption that Middlebury College was unique in that respect; such is simply not the case.

THE NATURE OF CONGREGATIONALISM

The issues that shaped the development of Congregationalism in New England need some attention in order to understand the context

for Congregationalism in Middlebury at the time of the college's founding. Congregationalism developed out of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century in Switzerland, led by John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. Calvinism splintered in the years following the deaths of these two major figures and prompted some fierce theological warfare. It was never a unified whole and took different forms in Switzerland, the Netherlands, England, Scotland, and in the colonies in the New World. Most of the Congregationalists or "Puritans" of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century in New England were theologically rooted in the form of Calvinism known as Covenant Theology; they read not only the works of John Calvin but equally important the tracts of William Ames, John Preston, William Perkins, and others who brought a subtle change to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Calvinism. The covenant theologians emphasized the biblical covenant and insisted that fallen man needed to make a response to the saving grace of God in the working out of human redemption.

The covenant theologians were not, however, Arminians. The term Arminian comes to the fore in the second decade of the seventeenth century as a result of a dispute among Calvinists over divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Specifically, it is derived from Jacob Arminius, who represented a group of Calvinists against a group called the Remonstrants at the Synod of Dort in 1619. The Remonstrants, in brief, argued against the hard-line Calvinists by saying that the human being is not totally depraved, that election is conditioned by human response, that the atoning work of Christ is for all, not just the elect, that the grace of God is resistible—one can fall from grace—and that the saints (elect) will not necessarily persevere. The Remonstrants were condemned at the Synod of Dort; Arminius, who was to be their prosecutor, converted to their softening of Calvinism—thus Arminianism. So in the seventeenth century in Europe three broad groups of "Calvinists" were developing (leave out for now the Scottish Presbyterians): John Calvin Calvinists, the Covenant Theologians, and the Arminians.

Issues of church polity also divided the "Puritans" in the colonies. Those at Salem believed themselves to be still tied to the mother church in England; they came to America to reform the Church of England. To the Anglicans, the locus of authority resided in the bishop, archbishop, king, or queen. To some Congregationalists authority was vested in the local congregation; to others a group of Congregationalists or a Consociation (similar to a Presbytery, the authoritative structure in Presbyterianism) was dominant. Soon after their arrival in New England the Congregationalists struggled to define the "full" members of the church/congregation and this issue persisted throughout the sev-

enteenth and eighteenth centuries and was even apparent in the Congregational Church in Middlebury at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1648 the “full” members of the church were defined in the Cambridge Platform as those who were orthodox in belief, free from gross and open scandals, and who gave a public testimony of their regeneration. But not all among the new generations could meet those tests and therefore many could not be baptized, or cleansed from the guilt of original sin. Thus, the Half-Way Covenant of 1662 was adopted which allowed the children of unregenerate parents to be baptized. In 1677 Solomon Stoddard, pastor of the church in Northampton, Massachusetts, and the grandfather of Jonathan Edwards, argued as a Calvinist that no one can tell who is regenerate so everyone should be allowed to come into the church (as long as they are orthodox and free from gross and open scandal) and take the Lord’s Supper as a means of regeneration.

Later, in the 1740s and beyond, Jonathan Edwards and his successors, the New Divinity, sought to return to the stricter requirements of the Cambridge Platform and required public testimony of regeneration, even from those who were already members of the church. The result was Edwards’ dismissal from the Northampton Church, where he had become the minister upon Stoddard’s death in 1729. The exiled pastor assumed a small mission church in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and in 1758 served briefly as president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton). Precisely the same happened to his namesake, Jonathan Edwards the Younger, pastor of the White Haven Church in New Haven, Connecticut, who was exiled to Colebrook, Connecticut, in 1795 and in 1801 became president of Union College in Schenectady, New York.

By the time of the Great Awakening in the mid-1730s and early 1740s three theological groups co-existed within New England Congregationalism. The New Divinity, sometimes called the “consistent Calvinists,” were disciples of Jonathan Edwards; they were supporters of the Great Awakening and its revivalistic measures. In the middle were the heirs of Covenant Theology, who were the opponents of Edwards and the New Divinity. The third group was the Arminians, who were now taking over Anglicanism and making inroads in New England Congregationalism. Congregationalism was not a unified whole; there were deep, passionate divisions.

In part the conflict was marked by the geographical bifurcation of New England, with the Connecticut River as the dividing line. Those towns to the west of the river tended to be dominated by the New Divinity, namely Samuel Hopkins in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, Joseph Bellamy in Bethlehem, Connecticut, Jonathan Edwards the

Younger in New Haven, Connecticut, and Levi Hart in Preston, Connecticut. The moderate Calvinists were scattered on both sides of the river. The Arminians were gaining notoriety in eastern Massachusetts. Carl Bridenbaugh, in his grand study of the rise of the city, remarked that intellectually the distance between Boston and London was far less than the distance between Boston and the frontier villages, such as Northampton.²

An important reason why the New Divinity clergy became a force to be reckoned with in the remainder of the eighteenth century was how they received their theological education.³ Students were admitted to Yale for collegiate education at the age of thirteen, after having been trained by their local pastor in Greek, Latin, and classical literature. Normally those graduates who wished to become physicians or lawyers would be apprenticed to a particular individual. The same was true of prospective clergy because there were no Congregational theological seminaries until 1808. After four years at Yale, those who chose to study for the ministry did so in one of the “schools for prophets” run by a settled clergyman. Those disciples of Edwards mentioned before—Hopkins, Bellamy, Edwards the Younger, Levi Hart—attracted a number of students. Joseph Bellamy, for example, trained sixty fledgling clergymen whose names are known, and probably a score more.

Though these “schools for prophets” existed before the eighteenth century, they were not widespread until after the Great Awakening. The reason, apparently, is the divisive effect the Awakening had on New England churches; the revivals divided congregations along theological and ecclesiastical lines and prompted the formation of new congregations. For example, in New Haven, Connecticut, by the time the fervor of the 1740s was fully spent, three Congregational Churches were situated on the town green. Though it is difficult to place a particular parson in a particular school of thought because not all wrote tracts or published sermons, most ministers who had a “school” were part of the New Divinity tradition and had been supporters, in varying degrees, of the “enthusiasms” of the revivals. These teachers sought to guide carefully the doctrinal development of their students, to nurture their individual religious fervor, to instill in them the need to be concerned about the state of the souls of their future congregations, and to make them vigilant about the currents of heresy infiltrating the Connecticut Valley—namely Arianism, Arminianism, and Deism. (The Boston area had already shown signs of succumbing to the winds of dissension emanating from the motherland and those blessed Anglicans.) In brief, then, the effects of the Awakening lingered throughout most of the remainder of the eighteenth century and the “schools” tended to

sharpen the divisions within New England theology and nurture the religious fervor and theological position of the new generation of clergy, largely those of New Divinity persuasion.

Those clergy who were trained by the New Divinity Calvinists dominated the western Connecticut, western Massachusetts, and Vermont churches, and the third generation of this group was still evident at the end of the eighteenth century and into the early years of the nineteenth century. New Divinity clergy became founding presidents at Williams, Middlebury, Hamilton, and Amherst Colleges. For example, at Williams, founded in 1793, New Divinity sentiments were held by its early presidents: Ebenezer Fitch (1793–1815), Zephaniah Swift Moore (1815–1821), and Edward Dorr Griffin (1821–1836). A recent historian of Williams has written: “From the highest reaches of the presidency and board of trustees to the student body, (Jonathan) Edwards’s second, third, and fourth generation disciples shaped the religious character of Williams College. For forty years, they read New Divinity works, taught New Divinity theology, discoursed in New Divinity language, behaved in New Divinity ways, and promoted New Divinity revivals.”⁴ Seth Swift, pastor of the Congregational Church in Williamstown, was trained by Joseph Bellamy; his brother Job Swift, pastor of the church in nearby Bennington and later in Addison, Vermont, had studied with Jonathan Edwards the Younger; Benjamin Wooster had settled as pastor in Cornwall, Vermont, in 1794 and studied with Jonathan Edwards the Younger; John Barnet, the first pastor of the Middlebury Congregational Church, studied theology with Edwards the Younger; his successor Jeremiah Atwater studied with Timothy Dwight, the grandson of Edwards and his disciple; and Thomas Merrill, who was pastor at Middlebury from 1805–1842, had studied theology with Asa Burton, one of the most conservative Calvinists around. The list could go on.

In 1800 there were sixty Congregational Churches in Vermont with settled pastors.⁵ Of those sixty, twenty-five graduated from Yale, thirteen from Dartmouth, eight from Harvard, three from Princeton (College of New Jersey), and two from Brown. The background of eight are unknown. Of the fifty-two college graduates, thirty-five had known theological tutors, twenty-two of whom were trained by New Divinity clergy; only one could be identified as an Arminian (i.e., a liberal). Another student has made a list of Arminian New England clergy (largely settled in eastern Massachusetts) in this period; of sixty individuals, every one graduated from Harvard. Of twenty-two others he listed as New Divinity, none were graduates of Harvard; they were primarily Yale alumni, with a couple of Dartmouth degrees.⁶

The New Divinity ethos was clearly the dominant strain in the theo-

logical preparation of most Vermont clergy. We have no way of determining what the laity believed; no Gallup or Roper polls existed. But the “Confession of Faith,” the “Covenant,” and “The Articles of Discipline” that were adopted by the Middlebury Congregation at its founding in 1790 were Calvinistic documents. In 1809 the “Confession of Faith” was altered and words favored by New Divinity theology were inserted, words describing human nature as possessing a “moral inability” other than to continue “impenitent.” New Divinity sentiments were part of the religious culture of Middlebury.

SETH STORRS

The role of Seth Storrs in the founding of Middlebury College has not been given much attention; it is time to give him his long-due recognition. Storrs was born on January 24, 1756, in Mansfield not far from New Haven, Connecticut, and a few miles from what became Storrs, Connecticut.⁷ He entered Yale College in 1774 and graduated in 1778,



*Seth Storrs (artist and date unknown).
Courtesy of the Henry Sheldon Museum of
Vermont History,
Middlebury, Vermont.*

the year that Ezra Stiles became president. Thomas Clap was president of Yale during Storrs' years in New Haven and was not sympathetic with the new winds of theological change. He even chastised a group of seniors at Yale for soliciting funds to reprint Locke's *Essay on Toleration* and refused to graduate them until they publicly confessed their sin. Stiles was much more hospitable to the newer currents of thought and even added works of Deists to the Yale library during his presidency. Timothy Dwight was one of Storrs' tutors at Yale and they became close, life-long friends. (Stiles and Dwight did not get along; in fact, Dwight thought he should have been made president of Yale instead of Stiles. Dwight was in the New Divinity group and Stiles was an Old Calvinist which illustrates the theological division within Congregationalism.)

After his graduation from Yale Storrs was invited by Dwight to join him and another graduate of Yale, Joel Barlow, in a preparatory school Dwight was forming in Northampton. The school began in 1778–79 and Storrs remained with Dwight at Northampton until 1783. Any records of this school have been lost; in fact the reference librarians at the Northampton Historical Society and the Forbes Library in Northampton had never heard of it. There are, however, too many sources that refer to it to doubt its existence. After 1783 Storrs kept in touch with Dwight, either by letter or periodic visits.

When Dwight moved to Greenfield Hills, Connecticut, in 1783 to assume a pastorate and found another preparatory school, Storrs initially spent some time in New York City with his friend Mason Cogswell, who became a noted surgeon in Hartford, Connecticut. Then he moved in 1784 to Bennington, Vermont, to study law with Noah Smith, who had been in his class at Yale. Smith later became state's attorney in Bennington County. Sometime in the next three years Storrs was admitted to the bar.

Only a few letters that Storrs wrote during this period in Bennington, 1784–1787, are extant. These reveal a man of humor, education, and humility. One letter conveys his regret that he has not heard from his friends in New York City. He had a knack for letting his feelings known and in so doing he also revealed something about his own convictions.

Bennington 9th June 1786 To: A. Prosper Wetmore
Mr. Mason Cogswell,
Queen St. No. 219
New York

A couple of pretty Lads! to be so altogether engrossed by whirligigs and phantasies and phlibbertgibbets, that with all my writing, talking, thinking, & dreaming about you, I have been able to get only a

line from each of you for nearly six months. This is a circumstance, for which I was not, in the least prepared, not having forseen it, nor would I have believed it had it been told me. It often vexes me. However, it is not a matter of so much consequence, as it sometimes I have supposed it to be. Think what you may, I assure you that I keep, as good, not to say better company. If you are jealous, who cares? I have my choice of the grave or the gay, the devout or the dissolute, the prosaic or the poetical. To inform who these my companions are, would require longer time than I choose to spend in your company at the present. I will just name a few, but since the names of persons, with whose characters we are acquainted, are very little interesting I will be as sparing, of troubling you as possible. Still they are characters, with which, as a friend, I could wish that you might have some acquaintance.—If they would not be as agreeable, they might be as useful, as the giglers and flirters with whom your leisure hours are spent.—No it is not significant, whether you are made acquainted with them or not. They would not suit your taste. They have no regard to the fashionable dress, or to the pretty figure, or even to the fine speeches or approving smiles of their devotees. Therefore, they are by no means suitable companions for N. York Beaus. You, who reason thus—“What do I gain by being in company, where I have nothing to do, but to see, hear & receive information, when the company will not see, hear & admire me” I would be fatigued to death, in one half hour with the best of them. This would kill you outright.—You would not even have to die; you would be already dead. This manner of reasoning does not nicely correspond, with what I should adopt for myself. I am pleased with Homer, Virgil,—, Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, Milton, Thompson, Pope, Swift, Young, Goldsmith, Lyttleton,—, Locke, Edwards, Hume &— will regulate the ideas of the head, if not the sentiments of the heart, very much better than Peggy & Polly & Sally & Betsy. [undeciphered sentence.] These gentlemen do not require half the attention to fill stockings &---Bootes, as your City Belles. They will sit with me in the most humble situation. Nor will they refuse me their company when in bed. These are the companions of my leisure. At other times I make some serious researches into the laws of nature and nations, with Puffendorf,—; into the principles of society, with Littleton & Coke, read a lecture with Blackstone, or decide a nice principle of law with—. If your circle be a better one, inform me. I shrewdly suspect that altho. they may contribute to the making of softer hearts, they will not to the making of sounder heads . . .

You will not omit mentioning me in the most friendly manner to all your and my Friends. Seth Storrs⁸

This and other letters that Storrs sent to his friends in New York City have a whiny quality about them: “why have you good friends not written to me? I have my friends—Homer, Chaucer, Locke, Edwards, Hume, etc.—but no belles and you seem to party all the time. The least you can do is write.” But it also shows his breadth of interest and that his Yale education was a serious one.

In 1787 Storrs moved to Addison, Vermont, to practice law. He boarded with attorney John Strong and his family and shortly afterward married Strong's daughter, Electa, who was the mother of their eight children. In 1794 they moved to Middlebury.

In the period from 1784/5 when Storrs moved to Bennington until his move to Middlebury in 1794 Storrs became acquainted with the Evarts family, notably James Evarts. The original family settled in Guilford, Connecticut, in the 1640s and in the 1740s became entwined with the history of Middlebury. The story is complicated. In 1749 four Evarts brothers moved from Guilford to Salisbury, Connecticut: John, Nathaniel, Sylvanus, and Elijah. Salisbury was important for the settlement of Middlebury and surrounding villages. It was home to Ira and Ethan Allen, John and Thomas Chipman, and Elisha and Gamaliel Painter, and it was in John Evarts' tavern that a group met in 1761 to endorse the charter for Middlebury that had been granted by Benning Wentworth, who had been appointed governor of New Hampshire by the King of England in 1741. Sixty names were recorded, though not all moved to Middlebury: four Evarts did sign and moved to the Middlebury area. John and Nathaniel Evarts stayed in Salisbury and John became a leader of the community and moderated most town meetings there during his lifetime. Abner Evarts and Charles Evarts moved from Guilford to Sunderland, Vermont (approximately twenty miles north of Bennington), in 1766 and were among the first settlers there; Ethan and Ira Allen also joined the group. Another Evarts, James (1754–1824), also moved to Sunderland, probably by the early 1770s. James Evarts is key to an understanding of the circumstances that resulted in the founding of Middlebury College later in the century.

In 1774 James Evarts bought a piece of land in Georgia, Vermont; he moved there in 1787 and was the moderator at the town meeting on March 31, 1788, when the town was organized. (Ira and Ethan Allen also moved to Georgia.) In 1781 James' son, Jeremiah, was born. It was the meeting between James and Jeremiah Evarts and Seth Storrs in Middlebury in January of 1798 that became significant—the catalyst for Middlebury College. Father and son had visited Storrs before; this time James was taking Jeremiah to Guilford to study with the pastor of the Congregational Church, a Rev. Mr. Elliott, to prepare for his matriculation at Yale.

I have found four references to that meeting. The only individual who was in Middlebury in the 1790s and who is named as having the idea for the establishment of the college was Seth Storrs.⁹ These are my sources:

1. From Franklin Dexter's *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College*.¹⁰

"He [Storrs] was a member of the corporation of the County Grammar School which was created in Middlebury in 1797, and a year or two later he conceived the idea of having a college in the town. As a result of his suggestions Middlebury College was chartered in November, 1800, and Colonel Storrs (as he was called) was made one of the trustees. In this capacity he was one of the most active friends of the institution and the commanding site now occupied by the college buildings was one of his valuable benefactions."

2. From Thomas Merrill, *Semicentennial Sermon*.¹¹

"He is said to have been the first person, who conceived the idea of having a College in Middlebury. As the Father of Jeremiah Evarts belonging to the north part of this state called at his hospitable mansion, when carrying his son to Yale College, it occurred to Col. S. as extremely desirable, that Vermont should have a College in active operation, and thus save her citizens the necessity of sending their sons abroad to acquire their education."

3. From: Abby M. Hemenway, *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer*.¹²

"Mr. Evarts took his son to Guilford on horseback. On his way, as was his wont when on that road, he spent a night with his friend, the late Col. Seth Storrs of Middlebury. The object of the journey gave direction to the thoughts of these two public spirited men, and the talk, evening and morning, was of a college that should provide at home for the education of Vermont boys. 'This,' said Col. Storrs, mentioning the incident to the writer many years ago—"this was among the circumstances that led to the establishment of Middlebury College."

4. From: *The Storrs Family Genealogical and Other Memoranda*¹³

"He [Storrs] was foremost in promoting the prosperity of Middlebury, especially its literary institutions. There were then no colleges in Vermont, and in an account of him published after his death it is said that his interest in helping to found one was awakened in this wise: 'When the father of the late Jeremiah Evarts [father of Hon. William M. Evarts], who resided in the northern part of this State (Vermont), called at the hospitable mansion of Colonel Storrs on his way to Connecticut for the purpose of having his son enter Yale College, it occurred to the deceased as a matter of regret that Vermont, instead of enjoying facilities for the education of her sons at home, should be under the necessity of resorting for that purpose to the literary institutions of other States. In this manner seems to have been suggested the first idea of a college at Middlebury.'"

Ideas matter, and here are two individuals who knew Seth Storrs that

credit him with the idea for Middlebury College. Ebenezer Tracy, the son-in-law of Jeremiah Evarts and author of the sketch in the *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, wrote specifically that Col. Storrs mentioned to him that the visit of the Evarts to his home was “among the circumstances that led to the establishment of Middlebury College.” Thomas Merrill, pastor of the Middlebury Church, knew Storrs well and confirmed that Storrs “conceived the idea of having a college in Middlebury.” (Storrs was a deacon, clerk, and at times treasurer of the Middlebury church from 1798 until his death in 1837.)

Storrs also gave land to the Addison County Grammar School which was to be used later for the college. The first gift was for the land under the building being constructed in 1798. In July 1800, four months before the charter was granted, he deeded a sizable piece on the west side of Otter Creek leading up to the future home of the college, known as Storrs hill. That piece of land, largely owned by Storrs, also included parcels owned by Darius Mathews (later a founding trustee of the college), Appleton Foot, Stillman Foot, and Anthony Rhodes. In 1810 Storrs initiated a fundraising drive among Middlebury citizens for a building, which was completed in 1815.¹⁴

Other factors would enter the picture. Timothy Dwight stopped in Middlebury en route to Vergennes where he had been invited to preach on Monday October 1, 1798, to visit Storrs and baptize his son.¹⁵ Dwight spent the night in Storrs’ home and visited with some others in Middlebury at Samuel Miller’s home that evening to discuss Storrs’ plan. (Storrs rode with Dwight to Vergennes the next morning.) We do not know for certain who gathered at Miller’s home; they may have been other trustees of the Addison Grammar School but the only references to Mathews and Painter being there is in a Middlebury College catalog of 1961. (The catalog of 1961 does not mention Daniel Chipman.) The manuscript of what became Dwight’s *Travels in New England* does not mention their names.¹⁶ To be sure, the trustees of the Addison Grammar School would have talked about Storrs’ idea and probably could have squashed it if they were opposed. The importance of Dwight’s visit has been exaggerated.

It should also be noted that of the fifteen men who made up the original board of trustees most were college graduates except for the Middlebury group of Gamaliel Painter, Darius Mathews, and Samuel Miller, and the Baptist minister, John Leland. Six attended Yale; three were alumni of Dartmouth and influenced by its president, Eleazar Wheelock (1711–1779), whose missionary work had been encouraged by Jonathan Edwards. One attended Harvard; the educational background of the other trustee is unknown. Except for Leland they were

Congregationalists. The early board of trustees at the University of Vermont included those of Episcopalian, Congregational, Baptist, Quaker, Universalist, and Deist persuasions.

Seth Storrs had a primary role in the founding of Middlebury College. By education, experience, connections, and personal character he stands out as first among equals in the early history of the college. But it was not simply a fortuitous meeting of Storrs and James and Jeremiah Evarts that brought the college into being; it takes a person with fire in his belly to ignite others to pursue a common goal. Certainly many people within the Middlebury community at the time stoked the fire with their gifts of dedication and money and it is true that Middlebury College was in that sense a “town’s college.”

The Congregational heritage is part of Middlebury’s past.¹⁷ That does not mean that to be true to its past the college should retain the obscure and now long lost motives of that time. But Middlebury College would not *be* without that initial and sometimes unarticulated but felt tie to a mission its citizens believed in. It was not a mission to convert the world but a hope that through the education of a new generation that its children and Vermont’s children would benefit and serve and become lights to a future that was not yet born. Middlebury College’s ancestors from that time were Congregationalists whose perspective and daily routine were infused with shared religious convictions. There were no so-called “atheists” or, if so, they were deeply hidden; there were no Unitarians, or, if so, they were quiet as church mice. There were hidden Catholics, but no Jews, Lutherans, Mennonites, Hare Krishna, Buddhists, Christian Scientists, or African Methodists. That world is not ours, though it is part of our past.

NOTES

¹ The main histories of the college’s founding are: David Stameshkin, *The Town’s College: Middlebury College 1800–1915* (Middlebury: Middlebury College Press, 1985); Samuel Swift, *History of the Town of Middlebury* (Middlebury: A.H. Copeland, 1859; reprint, Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1971); W. Storrs Lee, *Town Father. A Biography of Gamaliel Painter* (New York: Hastings House, 1952); and W. Storrs Lee, *Stagecoach North* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1941). In these studies minimal attention was given to the role of Seth Storrs (1757–1837), a resident of Middlebury from 1794 until his death, or to the religious character of the town of Middlebury in the period of its founding.

² See Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness. The First Century of Urban Life in America 1625–1742* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1938), 139.

³ See Mary Gambrell, *Ministerial Training in Eighteenth Century New England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937; reprinted, New York: AMS Press, 1967), and Robert L. Ferm, “Joseph Bellamy and His ‘School for Prophets’ in Eighteenth Century New England,” *Bulletin of the Congregational Library*, 37:1 (Fall 1985), 6–19.

⁴ David W. Kling, “The New Divinity and Williams College, 1793–1836,” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 6:2 (Summer 1996), 199–200. See also: David W. Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792–1882* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Joseph Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and*



the New Divinity Movement (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981); Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Robert L. Ferm, *Jonathan Edwards the Younger 1745–1801: A Colonial Pastor*. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976).

⁵ See John M. Comstock, *The Congregational Churches of Vermont and Their Ministry 1762–1942. Historical and Statistical* (St. Johnsbury, Vt.: The Cowles Press, 1942).

⁶ Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955), 281ff.

⁷ Other Storrs family names in Mansfield from the eighteenth century were: Samuel, Andrew, Huckins, Experience, Eleazar, John, John, Jr., Richard Salter, and Richard Salter, Jr., most of whom were Yale graduates and became clergy. In 1881 Charles and Augustus Storrs gave a large parcel of land and a generous bequest to found Storrs Agricultural College, which became later the University of Connecticut.

⁸ This and five other letters of Seth Storrs are in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

⁹ W. Storrs Lee has called Gamaliel Painter the founder of the College. In his *Town Father: A Biography of Gamaliel Painter Lee* wrote: “The man responsible for founding the first college to open its doors in Vermont did not have the remotest bid to anything approaching erudition. Painter was unread and uncultivated. The only formal education he possessed was a few broken years of common schooling in Salisbury, Connecticut” (151). And later: “Painter was the principal founder of the College . . .” (167). But he offers no documentation. In another book, *Father Went to College. The Story of Middlebury Storrs Lee* reports in detail a conversation that Timothy Dwight had with the Grammar School Trustees for which there is no record (18ff). The book is cast more as an historical novel. Dwight’s report on his trip to Middlebury and Vergennes in September 1798 does not contain quotations from any conversations he had with Middlebury citizens on that visit and does not even record who was at the meeting.

¹⁰ Biography of Seth Storrs in Franklin B. Dexter, ed., *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (New York: 1885–1911), 4: 59.

¹¹ Thomas Merrill, D.D., *Semecentennial Sermon Containing a History of Middlebury, Vt., Delivered Dec. 3, 1840. Being the First Thanksgiving Day, After the Expiration of Half a Century From the Organization of the Congregational Church, September 5, 1790* (Middlebury: Printed by E. Maxham, 1841), note 37, 91.

¹² Ebenezer Tracy, “Jeremiah Everts,” in Abby M. Hemenway, ed., *The Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (5 Vols., 1867–91) 1: 241. Tracy later wrote a long biography of Jeremiah Everts, who became well known as the editor of the *Panoplist* and later as a missionary and a founder of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

¹³ Collected and compiled by Charles Storrs (Privately printed, New York, 1886), 336.

¹⁴ H. P. Smith, ed., *History of Addison County, Vermont* (Syracuse, N.Y.: D. Mason and Co., 1886), 334. The Sheldon Museum has the original solicitation that Storrs initiated. I am indebted to Nancy Rucker, archivist of the museum, for this information.

¹⁵ This fact was found by Robert Cushman of Middlebury in the records of the Middlebury Congregational Church. Quoted in T. D. Seymour Bassett, *The Gods of the Hills. Piety and Society in Nineteenth-Century Vermont* (Montpelier: Vermont Historical Society, 2000), 72 and 97, note 6.

¹⁶ The manuscript of Dwight’s trip, “Vergennes No 5 Middlebury-Onion River,” is not a very reliable historical source because it weaves together three visits to the Middlebury area: 1798, 1805, and 1810; it is not always clear which trip is being described. Also, between 1805 and Dwight’s death in 1817 he used twelve amanuenses to collate his manuscripts; the handwriting changes throughout the 166 page document. The manuscript is in Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

¹⁷ One trustee of both UVM and Middlebury was Asa Burton, pastor of the Church in Thetford, Vermont, and a New Divinity Calvinist. He was a graduate of Dartmouth and had studied theology with Levi Hart, who led a New Divinity school in Preston, Connecticut. Burton did not care for the “liberalism” of Harvard graduate Daniel Sanders, the first UVM president and former pastor of the Congregational Church in Vergennes. Burton and a few others fought to have Sanders removed as president but they finally gave up and Burton resigned from the board. He commented that if UVM had appointed “an orthodox man with a proper classical education” the college (UVM) “would have prospered and another college (Middlebury) would never have been thought of, or erected.” *Life of Asa Burton Written by Himself* (Thetford, Vt.: The First Congregational Church, 1973), 36. After his resignation from UVM Burton was appointed to the Middlebury College board of trustees.