- The Courageous Captain -

and

The Rise and Fall of Middletown's Military Academy

Stephen E. Post

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ABSTRACT

In 1825, Capt. Alden Partridge opened the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy in Middletown, Connecticut. It was one of many institutions which he either founded or headed in his forty years as an educator, but it was unique to the inhabitants of Middletown for whom it represented the first institution of higher learning.

Here, then, is a brief account of how a man of determination came to a town that yearned for its own institution of higher learning and received a special kind of institution and man heading it, but because both man and institution were apparently out of step with what was really anticipated by the State, the man's ideal was thwarted to the point where he took his institution and simply left the town.

Here is the story of a town that got what it was asking for when it allowed the entrance of Captain Alden Partridge and his 300 cadets: the beginnings of higher education, the physical plan of which was abandoned and has since been incorporated by Wesleyan University.
"Military man at heart, he fought in no war, but plead for preparedness, a volunteer militia and condemned standing armies".

(Words spoken at Alden Partridge's funeral by his son - 1854)
On October 20, 1824, a procession formed on Main Street in Middletown, Connecticut, opposite the Presbyterian Meeting House to go to the hill and lay the cornerstone of the Lyceum Building (South College). The procession was led by Capt. Stillman's company of light artillery (Middletown) and by Capt. Clark's company from Haddam, Connecticut. They were followed by distinguished citizens and members of St. John's Masonic Lodge #2.

After a prayer by Rev. Mr. Crane, the stone was laid "in due and Masonic form. An eloquent and appropriate address was delivered by the Hon. Samuel W. Dana, Mayor of the city, and the whole concluded with prayer by the Rev. Mr. Noble. Afterwards a salute of artillery announced the completion of the interesting scene" (American Sentinel, October 27, 1824).

This cornerstone ceremony was the culmination of months of hard work and anticipation on the part of the citizens of Middletown to establish an institution of higher education in their city.

As early as March 10, 1824, the Middlesex Gazette reported that a special meeting had been held the previous week by the Trustees of Washington College to "receive proposals for the further endowment and the location of Washington College." The following week, March 17th, the editor of the Gazette urged the inhabitants of Middletown to think seriously of the advantages and opportunities of locating Washington College in their city. It was not a question of which town could raise the most money, but it was "hoped that the question may be decided on more
permanent, appropriate, liberal considerations, and on grounds conducive to
the lasting welfare of the institution". The editor warned his readers not
to be "penny wise and pound foolish" about considering the establishment of
an institution of higher education in Middletown on the grounds that
"Middletown has been too long tributary to Hartford and New Haven".

The following week, the editor concluded a similar article advocating
the establishment of the proposed college by saying, "There are advantages
of a permanent and increasing nature....It is also understood that subscriptions
will be received not only in cash but in labor and material for building...."
(Middlesex Gazette, March 24, 1824).

On May 12, 1824, it was learned that the Trustees of Washington College
had met and decided to establish their institution in Hartford under the new name
of Trinity College. The Trustees had voted nine in favor of Hartford, five for
Middletown, and two for New Haven. Strangely enough, no reason was publically
issued by local Middletown newspapers for the choice of Hartford over Middletown.
Middletown had offered the greatest sum of money for the establishment:
$37,942.00, as compared with Hartford's $33,431.00, and New Haven's $20,000.00.
Middletown had also offered a site of 14 acres which was "agreed by people of
judgement and taste to be the most beautiful and desirable spot in the city and
probably in New England for the erection of college buildings, valued at
$3,750.00" (Middlesex Gazette, May 12, 1824).

It was approximately this time that Capt. Alden Partridge, Superintendent
of The American Literary Scientific, and Military Academy in Norwich, Vermont,
was turning his attention towards Middletown's now unclaimed site which was
awaiting the coming of a worthy educational institution. He was dissatisfied
with the little recognition Vermont was giving his military academy and became
more and more interested in the Middletown site for the following reasons:

1. The site was closer the the more populated sections of the country
and therefore had a larger potential pool of cadets.
2. The Middletown site was nearer the sea and water transportation. Partridge felt strongly about naval training, and the move would obviously supplement his courses in navigation and seamanship (Walker, 1965: 319).

Alden Partridge was born in February, 1785, on a farm in Norwich, Vermont. After completing three years at Dartmouth College, he was appointed to the military academy at West Point. He graduated in 1806 (the fifteenth cadet in the academy's history to do so), and stayed on as an assistant professor of mathematics. In 1812, he became a full professor of mathematics and engineering at West Point and was awarded an honorary M.A. by Dartmouth College that same year. For brief periods in 1815, 1816, and 1817, Partridge served as superintendent of West Point during the absence of General Swift. He organized the first physical education and exercise program at West Point: the first program of its kind to be incorporated into the curriculum of an institution of learning in the United States (Walker, 1965: 314).

At this point in Partridge's career, a letter of complaint was sent to General Swift and President Monroe by the West Point faculty stating "that he alternated excessively severe punishment with military laxness; that he was prone to favoritism; that graduation and commissions were more a matter of the captain's favor than solid achievement by the cadets" (Walker, 1965: 314).

When Capt. Partridge got wind of this letter, he placed the entire faculty under arrest. He was dismissed from his post on July 17, 1817, and a month later returned to West Point and read orders reinstating him as superintendent. All might have been well if it had not been for the fact that Partridge had apparently written the orders himself, and President Monroe accordingly ordered Partridge's arrest on the following charges:

1. Neglect of duty.
2. Conduct unbecoming an officer.
3. Disobedience.
4. Mutiny and exciting a mutiny.
When tried, Capt. Partridge was found guilty only of "Disobedience", and was sentenced to be cashiered. President Monroe commuted the sentence with Partridge's consent to resign (Walker, 1965: 315).

Capt. Partridge returned to his hometown of Norwich and worked on his ideal for the establishment of an educational institution for young men. The cornerstone of The American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy was laid on August 4, 1819, and represented the beginning of the first of two buildings, each of which would accommodate 42 cadets, two recitation rooms, a lecture room, and an armory. The Academy opened in 1820 with five faculty members and one hundred cadets from eight states, one territory, and Canada (Walker, 1965: 317).

In 1826, Capt. Partridge's philosophy of education was outlined in his book entitled, "Lecture on Education, a condensation of the basic points of which follows:

1. All students should not be required to take the same courses. Partridge felt that individual interests should be fostered and encouraged.

2. A specific period of time should not be assigned for the completion of a project or course, but the individual should proceed as quickly from project to project as his capacity permitted, not having to wait for slower individuals.

3. Solid backgrounds in Greek, Latin, Math, surveying, French, Italian, and Spanish were thought to be necessary and ideal for the aspiring student, in Capt. Partridge's thought.

4. Military training was deemed by Capt. Partridge to be a "must" for all students, since his idea of a perfect citizen was a citizen-soldier; a man of peace, but one who was willing and very capable to fight for his country.

5. A student must be strong in body as well as mind.

Capt. Partridge set aside eight hours a day for study and recitation; eight hours for sleep, three hours for meals and personal duties, two hours for military training, and three hours for practical gardening, scientific pursuits, and attending lectures (Middlesex Gazette, Feb. 9, 1824).

During the four months of July-October, 1824, events took place quickly
CATALOGUE
OF THE
OFFICERS AND CADETS
OF THE
AMERICAN LITERARY, SCIENTIFIC
AND
MILITARY ACADEMY.
To which is subjoined,
The
PROSPECTUS AND INTERNAL REGULATIONS
OF THE INSTITUTION, &c. &c.,


WOODSTOCK, VT.
PRINTED BY DAVID WATSON;
1821.
to assure that Capt. Partridge would relocate his Academy in Middletown:

**JULY 27, 1824** - A petition was submitted to the board of selectmen by a concerned group of townsmen to show that "They consider the establishment of Capt. Partridge's school in this town an object of great magnitude, deeply interesting to the future reputation and prosperity of the town - That to obtain this object great individual exertions have been made, but will probably fail of success without the aid of the town in its corporate capacity - Wherefore they pray the selectmen: to convene a special meeting of the town for the purpose of taking the subject...into consideration and granting such aid to this object as they may deem fit" (Public Document, Middletown, July 27, 1824).

**JULY 28, 1824** - Capt. Partridge announced in the Middlesex Gazette that the general examinations would begin in Norwich, Vermont, on August 4th and continue for nine days: seven days of academic exams and two days of military exams, and that "Military and navel gentlemen and friends of literature are invited to attend".

**AUGUST 2, 1824** - A Middletown Town Meeting moved "that in the opinion of this meeting, it is an object of great importance in the interest of this town to procure the removal of Capt. Partridge's Scientific and Military Academy to this place". The rest of the Meeting was spent discussing the issue of brownstone for the academy. A contractor hired by the school was to "raise, dig, and remove there from stone in such manner and quantities from time to time within five years from the 1st day of January next (1825) as they may deem necessary to be used in the erection of said buildings, and to defray the expence of raising and transporting the stone not exceeding in value at the cash price Ten Thousand Dollars..." (Town Votes and Proprietors Records, Vol. 3, 1798-1842, Middletown, Conn., p.p. 237-238).
Middletown, Aug. 24th, 1827.

RECEIVED of
W. P. Gorham,
Dollars, in payment of his subscription, dated February 6th, 1827, for the purchase of APPARATUS for the use of the AMERICAN LITERARY, SCIENTIFIC, and MILITARY ACADEMY—In consideration of which payment, he is entitled to an interest in the said Apparatus, as tenant in common with the other Proprietors; bearing such proportion to the whole value, as the sum so paid bears to twelve hundred dollars.

(Signed.)

Treasurer
of A. L. S. & M. Academy.

No. 187

AMERICAN LITERARY, SCIENTIFIC, AND MILITARY ACADEMY,

MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT.

Amount of Shares subscribed for by Individuals:

<table>
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<th>Shares</th>
<th>Nominal value of the grant of the use of the property by the town of Middletown,</th>
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<tr>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>$32,500</td>
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Total, $32,500

This Certificate is the order of

H. B. LeRoy.

Shares in the Land and Buildings, to be purchased and erected for the use of said ACADEMY, subject to his indebtedness herefor; constituting an interest therein in the proportion that $30 Dollars bears to thirty-two thousand five hundred Dollars, and to be increased in case the actual value of the above Grant shall be less than ten thousand Dollars; in such manner as to allow him his just proportion of such deficiency. MIDDLETOWN, September 6th, A. D. 1827.

(R. H. B.)

Trustees
SEPTEMBER 1, 1824 - Capt. Partridge was in town explaining his system. The editor of the Gazette assessed Partridge's educational system as being a "mode of governing" which was "the only practicable one for the youth of our country... The frequent disturbances in our best regulated seminaries...is alone sufficient to warrant the conviction that a material change is necessary in our 'nurseries of science'" (Middlesex Gazette, September 1, 1824).

SEPTEMBER 6, 1824 - The Gazette reported "that the subscription for the establishment of the school of Captain Alden Partridge in this city has been completed and that John L. Lewis, Esq. has contracted to have the necessary buildings finished by the First of July next".

SEPTEMBER 22, 1824 - "To masons, brickmakers, joiners & carpenters, etc. The subscriber will receive proposals for furnishing the materials and labour required for a building 150 feet by 50 feet and by four stories high, and a building 50 feet by 40 feet in the clear, and three stories high. It is expected that the proposals will be distinct and as follows:

Price of stone per perch. Price of brick per thousand, delivered on the stone lot, so called. Laying stone per perch. Laying brick per thousand. Timber for frame, per thousand feet. All the joiner's work, and furnishing the materials. Boating stone by the perch, from the quarry to the city of Middletown, to such place as shall be designated. Carting the stone from the river to the stone lot, to such place as shall be designated. Digging for the foundation walls. Digging for a well. John Lawrence Lewis" (Middlesex Gazette, September 22, 1824).

OCTOBER 27, 1824 - American Sentinel and Middlesex Gazette, account of cornerstone laying ceremony.
DESCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL BUILDINGS

Academy Building (North College) - Brownstone, 150' length, 50' width, four stories high, 64 rooms for cadets plus three singles.

Lyceum (South College) - Brownstone, 54' length, 45' width, four stories, basement (laboratory), upstairs (chapel, lecture room); two top floors (recitation rooms); Tower on end = 16' square, 54' high observatory.

Commons - Brick building, 120' length, 40' width, three stories.
1st floor - cooking area.
2nd floor - dining area.
3rd floor - Accommodations for guests.

Two Guard Houses - Stone.

Parade Grounds plus rest of grounds are cultivated "for the purpose of practically instructing them in the art of agriculture" (Peyre-Ferry, 1826: 228).
AUGUST 3, 1825 - The Middlesex Gazette contained the following "Notice":

"Capt. Partridge wishes to take a number of active, intelligent youths, from 11 to 15 years of age, to be attached, as attendants, to the American Literary, Scientific and Military Academy, at Middletown, Conn. These youths will be under the immediate care and direction of Capt. P., will be well clothed, kindly treated, and brought up to habits of industry and economy. Their morals and personal deportment will be strictly attended to, and they will have an opportunity of acquiring an education which will prepare them for most of the active and useful employments of life. No youth will be taken without being previously seen and personally examined by Capt. P. Those would be preferred who have given some attention to music, or who understand some mechanic art. Applications will be received by Capt. P. at Middletown, until the 22nd of August, where particulars will be more fully stated".

Besides a wide variety of courses offered the cadets, Capt. Partridge offered two series of public lectures annually. This was "to enable an individual or 'gentleman' to learn more in the military studies". Each series was four weeks in duration, consisted of twenty lectures, and cost $10.00. The lectures included:

1. Permanent and field fortification, and the construction thereof; marine batteries.

2. Attack and defence or fortified places.

3. Use of artillery and principles of gunnery.


5. Garrison and field service of troops.

6. General rules for attack and defence of a province or country.
7. Rules for inspection and review of troops.

8. Summary of ancient fortification plus ancient modes of attacking and defending fortified places.

9. Summary of ancient tactics (Greek and Roman).

10. Description of some of the most celebrated battles and sieges in both ancient and modern times. (Peyre-Perry, 1826: 233-4)

**NOVEMBER 8, 1826** - The Gazette announced that the first annual catalogue of A.I.S. & M. Academy had just been issued from the press. There were 293 cadets representing almost every state in the Union. The professors and instructors totalled 23: 12 in the scientific department, 4 in languages, 2 in metaphysics and belles lettres, and 5 in miscellaneous.

Also in November, the Journal of an Excursion was published, having been written by a detachment of cadets after they had travelled to Washington, D.C. The Journal was a result of Capt. Partridge's idea, executed yearly, of marching with some of his cadets to a point of interest, usually pertaining to some aspect of the nation's history. At stops in towns along the way, military drills and exhibitions were staged, sometimes with the local militia. It was a good public-relations stunt and possible recruiting exercise. The cadets drew maps of their march, calculated elevations, noted natural features, and returned to Middletown to compile their findings in journal form.

The following article appeared in the Gazette of October 3, 1827. It was reprinted from the New-York American (Sept. 28, 1827) with a rebuttal by the editor of the Gazette:

"Military schools - we observe with regret the extension of the mania, so we must call it, for military schools. Capt. Partridge travels through the country parading a parcel of boys in uniform, who, because they can go well through the manual, and march the lock step, are supposed to be equally well-grounded in more useful knowledge... A public meeting of the citizens (Rochester, N.Y.) was held... to
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AND

INTERNAL REGULATIONS

OF THE

AMERICAN LITERARY, SCIENTIFIC,
AND MILITARY ACADEMY,

AT

MIDDLETOWN, CONNECTICUT.

MIDDLETOWN:
PRINTED BY STARR & NILES,
1829.
JOURNAL
OF AN
EXCURSION,
PERFORMED BY
A DETACHMENT OF CADETS,
BELONGING TO THE
A. L. S. C. E. ACADEMY,
UNDER THE COMMAND OF
CAPTAIN ALDEN PARTRIDGE.

November 1st, 1826.

MIDDLETOWN,
PRINTED BY E. & H. CLARK,
1826.
confer with Capt. Partridge on the expediency of his establishing a school there... We, a good deal doubt whether it would be advanced by turning their yourth into make believe soldiers, and inspiring them with the notion that bullet buttons and a bayonet, can usefully supply the place of sound learning or turning their young heads with the pretension, pomp, and parade of arms, instead of filling them with lessons of wisdom and precepts of humility”.

The rest of the articles that appeared in either the Gazette or the Sentinel for the following two years (1828-9) simply reported the events which were basic to any institution of learning, such as invitations to the exams, lectures, exhibitions, and balls.

In 1829, Capt. Partridge started having dreams of bigger and better things for his Academy. He had plans of opening a preparatory school for his Academy in the buildings he had abandoned (but still owned) in Norwich, Vermont, but lacked sufficient funds to run two campuses simultaneously.

Capt. Partridge also wanted to be able to have the power to grant degrees. To accomplish this, he asked his trustees to petition the state legislature for degree-giving rites and permission to hold a lottery. The upper house was willing enough, but the lower house, made up mostly of clergy, were opposed to lotteries and the concept of a military education. The petition was denied for two consecutive years.

His fight for petition seeming hopeless, Capt. Partridge closed down his Middletown campus and moved with his cadets back to Norwich, where he was granted the power to offer degrees by the Vermont legislature. His school was renamed Norwich University and was primarily a Universalist venture. Students were permitted to omit the study of the ancient languages, which were considered obsolete by this time, and a new degree of "Bachelor of Sciences" was created
for the first time in this country (Walker, 1826: 319).

While in Norwich, Partridge inspired and founded The Virginia Literary, Scientific and Military Academy (est. 1839), at Portsmouth, Virginia, and in 1842 founded The Pennsylvania Literary, Scientific and Military Academy at Bristol, Pennsylvania. Disagreements with his Board of Trustees in Norwich, adding to a long history of disagreement with superiors, finally came to a head on November 6, 1846, when Captain Alden Partridge deeded his Norwich claim and title to his Board of Trustees and thereby ended a forty-year career in education.

- POSTSCRIPT -

What had formerly been the campus for Partridge's Academy in Middletown became the campus of The Methodist College in 1831.

October, 1829:


October 16, 1829:

"Resolved - That the Town Clerk be authorized and directed to subscribed for and in behalf of the Town for Four Hundred shares of the stock of the Wesleyan College or Universtity to be located in Middletown - The payment to be made in five annual installments of Two Thousand Dollars each" (Town Votes and Priorites Records, Vol. 3, 1798-1842, Page 289).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


American Sentinel, Middletown, Connecticut (weekly publication).

Middlesex Gazette, Middletown, Connecticut (weekly publication).
