

Bowdoin Confederates: Why Maine Students Fought for the South During the Civil War

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BOWDOIN COLLEGE

Introduction

During the Civil War, Bowdoin College earned a reputation for producing Union leaders who contributed significantly to the North's victory over the Confederacy. The most famous of these men was Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, a Bowdoin professor who joined the Union Army during his sabbatical and would go on to become a renowned soldier best known for defending Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg against repeated Confederate assaults in 1863. Oliver Otis Howard, another former student, also became a key player in the war, rising to the rank of general and later overseeing the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. Bowdoin's Civil War record, however, went far beyond the heroic military careers of Chamberlain and Howard. As a community, the college had the highest percentage of students and alumni serving for the Union amongst all northern colleges, among which Bowdoin produced the highest percentage of commissioned officers.¹ In total, 298 Bowdoin students fought for the Union, and many others supported the war effort in numerous ways, such as volunteering for the Christian Commission.² Harriet Beecher Stowe, wife of Bowdoin Professor Calvin Ellis Stowe, famously wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on Bowdoin's campus. Yet, despite the school's overwhelming association with the Union cause, there were eighteen alumni who took up arms in defense of the Confederacy. After graduating from a school in the northernmost part of the country, what motivations did these Bowdoin Confederates have? To get an answer, one has to consider the history of Maine, the Civil War, and the lives of these 18 men.

A close evaluation of the available documents on this unique group of men, the context of their lives in the North and South, the circumstances of their careers, and their personal beliefs, allows a clearer picture to emerge of what led them to fight for the South. This group of eighteen men can be divided into three distinct categories, ranging from least to most ideologically motivated. Conversely, the subgroups that consist of soldiers less inspired by ideology show other factors that contributed to their decisions to join the Confederate Army.

The subset of Bowdoin Confederates who were lowest on the ideological spectrum

were the alumni who moved to the South because of their occupations and residence there for many years before the war began. For them, it is most likely that ideas of duty and discipline — attained at Bowdoin— were primary factors in their enlistments. The second subset consists of Bowdoin students who were Southerners by birth. Their motivations appear to be linked to their allegiance to the state in which they grew up. The third group, consisting of individuals who went to the South specifically for the Civil War and fought because they fervently supported slavery, showed the largest and clearest commitment to the Southern Cause and the racial supremacy that defined the Confederate States. To varying degrees, all these men went “against the grain” of pro-Union sentiment at their school when they joined the Confederate Army.

Pro-Union Activity at Bowdoin

At the outbreak of war, Bowdoin College was firmly against the rebellion of the Southern states. Bowdoin students overwhelmingly voiced their support for Abraham Lincoln during the election of 1860, with 135 joining a political club created for his campaign, compared to 30 who supported Stephen Douglas, and seven who supported John Breckinridge.³ Reflecting on the attitude of Bowdoin students towards the war, alumni of the class of 1862 described themselves as a “war class” who responded to the call that “thundered all around the horizon” and enlisted in the Union army immediately after graduating.⁴ Before them, the classes of 1860 and 1861 “had already sent more than a score each into the field.”⁵ Graduating students were not the only ones joining the Union Army. Professors Chamberlain and Whittlesey “exchanged the professor's chair for the saddle” and enlisted as well.⁶ Students still enrolled in the college created volunteer companies with drill practices.⁷ As a community, Bowdoin embraced the Union cause.

The personal circumstances of the Bowdoin Confederates make the question of why they fought even more intriguing. Many of them not only attended Bowdoin for four years, but also grew up in Maine or other parts of New England and spent some time after college living in the North. John M. Morrill, class of 1844, was born in 1825

in Limerick, Maine. After graduating from Bowdoin, he worked as a schoolteacher in Sing Sing, New York.⁸ James L. Hoole, class of 1849, was born in Fryeburg, Maine. He spent his youth in Portland, before moving to Durham, Maine at age 14. After Bowdoin, Hoole resided in Brunswick and found work as an apprentice to a local attorney.⁹ John C. Merrill, class of 1851, attended the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York, and then returned to Maine to practice medicine in Lewiston.¹⁰ The stories of other Bowdoin Confederates are similar to these, and indicate that most of the students who fought for the Confederacy spent a significant part of their lives in the North, before leaving for the South. In many cases, their families and friends even remained in New England during the Civil War.

While Confederate students from Bowdoin were an incredibly small minority compared to those who fought for the Union, an additional detail worth considering is how they fit into the larger population of Civil War soldiers. Seventeen out of the eighteen Bowdoin Confederates enlisted voluntarily at the start of the war. While it is true that Bowdoin had an exceptionally high number of Union soldiers, many Bowdoin graduates chose not to fight on either side. The most enlisted class graduated in 1863 with 52 percent of students directly participating in the war effort. Enlistment percentages for other class years never exceeded 50 percent, and the class of 1865 had only 29 percent participation.¹¹ Thus, most alumni made the choice of either leading a civilian life or becoming a Union soldier. Eighteen graduates of Bowdoin, however, chose to fight for the Confederate States of America (CSA).

The George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives at Bowdoin has “Biographical Profiles” for all graduates of the college. With the exception of Arthur McArthur Jr., the archives contain no letters written by Bowdoin Confederates before or during the Civil War. However, the archives possess obituaries and letters that recount biographical information as it was reported to staff members at the Bowdoin library. In the years after the war, Bowdoin gathered information on its alumni for the college's catalogue, and the inquiries staff made into the graduates lives after Bowdoin have

provided valuable information about how the men ended up in the Confederate Army. Unfortunately, since the college's queries were solely for the purpose of informing the school about the whereabouts and occupations of the alumni, the responses they received were written in a matter-of-fact tone, with few details about military service. Out of the eighteen Bowdoin Confederates, the profiles for John F. Shaw, class of 1855, and Robert M. Spearing, class of 1857, are the only ones that are completely empty. Information on their lives was obtained from the Bowdoin catalogue and Nehemiah Cleaveland and Alpheus Packard's *History of Bowdoin College*, which contained biographical summaries of all graduates from 1806 to 1879.¹²

Overall, while the scarce amount of information undoubtedly limits our ability to understand why Bowdoin students became Confederates, the available resources have proven sufficient in revealing important patterns in the lives of these men. In particular, the career parallels found amongst this group provide clues as to why they joined the rebellion. As historian James McPherson notes, "The motives of many volunteers were mixed in a way that was impossible for them to disentangle in their own minds."¹³ Looking at the totality of their lives from beginning to end, however, provides a special opportunity to discover the most plausible motivations of these men.

Other studies of Civil War soldiers' decisions to enlist have shown a spectrum of motives that were determined by their class, education, commitment to ideology, and wartime fervor.¹⁴ In the case of the Bowdoin Confederates, they all had a similar economic background and the same Bowdoin education. The reasons that led them to join the Confederate Army, therefore, were rooted in their commitment to the ideology of the CSA and the nationalistic excitement that both the North and the South developed as the conflict neared. For the South, nationalism and culture created the idea of "Southern Honor." Historians use the term to describe the code of discipline and dedication that was a part of Southern society. Bertram Wyatt-Brown, for example, views Southern Honor as consisting of a belief that the "personal bravery" of Southerners "stood next to no other people," with "a capacity for hatred" that upheld the view of death as the better option compared to being a coward and living with dishonor.¹⁵ Did Bowdoin Confederates develop an allegiance to the Southern Code of Honor in this manner after growing up in the North, or at least spending a portion of their formative years there?

Recent scholarship on the motivations of Union troops for participating in the war has shown them to be led by a sense of "Northern Duty," a code of conduct

that parallels the "Southern Honor" which inspired many southerners to take up arms.¹⁶ While precisely how — and if — the battle cultures of the North and South differed are still debated, the lives of the eighteen Bowdoin Confederates suggest that they were all influenced by both Northern Duty and Southern Honor, albeit to varying degrees. Their unique experiences in the antebellum period shed light on the personal and societal forces that caused them — and many other northern-educated men — to become Confederates.

Brunswick, Maine in the Antebellum Era

While it is true that the sentiment on Bowdoin's campus during the time of the war was decidedly in support of the Union, the same cannot be said for the college — and the rest of the North — in the years before the firing on Fort Sumter. Unlike Bowdoin graduates who fought for the Union, the majority of Bowdoin Confederates attended the school at a time when abolition was not popular in Maine and many people residing in New England sympathized with the South. After a public discussion on slavery in Brunswick in 1838, town citizens made a resolution that any attempt to "mislead" the "brethren of the South" and convince them of slavery's evil was "unjust, inexpedient, and an unwarrantable encroachment upon the rights of a portion of the citizens of our country."¹⁷ Considering that almost half of all Bowdoin Confederates graduated within a decade after this proclamation by the townspeople of Brunswick, it is likely that they too viewed slavery as an undeniable right of the South.

The reasons these sympathies prevailed are varied. White supremacy was an inherent characteristic of the American breed of slavery, and one did not have to reside in the South to view the ownership of African Americans as a fair and just policy. Voting records of elections in Maine during the 1840s indicate that antislavery candidates for governor polled below 15 percent, sometimes attaining as little as 5 percent, a far cry from the electoral domination of the proslavery Democrats.¹⁸ A positive — or at least acquiescent — view of slavery existed beyond the Mason-Dixon line, and its presence in Maine in the prewar years arguably made allegiance to the Southern Cause easier for future Bowdoin Confederates.

Secondly, Maine was also connected to the Southern states by trade, so issuing a denunciation of slavery was viewed as an unnecessary instigation of conflict for many Mainers. The state was home to shipyards that had strong business ties to the South, and as Charles Calhoun notes, for "commercial parties" who appeared to have "any sympathy with antislavery... their chance for Southern freight was at an end."¹⁹ Even if Maine

residents had personal disagreements with the institution of slavery, the political climate that the majority of Bowdoin Confederates lived in did not reflect these views. On campus, there was a club devoted to electing Bowdoin alumnus and pro-slavery Democrat Franklin Pierce in the early 1850s.²⁰ In fact, a consideration of the class years that most Bowdoin Confederates came from reveals few alumni who fought for the Union. The graduating classes of the 1840s and early 1850s, produced minuscule amounts of Union soldiers when compared to later class years (see *Figure 1*).

Therefore, whereas overall Bowdoin Unionists outnumbered Confederates roughly 18 to 1, earlier classes saw a much smaller — and more balanced — number of Union and Confederate troops. The class of 1847, for example, produced two Union soldiers and two Confederates.²¹ These Bowdoin students were not exposed to the strong anti-slavery sentiment that swept Brunswick in later years, and so among the graduating classes of the 1840s were many more future Confederates. The markedly lower Union to Confederate ratio before the late 1850s also indicates that older Bowdoin alumni who supported the South were more likely to enlist than their northern counterparts.

For the two Bowdoin Confederates who graduated during 1861, however, their direct ties to the South appear to have made up for the increased antislavery sentiment that developed in the North during the buildup to the Civil War. These two men were Sidney M. Finger and Manuel E. Shell. They were born and raised in the South. Both were North Carolina natives, and returned to their home state months before the war began.²² The only other Bowdoin Confederate from the decade of the war was Winthrop Norton, class of 1860. Unlike Shell and Finger, he was from the North. Nonetheless, he only served — and died — as a Confederate soldier because of the compulsory service that was implemented in 1863.²³

Thus, the Bowdoin Confederates who graduated immediately before the war commenced either enlisted because of their birthplace loyalties or as a result of compulsory service. For those who graduated in the early 1850s and earlier, the time they spent at Bowdoin and in the North in general was not marked by a concerted pro-Union effort, simply because war was not yet on the horizon. McPherson writes that "patriotic furor" only spread after the South fired on Fort Sumter in 1861. Only then did "Northern cities and towns" erupt "into volcanoes of oratory and recruiting rallies."²⁴ Evidently, Bowdoin took part in this wartime fervor as well. During the senior orations of 1862, all but two of the speeches were about support for the Union and the need for

abolition.²⁵ However, while school, state, and countrywide sentiment evolved to embrace the Union cause, it occurred only after these future Confederates already found their way to the South. Once there, the lives of this group would develop in such a manner that each would enlist.

Life in the South: Road to the Confederacy

In attempting to understand how Bowdoin students ended up fighting for the Confederate States of America (CSA), the career choices some of these men made appear to be the turning points that led them to the South, and ultimately, the Confederate army. Of the eighteen graduates, nine moved to various southern states for their occupations many years before the Civil War. Their experiences mirror those of Confederates from other northern schools such as Harvard, which also saw some of its students move South for a job and end up fighting for the Confederacy. Other research into “adopted Southerners” — individuals who moved from the North to the South to begin their careers — has shown that sectional identity was not “fixed at birth.” Native northerners who spent their early careers in the South or started their families there quickly developed an affinity for their new home that played an important role in their decision to enlist. As David Zimring notes:

[Adopted Southerners] based their justifications for secession mainly

on loyalty to the section that provided them the opportunities and stability to succeed in adulthood. Regardless of how long these native Northerners had actually lived in the South, they felt compelled by the power of residence, community, family, property, and ideology to join the Confederacy.²⁶

Additionally, there were often societal pressures at play. Native northerners had to “prove” their allegiance to their adopted state or risk suspicion, isolation, and harassment. Men from the upper ranks of society also experienced a collective coercion to exhibit their sense of honor and duty by enlisting.²⁷

For other Bowdoin Confederates, their reasons for joining the army were more politically motivated than desiring to support a new home state or being pressured by societal factors, as their actions show a genuine and intense support for the Confederate agenda. Three graduates went back to the South months after graduating from Bowdoin because they were originally from a Southern state.²⁸ Their voluntary enlistment demonstrates a level of ideological devotion above Southerners who did not volunteer as well as the Bowdoin Confederates who were employed in a seceded state when the war began. Consisting of five Bowdoin Confederates, the most ideologically motivated group contains graduates who demonstrated significant allegiance to slavery and the Southern Cause.

John C. Merrill, class of 1851, is a member of the first subgroup, and one of many Bowdoin alums who traveled to the South after graduating (see Figure 2). He went to New York Medical School (NYM) immediately after finishing his studies at Bowdoin. After earning his degree from NYM in 1854, he practiced in Portland, Maine and Lewiston, Maine, before taking a job in St. Paul, Missouri. He was working in Natchez, Mississippi when the war broke out, at which point he became a surgeon for the Confederate Army. While the duration of his time at each of his practices is unknown, he moved to the South long before people crossed into slaveholding states specifically to support the war effort.²⁹

Similar circumstances are seen in the geographic movements of James Hoole, Charles Butler, Thomas Lenoir, and John Morrill. Hoole, class of 1849, apprenticed with a Brunswick attorney for less than a year before traveling to Holly Springs, Mississippi, to teach at a “country school.” He would become an Associate Principal at Chalmer’s Institute, a Presbyterian boys school, before passing the bar exam to become an attorney in 1855. He moved to Panola, Mississippi in 1857 to continue working as an attorney before joining the Confederate army.³¹ Charles E. Butler, class of 1850, was a Mainer who graduated from Bowdoin with honors, and up until the war taught in Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. In 1861, he joined the Confederate army, and served until the

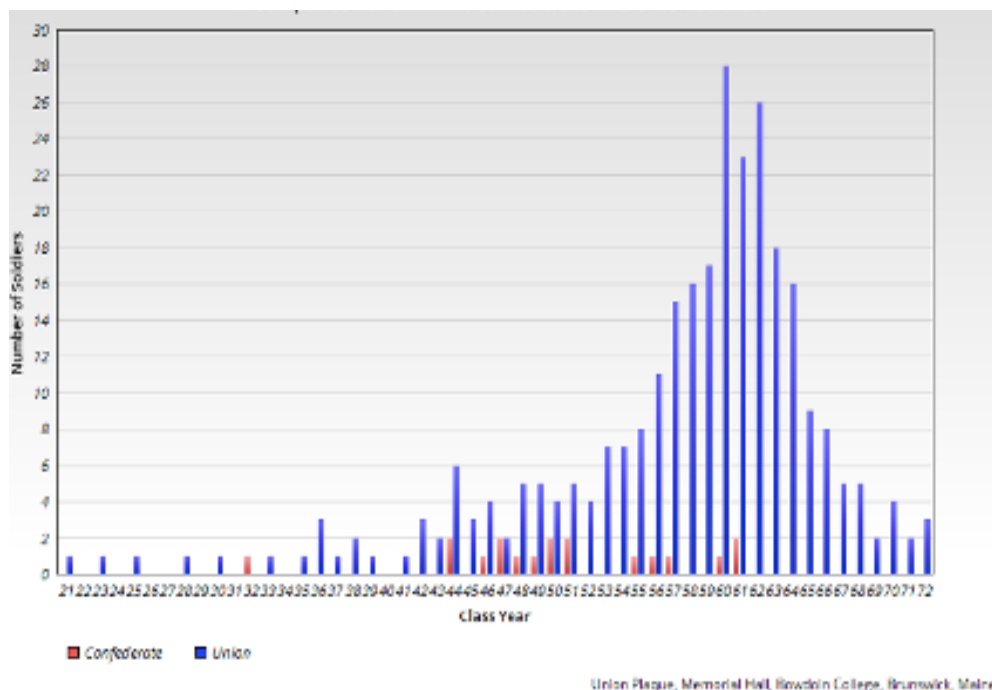


Figure 1: Bowdoin graduates participated on both sides of the Civil War.

conclusion of the war.³² Thomas B. Lenoir, class of 1856, was born in Missouri. He graduated from Bowdoin closer to the start of the war and at age 18. At 19, he became a cotton planter in Mississippi, and would go on to serve as a Confederate Adjutant General and Lt. of ordinance for the last two years of the war.³³

The availability of information on the life of John Morrill, class of 1844, provides more insight into the lives of the men that moved to the South years before the war. After graduating, Morrill went to Tennessee to be a teacher. He tutored a family in Madison county, and then clerked for a judge before opening his own law practice. He would work as an attorney for over a decade before the war started, getting married for a second time in 1860. His brother, Reverend Abner Morrill, wrote: "At the breaking out of the war of the Rebellion, [John] was an officer in one of the regiments of the Tennessee Militia, and was called into service."³⁴ Morrill's prewar participation in the militia, as well as his brother's remark that he "was drawn in by the enthusiasm of the moment" clearly indicates Morrill's commitment to the Confederacy.³⁵ However, while "enthusiasm" for the war inherently implies support for the CSA, he was probably less ideologically driven than some other soldiers, as his initial motivation to move to the South was an intention to finish his legal education.

William O. Otis, class of 1851, had a similar career path to Morrill. After passing the bar, he went to Austin, Texas to practice law and teach language, later serving in the Confederate Army as a quartermaster. In a letter written by his brother to the College for Otis's entry in the school catalogue, his brother wrote that Otis "was a union man and that his service in the confederate army was only in the quartermaster's department."³⁶ The catalogue recorded his time in the army but did not report his position, opting for the generic term of "soldier."³⁷ McPherson writes that many men who did not want to fight sought out positions such as quartermaster, which entailed office work and ensuring troop regiments were supplied and sheltered.³⁸ Considering Otis's brother's statement and the position he held, it appears that he was not in support of the Confederacy on an ideological level.³⁹

Henry Whitcomb, class of 1847, John Goodwin, class of 1844, and John F. Shaw, class of 1855 also ventured South for their occupations. Whitcomb and Goodwin were both civil engineers, and Shaw was a teacher. In 1849, Whitcomb was offered \$60 for a one-month job in Virginia, which he accepted. After liking "the surroundings and the people," Whitcomb agreed to have a more permanent position and rose through the ranks until he became general superintendent in 1861.⁴⁰ Having this title

during the war meant Whitcomb "was in charge of the transportation of troops and supplies."⁴¹ Less is known about the careers of John Goodwin and John Shaw. Like Whitcomb, Goodwin also worked as a civil engineer in Lynchburg, Virginia before the war, and achieved the rank of major.⁴² Shaw was born in Greenville, Maine, but was a teacher in Georgia and South Carolina before joining the army. The position he held is unknown, but the Bowdoin catalogue states that he died in service in 1863.⁴³

The only Bowdoin Confederate from the decade of the war who went to the South for his occupation was Winthrop Norton, class of 1860. While his biography up until the war resembles other graduates — Norton, like John M. Morrill and James L. Hoole, went to the South to teach — he is the only Bowdoin Confederate who was conscripted into the Confederate Army. Born in Norridgewock, Maine, Norton traveled to Sterling, Texas immediately after graduating to open a school. His family in Maine received a letter from him at the very start of the war, saying that he planned on continuing to run his school. Two years later, through a truce-established mail line that was censored by Confederate authorities, Norton's family learned that he was a member of the 4th Texas regiment, but suspected by his tone and word usage that he had been forced into service. This was the last they ever heard of him, as he died on the battlefield in Chickamauga, Tennessee, on September 20th, 1863.⁴⁴ The first conscription law was passed by the Confederate Congress in 1862, but it had an exemption for teachers that appears to have applied to Norton. In 1863, with the Confederacy facing a shortage of soldiers, new legislation removed the exemption for teachers, thereby leading to Norton's involuntary conscription into the Confederate army.⁴⁵

It is important to note that moving to a southern state after graduating from school and ending up in the Confederate army was not an experience unique to these few Bowdoin Confederates. In *Crimson Confederates*, Helen P. Trimpi catalogues the lives of all Harvard University students who fought for the South.⁴⁶ While the vast majority of them were born and raised in Georgia, the Carolinas, Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee (among other Southern states), some were Northerners by birth. Although Harvard students tended to come from wealthier families than their Bowdoin counterparts, Confederates from both schools were similar in that they often relocated to the South years before the Civil War, adopting secessionist views after their arrival.⁴⁷

William A. Davis, for example, graduated from Harvard College in 1837 and Harvard Medical School in 1840. Originally from New

York City, after graduating, he worked as a doctor throughout Massachusetts for twelve years, during which time he married and had a daughter. In 1852, he moved to Virginia to continue his practice and also run his own farm.⁴⁸ When the war started, he became a surgeon in the Confederate Army, eventually becoming Chief Surgeon in April of 1864.⁴⁹ Another example of career paths leading to participation in the Confederate army can be seen with Jeremiah M. Clough, Harvard Law School class of 1844. A native of New Hampshire, Clough went to Texas the year after he graduated to open his own law firm. He gained military experience as a volunteer during the Mexican American War and served in the Confederate forces as a private. He participated in many battles, ultimately dying alongside nineteen other Texans in an attack on Union Captain Andrew H. Foote's troops near the Cumberland River.⁵⁰ A third example can be seen in the life of William H. Brown, whose immediate post-college plans mirrored those of Bowdoin Confederate James L. Hoole. A Harvard College graduate of 1841, Brown moved to Virginia "to teach young ladies."⁵¹ After marrying the daughter of a wealthy farmer and opening his own seminary, he would organize his own company and become a commissioned Confederate captain less than three weeks after the first battle of the war.⁵²

The significance of these accounts — the lives of Bowdoin and Harvard Confederates — resides in the details that are revealed when considering the group as a whole. Confederates from Bowdoin were not always men who espoused secessionist sentiment and moved solely for the purpose of joining the rebellion. Analysis of nineteenth century census data shows that college educated and skilled men were more likely to travel across state lines to find work than unskilled laborers. Relocating was also most common amongst younger, unmarried males.⁵³ More than half of the Bowdoin Confederates fit this description. They moved to the South for apprenticeships and to become doctors, lawyers, and civil engineers. Seven of the eight graduates enlisted at the start of the war and — while proclaiming their allegiance to the CSA by doing so — their lives beforehand set them apart from the Bowdoin Confederates who were native Southerners, and from those who showed support for upholding slavery even before the events of 1861.

The second, and smallest group of Bowdoin Confederates, addresses the three individuals who were Southerners that only went north to attend Bowdoin. Sidney M. Finger, class of 1861, was born and raised in North Carolina. He returned there after graduation and became a major in the 11th North Carolina regiment. Finger would go on to attain moderate prominence as the superintendent of state public schools after

the war.⁵⁴ Manuel E. Shell, also a member of the class of 1861, was born in North Carolina. He was killed in battle in 1862.⁵⁵ His regiment and position are not known. Robert M. Spearing, class of 1857, was born in New Orleans. While it is not known exactly when he returned to the South, he became a colonel in the Confederate army and died in service in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1862.⁵⁶

Whilst this group volunteered for service (as did seven of the eight Bowdoin Confederates who went South for their careers), the biographies of these three men suggest a more ideological bend to their actions. They all graduated much closer to the start of the war, when the North was uniting around an opposition to slavery. Likewise, their records do not show any other occupations beyond the positions they held in the Confederate Army, making it likely they enlisted immediately upon graduating. In fact, in the case of Manuel E. Shell, a 1915 article in the *Lewiston Journal* claims he left Bowdoin two months prior to commencement in order to enlist in the Confederate army.⁵⁷

For Robert Spearing, who had four years between his graduation and the start of the war, this is more likely a result of missing information. In the cases of Finger and Shell, however, their immediate enrollment into the Confederate Army can be attributed to their identity as native Southerners, as well as the “*rage militaire*” that McPherson says swept the country in 1861 and was most probably a factor in encouraging the first group of Bowdoin Confederates to enlist.⁵⁸ While it is possible that Spearing, Finger, and Shell were conscripted into the army (the first Confederate Conscription Act was implemented in April of 1862, and their precise date of enlistment is unknown), their upper class background makes it probable that either of these men could have afforded a substitute or finagled their way out of participation by claiming an exemption.⁵⁹ Their respective reversions to their places of birth, however, suggests that all three felt some measure of allegiance — whether it was emotional, ideological, or both — to their home states.

The third and most ideologically motivated subgroup — Bowdoin Confederates who went to the South specifically to fight in the impending war — is comprised of five individuals: Jabez C. Rich, class of 1832, George F. Mellen, class of 1846, Jasper S. Whiting, class of 1847, Joseph C. Ives, class of 1848, and Arthur McArthur, class of 1850. By their words and/or actions, each of them expressed a clear support for the Confederate cause that was not a result of their geographic location or place of birth. The circumstances of their participation in the Confederate Army indicate that they were avowed supporters of the Southern way of life, and the institution that the Confederacy was trying to preserve:

slavery.

Jabez Cushman Rich, the oldest Bowdoin Confederate, was born in North Yarmouth, Maine in 1812. After graduating from Bowdoin in 1832, he became a Marine, achieving the ranks of second lieutenant in 1834 and captain in 1853. When war broke out in 1861, Rich was stationed at the Norfolk Shipyard in Virginia. Members of the Confederate-aligned Virginia militia attempted to take over the shipyard and use its warships and cannons to fight the North. The ill-equipped crew was ordered to burn the ships and destroy the weapons before the rebels could take them.⁶⁰ According to Cleveland and Packard’s *History of Bowdoin College*, Rich “espoused the Southern cause” and joined the rebels instead, later formally enlisting into the Confederate Marine Corps.⁶¹ Literally on the precipice between the Union and the Confederacy, Rich had a choice to make. Evidently, despite growing up in the North and having a career in the U.S. Marine Corp, Rich’s allegiance was with the South. He was later captured by Federal troops and imprisoned at Fort Preble, dying shortly after the conclusion of the war.⁶²

George F. Mellen was born in Durham, New Hampshire, and studied medicine in Saco, Maine after graduating from Bowdoin in 1846. He got his medical degree from Jefferson College in Philadelphia in 1851, after which he moved to Mississippi and accompanied William Walker to Nicaragua for his last attempt at establishing a colony there.⁶³ As with Jabez C. Rich, the actions Mellen undertook are sufficient to firmly establish his devotion to the white supremacist ideology of the Confederacy. Mainly, it is Mellen’s voluntary participation in William Walker’s 1860 invasion of Nicaragua that confirms his personal views.

Walker was a militant vigilante who unsuccessfully attempted to establish his own country in a largely unoccupied territory of Mexico and southern California in 1853. Lacking resources, funding, and men — his “army” consisted of forty-five people — Walker returned to the American South in 1854. About one year later, Walker and fifty-eight men invaded Nicaragua and “through a series of negotiations, deceptions, secret financial deals, and executions, he... became the de facto dictator of Nicaragua,” with the goal of creating a slaveholding ruling class.⁶⁴ Deposed by a multinational army of Central American troops with help from American mercenaries in 1857, Walker would once again unsuccessfully attempt take over Nicaragua in 1860.⁶⁵ It was on this final journey that future Bowdoin Confederate George F. Mellen joined Walker, thereby establishing his willingness to go to war for white supremacy.

“Slavery is not abnormal to American society. It must be the rule,” wrote William

Walker in 1860.⁶⁶ To him, it was clear that the Northern states would ensure all newly incorporated territories would become free states. Invading South American countries was the only way the Southern states could preserve the institution of slavery, which was essential to “furnish certain labor for the use of agriculture,” and “separate the races.”⁶⁷ Walker wanted an extension of the American slaveholding South, and by traveling with him on his last-ditch effort to accomplish this goal, George Mellen was on board with the plan. As a volunteer soldier, he was willing to risk his life to establish more territory that allowed for the enslavement of people. At the core of William Walker’s colonization efforts was his “dream of an empire where slavery would be recognized.”⁶⁸ After failing to help him achieve his “dream,” Mellen would attempt to preserve its inspiration back in the U.S. by serving in the Confederate Army as a soldier and doctor.⁶⁹ By being a part of Walker’s small army determined to expand slavery, George Mellen revealed his motivations for becoming a Confederate and earned a spot in a dark part of history.

Another Bowdoin Confederate, Jasper S. Whiting, joined the U.S. Military Academy at West Point after graduating from Bowdoin in 1847. He was an aid to U.S. General Charles P. Stone when the war broke out and left for the Confederate Army once South Carolina seceded from the Union. According to a postwar letter from fellow Bowdoin Confederate Henry Whitcomb, Whiting was married to a woman from South Carolina, although it is unclear if she resided in South Carolina at the time of the rebellion. Either way, Whiting’s decision to resign from his position in the U.S. Army demonstrated his unwillingness to support the Union. He died in Richmond, Virginia on Christmas Day, 1861 of what Whitcomb believed to be scarlet fever or “black measles.”⁷⁰

Graduating a year after Whiting, Joseph C. Ives joined the Bowdoin class of 1848 for its senior year after being tutored at Yale University. Born in New York City, his father died when Ives was nine years old, causing his mother to move him and his six siblings to New Haven, Connecticut, where she ran a boarding house. After Bowdoin, Ives graduated from West Point with an exemplary record, attaining a ranking within the top five students in his class for every year he was there. Upon graduating, he worked as an engineer and topographer for the U.S. Army, participating in projects as varied as mapping out the Colorado River and Grand Canyon to constructing the Washington Monument.⁷¹ Ironically, building a monument dedicated to the United States was one of the last projects Ives was involved in before he joined the CSA.

Two months after the war’s commencement, Ives was offered a position

as a captain for the 17th Infantry in the U.S. Army, which he rejected. As Bowdoin historian John Cross explains, Ives “waited six months before offering his resignation. His request was rejected, however, and he was dismissed for ‘having tendered his resignation under circumstances showing him to be disloyal to the Government.’”⁷² This charge was accurate. After Ives’s attempt to resign, he defected to the Confederate army, where he served on Robert E. Lee’s staff, was promoted to colonel, and spent the last two years of the war as an aide-de-camp for Confederate President Jefferson Davis.⁷³ Ives and Whiting’s resignations are not unique occurrences. During the war, hundreds of officers resigned and jumped ship to join the Confederate army.⁷⁴

Unlike Ives, who switched his allegiance only with the commencement of the war, Arthur McArthur Jr. exhibited vehement opposition to the North as early as 1853, the year he went to the South. As a result of the McArthur family’s prominence in New England, the extensive correspondence he maintained with his family members has been preserved, and the letters McArthur Jr. wrote depict the extreme ideological convictions that led him to take up arms against his own classmates and brother in 1861. Born in 1830, McArthur Jr. was a second generation Bowdoin student, his father having graduated from the College in 1810.⁷⁵ The family’s ties to Maine dated back to the time of the American Revolution,

when members of the McArthur clan settled in what would later become the town of Limington.⁷⁶ Despite the loyalties that the McArthur family possessed towards their home state, McArthur Jr.’s post-Bowdoin path shows how his ideological extremism was rooted in his adoration of Southern society.

At Bowdoin, McArthur Jr. was a good student in the classroom, but his restless nature frequently got him into trouble. Future Union general Oliver Otis Howard was his college roommate and mentioned McArthur in his autobiography. Otis described him as possessing “mental talents above the ordinary,” but noted that he “so suffered from his drink that he had hard work to secure his diploma.”⁷⁷ In three years, McArthur was suspended three times from Bowdoin on the grounds of his rebellious behavior.⁷⁸ Upon graduating in 1850, McArthur Jr. decided to sail through the Isthmus of Panama to get to San Francisco, where he hoped he could find wealth in the gold rush. The venture proved expensive and fruitless. In a letter to his father, McArthur Jr. wrote that he and his friends encountered “many difficulties of which they never dreamed.”⁷⁹ Unhappy, McArthur Jr. went to the South in search of a job. In addition to finding employment, however, McArthur Jr. found the cause to which he would devote his life to: slavery.

While traveling to the South for occupational purposes would seemingly

place McArthur Jr. in the first category of Bowdoin Confederates (those who fought for the South because they lived there as a result of their careers), his numerous endeavors to expand and defend the institution of slavery indicate that his ideological motivations greatly surpassed those of most other Bowdoin Confederates, if not all. Hence, he belongs alongside the Confederates who enlisted because they fervently believed in the Southern Cause. It was during his first job in the South — in 1853, 8 years before the Civil War — that McArthur Jr. expressed support for slavery.

McArthur Jr. was hired to tutor the children of the Gardner family in St. Louis, Missouri. Originally from Virginia, the Gardners were slave owners. In observing them and their slaves, McArthur Jr. concluded that Southerners were “the finest people in the world,” who were “right in summarily disposing of all freebooting abolitionists... They hang horse thieves [*sic*] in Illinois & Iowa & why not negro thieves in Virginia?” McArthur Jr. reasoned.⁸⁰ In his view, slaves made the lives of Southerners more relaxed. He remarked at “how easy people live with their niggers to do the drudgery” unlike the “poor day laborers” in Maine.⁸¹ It is unclear whether the economic or racial element of slavery appealed more to McArthur, but his enthusiasm for the institution would define the latter part of his life.

Enamored with human bondage, McArthur Jr. resolved to fight for its

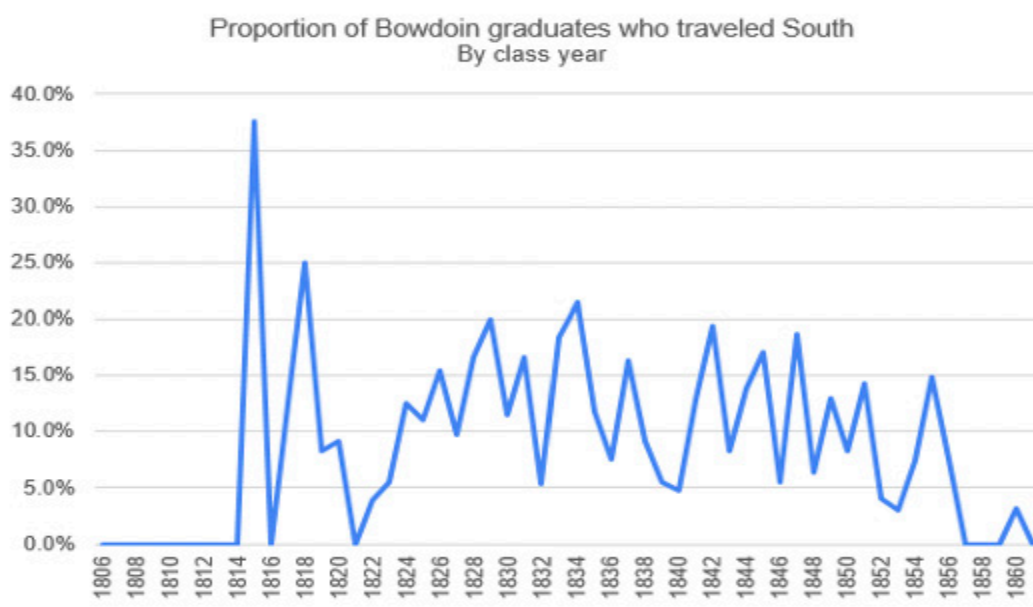


Figure 2. This graph depicts the percentage of students from each class year that resided in the South. With the exception of the four years leading up to the war, there does not appear to be substantial variation in the preceding three decades. A total of 178 students traveled to the South from 1814-1860.³⁰

expansion by joining William Walker on his 1858 expedition to Nicaragua, which ended abruptly when their ship was damaged by a reef in Honduras.⁸² While the shipwreck prevented him from engaging in any combat, McArthur Jr.'s intentions in 1858 made it very clear how profound his commitment to the Confederacy would be three years later. Two days after the firing on Fort Sumter — in his last letter home — he told his father that he was “a secessionist, immediate, no-compromise, never-go-back fire-eater,” adding that he had enlisted to fight for a country that was “destined to be the most powerful, richest & most glorious nation on the western continent.”⁸³ As historian Elizabeth Ring noted, “[McArthur Jr.] had no property to lose — nothing to gain by fighting for the South except for the satisfaction that he was fighting for a just cause.”⁸⁴

A year later, while his younger brother William McArthur was fighting for the Union as a member of the 8th Maine regiment, Arthur McArthur Jr. would die for the CSA in Winchester, Virginia.⁸⁵ Perhaps more so than any other Bowdoin Confederate, McArthur Jr.'s life exemplifies the tremendous power ideology played during the Civil War. Despite being a small group, the Bowdoin Confederates provide a conduit through which the various circumstances and motivations of other Confederates who went to college in the North can be gauged.

On the Eve of War: Why They Chose to Fight

Thus far, a look at the lives of the eighteen Bowdoin Confederates has shown the many reasons why they were not supporters of the Union cause and how they ended up in the South. The one query that remains is what motivated them to risk their lives for the South. For those who served only as civil engineers and surgeons (Henry D. Whitcomb, John. C. Merrill) or enlisted by compulsion (Winthrop Norton), their motivations are relatively straightforward. Norton simply did not have a choice, while Whitcomb's and Merrill's occupations directly related to the conflict. Whitcomb, a Chief Engineer in Virginia, saw

his position incorporated into the military arm of the Confederate government. While John Merrill's personal views on the rebellion are unknown, his role as a surgeon during the conflict and subsequent return to Portland at the end of the war imply that he was not truly devoted to the Southern cause.⁸⁶ For the other Bowdoin Confederates, it was clear that they developed loyalty to the South, or at the very least to the state in which they resided. In the words of David Zimring, “They arrived as strangers but emerged as full-fledged members of their communities.”⁸⁷ What is not as clear, however, is why they decided to voluntarily take up arms. A consideration of their standing in society as well as their Bowdoin education provides some clues.

In *Northern Character: College-Educated New Englanders, Honor, Nationalism, and Leadership in the Civil War Era*, historian Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai considers why college graduates from New England decided to take up arms in defense of the Union. By tracing the lives of forty-nine graduates from various New England colleges (including Bowdoin), Wongsrichanalai argues that the North possessed a distinctive set of attitudes which were responsible for the decisions of many college graduates to enlist in the Union army. These northern colleges “taught their young men to think independently, restrain their emotions, and never compromise their positions...Such ideas also corresponded with these individuals' sense of masculinity and their class-based concepts about themselves and their role in nineteenth-century society.”⁸⁸ The over 250 Bowdoin students who became Union soldiers may have been motivated by the values Wongsrichanalai claims were imbued in them through their education, but is it not also possible that these same values were merely transplanted to the opposing side for Bowdoin Confederates? Historian Timothy Williams disagrees with Wongsrichanalai's assertion that the North had a “regionally unique” code of discipline, arguing that Southern schools instilled similar values.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Williams asserts that it was the South's views on race and nationalism that were more central

to their culture during the time period, as opposed to the character development that happened in colleges across the country.⁹⁰ Hence, Bowdoin Confederates may have attained the discipline and grit required to participate in armed conflict through their Bowdoin education, and combined them with wartime excitement and ideological support for the South.

Dan Frost echoes the former part of William's comment, saying Wongsrichanalai has a “disinclination to acknowledge fully where his evidence leads: that northern character and southern honor are essentially the same thing.”⁹¹ This idea can perhaps be used to better understand why some Bowdoin students joined the CSA. The code of duty that they developed at Bowdoin was simply applied to the circumstances the graduates found themselves in when the war started.

In fact, it is possible that “Northern character” blended with “Southern honor.” For those that resided in the South before the outbreak of conflict, perhaps they would have felt obligated to join the Union's war effort if they worked or were born in the North instead. The only difference in the positions Bowdoin alumni assumed in the war was the side they were on as a result of circumstances and ideology; being in either army required similar discipline, commitment, and effort. Jasper S. Whiting and Joseph C. Ives served in the U.S. military before defecting to the Confederacy. Both had graduated from West Point. Presumably, it was their discipline — attained at a northern college — that allowed them to succeed at the military academy. The intensive dedication seen by Bowdoin students on both sides of the conflict suggests that their time in school taught them how to be soldiers and leaders, but not for which cause. Bowdoin graduates were inspired by the ideas of honor and loyalty, but these rather abstract concepts were molded by each person's individual experiences and views.

In *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War*, James McPherson analyzed thousands of letters and documents from 1,067 Civil War soldiers, 429 of whom

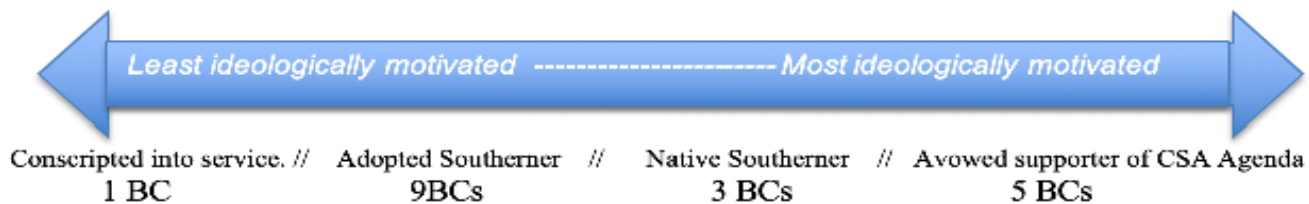


Figure 3: Ideological commitment typology. (BCs= Bowdoin Confederates)

were Confederates.⁹² Across both armies, McPherson found that men of the upper and middle classes tended to be motivated by “duty, honor, and patriotism,” and conversely disliked the lower class soldiers who were often unmotivated, conscripted, or skulkers.⁹³ At the time, Bowdoin was part of a group of rural northern colleges whose students sought to become “gentlemen” and leaders willing “to do what was ‘right’ even if [it] was unpopular.”⁹⁴ Therefore, it is fair to say that the first and possibly second subset of the eighteen Bowdoin Confederates fit into this characterization found by McPherson in his survey of soldiers’ motivations. Bowdoin Confederates applied the values they attained at Bowdoin to the circumstances of their lives in 1861 and decided to join the rebellion. For the soldiers for whom there is less evidence of ideological support for the CSA, other factors likely contributed. A key element of the South’s Code of Honor was the “community pressure” which coerced men into situations where they could exhibit “military valor.”⁹⁵ Among the Bowdoin alumni who settled in the South, this pressure may have led them to enlist despite their personal desires.

Beyond a commitment to fighting because it was their duty, however, McPherson also found that many soldiers strongly believed in the cause they were fighting for. “White supremacy and the right of property in slaves were at the core of the ideology for which Confederate soldiers fought,” writes McPherson.⁹⁶ The more enthusiastic Bowdoin Confederates, particularly the five members in the third group, fit this description. From Jabez C. Rich to Arthur McArthur Jr., these individuals had a well-documented and passionate commitment to the Southern Cause that pitted them against their classmates and — in the case of McArthur Jr. — their brothers.

Beyond merely delineating the events that led Bowdoin students to represent the CSA on the battlefield, this research provides a typology that can be expanded to consider all other Confederate soldiers who were educated in Northern colleges. Like Bowdoin, Harvard and other universities in the North had large numbers of Union troops and a minority of Confederates. Evaluating these unique groups of Confederates alongside one another may shed more light on the motives that lay hidden when each soldier’s life is studied on its own.

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¹¹Calhoun, *Small College in Maine*, 172.

¹²See General Catalogue of Bowdoin College and the Medical School of Maine: A Biographical Record of Alumni and Officers 1794-1950 (Brunswick, Maine: Bowdoin College, 1950); Nehemiah Cleaveland and Alpheus S. Packard, *History of Bowdoin College with Biographical Sketches of its Graduates from 1806-1879* (Boston: J.R. Osgood & Co., 1882). Information about the Bowdoin Confederates was obtained primarily from the college archives and biographies of the school. It is possible that there may be more information about the wartime experiences of the 18 men in regimental histories and other Civil War databases.

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¹⁴See McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades*.

¹⁵Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), 34-5.

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²⁵Documentary History Scrapbook of the Civil War, June 1860-August 1865, 6.1.19, Volume Two, College Archives, Bowdoin College Archives and Special Collections, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, Maine, 73.

²⁶David Zimring, “For their Adopted Home: Native Northerners in the South During the Secession Crisis” in *So Conceived and So Dedicated: Intellectual Life in the Civil War Era North*, ed. Lorien Foote, Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai (Fordham Scholarship Online: Fordham University Press, September 2015), 175.

²⁷See W. Eric Emerson, *Sons of Privilege: The Charleston Light Dragoons in the Civil War* (University of South Carolina Press, 2011).

²⁸From Bowdoin’s first graduating class in 1806 to the class of 1861, there were only 10 Bowdoin students who came from the South. Three of them graduated in 1861, five fought for the Confederacy, and one fought for the Union.

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³⁰Artur Kalandarov, *The Demographics of Bowdoin Students: Class of 1806-Class of 1861* (2020), George J. Mitchell Department of Special Collections and Archives, Bowdoin College, <https://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/archives/a003/a003s032u006-KalandarovSummary.pdf>.

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³³“Thomas Blanchard Lenoir,” in *General Catalogue*, 105. It is unknown if Lenoir owned or employed slaves as a cotton planter, although this is a possibility.

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³⁷General Catalogue of Bowdoin College, 97.

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³⁹Another plausible interpretation is that Otis’ brother is playing down his service in the Confederacy out of embarrassment. Educated men were also coerced into the quartermaster service for their ability to write and maintain ledgers.

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⁴⁷For an analysis of the backgrounds, aspirations, and career paths of students from northern colleges, see Kanisorn Wongsrichanalai, “Leadership Class: College-Educated New Englanders in the Civil War,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 13 (2011), 67-95, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5224/masshistrevi.13.1.0067>.

⁴⁸It is unclear whether Davis had slaves on his farm.

⁴⁹Trimpi, *Crimson Confederates*, 56.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 41.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 26.

⁵²*Ibid.* As with Harvard Confederate William Davis, it is unclear whether Brown or his father-in-law owned slaves. Running a large farm in the South, however, implies this was a possibility.

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