

FRANCIS H. SMITH: ARCHITECT OF ANTEBELLUM SOUTHERN MILITARY
SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL REFORM

A Dissertation

by

BRADFORD ALEXANDER WINEMAN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2006

Major Subject: History

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August 2006

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ABSTRACT

Francis H. Smith: Architect of Antebellum Military Schools and Educational Reform.

(August 2006)

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This study examines the historical significance of the Virginia Military Institute's (VMI) first superintendent, Francis Henney Smith, and his influence not only at his home institution but also on his broader social, educational, and political importance. Historiography neglects to credit or identify Smith's contributions to the notable expansion of military education in the antebellum South and his influence beyond VMI. Not only did he play a key role in the developing of Southern military education, but overwhelming evidence indicates that the growth of these schools in the South would not have happened without Smith acting as an influential father figure. He provided the structure, ideology and pedagogical models of these institutions and advised, guided and inspired nearly every other Southern military school in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Moreover, his innovations spread far beyond those of military schools as he promoted a new vision for Virginia and the South, one in which independence could be established through intellectual solidarity by creating a society centered on education.

As a West Point graduate, Smith structured VMI on the Sylvanus Thayer educational model and sought to promote this system throughout every school in

Virginia and the South, both in military and non-military institutions. He also created a network of like-minded academics, mostly with alumni from the U.S. Military Academy who launched a movement to encourage a more practical education in the South, focusing on mathematics, engineering and the sciences. VMI graduates would also spread Smith's academic gospel throughout the state and region as he encouraged them to serve their republic as teachers rather than soldiers. In spite of the popularity of his reforms and ideologies, Smith contended with the challenges of the volatile nature of antebellum Virginia politics as well as the social constructs of his native South, particularly in the forms of honor and masculinity demonstrated by his cadets. The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 temporarily destroyed his dreams improving VMI on the model of the most advanced scientific institutions in Europe as the Institute converted to an exclusively military mission to serve the Confederacy.

DEDICATION

To Colonel Leroy D. Hammond '57 and Dr. Zoltan Kosztolnyik

Two scholars who encouraged this project but unfortunately passed away before its completion. Like Francis H. Smith, both were soldiers, scholars and devout Christians who dedicated their lives to inspiring others to learn.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, the staff and administration from the Texas A&M University History Department for their guidance, support, and patience in completing this project, particularly in their cooperation with my completing it from the other side of the country. I would also like to thank the department for the travel grant that made my research possible.

I have to extend an equally warm thank you to the entire staff of the VMI Preston Library, particularly Diane Jacob and Mary Laura Kludy of the VMI Archives, with whom I spent more time than with my wife over the last three years. Many other archival staffs provided wonderful support of this project including those at Washington and Lee University, The Citadel, United States Military Academy, University of Virginia, Library of Virginia, Virginia Historical Society, Norwich University, University of South Carolina, and University of North Carolina. The Rockbridge Historical Society was kind enough to provide me the opportunity to present some of my research to the Lexington community and offered much encouragement throughout. Professors Jennifer Green and Tom Buckley provided vital feedback and suggestions at various stages of my research, my thanks to both of them.

It often feels as though the entire VMI community played some role in supporting this project. I would like to particularly thank my mentors and colleagues in the VMI History Department for their advice, perspective and faith during this enterprise and for allowing me to return to my alma mater to make it a reality. Page limits do not permit me to identify their contributions individually but my thanks to each of them for

having their own small role in shaping this work. My sincerest thanks to Lee Dewald of the Mathematics Department and Alan Farrell of Modern Languages for crucial West Point resources and sage counseling, respectively. In the broader VMI community, I have to thank two individuals who began the original research of Francis H. Smith: Edwin Dooley and Leroy Hammond, who both who allowed me to use their scholarship as a foundation and provided me with many excellent ideas. Two VMI alumni also deserve special thanks: Colonel Alexander Henderson Morrison ('39) and Colonel William Mayo Smith ('38), both great-grandsons of Francis H. Smith who offered me many useful family sources to tell the story of their distinguished ancestor. Most importantly at the Institute, I wish to thank the hundreds of VMI cadets who kept me motivated every day and night while working on this study. Whether they did so out of earnestness or the extra-credit I offered, they have made both me and "Old Spex" very proud of their enthusiasm for their Institute's history.

Finally, no one deserves greater appreciation for making this dissertation possible than my wife, Casey. For enduring all the late nights, early mornings, research trips, lack of social life, lengthy drafts for her editing, an unexpected relocation to Virginia and my "sabbatical" to fight in the Iraq War in the middle of my writing phase, she has demonstrated a patience, dedication and compassion that few married individuals, much less scholars, have ever enjoyed. Her love and support, as well as that of her parents, contributed more to the completion of this work than any toiling in the archives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II SMITH AS PEDAGOGUE AND ADMINSTRATOR.....	22
III SMITH AS EDUCATIONAL REFORMER.....	87
IV SMITH AS VIRGINIA REPUBLICAN.....	158
V SMITH AS POLITICIAN.....	224
VI SMITH AS MASCULINE MORALIST.....	298
VII CONCLUSION: SMITH AS RELUCTANT CONFEDERATE.....	398
REFERENCES.....	417
VITA.....	441

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		Page
1	Enrollment by Class at the Virginia Military Institute (Classes 1842 – 1862).....	168
2	VMI Cadets and Prestigious Relatives, 1842-1862.....	273
3	VMI Church Rotation System.....	306

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

American military schools have been an object of interest by capturing the public fascination, particularly as they have moved into the national consciousness in the news and popular culture. Movies such as Lords of Discipline (1983), Taps (1981) and Gods and Generals (2003) have brought a rising awareness of military education, particularly its unique culture. The national media also brought attention on the country's last two state-supported military academies during the 1990s as both admitted women into their formerly all-male Corps of Cadets for the first time. Even television fell to the allure of these unique institutions through cadets participating Norelco razor commercials and reality television appearances. The interest, both positive and negative, on military education, particularly those located in the Southern states, have raised a collective curiosity about why these schools were created, their ideological foundations, and their contributions to society going back to their pre-Civil War establishment.

To truly understand the origins and the critical initial years of Southern military schools, one must explore the overlooked importance of Francis Henney Smith (1839-1889). This dissertation seeks to provide the first comprehensive examination of Smith's historical significance not only at his home institution of the Virginia Military Institute but also his broader social, educational, and political importance. Historiography neglects to credit or identify Smith's contributions to the notable expansion of military education in the antebellum South and his influence beyond VMI.

The journal style is The Journal of Military History.

Not only did he play a key role in the developing of Southern military education, overwhelming evidence indicates that the growth of these schools in the South would not have happened without Smith acting as an influential father figure. He provided the structure, ideology and pedagogical models of these institutions and advised, guided and inspired nearly every other Southern military school in the two decades preceding the Civil War. Moreover, his innovations spread far beyond those of military schools as he promoted a new vision for Virginia and the South, one in which independence could be established through intellectual solidarity by creating a society centered on education.

Studies on Southern military schools examined their existence in context of violent South or a broader Southern martial tradition. In The Militant South, John Hope Franklin argues that Southerners created military schools as a byproduct of their militaristic society. They designed institutions such as VMI, established in 1839, and other “West Points of the South” to defend their social institutions as tensions increased between North and South. The military training that young men received allowed them to prepare for a possible conflict with the North and stand ready for any potential uprisings amongst their slaves. Franklin contends that the school’s founders were “proud of the fact that in time of peace they had made formal preparations for war.”¹ Studies on antebellum Southern militancy by Dickinson Bruce and Bertram Wyatt-Brown reinforce Franklin’s assertion that military schools represented an extension of the region’s violent characteristics as they appealed to the aggressive nature of Southern men as well as their fixation with fighting, weapons, and dueling.²

Some historians, such as Marcus Cunliffe and Don Higginbotham, refute the conclusions that military schools existed as products of Southern militarism. Cunliffe views these institutions as part of a “convenient scheme” concocted by state legislatures to create more educational opportunities for their constituents while cutting the costs needed to provide soldiers to protect the arsenals where many of these schools were established. Since the creation of VMI and subsequent schools came “as much as a sign from poverty or parsimony as of military zeal,” Cunliffe contends that the West Points of the South only distinguished themselves as state-funded social welfare programs.³ Higginbotham argues that these schools actually detested their military structure and often had faculty members suggest dropping it altogether. Students also reflected this indifference to the martial elements. Since not a single member of VMI’s first eighty-five graduates, for example, pursued military careers, Higginbotham concludes that the military aspects of the Institute were altogether unattractive, unpopular, and exaggerated. With both the students and the faculty disinterested in the school’s military attributes, one cannot identify it as part of Southern militarism.⁴

Other studies take these schools out of the context of the South’s violent society and examine what they provided for Southern society outside of martial tradition and preparation. Rod Andrew’s Long Gray Lines argues that Southern military schools promoted core values of republicanism such as social equality, equal opportunity, morality, and civic mindedness more than military vigilance. Military academies shrewdly used their military structure to appeal to social mores and values that Southerners championed such as egalitarianism, independence and self-reliance in order

to maintain their popularity and serve as a reflection of the region's broader cultural identity. Andrew, however, also posits that the true Southern military tradition peaked after the Civil War with the advent of the military colleges created by the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 undergirded by the Lost Cause ethos of the defeated Confederacy.⁵ Jennifer Green's study also focuses on the practicality of Southern military education but attributes its success to supporting the growth of the burgeoning Southern middle-class of the antebellum era. Young men enrolled in military schools for the practical education and prestige in order to gain "advantage" for their socio-economic futures. All of the unique facets of military academies such as the practical education, discipline, and martial honor served the sole purpose of shaping class identity in the aspiring young men of the Southern states.⁶

While Andrew's and Green's works on antebellum military education examine its civic contributions to Southern society, none fully credit the influence Smith had on the creation and eventual success of these schools in the decades preceding the Civil War. Andrew comes closest by looking at factors in their growth but he and other historians do not acknowledge how these schools developed during the antebellum period from state to state, how word spread between schools and how these schools continued to exist in an social and economic environment where colleges rarely survived much less thrived. Smith stood at the center of this movement, overseeing and expanding its growth, definition and broader social impact. In this respect he served as both the model and universally acknowledged advisor for military school superintendents throughout the South during this crucial time in their development.

In spite of the martial heritage attached to Southern military academies, Smith aspired for his personal legacy to be one of broader educational reform. His pedagogical philosophy centered on two simple precepts: 1) discipline and 2) practical/scientific curricula. Crafting a learned citizen-soldiery always remained at the heart of VMI's mission but Smith pressed first and foremost for his graduates to be educators and scholars. The militaristic appearance of VMI did not reflect a violent Southern culture or the melding of military and republican values. Instead, the Institute's military structure provided the perfect environment to nurture Smith's dual-faceted educational ideology, discipline and scientific learning, he believed both were the essential to cultivate an effective, modern teacher. Discipline and knowledge, according to Smith, were inseparable – one could not exist without the other. As superintendent, he envisioned VMI producing a legion of self-controlled young men of science and learning who would fan out across Virginia and the South, to educate a new generation of eager but deprived young men who could eventually free themselves from their dependence on Northern states and Europe for a quality education.

The proliferation of Southern military academies during the antebellum period, with Smith serving as a chief crusader, cannot be analyzed as an isolated, regional incident but rather as part of larger, national crusade for higher education reform. Ironically, fellow reformers in Northern colleges echoed many of Smith's pedagogical ideals: scientific curriculum, better public education systems, civic duty, the promotion of morality and control in the classroom. Politics and social mores made antebellum military education uniquely "Southern," not its educational philosophy or objectives.

Smith balanced his idealistic outlook on the future of college education with a realistic grasp on the long odds stacked against the survival of institutions of higher learning during the antebellum era. He understood that while he was an educator, the key to institutional success lay in creating a symbiotic relationship with the state government, exchanging service to the state through its graduates for financial support and vice-versa. Realizing that the archaic and rigid attitudes of clerical headmasters governing colonial colleges could no longer keep their schools afloat, Smith adopted a leadership style which augured features indicative of a “modern” college president: pragmatic, political, and practical.

Exploring the life of Smith presents a new approach to “Southern Military School Tradition” by examining the man who had more influence on its creation and development than anyone else. A study of Smith’s achievements during the antebellum period calls for a reexamination of these analyses of the Southern military school tradition, given Smith’s unacknowledged influence on the movement, the spreading of his ideologies and the network of like-minded reformers, both in military and civilian schools who sought to change the face of Southern education. Smith must also be viewed in the context of an antebellum college president. Combining the uniqueness of his school’s design and his own initiative, he created a unique model of behavior for leaders of other institutions through his promotion of educational innovations, disciplinary philosophies, and ability to manipulate politicians and win respect in the academic community. Smith’s ideas, accomplishments and most importantly, his impact on American education demonstrates that his name deserved mentioning in the same

breath as the other pioneering reformist college presidents of his day such as Francis Wayland, Philip Lindsley, Mark Hopkins, and Eliphalet Nott. Like these more recognized icons in the field, Smith championed higher education as an underused method to develop and improve not just the lives of aspiring young men but could (and should) be utilized to improve society as a whole.⁷ Due to the broad scope of his reforms and the rapid success of his own institution, Smith and VMI enjoyed the benefits of a national reputation for academic excellence and distinctiveness by the beginning of the Civil War.

In this study, Chapter II will examine how Francis H. Smith built not only the Virginia Military Institute's physical structure but also created a unique collegiate environment. The chapter will first examine Smith's own schooling in order to identify the origins of his educational philosophies. His experiences as a cadet at West Point and a professor at Hampden-Sydney College shaped his attitudes towards what should be taught and how it should be taught as well as inspired him to dedicate his life to improving education. When he arrived at VMI, he took advantage of the loose structure and administrative freedom bestowed upon him by the Board of Visitors and guided the new Institute in ways he thought it could most effectively meet the ideological goals of the founders as well as his own.

For the next twenty years, Smith implemented his dual-fold educational strategy of scientific curriculum and military discipline as the primary tools used to operate the Institute. He borrowed heavily from his alma mater in shaping VMI's course offerings but also incorporated his own modifications to meet the needs of the state. A self-

proclaimed man of science, Smith wanted VMI's reputation to be that of an institution that provided genuinely useful knowledge. He saw the Institute as providing a practical education for a practical age and continually pursued the most up-to-date textbooks, equipment and to best prepare his students to engage in useful civilian occupations. Smith always placed himself in the vanguard of educational progress by traveling to Europe to bring back the newest methods of scientific and engineering instruction. He was also the first to formalize agricultural science as an academic discipline and attempted to establish a separate agricultural college at VMI nearly a decade before the Morrill Land Grant Act. This analysis of Smith's innovations will compare and contrast him with other college leaders and attempt to place military schools in the broader context of antebellum education.

Chapter II will also evaluate Smith as a college administrator as well as a pedagogue. Smith put as much energy into creating new techniques for controlling students (arguably the greatest problem that troubled antebellum schoolmasters) and crafted a new model for institutional leadership which receives little attention in noted works such as George P. Schmidt's The Old Time College President. This examination of Smith's attitudes towards discipline, student control, professionalism, and mentorship challenge many of the conclusions regarding the function of military school administration argued by historians Jennifer Green and Rod Andrew. This chapter will demonstrate how Smith's treatment of such issues such as cadet finances, hazing, student rebellions, *in loco parentis*, cadet punishment, parental influence, and faculty

relations set a unique standard for other college presidents with his distinctive views on how to deal with both students, professors, staff and the public.

If Francis H. Smith endeavored to leave any legacy, it would be as an educational and social reformer. Chapter III will examine how once he established a successful modern curriculum and discipline system at VMI, Smith made it his mission to incorporate his reforms into every institution of learning that was willing to try it. Already established as a reputable author of mathematics textbooks when he arrived at VMI, Smith expanded his influence on education by penning several pamphlets promoting his own curriculum and discipline reforms for all schooling levels, such as Regulations of Military Academies as Applied to the Conduct of Common Schools (1849) and College Reform (1851).⁸ Smith also engaged in extensive daily letter writing, creating an intricate network of communication with other reform-minded teachers who shared the same ideas regarding math and scientific education. Since he highly encouraged his graduates to engage in teaching careers, many of them physically took Smith's system to their new positions in Virginia's academies, colleges as well as out-of-state institutions, keeping close contact with their former superintendent and mentor. Many of Smith's West Point professors such as Charles Davies and Albert Church as well as fellow alumni like Benjamin S. Ewell and Dennis Hart Mahan wrote to him frequently to discuss new math techniques, disciplinary issues or exchange teaching advice. Although historians of antebellum higher education identify this era as one of academic stagnation because of archaic classical curriculums and ecclesiastical control, Smith's actions challenge this assertion as he guided a complex intellectual

exchange amongst fellow academics (particularly Southern ones) focused on promoting a more modern, disciplined and practical educational system.

By the time VMI's first class graduated in 1842, Smith had already achieved a substantial regional and, indeed, a national reputation as the ultimate authority on creating military academies. Administrators of every major military institution founded in the South after 1839 actively sought out Smith for guidance when forming their new schools. Founders and alumni of those academies would later proudly acknowledge that they constructed themselves on the "VMI model" and credited Smith for his invaluable assistance. Therefore, Chapter III will identify Francis H. Smith as the true architect of Southern military academies, not Captain Alden Partridge. Evidence connecting Partridge's influence on the military schools founded after VMI remains weak and circumstantial.⁹ While Partridge's Norwich Academy succeeded in Vermont, his attempts to create similar academies in the South all failed as they could not compete with VMI and other subsequent schools utilizing Smith's model. In sum, the success of Southern military education should be credited to Francis H. Smith, not Partridge.

The proliferation of Southern military academies during the antebellum period, with Smith service as a chief crusader, cannot be analyzed as an isolated, regional incident but rather as part of larger, national crusade for higher education reform. Ironically, fellow reformers in Northern colleges echoed many of Smith's pedagogical ideals: scientific curriculum, better public education systems, civic duty, promotion of morality, student discipline and control in the classroom. Francis Wayland, president of Brown University and arguably the most well known educational reformer of his time,

wrote Smith in 1851 seeking his counsel. Impressed with Smith's philosophies, Wayland implemented VMI's disciplinary system at his university and encouraged other prominent Northern schools such as Yale, Harvard and Williams College to do the same. Politics and social mores made antebellum military education uniquely "Southern," not its core educational philosophy or objectives. The collective desire for student discipline and practical courses transcended sectional differences and unexpectedly bound reformers in the North and South into an ironical alliance in the decades preceding the Civil War.

Chapter IV will explore the role of "republicanism" in Smith's philosophies and actions. Rod Andrew argues that Southern military schools combined the concepts of "republicanism" and "militarism" within their educational ideology. He defines militarism as the "exaltation of military ideals and values," not "aggressive military preparedness" and *republicanism* as the moral consciousness that made a citizen "self-reliant, outwardly moral, mindful of his rights and civic responsibilities, and most importantly, eager and capable of bearing arms in self-defense or for the public good."¹⁰ In constructing my counter-argument to Andrew, this chapter will follow two primary approaches centering on concepts of education and state loyalty which modify Andrew's conclusions about military schools' attitudes toward service, patriotism and civic obligation.

Smith believed that teaching, not specifically military service, provided the method to promote the "public good" of the republic. Smith's correspondence makes almost no mention of VMI's contribution to militia reinvigoration or the militia service

of its graduates. Instead, he centered all of his attention and energies into encouraging his cadets to pursue a career in teaching. Poor education and poor teachers contributed to Virginia's lack of public virtue and progress. Those who contributed learning to their fellow citizens accomplished more for the republic than any militia officer. For Smith, service in the classroom meant more than service in uniform for the republic's survival. Smith answered nearly a dozen letters a month from state schoolmasters requesting his graduates to serve as teachers. Every semester, he always had more requests for teachers than graduates, and sometimes requests tripled the number of graduates he could provide. No letters came from local governments desiring potential militia officers or thanking him for his graduates' distinguished military service, even during the Mexican War. When following the model of West Point, Smith and other founders purposely made teaching the service requirement for those receiving state-supported tuition and not military service.

Chapter IV also reexamines the role of state loyalty and regional identity of the South's military academies. Everything surrounding the ideology and function of VMI focused primarily on service to the state of Virginia. All allegiance, patriotism, service and loyalty of cadets and faculty belonged exclusively to the Old Dominion. While Andrew asserts that broad Southern republican ideals such as duty, honor, and civic responsibility flowed into the wider stream of national republican values, yet he overlooks the political object of this civic virtue.¹¹ Smith never mentioned promoting the public good nationally, only to his native state. It is worth reiterating that, he vehemently argued that an educated citizenry provided the best means of improving the

republic (Virginia). Once Virginia could provide its own intelligencia, it would no longer have to depend on outside sources of teachers (i.e., the North and Europe). Smith stated in 1853 that he believed his service would be complete once all of Virginia's teachers and engineers came from its own "native sons." Only through education, Smith believed, could Virginia achieve "autonomy and independence."¹² Connecting Smith to educational reforms in New England creates an interesting paradox in Southern military education: some Northern and Southern reformers shared similar philosophies regarding courses, discipline and academic progress but Smith sought to cut the academic umbilical cord that tied Virginia and the South to the North in hopes of creating a truly "Southern" education.

Since the state of Virginia provided the primary source of the Institute's funding, Smith embraced the obligation of his school to serve both the state legislature and its taxpaying citizens. Regardless of their qualifications, Smith always refused to accept applications from out-of-state candidates, though some of his graduates moved out of Virginia. Smith openly criticized private military institutions, proclaiming they doomed themselves to failure without a state government to provide a foundation for laws to govern discipline as well as an object of civic pride and service.

Other studies of military academies give little attention to the role of politics in antebellum Southern military schools. Historians acknowledge the political means needed to create these schools but often overlook the political prowess needed to maintain them, particularly in the anti-education political culture of the pre-war South. For example, Rod Andrew argues that military schools maintained their patronage

simply by promoting democratic practices (i.e. “poor boy” education) but otherwise treats the schools as politically benign.¹³ Chapter V will argue that the success of Smith, VMI and subsequent military schools did not come automatically. America’s Second Party System not only influenced the creation of these schools but also shaped their progress, both positively and negatively, throughout the antebellum era.

VMI, which embraced Jacksonian egalitarianism and democracy according to Rod Andrew, was actually a vehicle of the Whig party.¹⁴ Smith and other founders’ unwavering allegiance to the Whigs created several outspoken enemies of VMI, especially in the state legislature. Regardless of VMI’s altruistic mission, the process of soliciting state appropriations often deteriorated into political dogfights because of the intensity of party loyalty within the state, making financial and political support far from a *fait accompli*. Smith continually demonstrated remarkable political dexterity in order to win the affections of both parties and the state’s socially diverse geographic regions in order to maintain state funding. When he was not promoting educational reform or disciplining cadets, Smith spent an abundance of time massaging state politicians to keep the school alive, a lesson he learned from his mentor West Point Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer, particularly in the early 1850s, when a contingent of hard-liner Democratic politicians, supported by the governor, used partisan politics to attempt to push Smith out of office.

Playing the state political game for Smith extended beyond the House of Delegates in Richmond. He understood that as a public institution, he needed the support of Virginia’s citizens as well as its politicians. To maintain their allegiance to

his institution, he made the Corps of Cadets as visible as possible, taking them on Corps Trips throughout the state to display the school's "product" to the citizenry. He ensured that the people applauded the sharply dressed and drilled cadets as he paraded them through the Commonwealth's cities. He also cleverly scheduled the cadets' semi-annual examinations away from VMI so the public could come out to observe in person the benefit of using their tax dollars to support the education of such intelligent and poised young cadets as they brilliantly answered questions on their semester studies. Just as they had copied Smith's curriculum and discipline system, schools like the South Carolina Military Academy and Georgia Military Institute engaged in similar self-promotional trips for their Corps of Cadets through their respective states as well. Smith needed the popular support as he continually deflected smear campaigns from citizens in several Virginia newspapers who claimed he abused his power as superintendent of a state institution.

These military schools may not have been as Jacksonian as claimed by other historians. While institutions such as VMI offered education to in-state cadets who received free tuition to poorer students, they were by no means bastions of egalitarianism in their enrollment. The Institute's rolls included the relatives of some of the state's most influential politicians and citizens, many of whom Smith needed for support in the legislature. Conversely, state politicians used their appointment of cadets from their district in order to gain political capital and patronage amongst their constituents. Cadets, particularly those receiving free tuition, represented the unique altruism of state governments but they also served as devices of influence used by both

Smith and legislators in serving their own interests, and thus were examples of another aspect of Jacksonian era politics -- the spoils system.

Chapter VI examines Smith's contribution to the shaping of Southern masculinity during the antebellum period. He viewed a typical cadetship not only as an exercise in scholarship but as a crucial stage in the development of manhood which allowed him the opportunity to dictate his own philosophies on masculinity and gender identity.¹⁵ Smith, like many other antebellum reformers in both North and South, incorporated evangelical Christianity in his crusade for social betterment. As a devout member of the Episcopal Church, Smith integrated his spiritual beliefs into his broader educational philosophies. In his mind, submitting to a religious lifestyle and biblical code of behavior meant as much in shaping his cadets' discipline as strict military regulations. He incorporated religious studies into the curriculum, held daily private Bible studies in his home with cadets and made church attendance mandatory for all. Smith continually reinforced the connection between citizenship and Christianity. At each commencement ceremony, he personally handed graduates their diploma along with a Bible, demonstrating the dualistic nature of their service to both the state of Virginia and to God Almighty. He identified teaching as the best method to develop the state, but qualified that assertion by explaining that Christian men made the most effective teachers. In his educational reform pamphlets, he made such exclamations as, "The avowed opposer of the Christian religion is unfit for the trust of a public teacher" and that "Parents want Christian teachers" to emphasize the moral needs of Virginia

society.¹⁶ Historians have often explored the role of religion in Southern culture but rarely in this context of promotion within a state institution.

Bolstered by his evangelical idealism, Smith sought to incorporate all of his students with the highest standard of morality. Combined with Smith's brand of practical education, his cadets would set the new example for Southern masculinity and attempt to change many of the accepted constructs of masculinity in the region. Instead of supporting the traditional aggressive, hot-tempered, ultra-sensitive, and selfish nature of Southern masculinity, Smith redefined manliness in his cadets by promoting such traits as self-control, productivity, patriotism, republicanism, and philanthropy. He sought to overcome many challenges in the established culture to accomplish this, particularly the notion of Southern honor. Smith crusaded to dismantle this traditional behavioral code of the violent protection of reputation and egotism by instilling a sense of accountability and lawfulness in his students. He also contended with the tight bond of loyalty that cadets created with each other which obstructed Smith's disciplinary system as students often protected each other from the punishment of authority figures.

Chapter VI will address and challenge the studies of honor and liberalism in Southern military schools by Rod Andrew and Jennifer Green while drawing from the seminal works on the topics by such historians as Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Kenneth Greenburg and Edward Ayers. Analysis of Smith's reactions to Southern honor in particular suggests a re-examination of certain intuitions, as his philosophies contradicted many of the accepted aspects of antebellum Southern culture.

Analysis of Smith's antebellum contributions reinforces other studies that identify the Southern military school tradition as having a more civic mission and not one that specifically reflected the broader violence of the slaveholding culture. Indeed, Smith's ideologies and actions characterized the military academy as a device to develop the antebellum South into an Athens, not a Sparta. Unfortunately for VMI, the sectional tension between North and South diverted the purpose of the South's military academies from Smith's goal of civic betterment to military preparedness, preventing Smith from fully actualizing his long-term goals for educational reform in Virginia, the South, and the nation. The exploits of graduates of VMI and other West Points of the South during the Civil War overshadow the early histories of these schools. This study will return the focus to the pre-war intentions and accomplishments of these schools while introducing Francis H. Smith a leading reformer and educator in the antebellum South.

Notes

¹ John Hope Franklin, The Militant South, 1800-1860 (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 170.

² Dickson Bruce, Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 161-77; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Honor and Violence in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45.

³ Marcus Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865 (New York: Free Press, 1973), 76.

⁴ R. Don Higginbotham, "The Martial Spirit in the Antebellum South: Some Further Speculations in a National Context," Journal of Southern History, 58 (February 1992), 19.

⁵ Rod Andrew, Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition, 1839-1915 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 1-7.

⁶ Jennifer Green, "Books and Bayonets: Class and Culture in Antebellum Military Academies" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2002), 2-24.

⁷ George Schmidt, The Old Time College President (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930). Schmidt's work outlines the reforms and ideologies of the antebellum era's most influential college presidents such as Francis Wayland (Brown University), Philip Lindsley (Nashville University), Mark Hopkins (Williams College) and Eliphalet Nott (Union College).

⁸ Francis H. Smith, The Regulations of Military Institutions as Applied to The Conduct of Common Schools (New York: John Wiley, 1849); Smith, College Reform (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait, and Company, 1851).

⁹ For the case for Partridge, see Deal Paul Baker, “The Partridge Connection: Alden Partridge and Southern Military Education” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1986).

¹⁰ Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 4-5.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹² Francis H. Smith to William H. Richardson, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, 23 January 1853, VMI Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

¹³ Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 17-20.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4, 16-17.

¹⁵ For studies on antebellum Southern manhood, see Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Lorri Glover, “An Education in Southern Masculinity: The Ball Family of South Carolina in the Early Republic,” Journal of Southern History 69 (February 2003), 39-70; Anya Jabour, “Masculinity and Adolescence in Antebellum America: Robert Wirt at West Point, 1820-1821,” Journal of Family History 23 (October 1998), 393-416. For more general studies on American masculinity, see E. Anthony Rotundo, American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

¹⁶ Smith, The Regulations of Military Institutions, 29; Smith, College Reform,

52.

CHAPTER II

SMITH AS PEDAGOGUE AND ADMINISTRATOR

Born in 1812 into a middle-class family in Norfolk, Virginia, Francis Henney Smith began his life not unlike many young men in an urban merchant household in the early republic. With an upbringing typical of most youth of his class raised in Southern cities during this time, he received an exemplary private education. He excelled in Norfolk's finest academies through his childhood and early teen years. Under the tutelage of such noted pedagogues as William Campbell and Reverend George Nelson, Smith quickly demonstrated having a superior mind at an early age. By the age of sixteen, he had gained fluency in French, Latin and Greek, all the product of his thorough classical education.¹

Smith's interest in mathematical education, however, occurred through a less conventional set of circumstances. A young man by the name of William Bryant relocated to Norfolk in order to continue his education in one of the city's academies and boarded with the Smith family during his stay. His charm and talent eventually made him an adopted member of the family whereby Francis Smith, Sr., aided young Bryant with his appointment to the United States Military Academy in 1822. Bryant graduated from the Academy in 1826 and returned to his alma mater two years later as an assistant professor of mathematics.² In return for their previous hospitality, Bryant offered to tutor young Francis in mathematics at West Point during that summer of 1828. For the first time in his life, the classically educated Smith cultivated an interest for complex mathematics. Studying advanced math that summer under Bryant ignited a lifelong

passion for the subject. While in New York, Smith drew the attention of Doctor William Archer, a Richmond native, who served on the Academy's Board of Visitors. Impressed with Smith's intellect and potential, Archer presented him to the Board, and in turn, recommended Smith to the secretary of war for a cadet appointment. Smith entered the Academy as a plebe in the summer of 1829 not having yet reached his seventeenth birthday.

His appointment could not have come at a more advantageous time. Cadet Smith enrolled in the last class to graduate under the leadership of the Academy's legendary superintendent, Colonel Sylvanus Thayer. When Thayer took command of West Point in 1817, the Academy had struggled through its first fifteen years with poor leadership, political infighting and an academic identity crisis that had caused the school to falter after its founding under President Thomas Jefferson. Thayer's revolutionary innovations, which later became his legacy, laid the foundation for what historians recognize as a "Golden Age" at West Point, from his departure until the Civil War.³ The success that the Academy experienced during this period can be directly attributed to the changes and vision implemented by Thayer, making his administration the true formative years of West Point.

The Thayer era proved to be the crucial formative years for Francis H. Smith as well. The Academy's stern disciplinary system under Thayer presented a strict environment and many young matriculates could never successfully adapt to it. The shock of a military culture which stifled individualism and subjected its students to a relentless regimen of regulations, restrictions and punishments left a fair share of cadets

disillusioned and disgruntled. Attrition usually exceeded 50 percent for classes between first matriculation and graduation. Other dismissed cadets failed to maintain the academic standard set by West Point's unique mathematic and scientific curriculum. Poor preparation and the rigorous demands of courses forced as many to leave the Academy as the disciplinary system.

Francis H. Smith, as it turned out, did not fall into either of these delinquent categories. On the contrary, Smith thrived in the West Point environment, and fostered what would become a lifetime passion for the school. Although tall, awkward and the "object of universal observation" because of his gawky build, he made it though his plebe year without difficulty and continued on to excel in all military aspects of his cadetship serving as Color Corporal, Color Bearer and 2nd Captain.⁴ He also excelled in his academics, receiving especially high marks in mathematics and conduct, eventually graduating fifth in his class of 43 in 1833.⁵ Smith would leave the Academy craving discipline, adoring the study of mathematics, and appreciating a new sense of personal responsibility he attained through his experience in its Corps of Cadets.

Smith quickly became a loyal disciple of Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer while at the Academy. Although young Smith endured the rigors of the West Point system which often seemed merciless and unforgiving, he understood the long-lasting impact that Thayer's revolutionary educational system would have on his life and on American learning as a whole. Called the "Father of the U.S. Military Academy," Thayer implemented reforms to West Point's curriculum laying the foundation for the school's eventual worldwide prominence as the premier institution of higher learning during the

nineteenth century. Even as a successful graduate of the Academy, Thayer openly challenged the methodology of his own professors by emphasizing mathematics, science and engineering courses on the model of France's military engineering academy, the Ecole Polytechnique. His focus on "practical" college courses, stringent discipline, and progressive teaching techniques separated Thayer from other antebellum schoolmasters still rooted in classical curriculums dating back to the seventeenth century. Thayer also provided Smith with an exceptional model of leadership as a rigid disciplinarian who commanded the respect of his faculty and cadets with his moral constitution and commitment to the institution's missions. "Col. Thayer held the reins with a firm hand during the entire administration," Smith recalled in a speech to his classmates, "and if, at times, he transcended the limits of legitimate authority, no private pique or personal interest swayed his judgment."⁶

Thayer alone cannot be given all of the credit for shaping Smith's intellect. One of the more under-appreciated elements of the superintendent's leadership was his ability to recruit the finest professors to apply his unique system of education and discipline. West Point's faculty under Thayer read as a veritable "who's who" in the fields of math, science and engineering of the time. Faculty such as Albert E. Church, Charles Bonycastle, Edward Courtenay, William H. C. Bartlett, Charles Davies, and Dennis Hart Mahan had all achieved national recognition for expertise in their fields and many had written seminal textbooks on their subjects used worldwide.⁷ When reflecting on his Academy experience in a speech to the class of 1833 on the fiftieth anniversary of their matriculation, Smith dedicated the majority of his fond reminiscences of each

individual instructor who inspired him to eventually pursue a career in education.⁸

These legendary academics not only nurtured Smith as a student but would reappear later during his career to provide guidance and support as a respected colleague. Smith's personal success within the Thayer system and the inspiration from the faculty, convinced him that the basic tenets his mentors promoted, science and discipline, provided the essential keys to the best education possible.

Ironically, Smith did not fully realize these lessons immediately after graduation. His grand epiphanies about educational reform actually lay dormant for a short time. Smith served the obligatory year in the Army with the 1st U.S. Artillery, bouncing between monotonous assignments in different fortifications along the East Coast.⁹ While on leave in October 1834, he surprisingly received orders to return to West Point to take a position as an instructor of Moral and Political Philosophy. One would consider this to be the opportunity of a lifetime for a young man who would eventually leave his legacy for promoting the West Point system in American education. Yet for reasons unknown, Smith accepted the new assignment with bitterness, determined that he would request relief from this duty and return to his artillery company. He might well have followed through on this threat to leave had he not fallen in love with and married the daughter of the Assistant Surgeon, Miss Sara Henderson, who encouraged him to remain for the duration of his fifteen month assignment. But now burdened with a family, Smith chose to leave the Army and search for a profession with more geographic stability and economic opportunity. He tried his hand in a number of occupations

including surveying and topographical engineering. He even contemplated joining his brothers in land speculating out West but nothing kept his interest.

Fortunately for the jobless and disillusioned Smith, opportunity smiled favorably upon him when the small college of Hampden-Sydney in his native Virginia offered him a professorship in mathematics shortly after he resigned from the Army in May 1836.¹⁰ It was here that Smith truly cultivated his passion for teaching and crafted many of the philosophies that he carried for his next fifty years in education. Strangely, frustration, not enlightened inspiration, shaped the young professor's pedagogical philosophy during his first year at the college. Originally promised that he would only teach basic algebra and geometry, the administration burdened him with the responsibility of nearly the entire mathematical curriculum: algebra, geometry (analytic and descriptive), trigonometry, surveying, and calculus (differential and integral).¹¹ Although immediately troublesome, this load of courses actually benefited Smith in the long run by forcing him to reacquaint himself with the various fields of mathematics, which he had not employed since his West Point years. While pouring over his old textbooks, he rekindled his passion for mathematical topics but frustratingly found that the rest of the college, both faculty and students alike, did not share a similar love of this field. Smith lamented how the school's academic system suppressed the "scientific" branches while elevating the "classics," such as Greek and Latin. Smith should not have been surprised. This emphasis on ancient languages represented the norm in the collegiate curriculum. Even as late as the mid-nineteenth century, most Americans treated college as a luxury, a rite of passage for a learned gentleman since pursuing a career in medicine, law, politics

or business did not require a degree. Therefore, colleges concentrated on the subjects that constituted what many in pre-Victorian culture considered a scholarly education of primarily literature, philosophy, and ancient languages.¹²

Students in particular reflected this indifference with their poor performance in Smith's mathematics courses. He found the Junior class totally unprepared for calculus and barely comprehending the basic skills from algebra, geometry and trigonometry. The aggravated young professor therefore forced his juniors to review their elementary math courses with the freshman and sophomores, much to their chagrin and protest. But Smith quickly won over his students, supplementing his already heavy teaching load with countless hours of late night tutoring sessions focused on bringing their mathematical skills "up to the standards of West Point." Before long, seniors asked to review their mathematics with the juniors eventually leading to Smith teaching nearly every student in the college his subject by himself. Smith recalled, "I told them that I was willing to labor with them by day and by night, and if they would cordially second my efforts, the review would be profitable to them, and the Calculus course would then be readily mastered by them."¹³

The hard work that Smith expected to be reciprocated could only be maintained through discipline in the classroom. The disorderly behavior of his students appalled the West Point graduate, forcing him to focus as much on maintaining order over his pupils as on their lessons. "No discipline, properly called, prevailed at Hampden-Sidney College," Smith later remembered.¹⁴ To remedy this condition, he maintained strict, military-like control over them, demanding their respect and deference, while

immediately reprimanding those not willing to obey. Smith drew much attention for his audacious practice of “rusticating” or suspending students from the classroom or the college entirely for unruly conduct. One of his colleagues commented that Smith was “said to be a fine officer; he wishes to put the College under complete martial law, and make it a sort of West Point.”¹⁵

In May of 1839, however, Smith received an unexpected letter. A lawyer from Lexington had written the young teacher offering him a position as principal professor at a new military school being created at the site of the state arsenal there. This new academy, purportedly to be designed on the model of his alma mater, presented a tempting offer for Smith but the letter provided little detail. Since the specifics of the position remained obscure, he hesitated accepting it. He had just settled into his situation at Hampden-Sydney. Although not the ideal environment for his educational philosophies, it did provide steady employment and a brand new house which proved a luxury after his multiple relocations while in the Army. Yet he did miss the structure of a military lifestyle (as made obvious by the discipline he instilled on his unsuspecting students) and the salary at the new institution would nearly double the pittance on which he currently subsisted. He also had no idea that an arsenal even existed in Lexington, less than one hundred miles away, much less knew of the scheme to create a military school. After an extended correspondence with the lawyer in order to attain more information and consulting with several friends (two of whom served on the Board of Visitors for the new school), Smith boldly accepted the offer in July

but delayed in beginning his duties until he could finish his term at Hampden-Sydney and confer with his mentor, Colonel Thayer, for advice on this new position.¹⁶

When Smith arrived at the Lexington Arsenal in the fall of 1839, he found himself in a situation even more challenging than he experienced at Hampden-Sydney. At the latter, he had only to restructure and reinvigorate a neglected mathematics curriculum. In this case, the entire institution existed only as an idea. Its classes, structure, and mission did not extend beyond the boundaries of the Board members' imaginations. Moreover, he found the physical plant of the new school in total disarray. Upon initial inspection, he declared the grounds of the Arsenal completely unsuited to operate a military school of any kind: barracks were too cramped and dilapidated for cadet habitation, no sanitary facilities, a moldy basement served as the mess hall and two broken-down cabins provided the only facilities for classroom instruction.¹⁷ With the exception of the Institute's regulations freshly drafted by Board president Claudius Crozet, the Board left Smith and fellow professor J. T. L. Preston with little guidance on how to operate the new school. The new principal professor (later named superintendent) had not even met the Board of Visitors in person until the day that the Institute officially opened on 11 November 1839. The Board agreed, in an abstract sense, about the mission of the new Institute: to provide a liberal education to young men while maintaining sound military discipline in guarding the arsenal. They left the process of achieving these goals entirely up to Smith. What the Board lacked in providing guidance, it made up for by bestowing trust in its new superintendent,

allowing him the freedom to take charge of the school and execute the operation of the Institute as he saw fit.

Before reaching any of the high idealistic goals of the Board, Smith first had to tackle the myriad of day-to-day issues beleaguering the fledgling institution. The original plan called for the school to open late in 1839 in order to allow enough time for the necessary repairs of the facilities to be finished. Problems with the construction contract delayed the renovations needed for the arsenal buildings. All twenty-eight cadets had to cram into four half-finished rooms (less than sixteen feet square) in the old barracks.¹⁸ Some of the rooms did not have proper roofing. In a desperate move to provide his cadets with shelter, Smith transferred six of them from the barracks to a log cabin on the outskirts of the arsenal grounds. When the other arsenal buildings proved inadequate, Smith transferred classes to the log cabin as well. Sanitation was also poor. Toilet facilities consisted of chamber pots which were emptied every morning along Woods Creek flowing behind the arsenal.¹⁹

Almost all accounts of those who experienced the ordeal of VMI's first months made vivid references to the unusual harshness of the weather, remembered by Cadet Edmund Pendleton as "a winter conspicuous for its severity."²⁰ The school's dilapidated buildings housed students and professors who huddled together for warmth while practicing math problems or reciting lessons. Smith complained that "so intense was the cold in these comfortless rooms that it was impossible to write with chalk on the blackboard."²¹ Uniforms had not been delivered so the cadets wore whatever clothes they brought from home. No quantity of fuel was accumulated for the winter and re-

supply of any kind from the town was paltry due to the snow-filled roads. Major Smith eventually purchased a handful of “rough blanket overcoats” for cadets walking post during their guard shift.²² Shortly after the Institute opened, Cadet Valentine Saunders lamented in a letter home, “no weather will excuse the sentinel from performing his duty.”²³

Many of Saunders’s fellow cadets shared his sentiment of despair and frustration. Most seemed to appreciate the opportunities VMI had to offer but the living conditions were nearly unbearable. The cadets held a secret meeting to discuss whether they should disband and return home. Pendleton credited the “resolute spirit of a few of the cadets” who persuaded the others to remain by only one vote. Their faith in the infant school “saved the imperiled life of the Institute.”²⁴ Pendleton also attributed the determination to stay on the unifying belief that their young twenty-seven year old superintendent could improve the school when the winter ended. Once VMI had survived that crucial first winter, Smith focused his energies on ensuring the school’s long-term success. Routine and regimentation provided the means for the cadets to achieve a sense of stability, security and discipline. Warm spring weather allowed cadets to engage in daily squad and company drills on the new parade ground made from four acres of land recently purchased adjacent to the arsenal grounds.

Much like everything at the new academy, Smith crafted a new curriculum with only vague direction from the Board of Visitors. This *tabula rasa* offered him a chance to incorporate many of the tenants of his own education ideals without the restrictions of the entrenched classical curriculum he contended with at Hampden-Sydney. With

Claudius Crozet and Smith both having served on West Point's faculty, VMI's curriculum would mirror its parent institution as closely as its meager resources and two young professors could make it. The Institute could only initially offer a three-year course of study because of these restraints. This did not deter Smith from crafting a new curriculum from scratch that would eventually become the model of all subsequent schools of its kind. While he drew heavily from his own college education at West Point to provide an initial structure, Smith recognized that his alma mater and his new academy carried different institutional goals and therefore altered the Academy's curriculum to reflect the Institute's unique missions.

Smith also drew from his experience at Hampden-Sydney to recognize what changes he believed needed making in the American college. The curriculum in colonial American colleges such as Hampden-Sydney embraced the humanist purpose of education by promoting the intellectual inspiration of the ancient world, particularly its language, as was done during the Renaissance. Nearly all institutions of higher learning in America, regardless of region, taught Greek and Latin as the basis for human knowledge and understanding. Courses in the classical curriculum varied little beyond these two academic staples and usually included classes in Hebrew, literature, poetry, rhetoric. At the many church-affiliated academies or church-supported colleges, faculty offered courses in religious studies as far back as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and into the antebellum era when Smith was active. Most colleges did provide courses in mathematics and science but only at the most elementary levels. Mathematics rarely extended beyond basic arithmetic while science classes in chemistry and natural

philosophy (physics) focused more on theory and memorization than experiments and discovery, in spite of the intellectual heritage of the Renaissance and Enlightenment.

By the nineteenth century, some reformers bravely called for change in the classical curriculum demanded a more practical knowledge, particularly in America's colleges. Audacious proposals from academic visionaries in the nation's most prestigious schools such as Harvard and Amherst College proposed more advanced courses in mathematics and the hard sciences. Others suggested even more radical ideas such as elective courses, altering the recitation and examination system as well as more enlightened attitudes toward student punishment. Progress, however, came piecemeal, if at all. By the 1820s, some curriculums included modern languages to supplement the ancient and the occasional science class but major alterations to curriculum represented the exception rather than the rule. More enlightened curriculums such as the University of Virginia, founded in 1819, offered courses in anatomy, medicine, mathematics and natural philosophy but its strengths remained in the more traditional subjects. Above all, reformers could not overcome entrenched administrators who refused to acknowledge the traditional collegiate system of learning as defunct and therefore claimed it did not need changing. Their defense reached its apex in 1828 with the publication of the Yale Report in which the old guard boldly articulated its justification for the classical curriculum as the university would continue to serve, as historian Frederick Rudolph states, "its essentially aristocratic purpose," while "the American college curriculum remained almost immovable until after the Civil War."²⁵

At the core of Smith's curriculum resided the "twin pillars of the Thayer system," math and French.²⁶ Mathematics received the greatest amount of attention as Smith embraced the subject as a lifetime passion. Like his mentors at West Point, he recognized mathematical education as the foundation for the professional engineer. Yet Smith saw its value extending beyond its functional use in constructing bridges and roads. Stressing math provided a practical skill for real life as well as allowed students to exercise their minds through reason and logic in ways that reading the classics could not. Granted, nearly all colleges, even theological seminaries, called for students to take mathematics as a requirement for graduation. Renowned colleges such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton all boasted math departments of high national reputation. Yet, Smith's department eventually surpassed his Ivy League contemporaries in its breadth and difficulty. By the end of its first decade, VMI offered the most well rounded mathematics education of its time. The course of study required cadets to master every major facet of math: arithmetic, algebra, trigonometry, geometry, and calculus. Other colleges, however, rarely ventured beyond basics of elementary algebra and possibly a little geometry in their classics laden curriculums.

Smith brought with him from West Point the trend of shifting from the English to the French model of teaching mathematics. Thayer crafted his mathematics curriculum from the Ecole Polytechnique, where courses focused more on theoretical methods and better suited from the training of military engineers.²⁷ Many of America's traditional colleges, including Harvard, Yale, and Princeton still utilized the same English methodology employed since their schools were established during the colonial era.²⁸

While Smith may have admired many of his West Point professors, he absolutely worshiped Professor Charles Davies, the chair of the mathematics department.²⁹ By the time Smith matriculated to the Academy, Davies already had become a legend at West Point as an author of a dozen math textbooks and an innovator who made calculus a requirement for all cadets. Like Thayer, Davies embraced the French mathematicians and assigned the most rigorous French textbooks for his courses, including some he had translated himself. Once Smith chaired his own mathematics department at VMI, Smith emulated his idol by incorporating a comprehensive math curriculum that relied upon Davies' textbooks. He also translated French texts on algebra by Legendre and descriptive geometry by Biot contacting Davies frequently for assistance. Above all, Smith endeavored to have his texts and his teaching in the same ilk as the famed West Point master, "perspicuous, clear, and logically arranged."³⁰

The study of the French language complemented mathematics as one of the "twin pillars of Thayer's course."³¹ Smith naturally adopted this language into his curriculum for the same reasons it was required at West Point: translating math, military and engineering textbooks from their original French. In the pursuit of engineering education, the French had no rival, therefore, cadets at USMA, and now VMI, had to learn the language in order to study from the masters on the subject. "To the French," Smith proclaimed, "we pay a great deal of attention as more of our math and philosophical course is studied in this language."³² At the Academy, professors taught French simply as a crash course because of its utilitarian purpose and therefore focused exclusively on the skill of translation. He occasionally allayed the fears of those who

entered with no experience in the language. “A knowledge of French,” he assured one parent, “is not indispensable to a young man entering our third class, so as to graduate in three years if he possesses a pretty good English or Latin education. The French language is so easy that a good linguist can readily make up for the deficiency.”³³ Smith adopted two popular French novels used by several colleges, including West Point and Harvard, for translating, Gil Blas and Charles XII. While Gil Blas stood out as a personal favorite of Smith’s, a book he “deem[ed] far superior to any book I ever read in the French language,” both texts served the secondary purpose of providing a moral tale for his young male students.³⁴ These stories portrayed powerful men whose pride caused them to fall from grace but through perseverance, faith and fortitude redeemed themselves to become men of distinction. Cadets also read La Vie de Washington, a French biography of their state’s most idolized hero.

But similarities with USMA would end here in regards to the *belle lettres* as Smith pursued an uncharacteristically liberal course selection beyond French. In spite of his open opposition to the classical education being taught throughout America’s colleges, Smith’s curriculum placed a noticeable emphasis on Latin and English (both rhetoric and literature).³⁵ He firmly believed the mastery of the English language, and its roots in Latin, to be just as essential for a complete education, particularly of a young man training to be an educator.³⁶ Too many young men, both at VMI and other colleges, arrived with poor preparation in the basics of the English language. Therefore Smith treated the subject as comprehensively as he did mathematics by requiring courses

in multiple areas: grammar, rhetoric, declamation, literature, and Latin. He described his commitment to English studies to a parent:

I will only add to this, that it is our chief aim to make our pupils good English scholars, and to this end we encourage and require composition in every form. . . . We commence our course with the study of English—adopting a simple or elementary text book and we conclude it by extending this instruction to embrace the philosophy of grammar with rhetorical criticism. . . . Practice, however, is our chief means for improvement in this important department and we believe our graduates have generally been regarded as good English scholars.³⁷

The emphasis on Latin in the course of study also indicates a betrayal of his anti-classical opinions. Cadets took up to three years of Latin, translating the same classics assigned in civilian colleges, such as Cicero, Virgil, Horace, and Livy. However, Smith did not subscribe to the teaching of Greek. He considered Greek more appropriate for theological institutions, not his academy of arts and sciences. Moreover, he considered knowledge of the language as an indicator of privilege. During the antebellum period, only those young men who could afford to attend prestigious private academies or hire private tutors ever learned Greek. VMI excluded knowledge of Greek as a prerequisite for enrollment in order to pursue a broader pool of applicants.

In 1845, when West Point reduced its number of French recitation hours in order to incorporate more engineering courses, VMI did not follow suit.³⁸ VMI cadets received a continual exposure, all four years, to a foreign language, either French or Latin. Both of these languages increased their alumni's marketability as teachers after

graduation. Knowledge of French also allowed graduates mastery of the sciences as English translations of the best works on the subject existed. The Institute also maintained courses in Latin as most of Virginia's common schools still taught the ancient language. A controversy erupted in 1850 as J. T. L. Preston, VMI's professor of languages, proposed that Smith replace French completely with Latin as his department experienced greater difficulty in trying to teach both over a four year curriculum. Board members lambasted this proposal, defending French as the premiere language of science being taught in all other military academies worldwide. Teaching only Latin would change the character of the school, forcing VMI to make a choice about its identity: to be "either decidedly military or decidedly collegiate [classical]. . ." To blend them, the Board president continued, would simply be "impracticable."³⁹ Yet even after this debate, little changed in the curriculum regarding the language issue. Those outside of VMI identified how this difference in curriculum differentiated the missions of the two institutions. A traveler passing through Lexington commented on the Institute, "This Institution is destined I think to become the successful rival of West Point, and in some respects its superior; because the Latin language is not taught at the last named Academy. . . [the cadets] are thus made instruments of diffusing learning and virtue through the land."⁴⁰

The remainder of Smith's academic plan embraced his mission to make VMI's reputation as a scientific institution equal to that of West Point. The Institute's curriculum, therefore, placed a heavy emphasis on drawing as an academic discipline. The teaching of drawing served the practical purpose of the engineer, not the aesthetic

purpose of the classically trained artist.⁴¹ Smith hired his old Academy roommate Thomas Hoopes Williamson, and charged him initially with the duty of creating new courses in the drawing of landscapes, topography and human figure in the early 1840s. Both Smith and Williamson considered the skill essential for any engineer or soldier.⁴² Williamson also wanted desperately to teach a course in architectural drawing but found himself restricted by the lack of a decent textbook. Out of frustration, Williamson printed his own textbook for the course in 1850 since no other author met his satisfaction. Smith prided himself on the fact that his institution provided the only such drawing courses in any southern college.⁴³

Taking the Smith curriculum meant little variety during the first three years of one's cadetship. Each student tackled the basic triumvirate of Math-Language-Drawing with the only variety coming from the type of language (French, Latin or both) and mathematics (arithmetic, algebra, geometry, or calculus). These years provided the educational foundation for the most scientific and challenging year confronted by first classmen (seniors). During their final year of instruction (or last two years after 1856), cadets engaged in the truly unique portion of the Institute's course of study by taking one of the most specialized selections of scientific classes in the nation at the time. First classmen took on the challenge of taking simultaneous courses in both Chemistry and Natural Philosophy (modern physics). To be fair, most antebellum colleges did not design these two courses with modern practices of teaching pure science. Originally VMI's chemistry classes relied on blackboard recitations much like the rest of its curriculum and did not utilize any laboratory work whatsoever until Smith had a facility

constructed in 1859 for agricultural chemistry. Natural philosophy consisted of an amalgam of the modern subjects of physics, optics, mechanics, and astronomy rolled into one comprehensive course. Cadets in this course could at least observe experiments conducted by the professor and get a limited amount of hands-on experience with scientific equipment such as sextants, barometers, and telescopes. Smith sought out the best textbooks for his students for this course, adopting legendary West Point professor W. H. C. Bartlett's work on optics and selected volumes from selected French authors such as Boucharlat and Gummere, whom the world recognized as the renowned experts in the field of natural philosophy (with cadets reading the texts in the original French). These courses constituted the scientific framework needed to support a sound engineering curriculum.

The original emphasis on engineering education in America came from Claudius Crozet, a graduate of the Ecole Polytechnique who brought his expertise to the U. S. Military Academy in 1817 at the request of Sylvanus Thayer. Crozet taught the Academy's first courses in military and civil engineering, promoting the use of descriptive geometry and incorporating his personal experiences as an engineer in Napoleon's army.⁴⁴ Smith introduced a course known as "Military and Civil Engineering" taught on the model of its originator, Dennis Hart Mahan of the Academy.⁴⁵ Since no other institution taught this course, Smith had to utilize Mahan's lecture notes as a "textbook," later published as the 168 page text Outpost in 1843.⁴⁶ Cadets were introduced to the entire spectrum of military engineering: field fortifications, construction of batteries, entrenchments, and obstacles, and as well as

elements of civil engineering (bridge and road construction).⁴⁷ Before VMI could afford additional faculty, Smith included the teaching of infantry tactics. This combination military-civil engineering course, much anticipated by first-class cadets, served a two-fold purpose in the eyes of Smith and his staff. First, it taught all of the knowledge believed necessary for an educated nineteenth century military officer. Secondly, it gave cadets the opportunity to incorporate all of their prior scientific training (drawing, mathematics, natural philosophy) into a single practical engineering course. While other institutions taught the sciences in hopes of being perceived as more well-rounded, VMI stood apart by promoting a practical use for its scientific instruction: producing graduates who could use this education in the real world outside of the military.

During the 1850s, Smith labored endlessly to expand the curriculum in order to incorporate a wider scientific education. His persistent efforts allowed him to break down the lone comprehensive engineering course offered in 1840 into several, more specialized courses. By the end of the decade, cadets took separate classes in Mineralogy, Geology, Mechanics, and Astronomy. He boasted in his 1850 annual report to the state legislature that the Institute held the honor of being the only college in the South which taught the “physical sciences.”⁴⁸ The expansion of the curriculum also included a corresponding increase in the variety of non-scientific courses offered. A first classmen’s course of study also consisted of history, rhetoric, logic, moral philosophy, and the Constitution of the United States while underclassmen enjoyed a greater exposure to literature, geography, and exercises in declamation and composition. Other colleges did explore various courses in science, natural philosophy, and social

science, but “much of this added material was decorative and not to be regarded as of equal importance with Latin, Greek, mathematics, and philosophy.”⁴⁹ Smith’s own experience teaching advanced mathematics at Hampden-Sydney exemplifies the ornamental treatment of non-classical subjects. Even those institutions that had pure intentions of inculcating more practical courses into their curriculum typically suffered from a shortage of qualified professors to teach them. The professor of chemistry at Randolph Macon College in 1848, who admittedly knew nothing on the subject, taught by staying one lesson ahead of his students in the textbook.⁵⁰ Smith, however, stood out as a rare antebellum schoolmaster who maintained a high academic standard for both the arts and the sciences.

The construction of VMI’s curriculum represents the very best of Smith’s talents as an academic. At a point in time where imagination in the American curriculum had reached a standstill in the moribund aftermath of the Yale Report, he constantly endeavored to provide the most modern and practical curriculum possible.⁵¹ The Institute’s academic program thrived under Smith as he constantly pursued new faculty, better equipment and the most up-to-date topics to teach in the fields of science while the classical colleges stagnated in their often century old courses of study. Even successful college president Mark Hopkins of Williams College initially refused to demonstrate any creativity in his course of study. “A curriculum alone could not make men,” notes historian Frederick Rudolph, “and for that reason Hopkins and most of his contemporaries among college presidents were little inclined to excite themselves about curricular matters. As makers of men, rather than instructors in practical skill, they had

already evolved a workable and productive scheme of education, based on a tried course of study. . .”⁵² Innovators like Smith had to overcome the challenges of undoing centuries of academic complacency established by the great established institutions which proved to be a daunting task in spite of the common sense approach of his ideologies.

For Smith, West Point represented the academic standard for his institution. The U.S. Military Academy enjoyed international recognition as arguably the best school for mathematical and engineering education. If VMI could demonstrate similar excellence in teaching this unique curriculum, it could soon develop a comparable reputation as a premiere scientific academy to its parent institution. For both West Point and VMI, educating men of science always maintained a high priority. Many colleges envied USMA, recognizing the Academy as the most modern education in the nation yet no school adopted its methodology or curriculum. Most college presidents wrote off West Point’s curriculum as incompatible with their institutional missions. Meanwhile, outsiders took notice of how one-sided the West Point curriculum had become in pursuit of its own mission:

The general course of study at West Point is well known to the public. It is almost wholly scientific, and embraces very little that belongs to the study of arts, language, or literature. The Dead Languages, the Belle Lettres, Composition, Criticism, and even Geography, are not required for admission, and form no part of the course of instruction. In a merely military point of view, this is sufficiently proper; for it cannot be supposed that either grammar or Latin

is necessary to the attack and defence of fortified places, or that the graces of proper composition are necessary to the art of castramentation. The pupil of the Military Academy is, however, to be a member of civilized society,--not merely a soldier, but, a gentleman,-- and in this respect, it may well be doubted, whether he should not be inducted into some of these studies and accomplishments, which may give him a sympathy with the world in which he lives. The only branch of this sort, which he now at all pursues, is a brief course in grammar, moral philosophy, and national law, which, from the short and hurried time allowed, affords a very inadequate glance at these important subjects.⁵³

Nevertheless, Smith became a true visionary by being the first to adopt the Academy's core curriculum of science and mathematics to make more productive citizens, not simply better military officers. Unlike West Point, Smith wanted the liberal arts to have their own academic identity. By 1854, his course of instruction consisted of separate departments for English/Latin and French with their own department heads. Smith desired that his graduates would be men of education, not men of war. He therefore altered the West Point curriculum to create a more liberal and well-rounded education to prepare his cadets for careers in teaching. Good teachers, in his view, needed command of both the English language and a sound mathematical mind. He labored for the Institute to achieve a "thoroughness of education," that would best prepare them for any of the various needs for teaching in the state's schools.⁵⁴

"It matters not so much *what* subjects are taught," Smith warned, "as *how* they are taught."⁵⁵ Strong curriculums meant nothing without a structured system of teaching

to convey the knowledge in an effective manner. Oftentimes, the haphazard organization of antebellum colleges handcuffed the efforts of otherwise talented teachers. Limited numbers of qualified faculty forced one professor in charge of an entire academic subject for the entire school and therefore, unusually large class sizes. Unable to provide the proper attention need to individual students during his lessons, enormous classes forced teachers to replace “thoroughness” with “superficial knowledge.”⁵⁶ Smith understood how this loosely structured system wasted the time of all those involved, particularly indifferent adolescent pupils. He lamented that a “young man of sixteen or seventeen is not going to study very hard, if his teacher take[s] up time in lecturing instead of examining him upon the text. He will lay aside his books, and rely upon superficial knowledge derived from a hurried lecture.”⁵⁷

Smith’s answer to the woes of the antebellum classroom centered on the important pedagogical transition from the lecture to the recitation method. To be sure, this was not a genuinely new innovation in teaching as a handful of institutions already utilized this scheme.⁵⁸ Yet Smith refined it and actively promoted its use as the essential feature to teaching effectively. The recitation system called for a student to learn his lesson from the textbook then receive a quiz on the material from his professor in class. He would declaim the day’s lesson orally or on the blackboard demonstrating his comprehension of the given topic. This technique now put the burden on the student rather than the instructor, making him an active participant in the learning process rather than passively absorbing (or enduring) a professor’s homily. Lecturing, Smith believed, actually impeded learning as it left students, “without an effort to think for

themselves.”⁵⁹ Recitations, on the other hand, solved promoted “learning by doing.” Smith suggested active use of the blackboard as the vital function of the system. Depending on board work, instructors could physically ascertain a pupil’s knowledge on the given topic. Useful for all subjects, whether writing out algebra equations or French sentences, marking on the “slate” allowed professors to teach principles to the individual beyond just the facts of the lesson. The process forced the student to think on his feet and demonstrate the extent of his comprehension of the lesson. When a student performed a problem at the blackboard, Smith encouraged teachers to interrogate him “to ascertain if he fully understands what he has been doing.” Through recitation, professors taught pupils to actively think and reason in order to achieve their ultimate goal to “awaken the intellect of every individual scholar.”⁶⁰ The recitation system allowed the professors and superintendent to quantify a student’s progress and thereby monitor his progress much more closely. For each class period, an instructor graded a cadet on his daily recitation using a scale of zero (0) to three (3). This range of scores reflected their performance that particular class as best (3), good ($2\frac{3}{4}$ - $2\frac{1}{4}$), indifferent ($2 - 1\frac{1}{4}$), bad ($1 - \frac{1}{4}$) or worst (0).⁶¹ Smith also believed that recitation grades did not simply reward a single excellent effort but accounted for long trends in diligence as the merit roll calculated recitation grades over the course of a semester to determine the student’s final standing.⁶² The system rewarded consistency and habit as well as academic achievement.

In order to prevent overworking a single professor in a “promiscuous assemblage of 100 students more or less,” Smith adamantly argued for smaller, more manageable

class sizes.⁶³ Under his system, each department would divide into sections of ten to twelve students. If this breakdown left the professor with too many sections then the school should intervene and provide him with as many assistant professors or tutors as needed to teach that particular discipline. Smith also proposed the division of each section according to the individual's skill in the given subject. With the entire section comprised of the same learning ability, a professor could cater his lesson to better meet the needs of all of his students. This innovation allowed extra attention to be given to weaker students without lowering the institution's standards. After the completion of daily recitations, he encouraged students to question each other on the day's lesson until the end of the class period. This method built on Smith's broader philosophy of making learning a more interactive process. Having students quiz each other generated greater interest in the material, ensured the lesson would be more accurately studied and relieved the professor as the sole purveyor of knowledge as his pupils gained more confidence in the subject on their own.⁶⁴

The process of regularly testing pupils on their daily lessons prepared them for an all-encompassing examination twice a year. These semi-annual assessments applied similar pedagogical tenants as classroom recitation by having the individual student respond to questions from his instructors and answer them *viva voce*. The examinee, however, typically had to respond to inquiries from a panel of the institution's faculty and often invited academic guests: other professors, trustees, men from the scientific and academic community, or sometimes politicians. Examinations served the obvious purpose of confirming the student's mastery of the overall course material as Smith

admitted that “weekly marks will not always be a correct criterion of the actual merits of all the members of a class.”⁶⁵ The board considered the pupil’s examination marks with his class marks as well as the opinion of the teacher to determine the actual merits of all the members of the class. Those students not meeting the standards of the examining board would be pronounced “deficient,” leaving the faculty two choices: turn him back to “recommence” the course or withdraw from the college. Here, faculty and administrators now had a legitimate process to enforce a high academic standard for the entire student body. Twice a year, professors could remove all those who refused put forth the effort in their studies instead of having them flounder in the curriculum for years on end. By reviewing their progress at the end of every semester, instructors could use this formal system to justify dismissing or setting back substandard academic performers. Smith argued that this system also gave board members an opportunity to evaluate the faculty. The Board could witness first-hand how the instructor handled his students in an academic setting while the performance of the students reflected his efforts in the classroom from that semester. He even went so far as to add two members of the most recently graduated class to the examining board to ensure alumni that the academic standards of the Institute still continued after their graduation.⁶⁶

Other institutions, however, did not take this process so seriously. Many colleges held examinations of “varying seriousness,” according to one historian, where “cheating was common and tacitly condoned.”⁶⁷ Washington College did test its students rigorously at the completion of the year but undervalued the exam’s results, counting as only one-tenth of the pupil’s total recitation grade in 1851.⁶⁸ Smith identified more

problems within this process of evaluation at other institutions. He lamented that in too many schools only the professor of the course being examined made the final decision of whether a student passed for the term. Board members consistently absented themselves from these assessments, often at the request of students, like those at Princeton, who resented their involvement.⁶⁹ Smith, on the other hand, invited as many academics as possible to attend the examinations to ensure his cadets would receive the most thorough and challenging questioning possible.

Given the intensity of this academic system, not all cadets achieved the standards that Smith had set for them. Like at other colleges, several students who could not keep up with the rigors of the courses or had poor work habits might find themselves in danger of being cited as “academically deficient.”⁷⁰ Failing a course was not uncommon for students at an antebellum institution but Smith’s system set especially rigid standards for performance. Deficiency in any one subject could lead to one’s dismissal. Such drastic consequences for not keeping up with one’s studies, Smith believed, emphasized the institution’s commitment to academic success while weeding out those who genuinely did not want to learn. Still, Smith tempered this no-nonsense academic policy with his brand of paternal leadership to prevent extreme penalties. Using the daily recitation grades, he could closely track the progress of those students experiencing difficulties and attempt to diagnose the problem early. He would often confront the cadet personally to identify his weaknesses and try to craft a course of action to correct it. Smith used a variety of tactics to motivate his poorly performing students depending on the individual in question: guilt, appeal to sense of duty, incentives, warnings,

friendly encouragement or even threats of immediate dismissal. If a cadet failed a semi-annual examination, Smith occasionally exercised the privilege of allowing the student to repeat the course the following term if he believed the young boy to be genuinely trying his best. The decision to allow someone to repeat came rarely as he often deemed a failing student beyond hope after an entire semester of his combining warnings and encouragement. Nearly all of those whom he dismissed for academic deficiency he identified as too lazy to succeed or so poorly prepared in his elementary education that he could never catch up within VMI's rigorous course of study. His commitment to sending home those who could not keep up academically purposely challenged other institutions who kept dull-witted students as long as they paid their college fees.⁷¹

A rigorous physical regimen complimented the challenging course of academic studies, adding to the unique nature of the VMI educational experience. Smith sold this physical benefit to parents as additional incentive to attend his academy, particularly for more feeble young men. He boasted that, "Indeed many parents whose sons are affected with invigorating and healthful exercises of our drills to establish their weakly frames and such has always been the experience of the Institution."⁷² Students at other institutions occasionally organized sports or physical activities but never incorporated them into the required daily routine of the college. Cadets exercised their bodies every afternoon with intense drilling but also engaged in more entertaining physical enterprises such as fencing, boxing, swordsmanship and horseback riding.⁷³ This promotion of a healthy body as well as a healthy mind contributed to larger institutional missions of productivity and industry. Although these physical activities complemented the rigors

of the academic environment, Smith carefully made separate allotted times for both, unlike other colleges like the University of North Carolina where sports often interfered with education, offering a distracting alternative to class or study time.⁷⁴

Regardless of the innovative or practical facets of Smith's curriculum, it all amounted to nothing without the second crucial element of his dual-fold educational ideology: discipline. This emphasis on discipline made military schools unique from their civilian counterparts and makes them truly unique even in the scope of modern higher education. This unique quality, however, also represents one of the most misunderstood. Historian Rod Andrew posits one of the primary means of military schools as curbing the lawlessness and violence in Southern society. Academy founders, he argues, subscribed to the "conventional wisdom of the day that southern youth were rowdy, undisciplined, and riotous—lacking self-control and respect for law and order."⁷⁵ In actuality, reckless and wild Southern boys could not enter schools like VMI as the application process required letters testifying to the young man's strong moral character.⁷⁶ Smith never labeled his cadets as "vicious" or debauched. He sometimes identified the presence of "evil passions" inherent in young men but not to the extreme that Andrew describes. No young man arrived at VMI, in Smith's eyes, as a hopeless behavioral case. Each came with a blank slate and the potential to succeed under a system of discipline. Military academies did not serve as an alternative to reform schools for the lawless adolescents of the South.⁷⁷ Smith believed that the vices of carelessness, idleness and procrastination plagued young men rather than the pure immorality pictured by historians.

“The nature of our discipline enables us to be more particular in our instruction,” Smith wrote to the state legislature in 1842.⁷⁸ The two concepts of discipline and learning were inseparable if one wanted to have the most effective educational system possible. He learned from his experience as a cadet at West Point the necessity of discipline in the classroom. The Academy professors whom he idolized, like Albert E. Church, often “taught mathematics in a drill-room atmosphere.”⁷⁹ A regulated disciplinary system provided the means for what modern educators call “classroom management.” The structure of regulations he constructed to control his cadets in barracks extended to the recitation hall as well. Rules punished those who talked or spat during class, absented themselves from recitation, abused books or arrived unprepared for their lesson. All of these offenses carried penalties similar to non-academic military infractions such as poorly cleaned barracks rooms or unsatisfactory uniforms. This strict code of classroom behavior instilled students with a sense of deference to the teacher and respect for his fellow pupils. Even during examinations, Smith expected cadets to maintain the same respect for professors. During an examination in 1846, for example, a cadet at the blackboard refused to solve a math problem because of his lack of preparation. Giving the student a chance, Smith bade him to remain while he talked him through the process. When the cadet still refused to comply, Smith had him arrested for insubordination and expelled the next day.⁸⁰ The courtesy and obedience bestowed upon the instructor expanded beyond simply that required of soldier to an officer but demonstrated Smith’s belief that this deferential relationship should entail every faculty-student environment. VMI’s unique military rank structure for professors and cadets

simply formalized the rapport already necessary for the best learning atmosphere. However, this system enforced discipline by crafting a mutual respect, not antagonism, between those on the opposite sides of the lectern.⁸¹ This environment would keep the students engaged but controlled and allow the professor to concentrate his energies on the lesson at hand.

In sum, a disciplined classroom, one without the distractions of misbehavior, where students always came with their lessons prepared, and respected their teachers' authority, simply provided the most ideal place for a young man to learn. The already rigorous nature of the recitation method of instruction supported by this system of discipline aimed to cure the one the primary ills of the antebellum college student. Smith argued that idleness, not unruliness, presented the greatest challenge for young men to succeed in higher education. Even students in contemporary civilian colleges understood how indolence dictated the attitude of the typical collegian, even at the most esteemed institutions. A Randolph-Macon College student admitted, "The average student was. . . getting along as best as he could, idling through some classes, 'bluffing' others, and working when he had to."⁸² Smith knew that all those who entered the Institute had the raw academic talent to excel in VMI's curriculum lest they would not have been admitted. All of his students could do the work. The challenge rested in their having the discipline to get it done. Nearly all of Smith's letters to parents explaining why he dismissed their sons for academic reasons noted the young man's laziness, rather than lack of academic ability, that led to his failure. In 1845, he wrote to one father, "I have found your son an amiable and well-behaved young man and wanting only in

industry and energy, and on this account he has failed.”⁸³ It frustrated him the most as an educator to see “good minds” go to waste because of the simple absence of a work ethic. Smith believed that a student’s success would more often than not be determined by their own diligence.

Discipline within the classroom added a new level of integrity absent in other institutions. The nation’s most prestigious colleges boasted a difficult curriculum, but the process of succeeding in it often weakened its credibility. One historian commented that Princeton provided a “formidable course of study, but custom and usage made it otherwise.”⁸⁴ Students knew they would not be called on every day to recite lessons. Therefore, they could predict their time to perform and would only have to study periodically. If they still found themselves unprepared for class, they would contrive an excuse to leave the classroom and never be held accountable for the lesson. At the University of Virginia, cheating during daily recitations occurred nearly every day, yet professors did not consider it a “terrible offense.”⁸⁵ Smith sought to reverse this trend. When he caught a cadet in 1845 reciting a Latin assignment from a text that already had an English translation penciled under it, Smith failed the cadet for academic deficiency, then chastised him for having others do his work for him.⁸⁶ Five years later, a cadet named Gordon attempted to “prompt” a fellow classmate who struggled through his recitation. Although the recipient never heard his comrade’s assistance and failed the recitation anyway, Smith severely reprimanded Gordon, and even contemplated his expulsion.⁸⁷ This strict classroom discipline created a high level of expectation for students as well as unique sense of accountability. Preparation for class recitations now

became a duty rather than an occasional inconvenience experienced by students in other institutions.⁸⁸ The system left no opportunities for shortcuts, tricks, or shirking, thereby forcing cadets to learn their lessons while collaterally instilling a sense of responsibility and self-respect.

College discipline did not remain confined to the classroom alone. As a military school, discipline touched every aspect of student life at VMI and the schools it later inspired. Granted, much of the military regimen instilled at the Institute served the practical purpose of the Corps of Cadets functioning as the guard for state Arsenal. A martial structure (uniforms, rank structure, sentinels, and so on) represented a condition of the school's founding for guarding weapons just as the militia company they replaced. But the Institute used discipline for purposes broader than guarding the weapons stores and ensuring control of cadet-guards in their soldierly duties. The military structure provided the ideal means for *in loco parentis*, or the institution acting as a parental replacement for the young man away from home, often for the first time. Rules regulating behavior inside and outside of the classroom had to be maintained by regimented and consistent system of punishment. Naturally, other college presidents utilized various punishments to control students but rarely did they incorporate them with any uniformity or regularity.⁸⁹ Smith found the other collegiate disciplinary systems failed by only punishing the most vicious student offenses. Reprimands ranged from stern lectures to monetary fines to varied forms of suspensions but never within any pattern.⁹⁰ This erratic enforcement rarely deterred rambunctious behavior amongst

antebellum students as many young men thrived in their first consequence-free environment.

Few problems plagued antebellum American higher education as much as the rowdy behavior of its students. Any institutional history that recounts student life during the time period has dedicated a portion of its narrative to describing the various, and often dangerous, shenanigans executed by its mischievous young pupils. As a whole, campuses had earned a reputation as the locale for immoral adolescent behavior. Drinking, carousing, gambling, fighting, dueling, and destroying property had become common features in dormitories both North and South. Smith therefore sought to correct the evils of dormitory life prevalent in other colleges and use his system to mold a more self-controlled student overall.

Smith crafted a unique proactive element to his system to balance the reactive nature of simply issuing punishment for offenses as done in other colleges. VMI focused equally on correcting what other institutions would consider minor infractions such as unbuttoned uniforms, tobacco use, and lateness to class. Smith applied this heavy-handed discipline not simply to promote a militaristic “spit and polish” environment. He endeavored to establish proper habits rather than simply correcting poor behavior. Only by taking care of the minute details in life could a young man succeed. Mastering the “small things” allowed him to then conquer the greater challenges that awaited him later in life. Conversely, those schoolmasters who allowed small infractions to continue unchecked had potentially condemned their students to a lifetime of substandard performance. Smith believed that young men did not come into

the world as criminals. This delinquent endstate resulted from a natural progression of small offenses building into large ones.⁹¹ He bemoaned how other colleges invested far too much attention to the handful of extreme trouble-makers while “everyone else is left unnoticed.”⁹² These other institutions allowed students to continue unmolested in engaging in poor habits of work and character so long as they did not commit any gross offenses.

Discipline outside of the classroom often reflected an individual’s behavior inside the classroom. Smith recognized a direct correlation between academic performance and personal conduct. “It is not intellect alone,” Smith concluded, “but the union of this with industrious, methodical, and virtuous habits,” that made his system effective.⁹³ Simply conforming to college laws did not guarantee academic success as a student needed good habits to truly succeed in life. It outraged Smith that a student who graduated first in his class could potentially be the most morally depraved individual in the entire school.⁹⁴ To him, this defeated the purpose of pursuing an education. Historian James Morrison argues that “Professors at Harvard, Columbia, and Princeton, as well as a host of lesser colleges, viewed themselves as builders of character and disciplinarians of the mind first, and purveyors of knowledge second,” yet their failure to accomplish this “primary” mission of discipline left their students wanting in both self control and knowledge.⁹⁵ Other presidents such as Mark Hopkins of esteemed Williams College contradicted Smith’s ideology by asserting that schoolmasters could not waste their time by focusing on the “small things” when developing good habits within their

students.⁹⁶ Smith's efforts of educational reform intended to correct the errors of administrators as well as wayward pupils.

In order to promote the development of his education-behavior theory, Smith promoted the use of what he called the "merit roll" in order to allow the schoolmaster the ability to monitor each aspect of his students' overall activity. The combination of an individual's scholarship and conduct constituted his "general merit" or collective progress in his development. This merit could be quantified in order to track a student's overall performance. The merit roll calculated a pupil's demerit total with his daily recitation grades in each academic subject. For conduct, each student began with a mark of 300 and would have $\frac{1}{4}$ removed from that total for each demerit. Similarly, points deducted from a student's daily recitation grade would be reduced from a total of a possible 300 (or 200 depending on the relative importance of the course) from that subject.⁹⁷ Therefore, the cadet who avoided demerits and excelled in his classroom performance would ascend to the top of the merit roll published each week by the superintendent. Through this system, Smith created a true meritocracy where students would be judged by their performance not their birth or social standing.

VMI's discipline did not root itself solely in military tradition and culture as suggested by Rod Andrew.⁹⁸ Smith's methodology focused as much on human behavior as it did martial formality. His efforts to truly study and understand adolescent psychology made him unique in relation to other college presidents and educational reformers, and therefore, more effective. Many of his contemporaries missed the mark altogether. An historian of neighboring Washington College notes the "remarkable lack

of psychological insight” that plagued the president and professors who attempted to enforce a stringent code of discipline, and actually invited more infractions than it prevented.⁹⁹ While other headmasters gave up on ever controlling their rambunctious students, writing them off as perfectly unmanageable, Smith actually pitied them for being too young to understand the errors of their ways. He confessed to one parent, “I am aware of the temptations to which youth is liable, and I cannot withhold from them the sympathy and consideration which their inexperience so properly calls forth.”¹⁰⁰ He understood that these “temptations” presented a long-term challenge that needed a long-term countermeasure. Discipline, he argued, should continually mold, guide and improve not simply punish sporadically and seek to promote long term attributes of self control and self denial.

Smith understood better than any of his contemporaries that the greatest influence over adolescents in regards to behavior, morals and ideology most often came from other adolescents. Peer pressure also played a vital, yet often overlooked, key to controlling student behavior, both in positive and negative ways. The “inexperience” that left young men exposed to temptations also allowed their comrades to steer their judgment, often for the worse. In letters to parents, Smith often identified bad roommates as the source of their son’s poor performance and experimented with switching the “influenced” lad to a different room before dismissing him. He realized that allowing an ill-behaved cadet to remain at the Institute could instigate poor conduct in his comrades. Smith rationalized the expulsion of one cadet by stating, “To permit him to remain longer here, would be to encourage vice in others in consequence of my

leniency towards him and I have therefore directed him to withdraw and return home.”¹⁰¹ Yet he also identified the difference between a student “who would do wrong himself and then lead others astray, and him whose youth and inexperience may make him the dupe of the vicious and designing.”¹⁰² Smith quickly disposed of those few young men who arrived at VMI with an innate penchant for malevolence. Most others, however, had only learned bad habits from their classmates and could therefore be guided back into righteousness.

Under the Smith system, the cadets themselves, particularly upper-classmen, carried much responsibility for monitoring the actions of their peers. After catching a senior cadet absent without leave, Smith lamented to the boy’s mother about his failure to set an example. He complained that “as a first classman he ought to be a model to others and not to set them bad examples. He knows how heavy a responsibility I have and while parents are looking to me to guard their sons from vice he ought to stand by me now that he is about to graduate, as to help me in it.”¹⁰³ Understanding the impressionable nature of adolescents, Smith believed that having positive role models for these young men to look up to could be just as effective in controlling their behavior as demerits or other punishments. While he himself bore the ultimate responsibility of how his students acted, he argued that anyone who interacted with someone as morally malleable as a teenage boy should be held accountable for influencing his habits.

Quantified class standings provided by the merit roll allowed Smith to tap into another element of male teenage character: competitiveness. While fear of punishment drove most young men to succeed at VMI, many others worried about keeping pace with

their classmates. Smith argued that good academic progress and behavior “may be promoted by keeping constantly before the pupil’s mind what others . . . have accomplished.”¹⁰⁴ Respect from peers often meant as much from that of parents or instructors. Several cadets believed that they directly represented their communities and did their best amongst their comrades to represent them as best he could. Cadet Joseph Hart Chenoweth wrote to his parents in 1857 about the rivalry amongst his friends for the best marks, “The contest of highest ‘honor’ that will be awarded to my class at the Jan’ Examination, has been quite animated and grows more & more exciting as we approach the race, at present the chances are greatly in my favor.”¹⁰⁵ “Emulation,” as Smith called it, worked for those on the opposite end of the merit roll as well, such as Cadet John Thompson who admitted to Smith that he did not study but complained that his less intelligent comrades continued to surpass him in his studies.¹⁰⁶ In this system, cadets had to actively earn respect. Simply following orders did not automatically produce success as the system required an earnest effort, not simply obedience, to achieve a positive reputation. Smith reported to the Board in 1848, “Drones are excluded by the rigid discipline which has been instituted and the time allowed for the course must be constantly employed, or the cadet loses his position and sinks in the regard of his teachers and companions; and should this fail to correct him, neglect of his duties and studies will bring inevitable disgrace.”¹⁰⁷ Students in antebellum colleges rarely knew where they stood academically amongst their classmates and therefore cared little about earning their respect through academic achievement. For other college presidents, peer influence almost always carried a poor stigma. A student’s exposure to

a classmate's persuasion often led to vice and disruptive behavior. Smith, however, altered peer pressure into a constructive tool by using it to actually prevent vice by having cadets compete for positive attention through good marks rather than negative attention from punishment.

Smith also recruited the participation of another group of allies in the battle to mold his young cadets. Of all the aspects of antebellum military education, historians probably underestimate the role of their parents more than any other. Although Smith acknowledged the harmful effect of young boys falling in with the wrong crowd when arriving at college, he often traced ill behavior in American youth back to its source, lack of parental involvement. To remedy this problem, Smith boldly identified the role of parents as one of the central necessities to collegiate reform. When listing the essential elements to improve the college learning environment (daily recitations, small classes, merit roll), he also included the enlistment of parental cooperation.¹⁰⁸ While other schoolmasters may not have sought active contact with parents, Smith made them a top priority. "I can say with confidence," he boasted "that no letter was ever received by me from a parent of a cadet requiring a reply that I have not promptly answered."¹⁰⁹

The concept of *in loco parentis* suggested an institutional obligation as an absentee parent but it did not mean that parents would be removed from the educational process. On the contrary Smith highly encouraged their interest in their son's collegiate experience.¹¹⁰ Letters to parents constituted the overwhelming majority of Smith's outgoing correspondence during his career at VMI. He sent them information on courses and textbooks. Often without solicitation, he updated parents on academic

progress since he knew that the cadets themselves would not be so forthcoming in letters to home. By bringing parents into the inner circle of their child's education, he enlisted a much needed ally to correct those students deficient in their studies. Parental encouragement often made a greater impact on a struggling student than any guidance than Smith could give. "There is nothing which I consider of more importance in my responsible duty towards young men then to have the home influence constantly bearing upon them. With this your influence is double, without it I can do nothing."¹¹¹ Even those pupils who did well in their studies could only maximize their potential with support from home. Smith wrote to an Alexandria, Virginia parent, "You will notice in his circular that I have place his habits 'not studious.' Altho he has a good standing in his class. He has capacity to stand at the head of his class and with his talents properly directed will make a fine scholar. I hope therefore you will stimulate to his highest effort."¹¹² Conversely, Smith desired to know as much about his cadets as possible from their parents in order to best treat their individual behaviors. "I am obliged to you for the insight into his character which you have give me in your letter," he asked of one cadet's mother. "It will be an invaluable guide to me in my treatment of him, and if every parent could estimate as you have done the importance of such a view. I would have much less trouble in governing those who from time to time are committed to my charge."¹¹³ Unlike many of his contemporaries who considered themselves master disciplinarians, Smith humbled himself to admit that he did not always have to perfect solution for dealing with each individual cadet and laboriously maintained an open

pathway of communication with parents to ensure that the best course of action could be pursued.

In addition to academics, parents also played a pivotal role in controlling student behavior. Smith explained to one cadet's father that, "Although we are a military institution, we never resort to the rigor of the law until parental influence has been exerted in vain."¹¹⁴ Violating regulations resulted in immediate punishment from the respective Institute authority with no questions asked. But when infractions blossomed into a pattern of poor behavior, Smith did not let the militaristic system of punishment continue without parental intervention. He would send letters to the parent or guardian first with a warning about their ward's poor behavior, a list of the steps that he personally had taken to guide him in the right direction and the consequences if his behavior did not change. Smith tried to handle most cases by himself but exasperation often drove him to appeal to the student's household for assistance. In 1851, a frustrated Smith wrote to one parent, "It is possible a word of advice from you may have its influence upon him, and to this end I now write to you. He is now getting old enough to be reasoned with and I think his respect for, and attachment to you, will have much weight with him."¹¹⁵ Except in those cases where cadets committed egregious offenses that warranted immediate dismissal, Smith always gave parents an opportunity to intervene before the system took its course. Parents also maintained control over their son's future by Smith requiring parental permission if their son wanted to resign his cadetship. He arrested those who attempted to leave without their parent's blessing, denying their privilege to resign and disgracing them with a public dismissal.¹¹⁶ Even

the smallest vices, such as profanity, Smith believed that “parental influence might sometimes restrain,” since he and his staff could only do so much.¹¹⁷

While Smith labored relentlessly to incorporate parents more as part of the solution in his disciplinary system, he also privately identified them as part of the problem as well. Ironically, he acknowledged poor parenting as the source for many of his discipline troubles. Several cadets experienced difficulty adjusting to VMI’s discipline because they had never been reprimanded during their childhood. “If parents and guardians would act in such a manner, firm yet gentle,” he chided a cadet’s father, “we should have less trouble in managing unruly boys and the effect of this course in your son’s case may be to make him what he would not have been.”¹¹⁸ He believed his system often succeeded where parents failed, particularly in regards to attention to detail as a necessity of discipline. In 1851, he boasted, “we notice little matters of dress and order which would be overlooked by 2/3 of the parents in our land.”¹¹⁹ Smith hoped at the very least that soliciting parental involvement in their son’s behavior in college might correct for any negligence during their upbringing. Regardless of origin of the guidance, whether from the Institute or from home, students could not succeed without having some form of paternal influence or control to instill in them the proper qualities of self-control and discipline sometime before reaching adulthood.

Both parents and schoolmasters understood the challenges that awaited young men who left home for the first time in their lives to attend college. The absence of the watchful eyes of their mothers and fathers increased the chances of the new student engaging in a new lifestyle of vice and decadence. Smith maintained a simple

philosophy on college students and money, “I may conscientiously say that most of the negligences and irregularity in institutions of learning arise from the free use of pocket money on the part of students.”¹²⁰ Therefore any parent who wished to send their son spending money mailed it directly to Smith who managed an individual account for each cadet. Those who wished to draw from their account had to approach the superintendent personally to request a withdrawal and justify the reasoning. While Smith could not outwardly deny the forfeiture of the funds (since the money technically belonged to the cadet), he could certainly distribute stern lectures for expenditures which he deemed frivolous or report to the boy’s parents about his purchasing habits. He scolded students for buying frivolous items such as extra civilian clothing, fruit, candy, or in the worst case, alcohol. Those who begged the superintendent for an allowance to purchase new clothing simply received a lecture on how they should be more mindful to take better care of the clothes they already had.¹²¹ A cadet who carefully watched his expenses learned the values of thrift, simplicity and responsibility, skill that Smith hoped would stay with his students when they controlled their own finances long after leaving the Institute.¹²² In cases like these Smith tried to demonstrate that teaching the skills of life superseded the skills of the soldier. While not all of his graduates would serve in the militia, he made it his life’s work to ensure that they set the best moral example of any college student in the country and learned the skills necessary to succeed in the practical world.

Although he dismissed nearly one-third of his cadets every year for either disciplinary or academic reasons, Smith never lost his sympathy for the parents. As a

father of six children, he often empathized with the struggles of their wayward offspring.¹²³ He worded letters carefully to protect their feelings such as times when he admitted that he “anticipated in part the pain which the mother might feel and omitted the term ‘careless,’” when describing her son’s deportment.¹²⁴ He carefully balanced the harsh nature of the system with a sincere caring for all of his students. Collegiate discipline should be stern but not arbitrary, autocratic or harmful. Unnecessarily harsh systems defeated the mission of the institution, to develop the best character possible. “I have always considered it one of the chief recommendations of the discipline of military institutions that it may be enforced without destroying or materially affecting the kindlier affections of the heart and whatever roughness may be occasionally developed are removed by the lapses of time,” Smith concluded.¹²⁵

Smith’s system became the VMI system. It appeared harsh compared to how other colleges executed their institutional discipline but Smith reassured potential critics that his system did not resort to only heavy-handed tactics to get the best out of his students. He also preached an educational philosophy of positive reinforcement to compliment the rigors of the Institute’s often unforgiving punishments. He suggested that, “Prizes, certificates of proficiency, or other rewards, may be conferred upon those who have distinguished themselves during the session.”¹²⁶ Cadets who finished in the top two places on the merit roll by always had their names acknowledged to the governor in Smith’s semi-annual report to the legislature for their exemplary performance. Breaking slightly from the Thayer model of stoic and withdrawn leadership, he established a personal rapport with individual cadets which allowed him

to give more informal compliments and support to his students. Cadet John S. Wise recalled that Smith conversed with cadets frequently, asking them about their families or making other small talk.¹²⁷ Smith never missed an opportunity to personally encourage a struggling cadet or articulate his pride towards a cadet who made a turn for the better in his studies. This latter category instilled him with the greatest sense of pride as well as comfort knowing that his system could derive success out of anyone. He bragged to one state legislator, “You will be surprised by an examination of my report this year especially when you notice to whom I refer as lacking demerit – Ficklin, Thompson, L. Moss, and Paxton are all No 1. Surely we have some restoration as well as preventative properties in this Institution.”¹²⁸ Overall, Smith’s philosophy on discipline demonstrated more paternalism than militarism.

Naturally, all college administrations made some kind of effort to control their students. Some institutions attempted various creative ways to keep their pupils corralled. Administrators gave out fines, issued private admonition, and even tried replacing harsh discipline with kindness, but they soon learned that systems that existed in either formal regulations or tradition meant nothing without the proper leadership to enforce the policies.¹²⁹ Historian George Schmidt posited that, “far more important than all disciplinary regulations was the person of the president who gave them effect.”¹³⁰ Smith demonstrated that even the most well thought out disciplinary scheme meant nothing without a person of the proper constitution to make it function properly. An effective president needed to be an active agent in the enforcement of regulations and never make exceptions lest he would undermine his own system and authority. Still, one

had to balance his ability to punish with that of reward as discipline had to be strict but not abusive.

Smith's accomplishments at VMI did not rest alone on his interaction with cadets. During his administration, he enjoyed a remarkably productive relationship with his faculty. Taking a lesson from his mentor Sylvanus Thayer, Smith ensured he acquired the most talented faculty available to apply his unique curriculum and disciplinary system. All of the professors that he hired between 1840 and 1860 carried similar characteristics. All had graduated from either USMA or VMI making them products of the very system that Smith required them to put into practice.¹³¹ They also began their careers at the Institute at a relatively young age, averaging about 26 years old. But most importantly they were qualified experts in their academic fields. Much like his professors at West Point, Smith hoped his professors would not only excel at teaching but also contribute to the expansion of knowledge in their respective subjects. VMI's faculty compliantly subscribed to Smith's teaching philosophy of rigorous recitation, strict classroom decorum and commitment to scientific education. They also incorporated much "hands-on" learning (as much as resources would allow) in subjects such as drawing, geology, and artillery tactics. Smith maintained a high standard for his teachers in their pedagogy and their decorum. Yet he always appreciated their enormous teaching load and continuously appealed to the Board and state government for more professors in order to preserve the health of his overtaxed faculty as well as to increase their meager state salaries.¹³²

VMI's faculty also carried the burden of enforcing Smith's strategy of *in loco parentis* for the Corps of Cadets. While cadets occasionally violated classroom rules, the Institute's professors did not have to contend with the near anarchy that reigned in many college classrooms. At the South Carolina College, for instance, trustees compiled strict rules for proper behavior but left the faculty powerless to enforce them as the administration refused to expel any student who was the son of a prominent public figure. Devoid of authority, the college's instructors relied on bargaining with their pupils rather than futilely applying punishment.¹³³ Smith's professors routinely reported cadets for rule infractions both inside and outside of the classroom with little fear of insubordination. They benefited from a clearly defined disciplinary system and a superintendent who abhorred disrespect to his staff more than any other offense. Faculty at the University of Georgia despised "spying" on their students and only lackadaisically enforced regulations they hardly took time to understand anyway.¹³⁴ Since his professors took this effort to maintain cadet discipline, Smith went to great lengths to ensure that they received that same amount of respect that he did so students would respect their authority equally.¹³⁵

Smith also applied another lesson from his mentor Sylvanus Thayer by a delegating authority to his faculty wherever possible.¹³⁶ VMI's professors often took on collateral administrative duties, serving such offices as commandant of cadets, treasurer, and librarian. Remarkably, the faculty maintained an unwavering dedication to their superintendent and to each other which other antebellum colleges rarely duplicated. With the exception of one isolated quarrel between Smith and Thomas H. Williamson in

1846, no evidence exists of any serious friction amongst the Institute's faculty or with their superior. When cadets or parents ever questioned the actions of a professor, Smith always rose to their defense without question. The maintenance of harmony within the faculty allowed Smith more time to focus on his educational reforms, a luxury that several other college presidents of his time could not afford because of refereeing petty professorial squabbles.

Francis H. Smith did not truly stand in a world by himself as a college president. All institutions of higher learning worried about student behavior. Each at least prescribed to some form of regulations and respective system of enforcement.¹³⁷ They also pursued what they believed to be the best education possible for their students. All desired to maintain a high level of academic integrity for their institutions. Smith made his mark as an academic reformer through modifying, improving, and modernizing of defunct and archaic systems. He did not set out to reinvent American education. For the most part, the intentions were there in the abstract, they simply lacked a plan or structure. Drawing from his own educational experience, Smith adjusted education to suit himself and became an example to others in the process. A practical scientific curriculum and a disciplined learning environment could provide the keys to improve any academic institution. He would dedicate the rest of his life to promoting these reforms.

Moreover, Smith improved the concept of institutional paternalism, attempted unsuccessfully in many different forms by other college presidents.¹³⁸ He made the VMI paternalistic system successful not only through its regimented structure of regulation and punishment but through his sense of personal accountability to influence

each individual cadet. “I can well understand the feelings of a parent in sending his son from home and knowing as I so well do the temptations to which they are exposed. I am fully alive to the responsibilities which rest upon me,” he assured one parent.¹³⁹

Through his own personal responsibility, he hoped to instill the same crucial trait in all of his students. “There was no discharge in that war of life, but in personal, individual self meeting each new responsibility,” he proclaimed near the end of his career.¹⁴⁰ By controlling one’s self through discipline, one could then control his own destiny and if it could not be learned at an early age, a young man made success that much harder to attain. With this philosophy, he hoped to refine the accepted purpose of the college into an institution that prepared students for the “war of life,” instead of simply enjoying education as a luxury. Smith would soon take this ideology beyond the gates of VMI influencing education within his state and beyond.

Notes

¹ Francis H. Smith III, Old Spex of the VMI, typescript, 8, VMI Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

² Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the United States Military Academy, 1829 (West Point: United States Military Academy, 1829), 3.

³ Stephen Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 62-124; Theodore Crackel, West Point: A Bicentennial History (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002), 107-35.

⁴ Francis H. Smith, West Point Fifty Years Ago: An Address Delivered Before the Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, at the Annual Reunion, June 12, 1879 (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1879), 6; Smith III, Old Spex, 10.

⁵ Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the United States Military Academy, 1833 (West Point: United States Military Academy, 1833), 6, 19.

⁶ Smith, West Point Fifty Years Ago, 3.

⁷ Peter M. Molloy, "Mechanical Education and the Young Republic: West Point as America's Ecole Polytechnique, 1802-1833" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1975), 398-416.

⁸ Smith, West Point Fifty Years Ago, 7-15.

⁹ Smith III, Old Spex, 13. Smith served at Fort Trumbull in Connecticut, Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland, and Fort Severn near Annapolis, Maryland, between October 1833 and October 1834.

¹⁰ Ibid. There is no record indicating who exactly brought the position to Smith's attention. At the time of Smith's hiring, Hampden-Sydney, a Presbyterian college, was deeply involved in controversy between the "Old Light" and "New Light" factions of the Church and which would control the school. Appointing an Episcopalian professor avoided further hostility between the two factions.

¹¹ Francis H. Smith, "Hampden-Sydney Fifty Years Ago," Hampden-Sydney Magazine 10 (December 1893), 11.

¹² James Axtell, "The Death of the Liberal Arts College," History of Education Quarterly 11 (Winter 1971), 340; Douglas Sloan, "Harmony, Chaos and Consensus: The American College Curriculum," Teachers College Record 73 (1970), 204-41.

¹³ Francis H. Smith quoted in Herbert C. Bradshaw, History of Hampden-Sydney College: From the Beginnings to the Year 1856 (Durham, N.C.: Seeman Printery, 1976), 238.

¹⁴ Francis H. Smith, History of the Virginia Military Institute: Its Building and Rebuilding (Lynchburg: J. P. Bell & Co., 1912), 241.

¹⁵ John L. Brinkley, On This Hill : A Narrative History of Hampden-Sydney College, 1774-1994 (Hampden-Sydney, Va.: Hampden-Sydney College, 1994), 160-61.

¹⁶ Smith, History of VMI, 44-45.

¹⁷ Ibid., 52.

¹⁸ James Lee Conrad, The Young Lions: Confederate Cadets at War (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Publishing Company, 1997), 5.

- ¹⁹ Richard McMurry, Virginia Military Institute Alumni in the Civil War (Lynchburg: H. E. Howard, Inc., 1999), 12.
- ²⁰ Edmund Pendleton, "Early Days at the VMI," The Bomb [VMI Yearbook], (Lexington: Virginia Military Institute, 1896), 15.
- ²¹ Francis H. Smith, quoted in William Couper, One Hundred Years of VMI (Richmond: Garrett & Massie, 1939), 69.
- ²² Pendleton, "Early Days," The Bomb, 14.
- ²³ Cadet Valentine C. Saunders to Father and Mother, November 23, 1839, Cadet Letters, VMI Archives.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Frederick Rudolph, The American College and University: A History (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 134-35.
- ²⁶ Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 90; Crackel, West Point, 95-96.
- ²⁷ Malloy, "Mechanical Education," 402.
- ²⁸ Florian Cajori, The Teaching and History of Mathematics in the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), 57-84.
- ²⁹ Smith, West Point Fifty Years Ago, 7. Smith admitted that he "learned to respect" Professors Davies for his talents and fidelity but implied that the difficulty of the course prevent his cadets from truly adoring him. It was not until years later that Smith "knew him in his true character, and then learned not only to admire, but to love him."
- ³⁰ Cajori, Teaching and History of Mathematics, 120.

³¹ James L. Morrison, “The Best School in the World”: West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866 (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), 92; Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 90.

³² Smith to William C. Rives, 11 June 1846, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³³ Smith to J. B. Cary, 17 April 1849, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁴ Smith to William H. Richardson, 30 November 1848, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁵ Green, “Books and Bayonets, 76. Green asserts that the “central component” of military academy curriculums was their “rejection of classical studies.” While Smith and VMI sought to separate the Institute from the accepted classical curriculum, it did not reject the classics outright.

³⁶ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 111; Semi-Annual Report of the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute, January 1842, VMI Archives.

³⁷ Smith to William C. Rives, 11 June 1846, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁸ Morrison, The Best School in the World, 92.

³⁹ VMI Board of Visitors, Board of Visitors Minutes, 28 June 1850, VMI Archives.

⁴⁰ “An Excursion to the Natural Bridge,” Southern Literary Messenger, 20 (March 1854), 169.

⁴¹ Morrison, Best School in the World, 93.

⁴² Semi-Annual Report of the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute, 31 December 1841, VMI Archives.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Robert F. Hunter and Edwin L. Dooley, Jr., Claudius Crozet: French Engineer in America, 1790-1864 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 16-30; Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 97-99; Crackel, West Point, 79, 97.

⁴⁵ Smith originally entitled the course “Engineering and Science of War” from 1839-1845.

⁴⁶ Dennis Hart Mahan, An elementary treatise on advanced-guard, out-post, and detachment service of troops: and the manner of posting and handling them in presence of an enemy. With a historical sketch of the rise and progress of tactics, &c., &c. intended as a supplement to the system of tactics adopted for the military service of the United States, and especially for the use of officers and volunteers (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1847). Those who utilized this manual typically shortened the title simply to Mahan’s Outpost.

⁴⁷ VMI Semi-Annual Report, 31 December 1841, VMI Archives; Morrison, Best School in the World, 94-95.

⁴⁸ VMI Semi-Annual Report of the Virginia Military Institute, 4 July 1850, VMI Archives.

⁴⁹ George P. Schmidt, “Intellectual Crosscurrents in American Colleges, 1825-1855,” American Historical Review 42 (October 1936), 165-66.

⁵⁰ James Edward Scanlon, Randolph Macon College: A Southern History, 1825-1967 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 73.

⁵¹ Melvin Urofsky, "Reforms and Response: The Yale Report of 1828," History of Education Quarterly 5 (March 1965), 53-67. The faculty of Yale University published a report in 1828 reinforcing their full support for teaching the classical curriculum, claiming that only the classical languages could provide the necessary "disciplines and furniture of the mind," (p. 58).

⁵² Frederick Rudolph, Mark Hopkins and the Log: Williams College, 1836-1872 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 45.

⁵³ "West Point and the United States Military Academy," The New England Magazine 3 (October 1832), 272.

⁵⁴ VMI Semi-Annual Report, 4 July 1850.

⁵⁵ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 11.

⁵⁶ Smith, College Reform, 27.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Morrison, Best School in the World, 112.

⁵⁹ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 12.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 14-15.

⁶¹ Smith, College Reform, 29.

⁶² Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 17-18.

⁶³ Francis H. Smith, Introductory Address to the Corps of Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute on the Resumption of Academic Duties, September 2nd, 1856

(Richmond: Macfarlane & Fergusson, 1856), 16.

⁶⁴ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 15.

⁶⁵ Smith, College Reform, 32.

⁶⁶ VMI Board of Visitors, Board of Visitors Minutes, 22 June 1848, VMI Archives.

⁶⁷ Roger Geiger, "College As It Was In The Mid-Nineteenth Century," History of Higher Education Annual 16 (1996), 106.

⁶⁸ Ollinger Crenshaw, General Lee's College: The Rise and Growth of Washington and Lee University (New York: Random House, 1969), 84.

⁶⁹ Thomas Jefferson Wertebaker, Princeton, 1746-1896 (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1946), 237-38.

⁷⁰ Morison, Best School in the World, 106.

⁷¹ Smith, College Reform, 17.

⁷² Smith to Nathaniel Alexander, 7 September 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷³ Couper, One Hundred Years, 81; Thomas Davis, The Corps Roots the Loudest: A History of VMI Athletics (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1986), 1-2.

⁷⁴ Archibald Henderson, The Campus of the First State University (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), 109-18.

⁷⁵ Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 5.

⁷⁶ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 104.

⁷⁷ Couper, One Hundred Years, 129.

⁷⁸ VMI Semi-Annual Report, January 1842, VMI Archives.

⁷⁹ Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 93. Alfred E. Church was a favorite student of Charles Davies who worked as his assistant after he graduated from the Academy in 1828 and eventually replaced him as Chair of Mathematics in 1837. See also, Morrison, Best School in the World, 51-51, 59-60.

⁸⁰ Smith to Reverend John Grammer, 24 November 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸¹ Smith, College Reform, 39-40.

⁸² Virginia Fitzgerald, "A Southern College Boy Eight Years Ago," South Atlantic Quarterly 20 (1921), 239.

⁸³ Smith to J. B. B. Baber, 11 September 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁴ Geiger, "College As It Was," 106.

⁸⁵ Paul B. Barringer, James M. Garnett, and Rosewell Page, eds., University of Virginia: Its History, Influence, Equipment, and Characteristics (New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1904), 149.

⁸⁶ Smith to Douglas B. Layne 11 September 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁷ Smith to Thomas C. Gordon, 31 January 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁸ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 101.

⁸⁹ Rudolph, Mark Hopkins, 120-21. Historian Frederick Rudolph admits that Williams College's discipline logs were unclear, ambiguous, and inconsistent.

⁹⁰ Schmidt, The Old Time College President, 82-83.

⁹¹ Smith, College Reform 27.

⁹² Ibid., 46-47.

⁹³ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁵ Morrison, Best School in the World, 106.

⁹⁶ Rudolph, Mark Hopkins, 59-60.

⁹⁷ The merit roll in VMI Semi-Annual Reports showed rank in each subject and conduct so the lowest merit score (an average in a cadet's ranked standing in each category) constituted the best performance.

⁹⁸ Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 2-3.

⁹⁹ Crenshaw, General Lee's College, 99.

¹⁰⁰ Smith to B. W. S. Cabell, 2 August 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰¹ Smith to A.B. Hopkins, 11 December 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰² Smith to Daniel Smith, 28 August 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰³ Smith to Evelina S. Smith, 25 February 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 16.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph H. Chenoweth to L. Chenoweth, 30 December 1857, Chenoweth Papers, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Smith to John Thompson, 1 February 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁷ VMI Semi-Annual Report (Superintendent's Draft), 22 June 1848.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 18-19.

¹⁰⁹ Smith to James L. Ransom, 3 April 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁰ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 165-78. Green posits that military schools separated parental authority from military authority.

¹¹¹ Smith to R.J. Blackburn, 16 August 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹² Smith to M.L. Eliason, 18 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹³ Smith to Martha Saunders, 4 August 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁴ Smith to B. W. S. Cabell, 2 August 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁵ Smith to R. T. Daniel, 13 March 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁶ Smith to James A. Snead, 5 June 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁷ Smith to Ann S. Moorman, 24 October 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁸ Smith to J. B. B. Baber, 23 October 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁹ Smith to James S. Barbour, 19 November 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁰ Smith to John M. Otey, 11 April 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²¹ Smith to C.F. Fisher, 12 January 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²² VMI Semi-Annual Report, 6 January 1845.

¹²³ Smith to Thomas J. Green, 30 October 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁴ Smith to James S. Barbour, 19 November 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁵ Smith to James E. Blankenship, 29 April 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁶ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 18.

¹²⁷ John S. Wise, The End of an Era (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899), 244.

¹²⁸ Smith to William H. Richardson, 16 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁹ Schmidt, Old Time College President, 82-83; Rudolph, Mark Hopkins, 59-60. Hopkins used kindness to curb discipline problems and boasted how at Williams College, "love and influence replaced fines and prowling tutors." No evidence demonstrates that this method was any more effective than conventional punishments utilized at other institutions.

¹³⁰ Schmidt, Old Time College President, 89.

¹³¹ Edwin L. Dooley, "A New Look at the Old Guard," VMI Alumni Review 48 (Winter 1972), 9-11.

¹³² VMI Semi-Annual Report, 4 July 1848; Semi-Annual Report, 4 July 1854.

¹³³ Michael Sugrue, "We Desired Our Future Rulers To Be Educated Men: South Carolina College, the Defense of Slavery, and The Development of Secessionist Politics," History of Higher Education Annual 14 (1994), 45.

¹³⁴ E. Merton Coulter, College Life in the Old South (New York: Macmillan Company, 1928), 83; Schmidt, Old Time College President, 81.

¹³⁵ Smith to Hilary Harris, 23 April 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith severely prosecuted any cadet who might show any disrespect to the faculty through word or gesture, no matter how trivial. He complained to one parent about his son's disrespect towards one professor, "I do not

think his conduct has been marked by proper respect to his professors. A report was recently made against him by Major Gilham for hallowing at him as was passing his window. . . I spoke with him very plainly shewing him the impropriety of the slightest disrespectful conduct towards the officers of the Institution.”

¹³⁶ Edgar Denton, “The Formative Years of the United States Military Academy, 1775-1833” (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 1964), 177.

¹³⁷ Morrison, Best School in the World, 103-09.

¹³⁸ Rudolph, American College and University, 104.

¹³⁹ Smith to Henry S. Langhorne, 16 July 1853, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Smith, West Point Fifty Years Ago, 3.

CHAPTER III

SMITH AS EDUCATIONAL REFORMER

Once Francis H. Smith succeeded in shaping VMI's curriculum and discipline system to the best of his satisfaction in the early 1840s, he set his sights on larger goals. The educational ideals he promoted at his own institution, he believed, could easily be incorporated structurally into other educational venues. Since many Americans regarded West Point as the nation's most esteemed and advanced institution of higher learning, Smith believed its basic tenets could and should eventually be spread into schoolhouse and college in the country so all of the nation's pupils could enjoy similar success. In the process, Smith attempted to redefine what techniques made teaching effective and how the right kind of education could produce the most useful result to benefit a society, particularly one being driven by new technology and expanding markets. Formal military education, like that practiced at West Point, demonstrated the production of better officers. Depending upon the key elements from that education, a practical, scientific curriculum and a disciplined learning environment, could lead to disciplined students and better graduates throughout the land.

In the mind of Smith and many other American educators, Europe remained the global standard for educational excellence. This held particularly true in the field of mathematic and scientific education where Europe, particularly Great Britain and France, boasted the world's top scholars who authored nearly all of the quality textbooks used in American schools. Even the U.S. Military Academy was modeled primarily after the famous French military and scientific institution, the Ecole Polytechnique.¹

Smith typified those who used Europe as the model for excellence in education and reflected this in his idolization of legendary English schoolmaster Thomas Arnold. He served as headmaster of England's famous Rugby School from 1827 to 1842 where he earned a reputation as one of the premiere educational reformers of his day. Arnold's innovations in educational discipline inspired the foundation of Smith's pedagogical philosophy and practice. He preached the congruence of discipline and learning, the moral undertone needed to instill discipline, curbing student extravagance, recruiting parental intervention, promoting physical exercise and most importantly, calling for a firm comprehension of adolescent behavior.² Smith embraced his candid attitude toward dealing with those students who refused to learn. On more than one occasion when advising other educators, Smith recited his favorite citation from Arnold's philosophy, "Till a man learns that the first, second, and third duty of a schoolmaster is to get rid of unpromising subjects, a great public school will never be what it might be, and what it ought to be."³ For his entire career, Arnold represented the standard that Smith labored to live up to regarding his teaching and his discipline and he encouraged many of his educational colleagues to follow Arnold's example.⁴

The continual pursuit of the high standards set by his mentors, Arnold and Sylvanus Thayer, drove Smith to maintain a rigorous daily schedule. Nearly twenty years of constant dedication to his job without any real vacation began to wear on Smith mentally and physically by the late 1850s. He never took a day for rest other than the Sabbath and only took trips for official business for the Institute. His health became increasingly poor with the stress of managing the ever-expanding operation of the

school. He had mentioned as early as 1850 the possibility of taking a break but never followed through on the notion. Smith had himself partially to blame for his deteriorating condition. Not only did he force himself to endure long hours of administrative duties every day, he also refused to remove himself from those duties. In 1850, when an opportunity to take a leave of absence came up, he turned it down, convinced that the Institute would not be able to function properly without him at the helm. Finally, the Board of Visitors agreed to fund a leave of absence for him to travel to Europe for six months. The trip would accomplish the dual-fold purpose of allowing Smith the opportunity for “recruiting his health and strength” after nearly twenty years of service without a leave as well as serve as a fact-finding mission of European higher education. Carrying a letter of introduction from Governor Henry A. Wise, he sailed for his six-month tour of the continent on 9 June 1858. During his trip, Smith visited the universities of Cambridge and Oxford and the Military School at Addiscombe in England; the St. Cyr military academy, the Ecole Polytechnique and the Institute of Arts and Crafts in France; the Royal Military Academy of Sardinia; and the Agricultural School of Germany at Hohenheim.

To be sure, Smith was not the first academic to travel to Europe in order to observe firsthand the world’s finest educational institutions. Two of his closest mentors at West Point, Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer and Professor Dennis Hart Mahan, had both visited the continent early in their careers and brought back to the Academy fascinating innovations in mathematical and engineering education, particularly from the Ecole.⁵ Smith surpassed his contemporaries by translating his European experience into

a program to reform American education as a whole. Immediately upon his return to the Institute, he went to work assembling his copious notes into a 54-page pamphlet called A Special Report on Scientific Education in Europe. This essay not only reviewed the findings of his trip but more importantly served as an appeal to educators everywhere to draw from the European example by placing a greater emphasis on mathematics and scientific education. Smith compiled his Special Report to do more than simply to brief the state government on the activities during this leave of absence. He carefully crafted the pamphlet to serve as a manifesto of educational reform. After summarizing the details of his trip, the report listed several recommendations as to how the use of European models could improve VMI and potentially other American institutions. The suggestions included introducing modern languages, and creating better facilities for studying agriculture, engineering and sciences, improving the standard and attitude towards scientific instruction.⁶ Upon the completion of the report, Smith ordered thousands of copies to be printed from his publisher, intent on sending his findings to anyone who might have a remote interest in improving education. Professors, parents, politicians, administrators, classmates, officers, and alumni most likely found the phrase, “I’ve enclosed a copy of my Special Report on Scientific Education in Europe, which may interest you,” at the bottom of their latest correspondence from Smith in 1859. Nearly everyone who corresponded with him upon his return from trip received his Special Report, spreading his findings throughout Virginia and the South.

Smith's European trip also invigorated plans that he had been compiling for nearly a decade regarding agricultural education. Although not a farmer himself, Smith kept his finger on the pulse of the growing agricultural awareness movement in Virginia. Celebrated planter Edmund Ruffin drove much of this movement within the Old Dominion. Largely a self-educated agriculturalist, Ruffin labored endlessly to raise the common farmer's level of knowledge throughout the state by publishing an agricultural journal, writing essays on his farming experiments, and organizing Virginia's first agricultural society. He soon became close friends with Smith when his son enrolled as a cadet at VMI in 1849. During their friendship, both men agreed on the necessity of establishing an agricultural college within Virginia. Ruffin shared this suggestion with another of Smith's close friends, William H. Richardson, Virginia's Adjutant General, a member of VMI's Board of Visitors and parent whose son graduated from the Institute in 1843. Richardson also published newspaper articles advocating agricultural education and became the first president of the state agricultural society that Ruffin created.⁷ As an official in the state government, he followed Smith's encouragement and pushed a bill through the legislature to create a professorship of physical science at VMI in 1851. The duties of this professor included teaching courses in general chemistry, mineralogy, geology, and agricultural chemistry, making the Institute the first college in the South to teach the latter. Building on this success would prove to be a greater challenge.

Smith and Richardson spent the remainder of the decade battling with state legislators over funds to create a separate agricultural professorship at VMI and decide on which school in the state would earn the privilege of the new agricultural college.

Just as their case with the Virginia legislature looked hopeless, Smith's tireless campaign drew the sympathy of Philip St. George Cocke, the man who had financed his trip to Europe and who was himself one of the state's most wealthy planters. After hearing of Smith's plight with the indecisive legislature, the loyal Cocke bestowed a private gift of \$20,000 to establish an agricultural school at the Institute.⁸ A noted Virginia politician turned agriculturalist named Willoughby Newton, who had assisted Smith and his friend Henry Ruffner in the state agricultural society, soon supplemented Cocke's gift with another \$10,000 of his own money to support this project.⁹

During Smith's absence in Europe, Major William Gilham bolstered Smith's campaign to promote agricultural education. Gilham served as the aforementioned chair in physical science and the creator of the first course in agricultural chemistry taught in any Southern college. Since 1849, he had planned a purely agricultural professorship to accompany the proposed agricultural school but never saw it come to fruition because of political infighting within the House of Delegates.¹⁰ This did not deter Gilham as he continued to press his cause for promoting more scientific agriculture. In 1858, he compiled notes summarizing his thoughts on the agricultural school plan and upon Smith's return published a report which the superintendent attached as an appendix to his Report on Scientific Education in Europe.¹¹ Many of Smith and Gilham's ideas regarding the need for such an education in American colleges came nearly a decade before the famous Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862.¹²

The combination of the legislature's generous donation with the enlightenment from his European tour ignited Smith's mission to make his institution the most

educationally progressive in the nation. He intended to expand his small military academy into the state's "General Scientific School."¹³ This ambitious plan called for a reorganization of VMI's entire curriculum. Cadets who now entered the Institute would take a standardized course of study for two years consisting of mathematics, English, and drawing. Passing these courses stood as prerequisite for progressing into their choice of the Institute's three new "specialized schools of application" in Agriculture, Civil Engineering, and the Fine Arts. In spite of this planned academic expansion, Smith emphasized that the core discipline of the school would remain unchanged as the "habits of order, police, and obedience to lawful authority" were "important elements of character for every good citizen," particularly those who would seek employment and eventually apply the skills they acquired in this new academic system.¹⁴ This plan culminated a life's work by creating, in his mind, the ultimate scientific institution, borrowing the best from the European educational tradition while still retaining the ideological foundation regarding curriculum and discipline he established in 1839.

Each of these schools in Smith's plan (Agriculture, Engineering, and Fine Arts) incorporated the key reforms he had learned from his European trip. The School of Agriculture represented the culmination of nearly a decade of labor by Smith, Cocke, Gilham, and Ruffin. When outlining the structure of this school to the state government, Smith envisioned an institution in the mold of the Hohenheim Agriculture School in Germany. He proposed an audacious plan: the purchase of an experimental farm, an agricultural museum for the collection of seed, plant and root specimens, and a facility to develop new farming implements. Cadets who enrolled in this School of Agriculture

would take a remarkably sophisticated set of courses in botany, veterinary science, agricultural chemistry, dietetics, toxicology, and zoology. No college in the United States offered or proposed such an *avant-garde* course in the field of science. Smith aspired for the School of Civil Engineering to rival the Ecole Polytechnique with its specialization in the mechanical arts. Both years in the course of study would focus almost exclusively on learning the skills for what Americans called internal improvements. Classes covered the construction of roads, bridges, tunneling, canals, railroads, and the like. Smith also called for the extensive use of engineering models as he had seen utilized at the Military School at Addiscombe in England.¹⁵ Although the School of Fine Arts sought to bring “dignity and honor to the professional education of an artist,” Smith’s plan defined the occupation in purely scientific terms. The fine artists of this school would engage in a course of study focused on developing the skills of architectural, industrial and topographical drawing. Yet, Smith also planned courses in poetry, painting, modeling and sculpture that would “exercise an important influence in cultivating the taste of an educated gentlemen.” Few antebellum college presidents in America ever attempted a reorganization this ambitious but Smith returned from Europe determined that his institution would no longer trail behind those of Europe and would set the example for other schools in America to advance their curriculums in the mechanical arts and natural sciences.

Since VMI’s establishment, Smith labored to expose his cadets to the most advanced scientific research as his resources would allow. Often this came in the form of inviting prominent guest speakers to address cadets on new scientific issues. He had

suggested this method in his Report but actually had been making it a practice for almost a decade. Cadet James L. Hubbard noted in a letter home his appreciation for a lecture given by a Professor Hale on a new branch of science called “electro biology.”¹⁶ In 1860, Edmund Ruffin donated several works on the topic to VMI’s library, earning him an honorary membership in both the Society of Cadets and the Dialectic Society.¹⁷ Smith also took opportunities to take his students to scientific exhibitions. Cadet George Toole recalled in 1855 the Corps of Cadets traveling to Richmond and Petersburg to attend the state agricultural fairs there where the cadets could learn about the subject outside of the classroom in spite of the “noise from the omnibuses and hacks.”¹⁸

Many of Smith’s accomplishments in educational reform were made possible by his network of friends associated with his alma mater, the U.S. Military Academy. Historian William Skelton notes this group’s unique connection and how “A variety of informal ties interacted with social origins and career patterns to unify the officer corps. Whatever the academic merits of a West Point education, four years at the Military Academy had the effect of socializing young men into military life, providing a web of friendships and shared experience which bound them to a unique milieu.”¹⁹ These bonds also carried over to those who left the Army as well. Little attention is given in secondary works to the exploits and contributions of USMA grads in peacetime after graduation, particularly in the field of mathematic and scientific education.²⁰ Smith had made several attempts in the 1840s to create an alumni association for West Point graduates. Whenever time allowed in his busy schedule, he always did his best to keep in contact with friends from the Academy, both those who stayed in the military and those

who had returned to civilian life. He also developed close friendships with his former professors at West Point, as his relationship with them changed from that of a student to an academic colleague. These connections with those in the West Point community, both faculty and alumni, would prove to be the most beneficial to Smith as an academic reformer. He did not find himself as the sole voice in the campaign to incorporate more scientific instruction and student discipline in America's colleges. Several Academy graduates, like Smith, who chose not to make the military their career and dedicate their lives to higher education shared many of his educational beliefs. These men created an intricate network of communication that facilitated their goal of promoting education based on sciences and mathematics throughout the country.

Smith maintained an active intellectual exchange with his alma mater as he sought to emulate it in structure and daily function. Naturally, Smith continued to craft his pedagogy with the guidance from his old Academy professors most notably Charles Davies, William H. C. Bartlett, Albert T. Bledsoe, and Dennis Hart Mahan. He also relied heavily on the West Point faculty for logistical support, particularly when getting the Institute started with limited state funds. Throughout the 1840s, the Academy supplied the Institute with various books, weapons, engineering apparatuses and uniform patterns. For example, Lieutenant Richard S. Smith (Class of 1834), an assistant professor of mathematics at West Point, provided VMI with topographical maps and overcoat designs.²¹ Yet Francis H. Smith's own classmates proved most crucial in this respect. At West Point, Captain George Cullum, Smith's former roommate, published a pamphlet on bridge engineering, and delivered several copies to the Institute in order to

bolster his ever-expanding engineering curriculum. Classmate Henry DuPont supplied all of VMI's uniform cloth at a reduced rate as a favor to his old friend. "I take an earnest pride in every development of genius which our class of 1833 exhibits," Smith wrote Cullum, and embraced any opportunity when his classmates' successes could aid in the operation of his own institution.²²

Smith also initiated relationships with Academy faculty whom he did not know so well but shared common interests. Smith shared advice with the USMA commandant, Captain Bradford Alden (Class of 1831), on dealing with cadet discipline and privileges.²³ He solicited Captain Charles Hackley, West Point Class of 1829 and professor of mathematics, a man he hardly knew when they were cadets, and established a professional rapport on their mutual interests in publishing mathematics textbooks. Realizing they had so much in common regarding their pursuit of improving the study of advanced mathematics, Smith suggested that Hackley should visit the Institute in hopes that they might share ideas. "Kindred pursuits would have made a visit from you most agreeable," said Smith, "for we might have compared notes on math with mutual profit."²⁴ This cordial statement encapsulated the essence of Smith's "West Point network." Since alumni of the Academy constituted a cadre of some of the country's best scientific minds, he endeavored to connect with as many of them as possible to exchange intellectual and academic ideas in order to improve the quality of education overall.

Several of Smith's West Point colleagues followed him into the career of higher education after leaving the Army. Having all been educated in the Thayer system, they

shared similar ideologies regarding the implementation of an advanced mathematic and scientific education. Their communication, much like that between Smith and the Academy, represented a significant exchange of educational ideals regarding teaching methods, textbooks, discipline, and logistics. Moreover, their network also ensured they were placed in the best academic positions and the Thayer system of math was taught at many of the nation's best institutions. Roswell Park (Class of 1831) at the University of Pennsylvania, Edward C. Ross (Class of 1821) at Kenyon College and Henry Lockwood (Class of 1836) at the U.S. Naval Academy wrote to Smith throughout the antebellum period to discuss their mathematical craft. When Smith attempted to compile names of American mathematicians for his article on the history of mathematics, he sought out all of their suggestions for including "names of our West Point friends."²⁵ One of Smith's closet friends, fellow Virginian Benjamin S. Ewell (Class of 1832), also pursued a career in mathematics education where he benefited from connections with former graduates. His biographer notes how many of the same Academy alumni (Davies, Church, Ross, and Mahan), inspired by the special "bonds of brotherhood that lasted for a lifetime" had offered Ewell advice on textbooks, curriculum and teaching.²⁶ The common cause of promoting practical and scientific education united these men together long after they left the Academy and the Army.

This West Point network also served as a useful set of connections when searching for academic employment. Smith himself hired two Academy graduates, William Gilham and Thomas J. Jackson, from a pool of candidates consisting of only West Point alums. His influence and testimonials also secured positions for his other

colleagues from his alma mater such as his friend Benjamin S. Ewell. Smith swayed the boards of both Hampden-Sydney College and Washington College to hire him.²⁷ When the University of Virginia sought a new chair for its mathematics department in 1841, Smith launched a correspondence campaign to ensure that a West Point graduate would receive the appointment to such a prestigious position in the academic community. “So persuaded of the erroneous system at the University in respect to the mode of teaching mathematics that no one is more anxious than I to have a graduate of West Point appointed,” he wrote to one classmate.²⁸ He placed all of his energy into a campaign to hire Edward Ross, currently teaching at Kenyon College in Ohio. Smith encouraged Ross to secure recommendations from West Point professor Dennis Hart Mahan and Commanding General of the Army Winfield Scott in order to improve his application. Meanwhile, Smith wrote his friends on the Board of Visitors and faculty at the University of Virginia attesting that he “never knew a more perfect teacher” than Ross.²⁹ While this effort aided the cause of a good friend and fellow alumnus, Smith’s intentions served a higher purpose. Having a West Point graduate holding the mathematics chair at one of the nation’s premiere colleges would bolster the campaign to promote a more serious commitment to scientific learning in America. With professors like himself, Ross, Ewell and others preaching Thayer’s pedagogical gospel, this cadre of reformers could change from whom the nation learned and appreciated the concept of a more practical education.

This campaign for Ross became complicated when Smith’s classmate, William Henry Sidell, also solicited his assistance in pursuing the same position. Torn between

the two, Smith reluctantly advised Sidell against his applying for the headship because of his lack of experience and admitted that he had already pledged his efforts to Ross. Yet having a mathematician of his caliber interested in the teaching profession proved too good of an opportunity to ignore. He encouraged Sidell to apply for a position at Hampden-Sydney which would soon be vacated by another of West Point graduate, Benjamin S. Ewell (Class of 1832), who intended to leave to teach at Transylvania University in Kentucky. Smith advised that when writing his friends Professor Robert Branch and President William Maxwell to be sure to mention that “you were a classmate of mine.” Finally, Smith blessed him as a new participant in the broader crusade to inculcate the West Point system into the American college. “I should be glad to have you upon this field for the old system of instruction has so deranged the public mind that opposition meets me on every side.”³⁰

Smith also benefited from his friendship with Phillip St. George Cocke, Class of 1832, who served as president of VMI’s Board of Visitors from 1850-52 and 1858-61. Cocke subscribed wholeheartedly to Smith’s vision for the Institute by proving the finances for Smith’s trip to Europe and starting the endowment for VMI’s agricultural school in order to make it a first-rate scientific institution like their alma mater. He acquired the services of his own architect, Alexander Davis, to design and build a new barracks for VMI in 1851 and led the efforts to raise the money to fund it in the state legislature. Cocke also kept close ties with the Academy in the hopes of making VMI a better military institution. In 1847, he visited West Point on a fact-finding mission and contributed several suggestions to Smith from what he saw at the Academy, including

converting part of the Lexington arsenal into a gymnasium for exercise during inclement weather and providing bathing facilities for cadets on the campus.³¹ Historians Albert K. Cocke and A. Robert Kuhlthau conclude that Cocke brought to the Board “wealth, enthusiasm and vision” and “felt that VMI had the potential to become the great polytechnic institute of the South.”³²

Smith also sought collegial relationships with the handful of other like-minded professors who never attended the Academy. University of Virginia graduate Pike Powers proved to be the most valuable friend that he had outside of his West Point circle. Their relationship began strangely as Smith originally opposed Powers as Charles Bonycastle’s permanent replacement as the mathematics chair of the university, lobbying heavily instead for West Point crony, Edward Ross. Realizing that Powers had studied under the respected Bonycastle at the university, Smith developed a friendship with him as the two shared a mutual passion for mathematics. When Powers founded a school in Staunton, Virginia, he and Smith corresponded regularly, exchanging advice on teaching, recommending books and challenging each other with advanced mathematical problems. Smith soon appreciated Powers’ abilities as a mathematician so much that he drew him within his circle of West Point associates where Powers actually made valuable contributions. “I shewed your demonstration in the Binomial to Professors Church and Bartlett at West Point. They both considered in original and distinguished for its great simplicity.”³³

Although none of Smith’s West Point friends won the appointment to the University of Virginia, he did extend his friendship to the man who did. James Joseph

Sylvester, a renowned English mathematician, accepted the position in the fall of 1841 and received a warm letter of welcome from Smith. He extended his assistance to the new professor and recommended textbooks for him to adopt.³⁴ When Sylvester resigned after just one year, the headship would be controlled by two West Point graduates, Edward Courtney (Class of 1821) and Albert T. Bledsoe (Class of 1830) until the Civil War.³⁵ Smith continued to express his appreciation to the small handful of professors who promoted reform in mathematical education in the same manner of Thayer. With Academy alumni controlling the mathematics department, Smith maintained an amiable relationship with the administration of the university, pledging his admiration and support.³⁶ In 1842, he wrote to John Farrar, professor of mathematics at Harvard College who, like Smith and the Academy professors, pressed for the use of French authors instead of the English and translated several French texts himself.³⁷ As a tribute to his contributions, Smith included his name in a biographical collection of famous American mathematicians in his article on the history of mathematics.³⁸

During the antebellum period West Point graduates and like-minded academics created a blossoming academic community committed to the goal of improving the quality of mathematic and scientific education in America. Francis H. Smith served as one of the major leaders within this community, actively using letters, pamphlets and job placement to promote their educational philosophy. Smith also played an important role in another aspect of their educational movement in the field of textbook publication. Much like his reforms in VMI's course of study, he subscribed the premise of adopting the best of European math education into American classrooms when authoring his

collection of texts. Like his mentor Charles Davies, Smith made his mark as a publisher by primarily translating complicated French textbooks into English for use in American classrooms. He reflected this in his lifelong admiration of mathematician Jean-Baptiste Biot and translated his Treatise on Analytical Geometry in 1840. Smith embraced not just the book itself but the entire methodology that Biot promoted. He explained to Pike Powers, “I esteem his [Biot’s] work the most valuable mental discipline of any I have ever taught. To appreciate it, the system must be viewed as a whole and hence while teaching my classes, I keep constantly before me the unity of the system.”³⁹ In 1846, he published his own work, An Elementary Treatise on Algebra, originally intended solely for use at VMI since he could not find an acceptable work on the subject in English. “The truth is that in this age of easy text books, so much is done for the pupil by the author, that no room is left for the development of the mind,” he lamented again to Powers.⁴⁰ Smith made it his goal to incorporate complex European mathematical instruction into the most understandable yet challenging way possible. “I have labored to adapt it to the dullest mind, so as to spare the teacher the constant effort which is oftentimes required in the use of the ordinary textbooks,” he wrote to another teacher.⁴¹

The writing and distribution of textbooks invoked as many discussions on publishing as teaching or discipline in these professorial networks. Smith and his associates conferred about which publishers to use, the types of math problems that worked most effectively, kinds of analytical methods best suited the classroom, which new books had come out, and what needed to be published. He discussed these issues mostly with West Point authors, since they initially contributed the most to the

promotion of math education, but he eventually enjoyed many exchanges with other intellectuals such as Powers. These intellectual circles continually exchanged texts between fellow professors and superintendents, asked each other to review them for journals, sought each other's advice and corrections, requested endorsements for new books, or asked that they be adopted into their curriculum. While many schools sought Smith's advice or the services of his graduates, several others adopted the textbooks he published into their curriculums. The University of Virginia, University of North Carolina, and William and Mary, for example, all adopted his Algebra while Washington College, Hampden-Sydney, University of Virginia as well as countless other smaller preparatory academies employed his Analytic Geometry.⁴² When releasing a new edition of his geometry textbook in 1860, Smith advised his publisher to distribute copies to the following individuals:⁴³

Major D. H. Hill	Charlotte, North Carolina
William D. Stuart	Richmond, Virginia
Prof. Eustis	Cambridge Scientific School, Harvard University
Dr. Garland	University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Prof. Venable	Colombia, South Carolina
Prof. of Math	Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Prof. Fristoe	Washington City, D.C.
Rev. Leonidas Polk	New Orleans, Louisiana
Rev. S. H. Elliott	Savannah, Georgia
Mons. J. B. Biot	College de France, Paris

Utilizing all of these books in his own curriculum, Smith used his texts as a standard for those cadets wishing to place into an advanced class at VMI. All cadets who could demonstrate the ability to solve problems in Smith's algebra text and speak basic French could enter the Institute's third class instead of fourth.

While textbook publishing brought Smith and many mathematicians together, it also drove some apart. Charles Davies held the intellectual monopoly on textbook publishing in America during his early years at West Point until his former pupils began compiling their own versions. Benjamin Ewell admitted that a new calculus book released by Davies' own personal assistant at the Academy, Albert E. Church, "far surpassed" the one written by the master.⁴⁴ In 1848, an even greater controversy erupted between Smith and his hero Davies. When Smith received a copy of Davies' new University Arithmetic, he noticed "too much similarity in the statistical examples" to his own work on arithmetic published three years previous. Davies responded by accusing Smith of plagiarizing one of his original textbooks on the subject. For nearly a month, the former master and pupil supported their accusations and defended their book's originality in a vehement exchange of correspondence. Smith tried to keep their long relationship in perspective by writing to Davies that he "still respect[ed] you as my mentor," but the two never corresponded again after this altercation.⁴⁵

In spite of this fallout, Smith enjoyed increasing prominence within the West Point circle as VMI continued to expand its academic programs and enrollment. His success inspired other Academy graduates to follow his example and create their own military institutions on the model of the Institute. But before embarking on this

endeavor, each of them sought out Smith first to seek his advice and guidance. Most of these new superintendents of these new military academies had graduated from West Point around the same time as Smith. As products of the same Thayer educational system, they understood its effectiveness and hoped to incorporate its tenets with the same effectiveness as Smith. Although many of these graduates had never officially met, they often used the common bond of their alma mater to serve as a means of introduction. Colonel Robert T. P. Allen (class of 1834) had never met Smith before but reminded him that they spent two years together at the Academy as an introduction to his letter of request. He continued to explain how he “endeavor[ed] to procure the establishment of a ‘Kentucky Military Institute’ on the same basis as yours [institution],” and asked Smith to send him copies of VMI’s regulations that he might use to help structure his new school.⁴⁶

VMI’s establishment in 1839 inspired South Carolina to create its own state military institution in 1842 modeled after the Institute. After sending an envoy to VMI in 1842 to observe and gather information on its operation, the state legislature passed a bill creating the South Carolina Military Academy that December.⁴⁷ After SCMA’s first superintendent, William F. Graham, died unexpectedly in 1844, West Point graduate Major Richard W. Colcock (Class of 1826) assumed command of the academy and the responsibility of shaping the fledgling institutions in Columbia and Charleston.⁴⁸ He knew that his academy needed a strong foundation and therefore contacted Smith for assistance. In May 1849, Colcock took a short leave of absence from SCMA in order to visit the Virginia Military Institute and view its operation firsthand. When he returned to

Charleston, Colcock continued to correspond with Smith for the remainder of his administration. Their exchanges ranged from logistical matters such as the use of iron beds and alum water to more sophisticated topics. Smith encouraged Colcock to have firm control over all of the school's fiscal activity, to personally make all contracts and purchases then issue the supplies to cadets at cost. Smith cautioned him about becoming overly involved in the implementation of discipline. Since a superintendent could not be "both accuser and judge," he needed to rely on a commandant of cadets responsible solely for the maintenance of cadet regulations. This arrangement would allow Colcock not to immediately condemn any cadet accused of a violation without judging the case objectively first.⁴⁹ Nearly a decade later, the SCMA Board of Visitors named Major Peter Stephens, one of Colcock's former graduates, as superintendent in 1859. Stephens also appealed to Smith shortly after entering office, seeking his guidance on the best method to execute semester examinations.⁵⁰

Arnoldus Brumby, a graduate of the Class of 1835, remembered Smith from their academy days and decided to seek him out again as he began his own start to commanding a military school. Brumby actually had extensive experience commanding a military academy as he served as superintendent of the Alabama Military Institute since 1846 before taking the position as head of the Georgia Military Institute in 1851. Nevertheless, he still felt it necessary to consult with Smith on myriad of issues concerning the governing of his school.⁵¹ He desired to visit VMI, as SCMA's Colcock had done, but lamented that he could not find the time and chose to submit his requests for advice through correspondence instead. Brumby's letter to Smith in July 1852

flooded him with inquiries such as advice on where to procure good uniforms, how to conduct mess hall procedures and which apparatuses worked best for scientific classes. He also pursued more non-logistical matters, asking Smith about the viability of incorporating religious instruction into his curriculum. Like other schoolmasters, Brumby found Smith most useful as a sage on the topic of student discipline. He desired to incorporate a disciplinary system identical to VMI's and had Smith outline its structure in detail, including his policy on executing court martials.⁵² Brumby carried Smith's advice to the state government whose members became equally fascinated with his reforms and wanted to learn more from him. In 1858, he provided Smith with a letter of introduction to former governor Charles James McDonald whom Brumby explained desired "to obtain accurate information in regard to the organization, government, discipline, etc of your institution."⁵³ While it remains unclear if the two ever formally collaborated or exchanged information, it does demonstrate that Smith had become an authority on military education.

Colonel Tench Tilghman, West Point Class of 1832, retired from the Army in 1833 and returned to his native Maryland. As he gained prominence in his state and militia, he decided to seek out Smith about the possibility of his state creating its own military academy. In 1852, he wrote Smith informing him of "endeavoring toward our Legislature to establish a state Institution on the plan of yours." Tilghman requested copies of VMI's regulations and asked for Smith's thoughts on such issues as "vacations, the care of books used in their studies and anything else that may occur to you and still more to give use your company whenever your engagements permit you."⁵⁴

Smith responded to his request as the Maryland Military Academy flourished throughout the 1850s under Tilghman's leadership and following VMI's course of instruction.⁵⁵

The state of Louisiana followed several other Southern states by establishing its own state military college, the Louisiana Seminary of Learning and Military Academy, in 1859. Its most prominent Board member, George Mason Graham, a transplanted Virginian and West Point Class of 1827, announced the appointment of the Seminary's superintendent, Major William Tecumseh Sherman, West Point Class of 1840, in August. Sherman excelled as a cadet at West Point and embraced the ideology of discipline throughout his military career but found himself at a complete loss when taking command of this new military school. Fortunately, his former business partner and army friend, Henry S. Turner, West Point Class of 1834, provided a solution to his dilemma. Just the previous year, Turner enrolled his son in the Virginia Military Institute in order to receive an education from his old Academy friend, Francis H. Smith. Turner suggested that Sherman contact Smith for guidance on operating a military school. He wrote his friend Smith on 15 September 1859 in the hopes that his "long experience as superintendent" and experience from his recent trip to Europe could help the captain.⁵⁶

Ten days later, Sherman himself wrote asking to "consult you [Smith] regarding the organization of the Seminary of Learning in Louisiana." Sherman knew well of Smith's reputation through the success of VMI and also knew Major Gilham, who finished one place ahead of him in his graduating class at West Point. He inquired about many of the logistical and pedagogical issues typical of earlier first-time military

schoolmasters: types of uniforms, study hours, annual examinations, summer encampments, and military training. Since Sherman desired to visit VMI but could not afford the time, he asked Smith to send him any other literature that might be of use to supplement the copy of the Institute's regulations and Smith's European Report which he had already consulted. Smith replied with answers to all of his questions in turn, emphasizing a strong mathematics department most of all. He intimated to Graham that their Board was "fortunate in securing Major Sherman," and offered the Seminary command of his services whenever they needed. Both men reciprocated this respect by incorporating as much of Smith's advice as possible into his new institution. Sherman biographer John F. Marszalek notes that the new superintendent and Graham established regulations for the Seminary by "modeling them after those of the Virginia Military Institute."⁵⁷ Smith also advised Graham on administrative matters such as the maintenance of a quartermaster department and other institutional finances.⁵⁸ In the end, Sherman took on a leadership style not unlike his advisor Smith, stern when enforcing rules and standards yet still a kind, friendly figure who would do anything to ensure their welfare.⁵⁹

A graduate of the Class of 1842 from the U.S. Military Academy, Daniel Harvey Hill distinguished himself as a professor after leaving the army following the Mexican War. He first became acquainted with Smith when he assumed the mathematics professorship at neighboring Washington College in 1849, a position vacated by their mutual friend from the Academy, Benjamin S. Ewell. Smith enjoyed discussing math with a West Point graduate at the classical college next-door.⁶⁰ Hill convinced Smith in

1851 to hire his Mexican War friend, Thomas J. Jackson, for the vacant position of natural philosophy professor.⁶¹ Hill then moved to North Carolina to become professor of mathematics at Davidson College in 1854 but kept in contact with Smith, continuing discussion on mathematics and student discipline. When presented with the opportunity to serve as superintendent for the newly established North Carolina Military Institute in 1859, Hill accepted immediately and sought the guidance of his old associate at VMI in getting his new institution started. Unlike previously mentioned superintendents, Hill had shared a nearly decade long friendship with Smith and they shaped similar ideals regarding their educational philosophy and classroom operation. By 1859, most of Smith's advice came on the topic of logistical issues such as the best merchants to secure cloth, tents, and caps.⁶² He also sent Hill copies of his latest edition of algebra and geometry textbooks to facilitate the quality of his academic program as well.

Smith's system became so popular that even civilian colleges weighed the option of converting their schools to a completely military structure. Several turned to him for advice on the best way to make this transition. Two schools stand out as the most interesting examples of these inquiries to make the conversion. When the University of Alabama was founded in 1831, it assumed the same shape and structure of the South's other state universities, such as the University of Georgia and South Carolina College. Rooted in the traditional classical curriculum, the university catered primarily to the sons of the state's aristocratic elite who brought their rambunctious and undisciplined habits with them to college.⁶³ As a graduate of Hampden-Sydney and professor at both Washington College and Randolph-Macon College, Landon Garland had seen his fair

share of misbehaved students yet still found the situation at Alabama intolerable. Having all of this experience in Virginia institutions, he also knew where to turn to for advice about student discipline. Garland wrote Smith in 1850 and 1851 asking him basic questions about his system of education and mulling the idea of establishing military discipline at his school.⁶⁴ When he became president of the University of Alabama in 1855, his pursuit of advice from Smith intensified as he gave more serious consideration to converting his civilian college into a military institution. One letter, for example, extended over a dozen questions to Smith regarding the operation of a military school, including:

1. Does the system require a walled enclosure? 2. Does it require regular guard-mounting and what influence has this duty on feeble constitutions? 3. Does it curtail the hours of study and as a consequence diminish the amount of study?
4. Does it prevent vice and immorality. . . ? 5. Does it prevent disorders – noises during study hours – and excessive boisterousness during leisure hours? 6. Does it require more than one superior officer filling a chair of instruction in the University? 7. Are cadet officers, squad marchers, etc., reliable and faithful? 8. Does it require cadets to board in commons? 9. Are students disposed to retire on account of the rigor of the system? 10. Is music essential to all parades? To what extent – and at what probable cost? 11. What does the wardrobe of one of your cadets cost per annum?⁶⁵

Garland struggled for the remainder of the decade trying to convince the Trustees of the necessity of converting the university into a military institution on Smith's plan.

Finally in 1860, Garland received his wish when the Alabama General Assembly approved to change the existing student body into a corps of cadets to live under military discipline. Garland recalled the circumstances that led to this monumental transition in a letter to the governor two years later:

The old collegiate system had proved a failure. The Institution was doing more harm than good. For one good scholar it sent out, perhaps two—two who were rakes or drunkards or problems. This was an evil inherent in the system. . . It was to correct these evils that for six years I labored to effect the introduction of the Military System—and it was for this purpose that the Trustees introduced it; and that it has corrected these evils to an extent surpassing the most surprise expectations of its friends, no one who has enjoyed an opportunity of marking the contrast will deny. It has operated as much to the physical as to the moral improvement of the corps.⁶⁶

The other example came from Thomas Stockton, a graduate of the West Point class of 1831. Stockton had resigned his commission in 1836 and served as a civil engineer throughout the South and Mid-West. As an officer in the Ohio militia, he explored the option of creating a state military academy and turned to Smith for guidance as the authority on the subject. Stockton explained in a letter to Smith in 1850 his intentions of giving a “military character” to Capital College in Columbus, Ohio, a Lutheran seminary which had received a collegiate charter from the state just months prior. Stockton hoped that adding a military professorship to the usual literary course might make the school “one of practical utility.”⁶⁷ Smith did not see the school’s lack of

military structure as an obstacle. “Many of the details which belong to the military schools may be extended to the ordinary college – the tendency of which will be to give energy to the discipline whenever it is introduced,” he ensured Stockton. But he also cautioned about not fully converting to an all-military system. Simply hiring a professor of military science might prove to be too expensive at a civilian college while the “tendency to disorder will be increased by the students with arms in their hands” due to the absence of martial discipline controlling the student body.⁶⁸ Stockton, however, did not succeed in this military conversion. When the college officially opened that fall, it remained under the governance of the Lutheran church with no evidence of Smith’s reforms put in place.⁶⁹

Many other school administrators that did not seek Smith’s direct advice benefited from his influence through the placement of graduates that he found teaching positions for in the dozens of institutions modeled after his own.⁷⁰ Just as VMI chose to rely on West Point alumni for its first faculty members, several of the new military academies forming throughout the South actively sought Smith’s graduates to serve as professors. Few young men in the 1840s and 1850s had received a military education with the disciplinary and academic rigor of Smith’s system. Having experienced the ideas that Smith preached firsthand during their cadetships, VMI graduates understood its function better than anyone. Their intimate familiarity with military education proved to be more effective than advisory letters or pamphlets. Plus, these alumni represented a living product of what the system could produce. They carried not only the knowledge from their unique education but also the character and temperament that cadets could

emulate. Smith treated his graduates as the essential commodities needed to promote his reforms and impressed upon those who sought his advice the necessity of hiring them. To Arnoldus Brumby at the Georgia Military Institute, he emphatically recommended “to select men who have had a military education,” particularly from his institution in order to create a reputable and effective faculty.⁷¹

Nearly all of the military schools that sought Smith’s council also submitted requests to him seeking the services of one of his former cadets to serve on their faculty. Brumby, Johnston, and Allen all wrote to Smith inquiring on the availability of VMI graduates to fill crucial roles in their faculty. Charles Derby (1848) taught briefly at Kentucky’s Western Military Institute where he “made improvement in its mathematics department,” and demonstrated that the “method of instruction,” taught by Smith, “has always been successful.”⁷² He then took a position at the Georgia Military Institute who took advantage of his experience by placing him in charge of organizing commencement exercises and the cadet’s military summer encampment in addition to his professorial duties of teaching in “almost every department in the establishment.”⁷³ Daniel Trueheart also took a position at the Georgia Military Institute in 1850 while James Porter Mason (1845) taught briefly at the Kentucky Military Institute before resigning due to illness.⁷⁴ William A. Forbes (1842) also served as a professor at the Western Military Institute and won the affection of the cadets who were “pleased with him” as an instructor of mathematics.⁷⁵ Smith sent Thomas O. Benton (1850) to the Arkansas Military Institute during its inaugural year in 1850 armed not only with his VMI education but a case full of Smith’s pamphlets and swatches of cloth to recommend to

Superintendent Alexander.⁷⁶ Each held positions of relative importance either in the departments of mathematics, physical sciences or military tactics.

The surge of military school establishments drew heavily from the ranks of VMI's graduates for qualified professors even more frequently in the late 1850s. Those who wrote Smith for advice also requested Smith to send them his graduates to serve on their respective faculties. When D. H. Hill founded the North Carolina Military Institute in 1859, he loaded his faculty with Smith's pupils including George M. Edgar (1856) as professor of astronomy, James H. Lane (1854) and Robert M. McKinney (1856) as professors of tactics. In order to assist Superintendent William T. Sherman, Smith engaged in a vigorous campaign for the Louisiana Seminary to hire his prize protégé, nephew Francis W. Smith (1856).⁷⁷ The younger Smith graduated at the top of his class at VMI, studied at the esteemed French engineering school L'Ecole Imperiale des Ponts et Chaussées and the University of Virginia and accompanied his uncle on his trip to Europe in 1858. Appointed as professor of chemistry and mineralogy commandant of cadets, F. W. Smith enjoyed immense popularity and success at the Seminary as the Board elected him superintendent in 1865 shortly before hearing of his death. One of the greatest disciples of Smith's system, Landon C. Garland of the University of Alabama, actively sought out VMI graduates to strengthen his newly converted military school. Smith sent James T. Murfee (1853) to serve as professor of mathematics and eventually commandant of cadets, Charles L. Lumsden (1860) James H. Morrison (1860) and Digges Poyner (1860) as instructors of tactics. With no military experience

himself, Garland relied heavily on these graduates to guide the daily operation of his new corps of cadets.

Smith's graduates contributed to the development of still more military institutions in the 1850s. Their reputation became so esteemed that the superintendent of the Hillsboro Military Academy, SCMA graduate Colonel Charles Tew, hired two VMI graduates William W. Gordon (1852) and Charles E. Lightfoot (1854) instead of actively pursuing graduates from his own alma mater. Their credentials proved too good to pass over. Gordon graduated at the top of his class and served as an instructor of math and Latin at VMI while Lightfoot distinguished himself on the faculty of the Bethel Military Academy, a preparatory academy in Culpepper, Virginia.⁷⁸ After helping D. H. Hill establish the North Carolina Military Institute, James Lane and James L. Cross, along with recent graduate Valentine M. Johnson (1860) responded to a call from Smith to accept positions at the West Florida Seminary, an academy in Tallahassee (which would later become Florida State University) that decided to offer military instruction in 1859.⁷⁹ The Pine Bluff Military Academy in distant Arkansas also benefited from the services of VMI alumni on their faculty.⁸⁰

Many of Smith's graduates took the initiative to establish or lead their own preparatory military academies in Virginia on the model of VMI with the help of their former superintendent. After assisting in the conversion of the esteemed Norfolk Academy's organization into a military configuration, John Bowie Strange (1842) left in 1856 to create his own preparatory military academy near his boyhood home in Albemarle County. He wrote to Smith several times during the school's inaugural year

seeking the best sources to acquire the accoutrements necessary to outfit a corps of cadets including dress caps, overcoats and swords. Once classes began, Strange turned again to his mentor to supply him with teachers to instruct in mathematics, English and tactics as well as provide advice on cadet discipline and finances.⁸¹ When creating a new military school in Maryland, John S. Gamble (1848) consulted Smith regarding the procedure of operating a summer training camp before fall classes.⁸² John Henry Pitts (1844), founder of the Rumford Military Academy, praised Smith for his assistance in helping him create his preparatory military school. He wrote to him in 1849, “To you my former instructor I may pardonably play the egoist especially as I attribute my success to your system of discipline and mode of instruction which first formed my character and then raised my school.”⁸³ Cadet Charles Williams approached Smith with an advertisement in 1852 searching for a teacher to take over a new academy being established in his hometown of Culpepper Courthouse. Whiting asked the superintendent for his help in his effort to have himself and fellow classmate Henry Whiting assume the leadership of this new school. Smith wrote a flattering letter of introduction to the town explaining how his two graduates would put the academy in “high standing” and possibly “organize the boys in a little military corps” if the town so desired.⁸⁴ In 1859, Edward C. Edmonds wrote to thank Smith for the copy of his European report for inspiring the curriculum for the Danville Military Academy which he served as principal.⁸⁵ Smith also inspired graduates James J. Phillips (1853) and Titus V. Williams (1859) to establish the Chuckatuck Military Academy in Nanesmond County and the Jeffersonville Military Academy in Tazewell County, respectively.⁸⁶

Some graduates may have incorporated Smith's plan when creating their own military schools but did not enjoy their mentor's longevity. James L. Bryan (1843), founder of the Petersburg Military Academy abandoned his school to pursue a career in the Episcopal ministry while a yellow fever epidemic in Louisiana forced Valentine Saunders (1842) to close his Baton Rouge Military Institute shortly after it opened.

While a number of superintendents utilized Smith's advice when establishing their new military schools, several fell short of achieving comparable success because of their inability to combine his guidance with effective leadership. Thornton F. Johnson, a member of the U.S. Military Academy Class of 1822 who failed to graduate, established the Western Military Institute in Georgetown, Kentucky, in 1847. Like most military school founders of the time, Johnson structured his course of study and discipline on the model of the Virginia Military Institute.⁸⁷ But using the Smith model and hiring his graduates such as William Forbes did not guarantee him similar success. When Johnson wrote to VMI in 1851 requesting another teacher, Smith declined after hearing reports of the school's disorganization.⁸⁸ Johnson's reliance on private funding and poor management of the schools affairs threatened to close the school by 1850. VMI graduate Charles Denby refused WMI's job offer after hearing from Forbes that "[Johnson] was not a reliable man. . . [the school] is completely broken up that no one will trust him and that his [Forbes'] own salary was not paid."⁸⁹ Charles Derby, another VMI graduate, ignored Smith's advice and took a position at WMI in 1853. He wrote back to his former superintendent appalled at how Johnson had failed to apply the system that Smith had created. Cadets led completely immoral lives, compelling a frustrated Derby to

label the institution a “nursery of infidelity.” He labored to improve the mathematics department but received little assistance from his colleagues who habitually “abandon[ed] their professorial duties.” More importantly, Derby advised all fellow VMI graduates to avoid teaching at WMI as it did not live up to anything that it advertised.⁹⁰ Derby’s luck did not change when he accepted a new position at the Georgia Military Institute in 1854. Superintendent Brumby incorporated much of Smith’s guidance but his own poor leadership impeded the school’s progress. Derby lamented that Brumby’s lackadaisical style forced him to take it upon himself to coordinate many of the institution’s day-to-day operations: organizing the summer encampment, arranging the commencement exercises, and teaching nearly every subject in the curriculum. Brumby had so alienated the faculty with his egotism that seven professors had resigned within the first five years of the school’s existence.⁹¹ GMI functioned on the VMI model primarily through Derby’s tireless efforts.

Through the success of VMI, the growing population of graduates on military school faculties and the countless advice he administered to aspiring superintendents, Francis H. Smith had firmly established his reputation as the South’s premiere authority on military education by the outbreak of the Civil War. His efforts, more than any one individual, contributed to the popularity and success of military schools in the Southern states during the antebellum period. The overwhelming majority of these military institutions experienced his influence in some form and emulated the VMI model.

Smith’s influence on Southern military education far exceeded that of one individual who has been misidentified as the principle inspiration behind these

institutions. Some historians claim that Captain Alden Partridge, former superintendent of West Point, convinced the Southern people of the necessity of military education and therefore planted the intellectual seed that eventually led to the establishment of the Virginia Military Institute and all of its antecedent institutions. Partridge had long criticized the U.S. Military Academy for its monopoly on army commissions and argued the necessity of private military schools to create a new cadre of militia officers. This philosophy inspired him to establish Norwich University (originally called the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy) in his home state of Vermont in 1819. "Hence arises the necessity—of an extended system of military education and of a general diffusion of military knowledge," Partridge stated after founding Norwich and continued on to create several similar academies throughout the Northeastern states in the 1820s and 1830s on the model of Norwich while simultaneously campaigning for national militia reform.⁹²

Evidence tracing Partridge's actual influence on schools in the South, however, remains circumstantial at best. He did write a letter to Virginia House of Delegates member Charles P. Dorman supporting the necessity of military education during J. T. L. Preston's campaign to establish VMI in 1835.⁹³ Other than the publication of this one letter in the Richmond Whig and Advertiser, no other evidence links Partridge to the approval of the Virginia Military Institute in the state legislature or its subsequent success after its opening. While Partridge's article may have brought the issue to the attention of many Virginians, the relentless lobbying of founder J. T. L. Preston amongst individual legislators contributed far more to the success of the VMI bill being passed

than Partridge's solitary letter.⁹⁴ In the crucial chapter entitled "Southern Replicas" of his study, "The Partridge Connection: Alden Partridge and Southern Military Education," historian Paul Dean Baker admits that "Although they were working toward similar goals, there is no known evidence of collaboration between Smith and Partridge or of influence by either in the creation of other's academy."⁹⁵ While Smith promoted military education through his pamphlets, correspondence and graduates, he received absolutely no input from Partridge. Nowhere does Smith or any one else involved in the Institute's government ever acknowledge the application of any of Partridge's ideas, plans or philosophies. In fact, knowing that Partridge left West Point under controversial circumstances, Smith and others in the West Point community personally disdained Partridge for his derogatory comments against the Academy. Dennis Mahan railed against "malicious old man Capt. Partridge" in letter to Smith which reassured him that Congress would "expose the falsehood, as well as the groundlessness" of the former's efforts to abolish West Point.⁹⁶

Partridge attempted to create more of his schools in the South but found himself marginalized by the success of VMI and the academies influenced by Smith.⁹⁷ He never sought out Smith's counsel or graduates when reaching into the Southern states during the 1840s with one exception. In 1857, Smith sent one of his prize graduates, Robert M. Mayo (1857) to teach in one of Partridge's schools, the Mount Pleasant Military Academy in Sing Sing, New York. Mayo, along with three other professors, resigned after only a few months because of the intolerable lack of discipline among the students and the poor leadership of the principal.⁹⁸ Partridge's contributions to Southern military

education must be viewed in a separate context from the accomplishments of Smith and his West Point colleagues. No collaboration or exchange of ideas existed between the two camps in the development of military institutions. Partridge actually alienated most other superintendents, many of whom were West Point alumni, because of his campaign to close down their alma mater. The credit for the explosion in Southern military education should be given to Smith whose influence on the success of these institutions throughout the region can be more easily identified and documented.

Smith's contributions to education were not confined exclusively to the development of purely military schools. He did not see the military academy, as an institution, as the sole answer to educational reform. The key rested in the fundamental pedagogical elements of the academy which he had labored so hard to perfect in his own college: discipline, scientific curriculum, quality teaching, and moral development. Francis H. Smith's greatest contribution to the pursuit of higher learning came in his philosophy that these basic tenets of military education should be inculcated into every academic environment, regardless of the scholastic level. He promoted this philosophy and a corresponding plan to have it enacted in two of his most noted pamphlets, The Regulations of Military Institutions as Applied to the Conduct of Common Schools (1849) and College Reform (1851). Places of learning, whether universities or ordinary schoolhouses, did not need to have a complete military identity or an exact replica of VMI in order to achieve ultimate effectiveness. Smith emphasized this point when introducing the goal of his essays, "It is not the design of the following pages to exhibit views of mere theorists who have written on the art of teaching. Adopting the system

which has been so successfully introduced into the Virginia Military Institute as the basis upon which an efficient system of instruction and discipline for schools and academies may be framed, the design will be to show what modifications are necessary for this purpose, and to enforce the views which will be presented by arguments derived from actual experience.”⁹⁹

The two pamphlets, in essence, provided a practical and workable guide for incorporating the basic tenets of the Smith’s educational strategy. Both followed the same basic outline for its readers with guidelines for faculty standards, the course of study, mode of instruction, and discipline. All schools, whether common schoolhouses or large universities, could function most efficiently by promoting a recitation system of learning, scientific curriculum, a demerit system, and a roll of conduct. Just as he did at his own institution, Smith asserted his dual faceted philosophy of reform: 1) discipline to ensure good student behavior promotes better learning and 2) a practical curriculum to ensure their success after graduation. He balanced his pamphlets with both philosophical musings and detailed instructions of operation including how to use the blackboard, enlist the help of parents, calculate a student’s general merit score and perform semester examinations. Always a proponent of detailed instruction, Smith also provided several samples in the appendixes as a reference for such administrative documents as special reports (for discipline offenses), weekly class report table, semester merit roll and a demerit book entry. He distributed the pamphlets amongst all those who might be interested in his educational innovations: professors, teachers, parents, politicians, and friends. It demonstrated the culmination of his philosophy on teaching

that he had garnered after over a decade in the classroom serving as a guide for his students beginning their teaching careers and for other educators seeking his counsel with more detail than he could compile in a single letter of advice.

It did not take long for Smith's innovations to win over a growing population of educators willing to try to incorporate his ideas. Several school superintendents and teachers incorporated his advice for reforming their curriculum and disciplinary systems, particularly his former students. William H. Harrison (1845) accepted a position as principal of the Amelia Academy and informed Smith that he thought "very strongly of remodeling my own school upon the plan of the Military Institute" and requested VMI graduates to assist him.¹⁰⁰ When called to "rescue" the Richmond Academy, Smith explained to the headmaster he should trust his plan since it had been successfully adopted at preparatory schools such as the Norfolk and Staunton Academy with noted success.¹⁰¹ He also implemented his reforms in both of the local Lexington academies "with most decisive beneficial results."¹⁰² Larger colleges such as William and Mary also experimented with Smith's system. His old friend Richard S. Ewell had been appointed president of the college and sought to expand the curriculum, improve discipline and increase enrollment in his stagnating school. He even contemplated converting the institution into a military academy on the VMI model. Ewell closely followed Smith's advice during the first years of his presidency and succeeded in achieving the aforementioned goals through his guidance.¹⁰³ The basic tenets of Smith's plan, as demonstrated by both of his pamphlets, could be adapted to just about any institution of learning regardless of size, affiliation, or age of students. His influence

became that much more profound than other reformers who concentrated solely on colleges or common schools.

Smith did not contain his wisdom to VMI and USMA graduates alone. His reputation as an educational innovator drew advice seekers from the broader academic world. Richard S. Burke, principal of the Richmond Academy, received advice from Smith on how to reorganize his mathematics department to more effectively teach higher levels of math.¹⁰⁴ Reverend John P. McGuire of the Theological Seminary of Virginia became fascinated with Smith's disciplinary system and sought him out for advice on how to better the behavior of his own students. Smith replied to him in 1854, "I would inquire whether you might not introduce into the H(igh) school the system of responsibility which exists in our Military Schools by dividing your dormitory into sections of boys, 2 or 3 of these sections again combined into a division under a more advanced boy and the whole under the supervision of a teacher acting in alteration with the adjuncts. Many private schools have introduced this system with great effect and under such an arrangement I think it is possible I might be able to furnish you with an assistant."¹⁰⁵ When Reverend William Meade of the Episcopal High School asked Smith about the duties and qualifications needed for his new principal, he encouraged the need for the candidate to take on the duties of both instruction and government, much like the commandant of a military school. Instead of explaining his entire philosophy, Smith encouraged Meade to "ride up and see the system at work here you would understand it better and appreciate it."¹⁰⁶

Many institutions that did not seek Smith out directly for advice on reforming their schools benefited instead from the legion of graduates that VMI sent out into the academies and colleges throughout the South. Institute alumni carried Smith's plan for common school and collegiate reform much like those who carried his ideology to military schools. "It is perfectly feasible to make the reorganization of your Academy upon the basis which you propose and if you can place the matter in the hands of our best graduates you will find the system to work admirably," Smith explained to schoolmaster George Dame.¹⁰⁷ Placement of teachers in Virginia schools and beyond augmented his mission of promoting reform through his pamphlets. Several of his graduates arrived at their new teaching positions armed with Smith's literature and personal mandate to apply his system as instructors. Smith advised one graduate that, "If you go there [Fairfax Court House] you had better organize your school as early as possible upon the basis of my pamphlet with energy into the matter."¹⁰⁸ Whether by direct advice or through the ideology outlined in his pamphlets, nearly all of Smith's teacher-graduates entered their new positions armed with the knowledge necessary to apply his philosophy.

As Smith heralded his Institute as an instrument in promoting educational reform, he sought to extend his influence in these fields by placing as many of his graduates in academies and colleges as possible. He took it upon himself to personally find jobs for all those "state" cadets required to fulfill their two-year obligation to teach within the state. With a wide variety of talent at his disposal and numerous teaching opportunities to fulfill, Smith did his best to match the skills of individual graduates with

a particular school's needs.¹⁰⁹ He intermittently asked those cadets demonstrating exemplary ability to remain at the Institute to serve as adjunct instructors in lower level courses for up to two years. If the situation allowed, he attempted to send graduates back to their home counties or to academies whose religious affiliation matched their own.¹¹⁰ He occasionally even sent his former students to serve as tutors for private families.¹¹¹ Smith understood that by keeping schoolmasters pleased with quality teachers, his reputation would continue to build throughout the state. VMI graduates drew special attention because of their ability to teach a wide spectrum of subjects. Much to Smith's satisfaction, many bolstered the quality of mathematics and scientific courses in schoolhouses and colleges by instructing in math, natural philosophy, chemistry and even the handful of advanced schools that offered engineering classes. Yet Smith proved equally effective staffing faculties in schools embracing the still widely accepted classical curriculum. He reluctantly placed cadets who knew classical languages from their pre-VMI education into positions that expected them to teach Greek.¹¹² Committing graduates to such institutions suggests that Smith purposely placed graduates in these academies in hopes that they could reform, influence, and promote a more scientific curriculum from the inside. This effort also proved true in his assignment to colleges as well when he secured positions for his students as mathematics professors at traditionally classical colleges such as William and Mary and Hampden-Sydney.¹¹³ The immediate goal was to place selected graduates into teaching positions where they could promote his ideologies.

Not all of Smith's job placement enterprises resulted in ideal situations for his graduates. Finding the right man for the right school often proved to be a hit or miss endeavor. With dozens of requests for teachers swamping him every month, many from new academies, Smith found it increasingly harder to determine the quality of certain teaching opportunities as he had to weed through offers that looked suspicious or unfavorable. Occasionally he found himself steering his graduates away from bad situations.¹¹⁴ Not only did he encounter this problem with some military schools corrupted by poor leadership. Other alumni placed in local academies occasionally encountered problems of their own and appealed to Smith for help. Complaints ranged from dealing with difficult headmasters, to not getting the classes they wanted, to the overwhelming workload of teaching.¹¹⁵ Smith identified many of these challenges as simply the growing pains of being a young teacher. But unless the situation proved so desperate as to provoke his intervention, he most often encouraged his graduates to remain in their present position.¹¹⁶ He advised a frustrated graduate in 1845 to "let well enough [alone]. . . Stick at your present employment and post until you can command by your age and experience a better position."¹¹⁷

Even students who never finished at VMI received assistance from Smith when pursuing teaching positions. William R. Galt, a Norfolk native and University of Virginia graduate, received a position at a Winchester, Virginia academy due to a shining recommendation from Smith who stated that although he was not a VMI alumnus, was "still a good teacher."¹¹⁸ In 1855, he wrote recommendations for two of his former Hampden-Sydney students who had shown exceptional talent when he taught

them.¹¹⁹ Smith concerned himself most with getting those with the finest abilities into the schools, regardless if they were exclusively his own. This crusade to employ the best talent in order to improve their education system also meant giving less than enthusiastic recommendations for his own students whom he believed did not have all of the proper skills for effective teaching. Smith kept realistic expectations for some candidates, such as James Henry Waddell (1855), when he recommended him only as a teacher for elementary English because of his low class standing.¹²⁰ In a handful of other instances, Smith fumed over the prospects of having to place a cadet he believed unworthy to command a classroom. He refused to commit the effort in finding positions for irresponsible cadets such as one who forced Smith to write his guardian and declare, “How could I recommend him as a teacher when confidence was wanting in his principles of duty here?”¹²¹ Like all college presidents, Smith desired to see his graduates succeed but in his case, it could not come at the cost of what he considered the higher purpose of the Institute.

Even when Smith had placed his graduates in teaching positions, many still relied on his assistance after they began their careers. They continually inundated their mentor with questions and requests for advice on how to be most effective in the classroom. This is where Smith was at his best, guiding them on the intricacies of pedagogy. He enjoyed advising graduates such as George Patton (1852), to promote the use of integral calculus and monomials to his students or Stephen T. Pendleton (1848) to “make your boys finished scholars and spare no labor for this end and awaken sprightly manner in their demonstration and explanation,” when teaching.¹²² He advised flexibility in their

own scholarship, telling one graduate to study branches other than his specialty during his off-time to make himself a better teacher and more marketable.¹²³ Smith understood that a schoolmaster's success often extended beyond his actions in the classroom. To Benjamin Ficklin (1849), he advised him to pursue friendly relations with the community around his academy yet avoid local politics. He explained to Ficklin, "You will find it best to keep aloof from all local quarrels. Your object should be to enlist the cooperation of all, without giving offence to any but be careful to give your academy a strictly moral tone."¹²⁴ Above all, Smith pleaded with his graduates to right the wrongs of the state's education system, particularly in the categories of discipline. He impressed upon Pendleton the "importance of a strict order and subordination in a school and cleanliness to progress in studies. I visited a school house a few days ago and I am sure I should not survive an attack of hysteria were I to be confined to it for 24 hours. Noise and want of neatness may always be prevented by demerit and when the list of demerit amounts a given number, instantly discharge the offender – it matters not whose son he may be."¹²⁵

Some of the advice given came under less than ideal circumstances. Upon hearing rumors that two of his graduates had failed to maintain proper discipline within the Staunton Academy they jointly operated, Smith chastised them for forgetting everything he had taught them. He wrote the pair sternly in 1848:

You will recollect that in the 'hints on teaching' which I gave to your class I suggested to you to establish a system of demerit. You will find this the most successful mode of governing your boys in school. Fix definitely those offence

or negligences which are to be punished make each boy write his excuse, this will be a good exercise in composition and when he has 50 or 75 demerit in any quarter, require him to leave school. You will find it indispensable to your success to be punctual yourselves in every duty for example will do more to form habits of punctuality in your scholars than all the precept in the world. You will of course understand the motive which I have in writing to you; No complaint whatever has been made to me, but it has been suggested that your school might be improved in the two points to which I have adverted. Should you ever need advice or cooperation, you know you can always command it in writing to me.¹²⁶

Smith impressed the need for graduates to present good examples of character and habit to reflect favorably not only on their own academies but on himself and the Institute.

Just as he had monitored their behavior as cadets, Smith now carefully watched over their careers as teachers. Ever the paternal figure, he enjoyed sending unsolicited notes of encouragement to balance all of those focused on advice and guidance, facilitating the transition of a graduate from the status of cadet to being a colleague. Briscoe G. Baldwin (1848) received warm tidings from Smith when he began his new teaching position at a Staunton academy: “. . . let me express the hope that in your new home you will not lose sight of us but will as your time allows you favor me with a letter. I cannot promise to be a regular correspondent, but I will endeavour to let you see that I value such evidences of remembrance.”¹²⁷ Smith often tried to talk them into extending their time in the teaching vocation, and consider making it a lifelong profession. He wrote to William Mahone (1847) “. . . I am pleased to learn that you are

sill actively and I have no doubt, profitably engaged in the duties of instruction. I hope the experience which you will have attained in it will induce you to continue yet longer at it.”¹²⁸ Once certain graduates did commit to careers in education, Smith drew them into the broader intellectual circle of exchanging ideas, textbooks, recommendations, and so on, with other like-minded teachers in other institutions.

A handful of graduates embraced Smith’s call to education so intensely that they embarked on creating their own schools. Many of them received assistance from Smith that often exceeded simply giving advice on teaching techniques. When an alumnus intended to create a new academy, Smith often alerted the respective delegate of the county to elicit whatever amount of support they could provide.¹²⁹ When William D. Stuart (1850) opened a school in Richmond affiliated with the Episcopal Church, Smith wrote the leaders of the city’s congregation to solicit their “special care and patronage” with his endeavor.¹³⁰ Through Smith, graduate Edward T. Fristoe (1849) found fellow alumnus Alexander C. Jones (1850) to assist him in establish a new grammar school in Surry Court House, Virginia.¹³¹ Smith also provided testimonials to print on the brochures of new institutions founded or supported by his graduates such as the Chuckatuck Academy, Danville Academy, and Hampton Male and Female Academy.¹³² An official recommendation from an individual of Smith’s stature in the field of education often helped schoolmasters as much as any advice he could give.

Educational historians agree that the democratization of schools, particularly colleges, represented the greatest change during the antebellum era. Although not a college graduate himself, President Andrew Jackson’s election to the White House

changed the face of the institutions of higher learning. Historian Frederick Rudolph notes that “Jackson came to symbolize the fundamental changes that were taking place in American society during the years when the American college . . . was wrestling with the problem of being an institution cradled in privilege in an age that insisted upon being democratic.”¹³³ VMI and other military academies followed this national trend with the creation of the “state cadet” program, providing free tuition to indigent but talented young men, in the hopes of creating a Jeffersonian “aristocracy of talent” by widening the opportunity for education. This philanthropic approach to admission carried one inherent problem: how does a board of trustees gauge a potentially flawed system without modern day methods of assessment such as report cards or standardized tests. The Board of Visitors and Smith set a minimum level of entrance requirements for potential matriculates to have a basic knowledge of mathematics and English skills. Still, a system that actively sought students from the lower ends of the socio-economic scale often drew young men from environments with sub-standard schooling opportunities. Finding a lad with potential proved to be an imperfect science, leaving Smith with the uncertainty of not knowing exactly what kind of talent he would be getting any given academic year. He openly admitted to the Board and parents that a good number of students who failed were poorly prepared.¹³⁴ This frustrated Smith considerably since most of these ill-prepared students carried the right attitude and work ethic, but did not have the time to catch up to those with better educational backgrounds in VMI’s rigorous curriculum.

To remedy this problem, Smith benefited from the increasing number of county schools founded by VMI graduates or had graduates on their faculty would eventually send many of their students to the Institute for their college education. With his numerous connections with academies throughout the state, Smith became increasingly familiar with the caliber of the education of the young men who applied to VMI, many of whom had been taught within Smith's educational system to some degree. Virginia preparatory schools such the Fleetwood Academy, Rappahannock Academy, and Winchester Academy, among others, routinely sent applications or student recommendations to Smith, many from the VMI graduates themselves. These schools provided VMI with a more attractive student. Smith knew these applicants had engaged in several years of high quality education under the tutelage of his own former students. Everything these VMI alumni learned about teaching, they learned from Smith. Knowing the rigors of the Institute's curriculum and discipline, they also would not send a young student whom they knew could not excel. Conversely, those boys who did not meet standards for admission, Smith encouraged to attend one of his graduates' academies first before attempt to apply again. He especially recommended the Norfolk Academy or Rumford Academy, run by John B. Strange (1842) and John Pitts (1845), respectively.¹³⁵ James T. Murfee (1853), who went on to his own successful teaching career, had Stephen T. Pendleton (1848) as his instructor at the Stony Mount Academy. Sometimes Smith's colleague Pike Powers sent applicants to VMI from his academy in Staunton.¹³⁶ Several times, he encouraged young men who failed to be accepted to VMI

who lived in the Tidewater to seek out Strange in person for personal tutoring sessions, particularly, in mathematics in order to get themselves up to standard.¹³⁷

Still, the system was not foolproof. In 1856, a VMI graduate suggested creating a catalog of Institute cadets listing where they attended primary school to promote the reputations of the academies from which they came, many with Institute alumni on the faculty. Smith rejected this idea as he believed listing their previous school might be a major embarrassment for those cadets with poor grades or a high number of demerits.¹³⁸ Regardless, the rapport between Smith and these feeder schools remained strong throughout the antebellum period. Both the principals of the Yale Academy and Rappahannock Academy, neither of them VMI alumni, sent their sons to the Institute.¹³⁹ This tight relationship almost created a controversy for Smith in 1849, when an applicant complained that VMI chose a student from the favored Rappahannock Academy instead of himself in spite of his better qualifications.¹⁴⁰ While this remains the only accusation of favoritism leveled at Smith, students recommended by VMI graduates most likely had a better chance of achieving admission to the Institute.

VMI teachers became so popular and successful that many academies created a self-perpetuating monopoly of graduates teaching at that school. William Couper's history of the Institute identifies the Norfolk Academy as an example of this cycle of hiring Institute graduates, "Many VMI graduates taught there and among the names we find those of John B. Strange, '42. . . John S. Gamble, '48; Robert Gatewood, '49; George M. Edgar, '56; and Henry A. Wise, Jr., '62. These men directed the instruction of Norfolk youth for about a quarter of a century."¹⁴¹ When graduates wrote to VMI

making preliminary inquiries announcing openings in their new schools they had just established, Smith actively sold them on the benefits of hiring more Institute alumni. He explained to William Forbes, president of Stewart College in Clarksville, Tennessee that “should any accident occur to yourself he [Robert Gatewood, 1849] can take temporary charge of the Math Dept and having been instructed by Major Gilham is also fully prepared on the course of Chemistry and Natural Philosophy.”¹⁴² In 1851, he convinced Forbes’ classmate and superintendent of Norfolk Academy, John B. Strange, that appointing Thomas Upshaw (1851) “will add greatly to the popularity of your academy.”¹⁴³ John Pitts at the Rumford Military Academy requested graduates from Smith on three separate occasions in the 1850s. VMI alumni most likely needed little advice when hiring graduates from their alma mater as they had created their own informal network within the confines of Virginia education much in the same way the West Point graduates had established one on a more national scale.¹⁴⁴

Smith even went so far as to scare schoolmasters into maintaining a VMI presence in their academies. He explained to George Butler, headmaster of the Rappahannock Academy, writing, “I consider Mr. Jones (1848) a young man of fine talents and fully qualified for the duties now discharged by Mr. Mahone. I hope you will not have occasion to lose Mr. Mahone and as a consequences that Mr. Jones will remain where he is. Changes in schools are injurious not only to the young men themselves but to the schools.”¹⁴⁵ Since Smith controlled an active system of teacher placement and kept close contact with his graduates he had already placed, he had an inside track on any position that might open in a given academy. When George Robertson (1848)

inquired about finding a position, Smith replied, "I had written to Finney (1848) who is now teaching in Loudoun who expects to relinquish his school and recommended you for the place."¹⁴⁶ As state cadets served their required two years of teaching, Smith could replace them, if they chose to leave, with a new crop of graduates, maintaining a cycle of VMI alumni on the faculty, as demonstrated earlier by the Norfolk Academy.

VMI graduates became coveted staff members for any schoolmaster in Virginia looking for a quality teacher. Smith lamented nearly every year that his supply of teachers could not keep up with demand, as principals and headmasters all over the state, and eventually all over the South, poured letters into his office requesting the services of his students. He routinely had all of his state cadets assigned to their first teaching positions before they graduated. The reputation of his graduates, the promotion of his ideas through his literature, and the success of the Institute itself made Smith a notable leader in the arena of Virginia education. His success and status became so great that an independent demand for his own services developed to match that of the demand for his students. Benjamin Ewell wrote to his friend informing him that although he resigned from Hampden-Sydney College five years prior and was not of the Presbyterian faith, he still earned a few nominations to take over as the school's president in 1843.¹⁴⁷ In 1854, the Board of the College of William and Mary offered Smith the presidency of the school, an offer that he considered seriously. He decided that he was too valuable at VMI to take the position.¹⁴⁸ As a sign of respect, other Virginia colleges such as Randolph-Macon and Lynchburg College made him an honorary member of their literary societies.¹⁴⁹ He also received requests to be entered into numerous national

biography collections and even an invitation to the World's Fair in London for his contributions to education.¹⁵⁰ Regrettably, he could not attend, but he certainly did not suffer from a lack of opportunities to enjoy some of the greatest recognitions for his contributions to the field of education.

Smith's accomplishments in promoting his unique ideas for educational reform add a new perspective to the examination of military schools. Although martial in its structure and operation, Smith saw the purpose of his institution as primarily pedagogical. While many schoolmasters and college presidents toiled with the everyday struggle of keeping their institutions afloat, Smith enjoyed the rare opportunity to shape not only his own school but dozens of others through his literature, correspondence and graduates. His reforms did not find their way into every classroom, but those schools that he did influence demonstrated a much-appreciated improvement in the areas that he believed were most critical to the progress of education.

Notes

¹ Sidney Forman, "Why the United States Military Academy was Established in 1802," Military Affairs 29 (Spring 1965), 18-21; Frederick Rudolph, Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636 (San Francisco : Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), 62-63.

² Joshua G. Fitch, Thomas and Matthew Arnold and Their Influence on English Education (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1897), 75-110.

³ Smith, College Reform, 43-44.

⁴ Smith to Thomas B. Robertson, 6 February 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith advised Professor Robertson to "read the Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold. . . It is a treasure." Smith to Robert Gatewood, 4 March 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. He wrote to former student Robert Gatewood about Arnold's influence in his own life, "With my long formed views of discipline, you may be sure it gave me more than ordinary pleasure to find how nearly they coincided with those of Arnold. Sometimes I could not help reading aloud such parts of his book as thus struck my mind and Mrs. S would laughingly say, I was waking up as I read."

⁵ Denton, "The Formative Years," 3-5; See also, Malloy, "Mechanical Education," 2-14; Thomas E. Greiss, "Dennis Hart Mahan: West Point Professor and Advocate of Military Professionalism, 1830-1871," (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1969).

⁶ Francis H. Smith, Special Report of the Superintendent of the Virginia Military Institute on Scientific Education in Europe (Richmond: Ritchie, Dunnivant and Company, 1859), 52-53.

⁷ Ralph M. Brown, "Agricultural Science and Education in Virginia Before 1860," William and Mary Quarterly 2 (April 1939), 205.

⁸ Albert K. Cocke and A. Robert Kuhlithau, "VMI's Forgotten Benefactor: Philip St. George Cocke," VMI Alumni Review (Spring 1992), 14.

⁹ Willoughby Newton was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia in 1802 and graduated from the College of William and Mary. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates (1826-1832, 1861-1863) and the U.S. House of Representatives (1843-1845). He was elected president of the Virginia Agricultural Society in 1852 and took an active interest in establishing a state agricultural school.

¹⁰ Smith to William H. Richardson, 24 November 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to General Corbin Braxton, 26 September 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹ Smith, Special Report, 55-70.

¹² Brown, "Agricultural Science," 210-12.

¹³ Semi-Annual Report of the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute, 4 July 1860, VMI Archives.

¹⁴ Smith, History of the Virginia Military Institute, 152-53.

¹⁵ Smith, Special Report, 13.

¹⁶ Cadet James L. Hubbard to Robert Hubbard, 17 October 1852, Hubbard Family Collection, Special Collections, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia (hereafter UVA).

¹⁷ Cadet William H. Morgan to Edmund Ruffin, 28 January 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Cadet William J. Paxton, to Edmund Ruffin, 30 January 1860, Edmund Ruffin Papers, Virginia Historical Society (hereafter VHS).

¹⁸ Cadet George Toole to Jane Toole, 24 October 1855, Toole Family Correspondence, Special Collections, UVA.

¹⁹ William B. Skelton, "The Army in the Age of the Common Man," in Kenneth J. Hagan and William R. Roberts, eds., Against All Enemies: Interpretations of American Military History from Colonial Times to Present (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), 98.

²⁰ Chris Arney, West Point's Scientific 200: Celebration of the Bicentennial, Biographies of 200 of West Point's Most Successful and Influential Mathematicians, Scientists, Engineers, and Technologists (Lexington, S.C.: Palmetto Books, 2002); Robert P. Wettemann, "To the Public Prosperity: The U.S. Army and the Market Revolution, 1815-1848" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2000). Arney's work catalogues famous West Point scientists and educators, giving brief biographies of their exploits and ranking their importance. Wettemann's study examines the role of the Army as engineers on internal improvement projects during the antebellum period but

neither study explicitly explores West Point's contributions to American higher education during this time period.

²¹ Richard S. Smith to Francis H. Smith, 8 January 1849, 22 January 1849, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²² Smith to George Cullum, 31 January 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²³ Smith to Bradford Alden, 3 March 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁴ Smith to Charles Hackley, 18 November 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁵ Smith to Roswell Park, 29 January 1842, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁶ Anne W. Chapman, "Benjamin Stoddert Ewell: A Biography," (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1984), 42-43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44; Smith to Richard S. Ewell, 6 December 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁸ Smith to William H. Sidell, 30 March 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁹ Smith to John Hartwell Cocke, 30 March 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁰ Smith to William H. Sidell, 30 March 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³¹ Smith to Philip St. George Cocke, 2 October 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³² Cocke, "VMI's Forgotten Benefactor," 13-14.

³³ Smith to Pike Powers, 15 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁴ Smith to James Joseph Sylvester, 18 December 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁵ Edward Courtenay served as chair of the University of Virginia mathematics department from 1842 to 1854 and Albert Bledsoe served from 1854 to 1861.

³⁶ Smith to James L. Cabell, 9 June 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁷ Cajori, 127-30; Amy Ackerberg-Hastings, "John Farrar: Forgotten Figure of American Mathematics," Proceedings of the Canadian Society for the History and Philosophy of Mathematics 11 (1998), 63-68. Farrar published a translation of Lacroix's *Elements of Algebra* (1818), which he followed by selections from Legendre, Biot, Bezant, and others. The U. S. Military Academy, Harvard College and other institutions at once adopted these works into their mathematics curriculum.

³⁸ Smith to John Farrar, 29 January 1842, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁹ Smith to Pike Powers, 5 April 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith would later translate Biot's work on descriptive geometry after the war.

⁴⁰ Smith to Pike Powers, 20 November 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴¹ Smith to Walter H. Harrison, 31 March 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴² Smith to Charles Phillips, 29 June 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to James Joseph Sylvester, 18 December 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Wiley and Putnam Publishers, 21 April 1842.

⁴³ Smith to Charles Desilver, 29 May 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁴ Richard S. Ewell to Smith 4 April 1844, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁵ Smith to Charles Davies, 15 April 1848, 13 May 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Charles Davies to Smith, 24 April 1848, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁶ Robert T. P. Allen to Smith 28 October 1846, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁷ Charleston Courier, 22 November 1842; Oliver O. Bond, The Story of the Citadel (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1936), 18.

⁴⁸ When the South Carolina Military Academy was founded in 1842, the school maintained two campuses, one at the state arsenal in Columbia (known as the "Arsenal") and the state arsenal in Charleston (known as the "Citadel"). Following its inaugural

year, incoming cadets spent their first year at the Arsenal for basic training and instruction before transferring to the Citadel. Both operated under the same regulations and collectively identified as the South Carolina Military Academy until the Civil War.

⁴⁹ Richard W. Colcock to Smith, 6 July 1849, 5 October 1849, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Richard W. Colcock, 7 June 1849, 1 November 1849, 4 February 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁰ Smith to Peter F. Stephens, 28 May 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵¹ Arnoldus Brumby to Smith, 28 August 1850, 23 November 1850, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵² Arnoldus Brumby to Smith, 22 July 1852, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵³ Arnoldus Brumby to Smith 23 August 1858, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁴ Tench Tilghman to Smith 7 January 1852, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Tench Tilghman, 14 January 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁵ Catalogue of the Officers and Cadets of the Maryland Military Academy, Oxford, Maryland, 1852 (Baltimore: John Murphy and Company, 1852).

⁵⁶ Henry S. Turner to Smith, 15 September 1859, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁷ John F. Marszalek, Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order (New York: Free Press, 1993), 125.

⁵⁸ Smith to G. Mason Graham, 27 October 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁹ Marszalek, Sherman, 128-29.

⁶⁰ Smith to Daniel H. Hill, 21 March 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶¹ James I. Robertson, Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend (New York : Macmillan, 1997), 103. Jackson later become Hill's brother-in-law when they married the Junkin sisters, Eleanor and Margaret, respectively.

⁶² Smith to Daniel H. Hill, 29 August, 1859, 4 February 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶³ Conrad, The Young Lions, 11.

⁶⁴ Smith to Landon Garland, 4 April 1850, 10 July 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Landon Garland to Smith, 30 June 1851, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁵ Landon Garland to Smith, 9 February 1856, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Landon Garland to Smith, 13 March 1856, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Landon Garland, 21 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁶ Landon Garland to Governor John Gill Shorter 24 November 1862, quoted in James B. Sellers, History of the University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1956), 40.

⁶⁷ Thomas Stockton to Smith 13 June 1850, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁸ Smith to Stockton, 17 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁹ Paul H. Buehring, These Hundred Years: The Centennial History of Capital University (Columbus, Ohio: Capital University, 1950), 30-70.

⁷⁰ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 5. As noted in Jennifer Green's "Books and Bayonets," the incoherent nature of antebellum higher education often causes confusion when determining the educational level of an institution. Schools, particularly military ones, used the terms "academy" and "institute" interchangeably for both preparatory schools and colleges. Without a standardized public school system, parents sent their sons to college whenever they believed their children were adequately prepared. However, two general categories of schools can be identified during this time period although the line differentiating the two, as Green argues, is "often hazy." Preparatory academies for boys and teenagers provided a basic introductory education (the 3 R's) while colleges consisted of more experienced adolescents and provided a more advanced education, conferring diplomas upon graduation. Smith promoted his reforms and sent graduates to both types of institutions. Whether teaching at an academy for young boys or a military college formed on the model of their alma mater, VMI graduates utilized

what Smith considered universal devices of educational reform, scientific curriculum and military discipline, to improve the new institutions they served. Smith's graduates, because of their experience and training, became highly coveted by military schools of all sizes and educational levels throughout the antebellum period. The majority of VMI graduates who taught in military schools, however, typically served in state military institutions throughout the South or in small preparatory military schools within the state of Virginia.

⁷¹ Smith to Arnoldus Brumby, 23 November 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷² Charles Derby to Smith, 25 November 1853, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷³ Charles Derby to Smith, 30 December 1854, 7 March 1855, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁴ Smith to Daniel Truehart, 16 September 1850, 25 October 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁵ Arthur Martin Shaw, "Student Life at the Western Military Institute: William Preston Johnston's Journal, 1847-1848," Filson Club Historical Quarterly 18 (April 1944), 90.

⁷⁶ Smith to Thomas O. Benton, 14 September 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁷ Smith to G. Mason Graham, 18 August 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Henry Wise to Authorities of the Louisiana Seminary, 11 July 1859, Henry Wise Collection, VHS.

⁷⁸ Stephen A. Ross, "To 'Prepare Our Sons for All the Duties that May Lie before Them': The Hillsborough Military Academy and Military Education in Antebellum North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review 79 (January 2002), 24.

⁷⁹ Smith to James H. Lane, 11 October 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁰ Smith to Levin W. Mears, 28 January 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸¹ John Bowie Strange to Smith, 21 March 1856, 23 June 1856, 26 September 1856, 1 April 1857, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to John Bowie Strange, 25 March 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸² Smith to John S. Gamble, 4 April 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸³ John H. Pitts to Smith, 29 August 1849, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁴ Smith to James C. Green, 20 March 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁵ Edward C. Edmonds to Smith 7 October 1859, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁶ Smith to James J. Phillips, 26 July 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Edgar C. Knight, ed., Documentary History of Education in the South Before 1860, Vol. 4 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 239.

⁸⁷ Mary Alstetter and Gladys Watson, "Western Military Institute, 1847-1861," Filson Club Historical Quarterly 10 (April 1936), 101.

⁸⁸ Smith to Thornton Johnson, 5 June 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁹ Charles Denby to Smith, 17 June 1851, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁰ Smith to Charles Derby, 25 November 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹¹ Charles Derby to Smith, 30 December 1854, 7 March 1855, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹² William A. Ellis, ed., History of Norwich University: Her History, Her Graduates, Her Roll of Honor, 2 vols. (Montpelier, Vermont: Capital City Press, 1911), 1: 4-5.

⁹³ Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, 27 January 1836.

⁹⁴ Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 10-11. See also, Gary Thomas Lord, "Alden Partridge's Proposal for a National System of Education: A Model for the Morrill Land-Grant Act," History of Higher Education Annual 18 (1998), 17-21.

⁹⁵ Baker, "The Partridge Connection," 394.

⁹⁶ Dennis Hart Mahan to Smith 17 October 1843, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁷ Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians, 79.

⁹⁸ Robert Mayo to Smith 8 January 1858, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁹ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 6.

¹⁰⁰ Walter H. Harrison to Smith 6 March 1846, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰¹ Smith to Trustees of Richmond Academy, 4 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰² Smith to Walter H. Harrison, 16 March 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰³ Smith to Richard S. Ewell, 31 December 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Chapman, Benjamin Stoddert Ewell, 92-93, Richard S. Ewell to Smith, 28 December 1850, 9 September 1852, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Smith to Richard S. Burke, 5 July 1843, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Smith to Reverend John P. McGuire, 31 May 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Smith to Reverend William Meade, 21 June 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁷ Smith to George Dame, 23 December 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁸ Smith to Charles Derby, 14 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Smith to Oliver White, 8 June 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁰ Smith to Alexander C. Jones, 16 November 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹¹ Smith to William N. Wellford, 7 June 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹² Smith to William F. Lockwood, 14 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹³ Smith to Walter H. Harrison, 25 February 1851, 18 March 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to James Blankenship, 15 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁴ Smith to John Bowie Strange, 12 September 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Richard H. Simpson, 28 December 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁵ Smith to Robert Gatewood, 22 June 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁶ Smith to Thomas O. Benton, 14 September 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; FHS to Thomas A. Harris, 28 July 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Charles Derby, 25 May 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁷ Smith to John Bowie Strange, 12 September 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁸ Smith to David W. Barton, 28 August 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁹ Smith to Richard G. Fain, 16 November 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁰ Smith to Henry Harding, 12 July 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²¹ Smith to David May, 6 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²² Smith to George S. Patton, 8 January 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Samuel T. Pendleton, 7 October 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²³ Smith to Thomas B. Robertson, 6 February 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁴ Smith to Benjamin Ficklin, 6 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁵ Smith to Samuel T. Pendleton, 7 October 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁶ Smith to Alexander C. Jones and John S. Gamble, 5 December 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁷ Smith to Briscoe G. Baldwin, 16 March 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁸ Smith to William Mahone, 23 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁹ Smith to Robert T. Woods, 11 March 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁰ Smith to William D. Stuart, 27 July 1853, 23 September 1853, 24 July 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³¹ Smith to Alexander C. Jones, 22 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³² Smith to James C. Councill, 20 June 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; James C. Blankenship to Smith 1 July 1854, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³³ Rudolph, American College and University, 202.

¹³⁴ Smith to M. Dupuy, 8 October 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to J. D. Price, 18 July 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁵ Smith to James M. Moody, 6 December 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁶ Smith to Pike Powers, 27 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to C. I. Klemper, 30 April 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁷ Smith to P. C. Johnson, 1 February 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Richard H. Chamberlaine, 19 March 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Charles R. King 11 August 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁸ John H. Pitts to Smith, 13 March 1856, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to John H. Pitts, 17 March 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁹ Smith to Peter R. Thornton, 30 April 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to R. Henry Glenn, 14 May 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Smith to William R. Mason, 17 July 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴¹ Couper, One Hundred Years, 231.

¹⁴² Smith to William Forbes, 21 December 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴³ Smith to John Bowie Strange, 10 July 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁴ Green, “Bayonets and Books,” 206-58. In this chapter, Green identifies an informal network created by VMI graduates who went on to serve as teachers but analyzes their relationships only in a socio-economic context and gives little attention to their academic exchanges.

¹⁴⁵ Smith to George G. Butler, 5 July 1849, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁶ Smith to George W. Robertson, 13 December 1849, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁷ Richard S. Ewell to Smith 4 February 1843, Superintendent’s Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁸ Smith to Rev. J. Johns, 7 January 1854, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁹ Smith to George B. Finsh, 10 April 1856, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Joseph King, 28 April 1856, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵⁰ Smith to John Livingston, 14 December 1852, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to William H. Richardson, 26 November 1850, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

CHAPTER IV

SMITH AS VIRGINIA REPUBLICAN

After arriving at VMI in 1839, Smith offered assistance to a wide variety of educators, from common schools to state universities, and rural schoolhouses to military academies. His guidance addressed questions on almost every topic pertinent to higher education such as textbooks, discipline, and curriculum throughout the antebellum period. Smith, however, gave one piece of advice to all of those who sought his guidance in creating a military school. He advised that their new institutions seek out the support of their respective state legislatures if they wanted any hope of surviving. VMI graduate Charles Denby, Class of 1850, received clearly Smith's message on this issue when asking his former superintendent about the steps needed to create a successful military school. Smith warned him, "To ensure your success in your enterprise of building up a military school, let me impress upon you the importance of its connexion with the state. No military school has ever permanently flourished upon private foundations."¹ This key piece of advice, Smith bestowed upon dozens of fellow educators.

Smith preached support from and service to the state government as the bedrock of military education. He cautioned R. T. P. Allen of the Kentucky Military Institute that the more he became familiar with the operation of private military schools, the more he became "convinced none can be permanent without the authority of the state."² When contemplating converting Capital College of Ohio into a military institution, Smith advised the necessity of coming under total state control, thereby making the

students “soldiers of the state.”³ Schools that had already leaning towards accepting state control received guidance from Smith on how to make the relationship and allegiance with the state government more effective. Arnoldus Brumby, founder of the Georgia Military Institute, received a letter from Smith in 1850, opening with the wish that he would “be able to convince the people of Georgia that their true policy is to make your school a state institution.”⁴ Even if he could not recruit many young men from the state, Smith reassured him that it was “better to have a small school at first than to depart from the rule” of state allegiance.⁵ Despite years of exchanging ideas on teaching, education and discipline, Smith imparted the same advice to his old friend Daniel Harvey Hill when the latter removed to North Carolina to establish a new military academy in 1859. Smith predicted, “Your school will succeed at Charlotte but your success will be made perfect if you secure the state authority.”⁶

These comments demonstrate that historians cannot treat Southern military education as a monolith. Smith sought to create a definitive distinction between those institutions that allied themselves with their respective states and those that did not. His correspondence indicates that superintendents who pursued state support, such as Richard Colcock of the South Carolina Military Academy, Arnoldus Brumby with the Georgia Military Institute, and Tench Tilghman of the Maryland Military Academy received more assistance and respect from Smith for following his recommended plan rooted in state allegiance. Conversely, he scoffed at the few who disregarded his warnings and maintained their military schools as private institutions. Colonel Allen of the Kentucky Military Institute did not heed Smith’s advice about state support and

chose to remain private. When one correspondent made an inquiry to him about the Kentucky Military Institute, Smith responded caustically that he knew almost nothing about the school other than that it was private and did not enjoy the benefits that VMI accrued through its connection to the state.⁷ Avoiding state support simply baffled Smith. When he learned that one of his West Point classmates, John Howard Allen, operated a private military school in Maryland, Smith admitted to a former student, “I don’t know how he does it.”⁸ Both Smith and Tilghman collaborated to try to buy the school from Allen in order to turn it into a state institution, but failed to convince him to convert from its private status.⁹ Occasionally and reluctantly, Smith did place graduates in positions at privately supported military academies, perhaps in the hopes that his former students could enlighten their stubborn leaders as to the merits of state allegiance. But as it became clear, VMI graduates who taught at private schools run by the likes of Allen and Alden Partridge did not remain long and complained to Smith of their disillusioning experiences there.

Smith promoted the necessity of state connection for several reasons. Firstly, existence as a state institution guaranteed a continual source of funding, a critical issue for antebellum colleges as bankruptcy caused the largest number of school closings.¹⁰ He also advised educators like Colonel Allen of the Kentucky Military Institute that the state would provide protection for all his institutional property and provide him the authority to confer degrees.¹¹ Allegiance to the state also served ideological ends as well as practical. An institution funded by and serving the state created a more fertile environment for cultivating the principles of citizenship. Cadets at private military

academies served no higher authority other than the school's administration. This restricted allegiance did not properly develop a sense of civic obligation or patriotism. State military schools educated cadets to nurture a sense of responsibility to their respective government as many had their tuition funded by the state in addition to the appropriations that paid for the school's operation. As the institution belonged to the state, Smith reminded his cadets that they represented the Old Dominion as well as their communities and therefore should represent both with honor. He imparted this same advice to other military superintendents such as Richard Colcock of the South Carolina Military Academy, advising him to impose this sense of state duty in his cadets.¹² The school's military structure reinforced this sense of duty in Smith's young men: just as soldiers fulfilled an obligation to their government, so did cadets to their state.

State allegiance also provided the essential element for maintaining cadet discipline. Smith overlapped his students' allegiance to their state as citizens with their duties as military cadets. Both carried the obligation of upholding and submitting to the laws of the state. Citizenship consisted not only of promoting public good but also subscribing to the respective laws of the republic. Cadets would be "trained to respect the laws of the state and obey those in authority; and when in authority themselves, to protect and defend those under their power."¹³ Moreover, connection to the state provided the necessary framework from which to enforce institutional military regulations. Just as the Articles of War and the U.S. Constitution bound soldiers in the regular army to certain behavior, the laws of Virginia would bind VMI cadets to their state through their behavior. "You need the authority of law to give sanction to your

discipline,” Smith explained to a former student about to establish a new military school.¹⁴ He argued that private military academies could not properly execute courts martial without state authority, explaining straightforwardly that military schools needed the “authority of law or discipline will fail.”¹⁵ Cadets who violated regulations would be subject to a military court martial which used the authority of the state government to prosecute the cases, while authority at a private school did not extend beyond the judgment of the individual superintendent. The authority of the state government supporting institute regulations, therefore, prevented the arbitrary rule of the individual and offered the fair and equal treatment of civic law. Smith lauded this system to Governor Henry Wise, “The rigid responsibility which happily characterizes a military institution secures to any cadet full justice, on the part of all those who are officially connected with them for, in any case, in which he may deem himself neglected or unfairly treated, he has reserved to him an appeal to those to whom all its officers are responsible.”¹⁶ He required all of his faculty, both permanent and adjunct, to take a commission in the Virginia militia as they served as officers of the state in this respect. As he elucidated to state delegate Charles P. Dorman, “You know that propriety requires some legal recognition of military rank and that a court martial is not only illegal but a farce without it.”¹⁷

In Smith’s view, the absence of a justice system supported by the authority of law made civic and military training meaningless as it undermined the goal of service to a government and the protection of its laws. Likewise, state authority also provided the means to bolster Smith’s efforts to shape the character of ideal state citizens. In his 1845

annual report, he identified the Institute's regulations as "laws punishing vice."¹⁸ Smith now made the behavior of young men accountable to the higher authority of law and government, instead of simply family, community, or even the individual. Moral conduct, the hallmark of any responsible republican, had to be put in the form of laws and regulations, not just social tradition, in order to be enforced at state institutions whose mandate was to create ideal citizens. "It is a lesson of the moral sublime to the young men of the literary institutions of our state and country which must command respect from the system of discipline which as so effectually instilled such proper principles," he pronounced to one concerned parent of a recently punished cadet.¹⁹ Submission to this system bonded every cadet to his state and his government. "There is a voice that speaks to the legislature in the beautiful exhibition of high toned honorable feeling which has marked the conduct of every cadet in the submission to lawful authority."²⁰

Once his students gained an appreciation for obedience and allegiance to their government during their cadetship, Smith focused his efforts on making his cadets apply this citizenship when they left VMI. After graduation, "state" cadets who had received free tuition from the legislature had to complete their obligation by serving Virginia as productive members of society. While some historiography agrees that military schools existed for the betterment of society, historians have overlooked the original intention through which this betterment would be achieved.²¹ Instead of creating a bastion of militarism, Smith used VMI as an instrument of broad educational reform to improve the overall learning and, optimistically, the quality of life in his state.

In spite of its wealth and reputation for its contributions to American democracy, Virginia suffered from a noticeably poor public educational system during much of the antebellum period. The 1840 census revealed that one in every thirteen Virginians was illiterate compared to one in every 4,500 in Massachusetts.²² Before Smith's superintendence, the Old Dominion compiled a lackluster record of promoting public schooling. In the 1770s, Thomas Jefferson made several proposals to create a system of public schools in Virginia but never achieved success.²³ Charles Fenton Mercer, a representative of Loudon County in the state General Assembly, proposed universal, state-supported primary education in 1816 but also met fierce resistance from tidewater politicians who feared state centralization and increased taxation that would almost certainly accompany the proposal.²⁴ The Literary Fund represented the only successful accomplishment that Virginia had to show for improving education in the first half-century following the revolution. Established in 1810, this fund set aside an annual stipend specifically for the education of the poor children of the state in the hopes of spreading educational opportunity. The fund, however, could not inspire a great commitment from both the politicians and people of Virginia to improve the state's school system.²⁵

By 1839, however, a new interest in public education spread throughout the state, inspired by Governor David Campbell and educator Benjamin Mosby Smith's essay detailing the success of the Prussian school system and the potential use of its model in Virginia.²⁶ Once appointed as superintendent of VMI, Smith threw himself into this new movement for educational reform inspired by the governor in the early 1840s.

Smith identified the mismanagement of the Literary Fund as one of the key culprits for the education system not reaching its potential. While the fund supplied a stipend to instructors in poorer schools to improve them, Smith argued that legislation did not provide proper controls over the distribution of funds. He estimated two out of every three teachers receiving financial support from the fund misreported their time spent teaching time in order to receive payment they did not actually deserve. The Second Auditor of Virginia, James Brown, the caretaker of the Literary Fund and de facto officer of the state's school system, echoed these sentiments when he lamented the potential benefit the fund could provide for the state's poor if it only received the organization and leadership it so desperately needed.²⁷ The product of the state's defective school system, some of the young men who matriculated at VMI with poor elementary education also motivated Smith as an educational reformer. He complained to one state politician, "If you could see the effects of our defective system, or rather of our no system, as I see them here, in grown up youths, with fine mental powers who can neither read write nor speak their mother tongue correctly, you would be stimulated to more than ordinary exertion. Remember that one of every 12 of our grown up white population in Va can neither read nor write."²⁸

While attending the 1844 College Convention of Virginia in Richmond, Smith directed the attention of his fellow college presidents to the repair of the state's common school system. He suggested a bold plan for counties needing schools to raise three-fifths of the funding while the state would furnish the remaining two-fifths. This idea seemed only fair since the state sanctioned similar programs to support banks and

corporations.²⁹ But simply building schools did not solve the problem entirely. Smith commented to a friend that, “Experience teaches us every year that our ordinary county schools are so defective that quantity is more regarded than quality.”³⁰ Frustration drove him to write the House of Delegates to propose a basic platform on which to organize the county schools: “1. The appointment of a general Superintendent of Public Schools 2. The organization of a Board of Education 3. The appointment of a single assistant Superintendent of schools for each county 4. Combining county with state taxation so that the local interest shall always precede and cooperate with state appropriations as in our joint stock companies for internal improvements.”³¹ Smith made a lasting contribution to the cause of Virginia education by publishing an arithmetic textbook for state common schools. Elementary mathematics textbooks, he argued, failed to use language and methods that could be understood by small children. He therefore made it his goal to adapt his text “to be suited for the infant mind.”³² By incorporating “important facts connected with the history, geography, agriculture, commerce etc of our state and country about the state and national government” into his elementary textbooks, Smith hoped to accomplish the secondary purpose of promoting civic knowledge. “Such questions as this give the pupil a knowledge of facts which he could not arrive at by the limited education which the law provide for them. Extending such questions through the various rule of Arithmetic so as to embrace. . . the many important facts connected with his state,” he explained to board member Bernard Peyton.³³

Few suggestions for reform, however, received as much attention as Smith's crusade to promote general excellence in pedagogy. He believed that proper teaching could have a more profound effect on the quality of an individual's education than any textbook or legislation. His experiences as both a student at West Point and as a professor at multiple institutions demonstrated to him the effectiveness quality teaching could have on an individual student, drawing out his talents and inspiring a lifelong interest in learning. In College Reform and the Regulations of Military Institutions, Smith argued for improved instruction as the foundation for all of the innovations that he promoted in his pamphlets. This objective for reform gave him the greatest amount of personal control in bettering the state's school system as opposed to legislation. By overseeing the training of aspiring instructors himself and placing them individually in various institutions, Smith bypassed politics and charted his own agenda. He, therefore, placed most of his energies into this enterprise and made it the hallmark of VMI's contributions to the state and society.

In many ways, Smith simply followed through on ideas that fellow state educational reformers had been discussing for years. The Second Auditor of Virginia, James Brown, traced the cause of Virginia's inadequate educational system to "the scarcity of competent teachers," and suggested incentives for colleges to train new instructors.³⁴ Improving the quality of teachers became one of the centerpieces of Governor David Campbell's proposals to create a new state educational system, which included a plan to hire four thousand teachers.³⁵ Washington College president, Henry Ruffner, also demonstrated a great commitment to solving the teacher dilemma in his

speech during the 1841 state education convention. The scarcity of qualified teachers in Virginia forced many schools to fill their desperate need with individuals whom Ruffner identified as, “lazy, drunken, unprincipled, ignorant vagabonds who impose on illiterate and incautious parents by crafty pretensions, and gain employment by offering to work cheaply.”³⁶ He saw the creation of a state normal school, a school taught by great educational masters which focused on “the best theory of teaching” as well a curriculum that provided a “broad foundation of learning,” as the only solution for this problem.³⁷ Smith’s views on the state teaching crisis placed him conspicuously into the campaign of some of Virginia’s most active and respected educational reformers of the antebellum period.

Smith’s commitment to using education to improve American society also reflected many ideas inspired by the America’s Founders. Many of the great political thinkers who shaped the character of the nation identified *education* as an essential element for the promotion of republican government. John Adams, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, Samuel Knox and Thomas Paine all articulated the need to raise the level of the nation’s learning, particularly through formal schooling, in order to ensure the prosperity of the republic. Rush and Webster in particular campaigned for the creation of a formalized public school system in order for the republic to connect its “educational schemes to the responsibilities of active citizenship.”³⁸ Other Founders, particularly Webster and Knox, argued that the federal government should extend this civic education specifically to the poorer populations to draw out the intellectual potential of the economically disadvantaged.³⁹ Above all, Francis H. Smith prided himself on

resurrecting the educational visions of Thomas Jefferson, particularly in offering the opportunity of learning to the “mass of talent” populated throughout Virginia who could not afford an education otherwise.⁴⁰

Table 1: Enrollment by Class at the Virginia Military Institute (Classes 1842 – 1862)⁴¹

<u>Class</u>	<u>Number Matriculated</u>	<u>Number Graduated</u>
1842	25	16
1843	35	13
1844	26	9
1845	30	20
1846	26	14
1847	30	12
1848	36	24
1849	51	26
1850	35	17
1851	44	29
1852	59	24
1853	44	25
1854	36	14
1855	48	19
1856	74	33
1857	58	23
1858	47	19
1859	61	29
1860	83	42
1861	55	17
1862	75	38

Certainly, Smith’s system of teacher placement aimed to create a perpetual cycle by placing graduates as teachers who would send their best students to enroll at VMI, contributing to its blossoming statewide reputation and increase in annual enrollment (Table 1). While only a modest number of young students in Virginia’s common

schools would go on to become teachers themselves, Smith saw this system as a small contribution to the improvement of the state's education.⁴² Those graduates who took teaching positions also created interest in education within their own communities. Smith opined to Delegate George Yerby, "These are our own Virginia youths who go back to their own counties possessing common sympathies and feelings with our people and institutions and above all trained to teach our rising population as they are taught here. This is the influence which must tell upon the destinies of our state."⁴³ Moreover, Smith knew that placement of teachers from VMI and other institutions into the common school system directly improved the quality and interest in college education in the state. Statistics demonstrated a sharp increase in college enrollment in Virginia's colleges and it appeared that the Old Dominion carried the distinction of have the highest percentage of its total population attending college of all the states in the Union. He attributed both of these accomplishments directly to VMI's teachers improving the quality of common schools throughout the state and for the increased number of schoolmasters who had adopted Smith's teaching reforms as proposed in his pamphlets.⁴⁴ Through all of his labors to promote the improvement of education in the state, Smith never viewed himself as promoting his own personal agenda as to how to improve the state. On the contrary, he viewed himself as a patriot, serving the will of the people. Smith treated the ever-growing popularity of the Institute and its contributions as a mandate from all Virginians to continue its efforts in educational reform. He reinforced this belief to the state legislature in his 1848 Annual Report:

In lieu of pecuniary compensation, an educational basis was given to the new establishment, which as been expanded from year to year, by the force of public sentiment, until now it seems as if upon the VMI, had devolved a conspicuous part in the great work of reforming the elementary education of the state. In this work she is now actively engaged, not by attempting to introduce some new theory of popular education; but by the silent and certain influence resulting from the annual distribution of a corps of well-trained native teachers among our people. We see this influence in the material which is annual seeking admission to the benefits of the institute. We see it again in the increasing demand for more and more teachers; and we may now anticipate what it will be when some twenty years have passed, and the system, now only partially introduced, shall have reached every county and every neighborhood in the state.⁴⁵

Other historical examinations of the state cadet system misinterpret its function and purpose. Jennifer Green's study on antebellum military academies posits that "the cadets and much of the antebellum community perceived teaching as a beneficial career," and many identified teaching as a viable occupation to enter into the comfort of the middle class.⁴⁶ In actuality, fulfilling the teaching obligation of a state cadetship proved to be a burden for many of Smith's graduates financially and socially. Those who accepted teaching positions after leaving VMI did so out of a sense of duty, not as a prospect of achieving eventual success in the ranks of the burgeoning middle class, as asserted by Green. While Smith expended much of his energy finding employment for

his graduates as teachers, he spent an equal amount of time attempting to secure for them an adequate salary. He blasted schoolmasters who offered only paltry salaries for the services of his graduates, "I cannot say whether I shall be able to supply you with a teacher or not," he admitted to one academy principal, "Your price is so low. Why your countrymen will give \$1 a day to a raw Irishman – ought not our educated Virginia youth to command more?"⁴⁷ Smith could not understand why his fellow citizens would pay "\$200 or \$300 for a riding horse but think hard of paying as much for a teacher."⁴⁸ In his mind, teaching a young boy to read took a greater amount of energy and skill than any other labor and should be compensated accordingly. Unfortunately for his graduates, his pleas made little difference as teachers throughout the state continued to work for rarely more than \$300 or \$400 a year, far below the potential of their education. Green misconstrues VMI and other military academies as a stepping stone to middle class prosperity.⁴⁹ Many graduates struggled through their first years after leaving VMI. Smith had little to offer them except a reminder of their commitment to the state and sympathy for their plight. He commiserated with Gabriel Gray, Class of 1853, beginning his first teaching assignment by retelling how poor he was getting started as a young man in the 1830s. "When I left West Point, I had not 3 shirts to my name and I owed \$1000 to my brother for advances he had made for me. So far from being discouraged by these disadvantages they were stimulants to me to effort and by blessing of God these efforts have been successful. You are now better off than I was then and by the same blessings you may meet with the same success."⁵⁰ Smith crafted his

pedagogical system and the philosophical purpose of the Institute to benefit greater society, not advance the pecuniary prospects of individual cadets.

Accepting a teaching position did not provide the best method for young men to get started in life and many of VMI's graduates knew this. In fact, several cadets attempted to find a way out of fulfilling their teaching obligation after they graduated. Graduates presented various excuses for exemption but most often desired the opportunity to pursue opportunities in careers more lucrative than teaching. Few college trained civil engineers existed in the mid-nineteenth century and those who served on the numerous internal improvement projects in progress around the nation commanded enviable salaries. Nearly every year, former state cadets eagerly voiced their desire to utilize their state-supported education to enter the more profitable fields of medicine, law, and especially engineering rather than pedagogy. Smith understood that this grim economic reality provided the greatest challenge to instilling a sense of duty to those who owed the state their services. "We are glad to see our graduates engage in engineering but wish to see them discharge first more binding duties. Ten are willing and able to become engineers where one is to be a teacher," he explained to one such graduate.⁵¹ State cadets tried various methods to skirt their teaching obligation such as suggesting alternative occupations, negotiating to teach less than two years, delaying their assignment or complaining of debilitating illness. Regardless of the variety of excuses, Smith stood firm on enforcing their duty, often disillusioned and frustrated with the resistance he encountered. He enlightened Cadet William Fitzhugh Lee, Class of 1853, that delaying would make his duty harder to fulfill, explaining that, "If it be right

to postpone the duty for one year, why not two or three or 20 and so on and thus postpone a high moral obligation until age, infirmity or death renders the person incapable of doing it.”⁵² More importantly, those who violated the contract of their state cadetship also damaged the reputation of the Institute. If a state cadet refused to fulfill his teaching obligation, the Institute, using state funds, lost a sizable investment in his education and missed an opportunity by not choosing another student from his respective district who would have completed his obligation. Smith brought to the attention of recent graduate Caleb Boggess, Class of 1845, who refused to accept a teaching position that he weakened the Institute’s influence in his district by not fulfilling his duty.⁵³ To Smith, committing oneself to a sense of duty far outweighed any pursuit of self-determination.

Since Smith used the military structure of his institution primarily as a means to an educational end, the goal of actually utilizing the military skills they acquired received far less attention than their application of their academic knowledge. VMI’s founders intended for the Institute to provide highly educated and trained young officers for the Virginia militia in hopes of reinvigorating the state’s military forces. J. T. L. Preston’s original articles called for Institute graduates to remedy the militia’s “want of suitable officers.”⁵⁴ But Smith’s focus on educational reform for the state made this mission more of an afterthought as VMI gained more repute as a normal school in the 1840s. The Institute’s records do not give nearly as much consideration to the role of graduates in the militia as they do to their contribution to the state’s schools. Annual reports and Board of Visitors’ minutes detail the number of alumni teaching throughout

the state, often naming the more prestigious schools they served and often documenting the number of graduates who served as teachers. Smith's Annual Reports to the state legislature continually heralded the Institute's contribution to state education by identifying the number of those currently teaching, naming those who reached distinguished positions as instructors, or his inability to keep up with all of the requests in the state for teachers. These reports, remarkably, never detailed the Institute's contributions to the militia. Some never even mention the word militia in nearly fifty pages of text. On the rare occasions that he did mention the Institute's military contributions, they almost always were overshadowed by the accomplishments of graduates in the field of education. "[O]ut of 83 graduates," he mentioned in 1847, "we have some 35 actually engaged in teaching and 6 with the army in Mexico."⁵⁵ Official reports to the state government as well as Smith's personal correspondence demonstrate that academic achievement clearly meant much more in the eyes of those who supported the Institute than any martial contribution.

Smith acknowledged the militia with more frequency after the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848 but never achieved the same attention and comprehensiveness as his tomes on cadet academic progress and their contribution to the field of education after graduation. "[M]y object is particularly to elevate the character of our militia. The present system is a complete caricature and every one admits it," he lamented to Adjutant-General William H. Richardson. Yet, his only plans focused on the militia officer corps' lack of modern military training. In 1841, Smith noted his hope of training the militia in attack and defense in pyrotechny because of his certainty "that half

our militia officers are altogether ignorant of its use.”⁵⁶ No correspondence or report ever followed this claim to confirm if he ever achieved this goal. In fact, Smith never articulated any identifiable plan to contribute to the militia’s improvement until the eve of the Civil War. Aside from his aim to teach officers pyrotechny, his letters make no comment on organizational, legislative or personnel reform in spite of his admission of the militia’s decaying condition. On the other hand, his correspondence expounded on educational issues such as teaching, textbooks, curriculum and discipline nearly every day.

The plan for using graduates to improve the militia lacked structure as well as enthusiasm. Smith proclaimed to the state adjutant general that, “If 30 or 40 well educated young men graduate from the V.M. Institute every year, the state will then be supplied with this number of efficient officers whose experience and knowledge will be diffused throughout the militia and do more for it than anything else.”⁵⁷ This desire reflected Preston’s original vision to encourage participation in the militia. He suggested that the Institute’s “students might not be universally desirous of a command in the militia of their respective counties, but doubtless many would seek after and obtain these distinctions.”⁵⁸ Yet no provision in VMI’s Establishing Act or institutional regulations made militia service mandatory for graduates. Once they left the Institute, alumni were only compelled by their own patriotism to return to their home counties to serve as officers in their local units. Smith placed all of his expectations for militia reform solely on the voluntary service of former cadets. Even in this respect, he never took an active role. During his first twenty years as superintendent, Smith never inquired to any of his

graduates about their service in the militia. He sent no letters of recommendation or assistance to aid in their achieving state commissions. His graduates, likewise, did not write a single letter updating their old schoolmaster about their experience in the militia, either positive or negative. Moreover, neither he nor the Board of Visitors made any effort to keep accurate counts of those who did serve in the militia after graduation as they had done with those who served as teachers. With the exception of those counted who served with the Virginia Regiment during the U.S.-Mexican War (only 16 served out of over 260 alumni available for duty by July 1848), no other statistics exist on just how many VMI alumni served in the antebellum militia, reflecting a greater ambivalence by the Institute and the state towards their service.

For those graduates who did serve in the Virginia militia, sources indicate that they had little effect on improving the state's defenses as the Institute's founders intended. The militia's problems proved more complicated than the Institute's educated and virtuous leadership could remedy. The Old Dominion's military forces during the antebellum period suffered from the same problem prevalent in most state militias: sporadic attendance, inefficient training, political partisanship, and a picnic-like atmosphere at musters.⁵⁹ For example, Wyatt Moseley Elliot, Class of 1842, served as captain of the Richmond Grays from 1847 to 1862 but appeared to have little effect on the unit's discipline or combat effectiveness.⁶⁰ Problems plagued the Virginia militia such as class conflict, political partisanship, incompetent leadership and poor training. In theory, VMI graduates could solve these issues by offering a source of virtue and education badly needed in the command structure as graduates aged and moved into

positions of authority beyond company assignments. But military education provided no guarantees of success in militia leadership. Soldiers of the Fourth Texas Infantry Regiment refused to accept the command of Colonel R. T. P. Allen, West Point Class of 1834, who served as superintendent of the Kentucky Military Institute and Texas Military Institute, and literally ran him out of their camp in 1861.⁶¹ Since VMI did not require militia service of its graduates, its founders left the specifics about their contribution to the militia vague and clouded by idealistic expectations. Although VMI did not assign its graduates to individual militia units, Preston posited in his “Cives” articles that communities would naturally appoint Institute men to lead local companies because of their superior moral, scientific and military training. Militia soldiers typically voted for whom they wanted to serve as their officers and often elected prominent politicians and citizens of their towns, regardless of their military experience. This placed the burden of improving the militia on the common sense of ordinary Virginians to make the logical choice when selecting their officers, a choice that did not always demonstrate a serious commitment to truly improving the state’s military forces.

Strangely, Smith made a more overt effort to assist graduates in their pursuit of a commission in the active duty U.S. Army. In spite of his orations on improving the state militia and his own brief and disillusioned military career, Smith warmly supported those former students who desired to be Army officers. His letters of recommendation arrived on the desks of senior members of Congress, high-ranking generals and even the Secretary of War. His motivation came from a desire, again, to promote the reputation of the Institute. From the outset of the school’s establishment, Smith endeavored to

make VMI the equivalent of West Point in structure, academic caliber and, most importantly, national recognition. “Although we will present to you West Point upon a very small scale,” he confessed to his friend Dennis Hart Mahan, “our second year’s existence may not stand a very bad comparison with West Point [in its second year] in 1804.”⁶² By the 1840s, the U.S. Military Academy supplied the majority of the commissioned officers in the U.S. Army and surpassed the qualifications of politically appointed officers with their superior scientific and engineering education. Smith knew that one proving ground for his accomplishments with the VMI curriculum would be demonstrated through the performance of his graduates in the Regular Army officer corps. When recommending one of his graduates, William Stuart, for a commission, he boasted of his comprehensive education in mathematics, science and military tactics. “From my personal knowledge of the qualifications of an officer of the army, I know that there are few young men who enter the service from West Point who are better qualified than Stuart.” Smith continued, “This institution has been laboring now for 11 years in building up its military reputation and we should like to have an opportunity of comparing our graduates with those from West Point.”⁶³ With the intellectual quality of West Point graduates being so high, Smith used caution when investing time, energy and favors to secure positions in the Army for VMI alumni. He refused to assist those who had not yet graduated, had been dismissed, or did not perform well as cadets at VMI-- including General Winfield Scott’s nephew. He warned of these “underqualified” candidates that if they decided to pursue a career in the Army, that they would “have to compete with graduates of West Point,” and their opportunities for success would be

extremely limited.⁶⁴ Regardless, Smith believed and aimed to prove that VMI could provide the same quality of scientifically trained men as his alma mater and always took the opportunity to compare his students with those of the esteemed Academy.

Smith's goal to demonstrate that VMI cadets could compete with those of West Point also inspired a unique plan that he offered to Mahan in 1848. Smith proposed that the Academy accept the first five Institute cadets in the rising first class and have them enroll at West Point as cadets in their first class. When proposing this idea to his old friend, Smith presented it as especially advantageous to the Academy. Opening the doors of West Point to cadets from other military academies (only "state" cadets from state military schools) would eliminate the still lingering label of the Academy as an "exclusive" institution. Placing the best VMI cadets in the West Point Corps of Cadets would also increase the standards for entering the first class and increase the quality of the class overall, thereby making better officers overall. While Smith argued that only pure intentions motivated this plan and that he considered state military schools "nurslings of the parent tree" of West Point, he truly desired to demonstrate that his cadets, educated on the rigorous Thayer academic curriculum, could prove their caliber in the nation's most prestigious scientific academy, in front of many of his former professors.⁶⁵ Unfortunately for Smith, Mahan rejected his plan and he could not succeed in getting the measure passed as a bill in Congress.⁶⁶

With this promising avenue closed, Smith's philosophies opened the door to a new series of questions regarding Southern military education and its role in promoting citizenship and the issue of antebellum republicanism. Most of these new questions

focused on explaining why he made education, not military service, the means of exacting citizenship. According to historian Kenneth McCreedy, since the seventeenth century, America had built the tradition of the militia as the “palladium of liberty,” and the “keystone on which individual liberties rested.”⁶⁷ Americans drew from a more ancient tradition of associating such military service with citizenship. In The Machiavellian Moment, historian J. G. A. Pocock identifies the belief that military virtue necessitated political virtue as both aimed to protect the republic and the “common good” through selfless sacrifice. The citizen-soldier, therefore, learned civic virtue through military discipline and service.⁶⁸ Historians also have associated military schools as part of this military republican tradition. Rod Andrew argues that Southerners agreed with Machiavelli in equating military and civic attributes and utilized military education to make better citizens. Military schools also grew in popularity with state governments because of their promise to provide officers for state military forces.⁶⁹ It was no secret to any citizen in Virginia that the militia needed a corps of young men professionally trained in the military art, like those from West Point, to solve its continual crisis in leadership. Smith admitted this openly and several members of the Institute’s Board had served as commanders of the state military forces over the years, including Virginia’s Adjutant General, General William H. Richardson. Still, VMI’s founders made militia service voluntary, and ambiguously at that, even though the militia desperately needed their service. Most likely, the wider socio-political trend of replacing mandatory militia service for volunteer forces in state militias drove their

thinking but neither Smith nor any of his superiors appear ever openly addressed the issue.⁷⁰

The decline of the militia did not signal the decline of civic virtue for Smith. Instead, the anemic condition of the state's education system posed the greatest threat to Virginia's prosperity and progress. Learning represented the new "palladium of liberty" as an education gave a citizen the best devices for improving his society rather than the qualities of military culture. The state's primary problem rested solely in its teachers: too many uneducated, underqualified instructors populated the schoolhouses of the Old Dominion, producing an endless cycle of ignorance. This ignorance destroyed civic virtue and retarded the potential of creating a genuine culture of learning and enlightenment. Smith believed that knowledge, bolstered by a sense of state patriotism and the promotion of the public good, provided the best defense for the republic. He explained this argument in his 1848 Annual Report:

Instead of confiding public arms to a hired soldiery, the state has submitted the defence and protection of her sons, educated in sentiments of intelligent patriotism and public virtue. . . she [Virginia] has substituted the educated and intelligent student taken, in all cases, from among her own children and made them the guardian of her means of defence; and by educating them, and by sending them forth as instructors throughout the commonwealth, she has made even the means of defence less necessary. The moral power of an intelligent and disciplined corps of young men, annually sent forth to mix in the affairs of

society, will exercise the greatest influence in maintaining respect abroad and peace at home.⁷¹

During the antebellum period, few schools enjoyed a reputation as esteemed as the U.S. Military Academy. Many Americans considered it the most respected institution of higher learning in the nation.⁷² Knowing this, Smith labored to make VMI as close to West Point as possible in curriculum and military structure so it also could develop the respect of the nation. Smith stated in his 1851 Annual Report that he hoped that his school could “do for the state of Virginia what West Point has done for the United States.”⁷³ The closer the Institute resembled West Point, the more respect it would receive from both politicians and the general public. West Point drew most of its reputation from the fact that it provided one of the few quality collegiate engineering programs in America. Its graduates dominated the professional engineering ranks and participated in nearly every internal improvements project in America during the antebellum period.⁷⁴ Even as late as the 1850s, most educators associated a quality engineering education with a military college. The world’s most respected engineering schools, West Point, L’Ecole Polytechnique in France, and Sandhurst in Great Britain were not coincidentally military institutions. Civil engineering as an academic discipline began in the eighteenth century when the French army created a series of schools for training its officers of the Corps de genie (corps of engineers) which eventually consolidated into the Ecole Polytechnique in 1794. Britain, Germany and eventually the United States created similar institutions for their officer corps by the early nineteenth century and accepted the army as the primary source for its scientific and engineering

minds.⁷⁵ If the new profession of the engineer was still traditionally that of the military officer, Smith logically endorsed military education as the optimum environment to teach future engineers and scientists.

Smith also promoted military education because of its ability to provide the ideal environment for learning. To be sure, the basic tenets of military education such as loyalty, patriotism, and devotion did encourage qualities necessary for a lifetime of good citizenship.⁷⁶ However, Smith believed the benefits of utilizing a military structure for any school optimized the efficiency of the educational process. All of his pamphlets, letters and reports preached that a classroom, and a school as whole, could not function properly without thoroughly disciplined behavior from its students. The structure of reforms suggested in both College Reform and Regulations of Military Institutions as Applied to Common Schools in particular centered on the premise of controlling the student in order to promote a more efficient learning environment.⁷⁷ While Smith saw discipline, regardless of its form, as a benefit to a school, adopting a military structure provided the most effective method to regulating behavior and academic output. He assured University of Alabama president Landon Garland of latter's decision to convert his institution to a military format by stating, "[it] is not too late for one of the peculiar advantages of the military system in that young men study better and work harder than under the civil establishment."⁷⁸ Living under military discipline instilled habits of character and behavior that would serve VMI graduates for a lifetime but more importantly for Smith, it satisfied the immediate need of controlling his students.

Other attributes that military discipline imbued such as self-control, diligence, and obedience could also assist graduates for a lifetime of productive scholarship, not just citizenship. The young men who applied the habits they acquired through military discipline for the betterment of their society demonstrated republican virtue equal to that of the citizen-soldier. Utilizing a military format played a key role in the application of republicanism in graduates. The rigorous discipline of VMI provided the means to shape the habits necessary to become effective educators. “The normal character which the law and public expectation have thus given to the Institute has controlled in a great degree its system of instruction,” Smith explained to Virginia’s Adjutant-General William H. Richardson, “Elementary instruction commencing with our 4th class and those who are to discharge the important office of a teacher are disciplined for this special purpose. To give greater efficiency to this interesting department of the Institute, the Superintendent has in the course of preparation a detailed system of instruction and discipline for its teachers which it is hoped will aid in ensuring uniformity in the conduct of subordinate schools.”⁷⁹ The habits of a soldier, namely punctuality, promptness, responsibility, neatness, energy and decision, instilled the qualities necessary to become the most effective teacher possible.⁸⁰

A close examination of Smith’s philosophy, however, reveals that he did not view military education, in itself, as the true salvation of the republic. Throughout his career, he promoted the development of education on all levels but maintained that schools did not have to be uniquely military to make a difference in society. An effective institution, he argued, needed two key features which were coincidentally

commonplace characteristics in the best military schools: a disciplined learning environment and a practical scientifically based curriculum.⁸¹ Schoolhouses or colleges did not necessarily have to create a corps of cadets, wear uniforms or conduct military drill in order to function effectively. Smith proposed that certain features popularized by military institutions such as demerit systems, merit roll, and peer emulation could be incorporated into civilian schools as more efficient methods to apply student discipline. A military structure was ideal, but never mandatory to achieve success. He compiled the pamphlets College Reform and Regulation of Military Institutions for the purpose of outlining this very reason. These essays argued that an institution did not have to be exclusively military in order to effectively enforce student discipline. Smith only stipulated that schools needed to make the explicit commitment to choosing an exclusively military or exclusively civil structure.⁸² In 1850, Smith advised his friend Benjamin S. Ewell, a professor at the College of William and Mary, not to enforce discipline on his civilian student body with a military commandant. “The experience of our neighbour [Washington College] here will have convinced you of the absurdity of making a military college with a military officer. The institution should be exclusively military or exclusively civil. To make it civil in all its organization save a military police officer as a high constable would destroy whatever discipline might otherwise be obtained.”⁸³ He repeated this advice a decade later when he explained to Landon Garland that the president of a university does not need to be a military man to enforce discipline unless he school specifically under a military organization.⁸⁴ When Thomas Stockton of Capital College in Columbus, Ohio inquired to Smith about establishing a

military chair, he advised against the idea arguing that such a chair without a pure military system would be useless. He also warned against having students drill who were not organized into a military corps of cadets. “[T]he tendency to disorder will be increased by the students with arms in their hands.”⁸⁵

Whenever recounting the progress of his institution, Smith often made reference to the company of troops who guarded the Arsenal before the establishment of VMI. Just as Preston had in his original articles calling for their replacement, Smith always referred to them as the “hired soldiers.” This choice of label served as half of the dichotomy of the two groups the citizens had to choose to protect the Arsenal: a body of misfits simply working only for a wage compared to a corps of educated and patriotic young lads who volunteered to protect their state while developing their intellect and moral character. The moniker also connoted a reference to a professional standing army, traditionally an overt symbol of oppression and potentially a threat to free republics. Armies who filled their ranks through compulsory service contradicted the essence of liberty in the minds of many Americans. Both Preston and Smith seized the opportunity to offer the solution of protecting the Arsenal through providing the state with a body of young moral educated republican volunteers. Smith reinforced this idea when he identified the differences between VMI and European military schools in his 1846 Annual Report. These institutions, which were an extension of standing armies, had only the prospect of awarding a military commission after graduation as the only sufficient stimulant to promote good behavior. The absence of complimentary methods to enforce moral influences in this environment, he argued, defeated the purpose of

developing an ideal citizenship. Much of Smith's argument reflected the views of the nation's Founders. As historian Gordon Wood posits, the Founders envisioned a government and society dictated by those endowed by "public virtue" as free citizens who served the good of the republic instead of their own self interest.⁸⁶ The voluntary nature of VMI's admission policy more easily facilitated the development of character and allowed each individual cadet to have his conduct judged as part of his general merit.⁸⁷

Founders of military academies established these institutions with a clear sense of how broader society would benefit from their existence. Arguments, such as Jennifer Green's, focus solely on the individual advantage gained by the cadets, particularly those "aspiring to middle class status."⁸⁸ When weighing the benefits of the existence of VMI, one must look beyond the comfort enjoyed by graduates in the "middle class." The purpose of the Institute stretched far beyond the monetary success of its alumni in Smith's eyes. He viewed himself, first and foremost, as a public servant who commanded an institution dedicated to the betterment of his society. "The post which I have held has been one of great labour and responsibility and my chief reward will be the consciousness that I have done my state some service that may tell upon her own sons," he reflected in 1855.⁸⁹ While he contributed significantly to the career development of hundred of his former students, his catered the function of his institution for higher, altruistic goals. One cannot view military education during this time period in solely context of the career gains achieved by individual cadets. Smith endeavored to use his institution to improve citizenship and therefore create a better society.

The society he aimed specifically to improve, however, is often overlooked in all of the literature detailing the intricacies of military education. When examining the historical significance of antebellum military schools, identifying the object of service means just as much as exploring how the academies educated their young men. These institutions needed to repay the support they received from the state, both monetary and political, through the service of its graduates within the state. As superintendent, Smith recognized a genuine attachment to the state and promoted this loyalty as the central tenet of the Institute's ethos. In that process, he also attempted to reinforce a socio-political identity for his graduates and those who supported the institution as Virginians and eventually more broadly as Southerners. Smith's rhetoric rarely articulated a concept of citizenship extending beyond regional loyalty or encouraged his cadets to become "good Americans," per se. VMI complemented its mission of improving state welfare by also generating a sense of social, cultural and economic independence for Virginia and the South.

Smith identified exactly who qualified as a "citizen" through the Institute's admission policy as state patriotism led to exclusiveness. During the antebellum period, VMI accepted only young men from Virginia. While the regulations did not officially bar the admission of non-Virginians, Smith explained that the "Board of Visitors gives priority to 'our' citizens."⁹⁰ He rejected dozens of applications for admission every year that arrived from outside of the Old Dominion, representing both Northern and Southern states. With succinct politeness, he typically explained to out of state inquirers of VMI's status as a state supported institution and that the Institute only had the funding to

support its own sons within the state. With Virginia applicants also being turned away, Smith could not justify using state funds to educate non-Virginians. On an ideological level, he guarded the benefits of the Institute closely, offering admission only to the Old Dominion's "native sons" in order to clearly define to whom they owed their allegiance to as citizens, i.e., the state of Virginia. Rejecting non-Virginia applicants reflected his ideological sentiments about patriotism and republicanism as much as fiscal responsibility to the state. Smith criticized other state schools, particularly military ones, for accepting out of state students. Such an admissions policy misallocated funds by investing state funds on those who were not state residents but it also undermined the sense of state service crucial to operating a military school.

Inculcated with a sense of state patriotism and citizenship, many VMI graduates promoted these same values as educators throughout the state. Pedagogy now served as the ultimate instrument for developing a sense of civic allegiance to a government and society. To create a civic identity within their children, Virginians desired to staff their schoolhouses with their own "native" teachers. Early educational reformers within the Old Dominion, such as Henry Ruffner and Charles Fenton Mercer, argued this as one of the key features of their improvement plans as early as the 1830s.⁹¹ The creation of VMI's state cadet system in 1842 fit perfectly into the design to have learned Virginians educate as many other young Virginians as possible. Having state cadets from VMI serve as teachers achieved a greater purpose than simply repaying their gratis tuition and returning the state's investment. This scheme filled what Smith believed was a statewide desire for native teachers. In 1851, he explained to one state legislator that

“each Senatorial district would have a young lad here at state charge under preparation as a teacher to go back to his district and do his duty in distributing the blessings of education among his people. This is what our state wants in education – good native teachers and any pension that will take up the poor boy and furnish him with the means of becoming a good and useful citizen will be money well spent.”⁹² With the commitment of this loyalty from VMI graduates, Virginia would therefore continue to pledge its support to the Institute. “Let the state stand by her own institutions and her own sons and they will ever rise up and do her reverence,” proclaimed Smith.⁹³

Of all of his contributions to his government and society, Smith always regarded his role in providing teachers for the state as his proudest achievement. He enjoyed the greatest sense of civic self-satisfaction by fulfilling what he interpreted as the mandate of his fellow citizens. As more Virginians appreciated Smith’s theories correlating the improvement of education with the education of society, the demand for the Institute’s graduates as teachers increased noticeably every year. “I have now upon my table from 8 to 10 applications for teachers which I cannot supply and the public are just beginning to appreciate our system of training teachers. A premium is now offered for their services,” Smith boasted to Charles P. Dorman. “Since you left, a letter from Norfolk says ‘we must have one of your teachers.’ A little before, one in Richmond writes ‘do send me one of your teachers.’ A letter from Leesburg says ‘our people here can’t do without a graduate of the Institute.’”⁹⁴ Smith echoed these sentiments to the state legislature a few months later in his Annual Report, “In this work she [VMI] is now actively engaged, not by attempting to introduce some new theory of popular education;

but by the silent and certain influence resulting from the annual distribution of a corps of well trained native teachers among our people. . . We see it again in the increasing demand for more and more teachers; and we may now anticipate what it will be when some twenty years have passed, and the system, now only partially introduced, shall have reached every county and every neighborhood in the state.”⁹⁵

Virginia’s campaign to educate and provide native teachers demonstrated enthusiastic state patriotism and commitment to public service but also reflected broader social trends in the South during the antebellum period. If individual states could not produce “native” teachers from their own state, they at least desired the acquisition of an instructor from another slave holding state. As early as the 1830s, Southern educational reformers openly advocated the purging of all Northern education influences-- particularly teachers. Historians, such as John Hope Franklin, identify the collective desire amongst Southerners to identify their education as unique, separate and free of Yankee influence.⁹⁶ John S. Ezell’s analysis of Southern enrollment in Northern schools confirms the effectiveness of efforts to return native Southerners to their own schools in the late antebellum period. “As the twin wedges of slavery and sectional pride pushed the people farther and farther apart,” Ezell concludes “adherence to customs more typically Southern was demanded” in the form of “native” education.⁹⁷

Letters and articles from Southern educators reflected this burgeoning crusade to promote a distinctly regional, non-Yankee education throughout the 1840s and 1850s. Pamphlets, speeches, and newspaper articles increasingly demanded the return of Southern students from Northern schools and removal of all Yankee teachers (eventually

all stereotyped as “black Republican” teachers) in the South in order for the slaveholding states to promote educational institutions that imbued Southern values and institutions to its youth.⁹⁸ DeBow’s Agricultural and Commercial Review published a series of articles between 1854 and 1857 dedicated solely to convincing fellow Southerners to patronize and support their own institutions of learning. One such article, entitled “Home Education at the South,” identified education as the ultimate source of independence and progress. “Men from the South must be educated in the South; then they will rejoice in their own institutions, advance the integrity and strength of their own native states; and, knowing no foreign or remote interest in the form of local attractions, they will never impoverish their own land by merely acquiring wealth to be carried away or encourage a system of absenteeism, alike destructive to social concord and permanent improvement.”⁹⁹ Other contributors took a more defensive stance, arguing a Southern education as the only defense against destructive Northern intuitions such as industrialism and abolition.¹⁰⁰

Smith was no exception to this anti-Northern educational sentiment expressed by his fellow Southerners. He carried these prejudices to his broader efforts for common school reform. In his opinion, the South had become too dependent on the Northern model for common school systems, educational literature and instructors. Southerners, in all levels of education, needed to purge every element of Yankee influence from its instruction. “Here the good people have been so much in the habit of decrying the old system and of exalting those of the North . . .,” Smith complained to James Brown, Virginia’s Second Auditor.¹⁰¹ Smith promoted this regionalist policy without remorse as

he argued that their Northern educational counterparts practiced the same tactics. “I am informed that in Mass[achusetts] and some other N.E. States no book is allowed to be used in the public schools unless the product of home industry and talents. . . My little books was prepared expressly for the schools of Va.” Smith and other Southerners contended that Northern teachers, textbooks and educational systems served the sole purpose of infecting Southern culture with their treacherous values and ideas. He warned one politician that “many school books come into Va from the North which contain sentiments adverse to our institutions.”¹⁰² This crusade also included a fervent effort to convince other Southern educators to follow this course of action. In 1860, he explained to the president of the University of Mississippi, “I am now making arrangements to have all my books published in Richmond and if Southern Institutions will sustain the efforts now being made in this and other Southern States, northern books like Northern teachers will be driven out of the South.”¹⁰³ Fellow military school superintendents Tench Tilghman at the Maryland Military Academy and Daniel Harvey Hill with the North Carolina Military Institute also openly embraced the promotion of “home” education for Southerners through their correspondence and activism in Southern education conventions.¹⁰⁴ Smith also offered much needed guidance to his old friends Reverends Leonidas Polk and James H. Otey during their establishment of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, an institution whose curriculum would specifically endorse the region’s arts and literature, particularly in the tradition of ancient slaveholding civilizations such as the Hebrews, Greeks and Romans.¹⁰⁵

Aside from the indifference of the state legislature, Northern teachers appeared to pose the greatest threat to Virginia education. Smith labored to employ as many of the Old Dominion's children under the tutelage of his homegrown Institute graduates, regardless of their talent, to keep out "foreign" (i.e. non-Southern) instructors. When placing a cadet who graduated last in his class as a private tutor, Smith reassured the new employer that, "I am sure he will do your sons more good than 4/5 of the northern men who are strolling about our state."¹⁰⁶ In many ways, his sentiments simply reflected those of other Virginians. He commented to Richardson that "Had Mr. [R. C. L.] Moncure's son been an applicant at the time, I am sure he would have had the preference for the ground of Judge Crump's preference was that the only applicants from Richmond were the sons of northerners and he would prefer a boy of good Virginia stock to the others."¹⁰⁷

Smith maintained his anti-Northern sentiment when dealing with his own faculty as well. When considering candidates for a professor of physical science in 1850, he convinced the Board of Visitors to pass over the most qualified applicant, Major John James Peck (USMA Class of 1843). Smith decided to "reject Major Peck because he was a New Yorker and to elect Mr. [Robert] Rodes because he was a [VMI] graduate" and a Virginian.¹⁰⁸ Schoolbooks also had to be purged of Yankee influence as well. Even at an early age, Smith argued, young Virginians needed exposure to works produced by their own "native" citizens. He explained this reasoning to state delegate George Yerby,

It has been the policy of the state as expressed by law to encourage native industry and talents by authorizing the purchase of elementary works for educational purposes. Such a policy cannot be objected to. It prevails in most of the Northern States and with universal satisfaction. The propriety of such a measure is manifest, also from the fact that many school books come into Va from the North which contain sentiments adverse to our institutions.¹⁰⁹

Pure hatred of all things Yankee did not account for all of Smith's anti-Northern prejudices. As an intellectual, Smith endured an identifiable inferiority complex as he openly acknowledged the traditional superiority of Northern and European education and, consequently, the South's dependence on it. The reputation of Northern state educational systems, particularly in New England, was common knowledge to most Americans, especially to Smith, who subscribed to several Northern educational journals. His 1858 trip to Europe inspired an even greater sense of intellectual inferiority once he observed the advanced state of scientific and technical education in nations like England, France, and Germany. This trip reinforced, his desire to meet the standard set by the Europeans in these fields inspired his pamphlet Scientific Education in Europe to inform and warn fellow American educators, particularly Southerners, just how far behind they had fallen intellectually.¹¹⁰ Letters to fellow educators and politicians reiterated his frustration over how the South lagged behind both the North and Europe.¹¹¹ Woven within the fiery anti-Yankee rhetoric, fellow pro-Southern education advocates also expressed their chagrin at detesting all things Northern but relying on their superior cultural intellect to support their own education systems.

Virginia educational reformer Charles Fenton Mercer suggested that schools in the Old Dominion should exclude non-native teachers just as Massachusetts had for decades. Others worried about the psychological damage brought on by this inferiority complex. Former president of the University of Louisiana, Francis L. Hawks, complained that Northern educational superiority caused Northerners to typecast Southerners as ignorant and would continue to treat them as inferiors unless the South promoted its own education systems.¹¹²

Moving towards an extreme position, Smith pursued the ultimate goal of creating a Virginia completely free of outside educational influence where the state could protect and develop its own cultural and institutional identity. Education, not a strong military, he believed provided the best means to guard the state's virtue and future prosperity. "The latent talent of many poor young men of the state is thus made tributary to the reform of the school system of the commonwealth and to the development of those resources which constitute their chief reliance for her progress and independence," he explained to William H. Richardson.¹¹³ By providing all of its own teachers and civil engineers, Virginia would no longer need to depend on outside sources of talent and therefore thrive in an economy and intellectual community that was truly their own. Since the conclusion of the Revolutionary Era, Virginia had fallen off as the center of cultural and intellectual superiority it enjoyed during the late eighteenth century. According to historian Richard Beale Davis, "the commonwealth held a political and intellectual primacy which was acknowledged and offend envied by here sister states and indeed by much of the European world."¹¹⁴ Smith hoped to create an independent

Virginia reminiscent of its past glory from the days of the American War for Independence. He promised his cadets in 1856 that “we can render our mother State no better service than by making her independent--by affording a home education for all her sons--and her daughters too. Home-spun fabrics were the badges of independence of our revolutionary ancestors. Let a home-spun education be the badge of Virginia’s independence now.”¹¹⁵

In addition to shaping patriotism for his native state, Smith’s prejudices also promoted a broader mission of protecting a more Southern identity. Historical works, particularly in the context of the rising sectional conflict, have underscored the role of military institutions in creating a Southern identity. Rod Andrew notes that “North-South tension provided only a vague and often unspoken justification for the original founding of the first military schools,” and cites protection of Southern identity as the impetus for the intuitions created in the years immediately preceding the Civil War.¹¹⁶ Long before Andrew, John Hope Franklin argued that the teaching of military skills at institutions such as VMI and other “West Points of the South,” reflected the values of a violent and militant Southern culture.¹¹⁷ The existence of military schools in Northern states, according to historian Marcus Cunliffe, negated the exclusivity of a Southern military educational tradition. An analysis of Smith’s rhetoric and educational philosophies, however, offers a different historiographical interpretation. Smith promoted complete isolation from Northern education as the best method to protect “Southern institutions.”¹¹⁸ Only through the South’s own design for education comprised of Southern teachers, Southern textbooks and, if possible, morally and

academically sound students shaped in a military-like environment, could the region ever hope to build a foundation for independence. Smith often gave credit to military education as the potential salvation for the South's educational uniqueness. He told one former student that "military organization and structure can save slave holding state universities, colleges and high schools."¹¹⁹

Smith and his faculty saw their institution as a bastion guarding the most sacred of Southern institutions: African slavery. A slave owner himself, Smith incorporated the defense of slavery into the VMI curriculum.¹²⁰ When explaining the necessity of teaching history and government, he emphasized the need for every cadet to also "believe the foundation of that divine institution of slavery which is the basis of the happiness, prosperity and independence of our southern people, and thoroughly fortified to advocate and defend it."¹²¹ He repeated these sentiments in his four-article series published in the Southern Literary Messenger in which he exclaimed that VMI's "important mission in protecting and giving efficiency to our [the South's] peculiar institutions."¹²² Smith, like many other Southern superintendents adopted and praised Charles Dew's lectures on American history which acknowledged slavery as the crucial element of the nation's development.¹²³ VMI professor William Gilham's report on scientific agriculture argued the productive coexistence of combining science and slave labor in the South's agrarian economy. Not only would Southern farmers be more productive, they would also enjoy the moral benefits of paternalism which those in the free Northern society could not experience.¹²⁴ While Andrew may be correct in his argument that Southern military education reflected broader national trends of

republicanism, the intention of Smith and his followers was far more regionally oriented. Smith's thinking put him in lockstep with a pure Southern mentality connecting education and the protection of slavery. Smith himself argued the necessity of a purely "Southern" education to protect the region's "institutions." Other Southern intellectuals echoed these sentiments, believing education as essential for white citizens to "intelligently and actively to control and direct the slave labor of the State."¹²⁵ Board of Visitors president James L. Kemper reminded cadets that they had "been schooled in a great nursery of States' Rights and of patriotic sentiment."¹²⁶ Southern military schools rarely taught their students to think of themselves as national rather than state citizens, reflecting the republican views of their culture.

The reach of Smith's national influence along with his state and regional prejudices was best exemplified through his peculiar relationship with legendary educational reformer Francis Wayland of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. A student and favorite disciple of educational innovator Eliphalet Nott at Union College, in Schenectady, New York, Wayland succeeded Asa Messer as president of Brown University in 1827, a position he held until his retirement in 1855.¹²⁷ During that time, he launched a vigorous program of progressive institutional reforms to the university's admissions policy, curriculum and disciplinary system that won him wide recognition in academe as an aggressive and effective reformer. Arguably Francis H. Smith's greatest and most underappreciated achievement as an educational reformer came in 1851 when the nationally renowned Wayland humbly sought out the advice of VMI's superintendent on the best method to control his students at Brown University.¹²⁸

After exchanging cordial letters discussing regulations, demerits, and recitations, Wayland thanked Smith and confirmed that he would incorporate a disciplinary system based on his advice and pamphlets. Smith then proudly informed colleagues and former students that the esteemed “Brown University in R[hode] Island has been remodeled upon the basis of our discipline,” and Wayland considered it “best thing they could do to govern the college.”¹²⁹ Three years later, Smith followed up on this success by asking Wayland to send him a copy of his regulations to assess how he had incorporated the demerit and merit roll system Smith had suggested.¹³⁰

A comparison of the respective educational philosophies of Smith and Wayland reveals striking similarities, near to the point of being identical. Wayland’s most famous pamphlets, Thoughts on the Present Collegiate System in the United States (1842) and Report to the Corporation of Brown University on Changes in the System of Collegiate Education (1850), proposed many of the same reforms that Smith had advocated in all of his own literature such as incorporating more science into the college curriculum, making education responsive to the needs of society and available to all citizens in order to provide the best means to improve their lives. Wayland’s essays called for the creation of a legion of trained teachers to improve his region’s school systems. Both men also built reputations as promoters of discipline, an issue which eventually brought them into contact. The correspondence between the two presidents demonstrated their commitment to controlling students in the classroom, *in loco parentis*, and making parents a part of the disciplinary process.

Following their correspondence, Smith cited the philosophy of Wayland in his essays College Reform and his 1856 Introductory Address to the Corps of Cadets. In these summaries of his educational philosophies, he built on Wayland's lament of the nation's inadequate engineering education and dependence on West Point to fulfill all of the country's needs in this respect. Smith also lauded his proposals making college curriculums more definitive in training young men for practical professions.¹³¹ Much like citing Matthew Arnold in his literature, associating his ideas with a man of Wayland's repute gave Smith's reforms even more legitimacy, even if Smith had advocated them first. Within his own curriculum, Smith adopted Wayland's Intellectual Philosophy as the textbook in 1856 for his course for first classmen on mental philosophy.¹³² For someone who held such strong opinions on removing Northern books from Southern schools, using Wayland's text demonstrated the respect that Smith held for him and his work.

But strangely after 1856, Smith turned on Wayland and suddenly associated him with everything evil that Northern education represented. He concluded the first of a series of articles to the Southern Literary Messenger on the progress of Virginia education with a damning diatribe on the great Brown University reformer. He wrote, "The materialistic, dollar and cent, engineering system of Dr. Wayland, and the rest of Yankeedom, no longer finds many advocates among our teachers."¹³³ This demonstrated that Smith had made a major reversal in his ideological priorities as he joined dozens of other Southern pedagogues in cutting intellectual ties with the great Francis Wayland, not because of his educational philosophies, but because of the culture

he represented. Southern colleges who had embraced Wayland now jettisoned all evidence of his influence in their curriculums, particularly his most utilized work, Moral Science, which had been adopted by several Southern schools but was now banned because of Wayland's outspoken condemnation of slavery.¹³⁴

This strange relationship with Francis Wayland, representative of Smith's broader animosity toward Northern education, offers a new dimension to the debate on the "Southernness" of antebellum military schools. Historiographical attention to this issue focuses on the obvious elements of this unique brand of education, namely uniforms, drills, teaching of tactics and overall military preparedness of a portion of the Southern male population. Obviously, these martial qualities exemplify, in the eyes of many historians, the inherent militancy of Southern culture.¹³⁵ Smith, however, demonstrated that teachers, not soldiers, played a more pivotal role in creating a distinctive society for both Virginia and the South. Institutions such as VMI made their primary goal to achieve distinctiveness and independence through intellectual separation rather than the art of war. So one must identify the "Southernness" of military academies more through their educational exclusiveness rather than their martial qualities as ideas and philosophies, through pedagogy, made these schools more unique to the region than the actual military training.

As a product of one of the best engineering educations in the world, Smith also considered himself a man of science. He understood the utility of science for social betterment and had observed first hand how his fellow West Point graduates contributed to the nation's infrastructure through internal improvement projects. Since no other

institution of higher learning offered a civil engineering program of equal quality, USMA established an intellectual and eventual occupational monopoly on a great majority of the bridge, road, and railroad construction throughout the nation during the early antebellum period.¹³⁶ Cognizant of how the nation depended on West Point for its development and prosperity, Smith shaped the purpose of his own institution to create a similar use within his own state.

While Smith championed education, particularly in the sciences, as the salvation for Virginia society, he also considered the application of this technical education as equally essential element to his state's prosperity. He considered the institutions of engineering and pedagogy as the dual cornerstones of social and economic improvement, frequently labeling them as "two of the most important interests of the state."¹³⁷ In every annual report to the legislature and in personal correspondence, Smith listed the numbers of graduates serving their state as either teachers or engineers.¹³⁸ Much like the development of more qualified teachers, he remained committed to the notion that the Old Dominion needed to produce its own homegrown population of native engineers and scientists in order for the state to flourish, and again, achieve complete autonomy. "When we can say that every teacher and engineer in the state is a native born Virginian then we shall feel the freedom of real independence," Smith proclaimed to state senator Douglas B. Layne.¹³⁹ He used every opportunity to convince his fellow Virginians that the promotion of engineering would improve their state. In 1851, a passage from his report reveals his views:

The age in which we live is one of progress--and especially of physical progress. The application of science to the arts is daily developing important facts connected with various departments of domestic economy. What is wanting in this great state to place her again in the lead of her sister states but the development of her immense physical resources? What state can compare with this in the climate, soil, mineral and agricultural wealth, and in natural channels of intercommunication? Let science be applied to direct change in the growing prosperity of our people and state. Here is a field for the active exercise of the education furnished by this institution, and I feel assured we shall receive the hearty co-operation of the board in the duty which lies before us.¹⁴⁰

For those graduates who did not owe the state teaching service or completed their mandatory two years, engineering became the most popular career of choice. Several VMI graduates took advantage of their highly valuable, West Point caliber education and the limited number of trained engineers in the state to secure lucrative positions on many of the state's numerous internal improvement projects. Daniel H. Calhoun's analysis of the nineteenth century American civil engineer reveals that educated engineers working on antebellum internal improvement projects made salaries comparable to the more prestigious occupations of the time including physicians, judges and politicians.¹⁴¹ The profession of teaching, regardless of how noble Smith portrayed the profession, could not compete with the financial prospects of engineering. Many graduates appealed to their former superintendent to aid in their securing a position with an engineering project instead of serving as teachers to fulfill their state cadet requirement. This frustrated

Smith who remained committed the belief that teaching as the hallmark of state service. “The great tendency now is for young men to allow themselves to be drawn away from their first and imperative duty by the strong inducement of other professions, particularly engineering,” Smith warned recent graduate William Fitzhugh Lee as he requested an exemption from his teaching duties. “You will lose nothing by making duty your first consideration.”¹⁴² Those “pay” cadets who did not have to fulfill a teaching duty also sought out Smith’s assistance in securing a position in the engineering field.

Occasionally, he could place an alumnus with a railroad company or recommend them for the U.S. Coast Survey, but more often than not, Smith found himself with dozens of opportunities for teachers that went unfulfilled as many of his former students preferred more lucrative careers in internal improvements.¹⁴³ While he boasted about and held immense pride for those students who did achieve success as engineers, he still clung to the belief that improving the state’s educational system should hold first priority and considered VMI’s role in that regard its greatest contribution. His disdain for those who lobbied to enrich their own personal careers instead of serving their government reflected the republicanism expressed by the American Revolutionaries who called for sacrifice for the good of the republic instead of the pursuit of self interest. Cadets, much like the citizens who created the new American government after the War of Independence, must first consider the common good before their own individual interests.¹⁴⁴ Much of this conviction came from his own personal experience as he abandoned a career as an engineer in order to commit to a life as an education and mostly likely hoped for the same path from his protégés. Regardless, in his speech to the

Corps of Cadets in 1856, Smith lauded the school's alumni for their contributions to developing the state's infrastructure. More importantly, Virginia had become self-sufficient for providing its own engineers. "Virginia has not had to look abroad for civil engineers to construct her railroads. Her own sons, educated in her own institutions, are now developing her untold wealth, and binding together the distant parts of this Old Dominion with iron bands, never, never to be disunited," he proclaimed.¹⁴⁵ Smith also lauded the accomplishments of individual graduates, such as William Mahone (1847), who had distinguished himself as one of the state's most successful civil engineers.¹⁴⁶ As the reputation of the Institute's engineering program grew, Smith worked more actively with the state government to secure practical experience for both his cadets and graduates on certain projects. In 1859, Governor Henry Wise solicited the services of several cadet volunteers to serve as junior engineers on a state-funded project to survey a canal in Giles County.¹⁴⁷

Historians have broadened the boundaries of the Market Revolution beyond the simple expansion of internal improvements and market participation to include the wide variety of social, political, and cultural effects that these changes in transportation and economy had on the development of America. Works by Harry L. Watson, Melvyn Stokes, and the seminal work by Charles Sellers identify such issues as religion, slavery and popular politics as products of the Market Revolution.¹⁴⁸ Southern military education must also be placed in this category as well. Robert Wetteman's study of the regular army during the antebellum period recognizes a similar connection to the Market Revolution by arguing that U.S. Army officers played a crucial role in the development

of the nation's infrastructure during the antebellum period.¹⁴⁹ The monopoly that West Point graduates held on employment directing internal improvement projects drove Smith to make his own graduates capable of competing against former Academy cadets in the engineering job market. Jennifer Green acknowledges the role of military school graduates in this burgeoning economic environment but fails to place their participation in the broader context of the Market Revolution, choosing instead to focus on the individual pecuniary success of the graduates.¹⁵⁰

Smith, on the other hand, clearly saw the opportunities provided by the needs created by the Market Revolution to use his unique educational system to not only offered promising futures for his students but also to contribute to his state's overall improvement. While he spread his ideas for educational reform throughout the country, both North and South, he guarded the benefits of his own institution jealously. Military schools, through their graduates working as educators, engineers and productive citizens, loyally served their native state and none other. New challenges would arise, however, in maintaining this support from the state government and the patronage of its citizens.

Notes

¹ Smith to Charles Denby, 8 February 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

² Smith to Robert T. P. Allen, 12 November 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³ Smith to Thomas Stockton, 17 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴ Smith to Arnoldus Brumby, 23 November 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Smith to Daniel H. Hill, 29 August 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷ Smith to William M. Lanne, 26 March 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸ Smith to John S. Gamble, 4 April 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹ Smith to Tench Tilghman, 14 May 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Tilghman to Smith 6 May 1856, 9 July 1856, 17 July 1856, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰ Rudolph, History of the American College, 177; Frederick Rudolph, "Who Paid the Bills?: An Inquiry into the Nature of Nineteenth Century College Finance," Harvard Educational Review 31 (1961), 144.

¹¹ Smith to Robert T. P. Allen, 12 November 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹² Smith to Richard Colcock, 11 October 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1848, VMI Archives.

¹⁴ Smith to Charles Derby, 8 January 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵ Smith to Thomas Stockton, 17 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶ Smith to Governor Henry Wise, 9 September 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷ Smith to Charles P. Dorman, 11 March 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁸ VMI Semi-Annual Report, January 1845, VMI Archives.

¹⁹ Smith to Oscar M. Crutchfield, 24 January 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 2-5.

²² Virginia Dabney, Virginia: The New Dominion (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1971), 245-33.

²³ Cornelius Heatwole, A History of Education in Virginia (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1916), 101-02.

²⁴ Douglas R. Egerton, Charles Fenton and the Trial of National Conservatism (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1989), 119-25.

²⁵ William Arthur Maddox, The Free School Idea in Virginia Before the Civil War (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 47-52.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 128-29; Benjamin Mosby Smith, The Prussian Primary School System as Seen by a Virginia Traveler A Century Ago with Suggestions as to its Application to the State of Virginia (Staunton, Va.: McClure Company Printers, 1936).

²⁷ James Brown, "The Second Auditor of Virginia Reports on the Literary Fund of That State, 1832," in Edgar W. Knight, ed., A Documentary History of Education in the South Before 1860, Volume V (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 43.

²⁸ Smith to George Yerby, 27 November 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁹ "College Convention of Virginia," Southern Literary Messenger 10 (February 1844), 122.

³⁰ Smith to John P. Wilson, 21 July 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³¹ Smith to George Yerby, 27 November 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³² Smith to Bernard Peyton, 18 December 1840, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³³ FHS to Bernard Peyton, 18 December 1840, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to James Brown, 4 January 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁴ Brown, "Reports on the Literary Fund, 1832," 44.

³⁵ Commonwealth of Virginia, Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1839 (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1839), 9-10.

³⁶ Henry Ruffner, "Report on Virginia Normal Schools," U.S. Bureau of Education, Report of the Commissioner 1899-1900, Vol. I (Washington, D.C., 1901), 386.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 388.

³⁸ Lawrence Cremin, American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876 (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1980), 120.

³⁹ Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 96-98.

⁴⁰ Smith, Introductory Address, 19-20.

⁴¹ 1849 was the first year VMI adopted the four year course (1842-1849 had been a three year course) while 1851 was the first year of the new barracks (expanded living conditions) and 1859 first year VMI opened admissions to non-Virginians, expanding the applicant pool.

⁴² VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1848, VMI Archives. The requests for teachers received by Smith increased nearly every year due in part somewhat of the

growing state population but more likely to the growing popularity of VMI graduates as instructors.

⁴³ Smith to George Yerby, 5 January 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁴ "Progress of Education in Virginia," Southern Literary Messenger 24 (March 1857), 162-67.

⁴⁵ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1848, VMI Archives.

⁴⁶ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 223.

⁴⁷ Smith to George W. Turner, 28 April 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁸ Smith to John Echols, 18 February 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁹ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 25, 33.

⁵⁰ Smith to Gabriel Gray, 10 November 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵¹ Smith to Stephen T. Pendleton, 17 April 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵² Smith to Mary C. S. Lee, 9 November 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵³ Smith to Caleb Boggess, 26 March 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁴ Lexington Gazette, 4 September 1835.

⁵⁵ Smith to Charles P. Dorman, 2 December 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁶ Smith to Bernard Peyton, 22 March 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to William H. Richardson, 13 April 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁷ Smith to William H. Richardson, 13 April 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁸ Lexington Gazette, 4 September 1835.

⁵⁹ Gregg Kimball, "Militias, Politics, and Patriotism: Virginia and Union in Antebellum Richmond," Virginia Cavalcade 49 (Autumn 2000), 158-77; Moreau B. C. Chambers, "The Militia Crisis" Virginia Cavalcade, 16 (Spring 1967), 10-14. Scholarship on the Virginia militia confirms these conclusions. Works by Gregg Kimball and Moreau Chambers depict a military force defending the state that benefited in no way from the supposed injection of a more educated and moral population of young officers

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶¹ Charles E. Brooks, "The Social and Cultural Dynamics of Soldiering in Hood's Texas Brigade," Journal of Southern History 62 (August 2001), 535-36.

⁶² Smith to Dennis H. Mahan, 30 March 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶³ Smith to Alexander H. H. Stuart, 3 December 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁴ Smith to Winfield Scott, 18 March 1855, Smith to William O. Goode, 8 July 1855, Smith to W. H. Woodley, 27 January 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁵ Smith to Dennis H. Mahan, 25 November 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁶ Smith to James McDowell, 2 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁷ Kenneth O. McCreedy, "Palladium of Liberty: The American Militia System, 1815-1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1991), 1-7; John K. Mahon, History of the Militia and National Guard (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1983), 79.

⁶⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 201-03.

⁶⁹ Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 18, 24.

⁷⁰ Mahon, History of the Militia and National Guard, 83-85. By the 1830s, most states had abandoned compulsory militia service in favor of volunteer units.

⁷¹ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1848, VMI Archives.

⁷² Morison, Best School in the World, ix, 102-113; Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 125.

⁷³ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1851, VMI Archives.

⁷⁴ Wettemann, "To the Public Prosperity," 182-83, 305-06.

⁷⁵ Terry S. Reynolds, “The Engineer in 19th Century America,” in Terry S. Reynolds, ed., The Engineer in America: A Historical Anthology from Technology and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7-10; Peter Lundgreen, “Engineering Education in Europe and the U.S.A., 1750-1930,” Annals of Science 47 (January 1990), 36-56; Karl-Heinz Manegold, “Technology Academised: Education and Training of the Engineer in the Nineteenth Century,” in Wolfgang Krohn, Edwin T. Layton and Peter Weingart, eds., The Dynamics of Science and Technology: Social Values, Technical Norms and Scientific Criteria in the Development of Knowledge (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing, 1978), 137-45.

⁷⁶ Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 4-7.

⁷⁷ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 19-29; Smith, College Reform, 35-51.

⁷⁸ Smith to Landon C. Garland, 6 June 1860, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 13 January 1849, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁰ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1852, VMI Archives.

⁸¹ Smith, College Reform, 53-54.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 54-55.

⁸³ Smith to Richard S. Ewell, 31 December 1850, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Washington College attempted to incorporate military drill in its curriculum under the command of a professor of military science (which

Daniel Harvey Hill served as for a time) but Smith always regarded the experiment as a failure.

⁸⁴ Smith to Landon C. Garland, 14 May 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁵ Smith to Thomas Stockton, 17 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁶ Gordon S. Wood, The Creation of the American Republic (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 65-70, 610-11.

⁸⁷ VMI Semi-Annual Report, January 1846, VMI Archives.

⁸⁸ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 7.

⁸⁹ Smith to Richard G. Haden, 1 March 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁰ Smith to J. R. Bestor, 28 January 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹¹ Maddox, Free School Idea in Virginia, 55, 107-8, 140-41.

⁹² Smith to George Yerby, 9 March 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹³ Smith to Oscar M. Crutchfield, 24 January 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁴ Smith to Charles P. Dorman, 2 December 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁵ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1848, VMI Archives.

⁹⁶ John Hope Franklin, Southern Odyssey: Travelers in the Antebellum North (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 71-79; L. Minerva Turnbull, "The Southern Educational Revolt," William and Mary Quarterly 14 (January 1934), 60-76.

⁹⁷ John S. Ezell, "A Southern Education for Southrons," Journal of Southern History 17 (August 1951), 304.

⁹⁸ (Raleigh) North Carolina Standard, 29 September 1856.

⁹⁹ "Home Education at the South," Debow's Review 18 (May 1855), 656.

¹⁰⁰ "Southern Education for Southern Youth," Debow's Review 19 (October 1855), 462-64.

¹⁰¹ Smith to James Brown, 4 November 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰² Smith to George Yerby, 19 February 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰³ Smith to Jordan M. Phipps, 4 February 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Professor Phipps served as head of the mathematics department at the University of Mississippi from 1858 to 1861. He succeeded professorial legends Albert T. Bledsoe (1848-1854) and Frederick A. P. Barnard (1854-58).

¹⁰⁴ "Southern Convention at Savannah Georgia," DeBow's Review 21 (November 1856), 553; Hal Bridges, Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill (New York: McGraw Hill, 1961), 36.

¹⁰⁵ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1859, VMI Archives; FHS to James B. Otey, 5 August 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁶ Smith to Lewis E. Harvie, 18 August 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁷ Smith to William H. Richardson, 13 April 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁸ Smith to William H. Richardson, 26 September 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Smith to George Yerby, 19 February 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁰ Smith, Special Report, 17.

¹¹¹ Smith to Daniel Lee Powell, 25 October 1850, Smith to James Brown, 4 November 1841, Smith to George Yerby, 19 February 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹² Francis L. Hawks to David L. Swain, 3 January 1860, Swain Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

¹¹³ Smith to William H. Richardson, 20 January 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁴ Richard Beale Davis, Intellectual Life in Jefferson's Virginia, 1790-1830 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1964), 3.

¹¹⁵ Smith, Introductory Address, 21.

¹¹⁶ Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 20.

¹¹⁷ Franklin, Militant South, 146-70.

¹¹⁸ Smith to George Yerby, 19 February 1848, 5 January 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁹ Smith to Walter H. Harrison, 11 April 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁰ Smith, Old Spex, 18-19. Smith owned a black body servant since birth named Tom Carter, the husband of his old black mammy. Tom lived with Smith and his family for his entire life.

¹²¹ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1856, VMI Archives.

¹²² "Progress of Education in Virginia," Southern Literary Messenger, 24 (April 1857), 247.

¹²³ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1856, VMI Archives.

¹²⁴ Smith, Special Report, 57-58.

¹²⁵ Anonymous, "The States' Duties in Regards to Public Education," Debow's Review 20 (February 1856), 148.

¹²⁶ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1857, VMI Archives.

¹²⁷ Codman Hislop, Eliphalet Nott (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), 226-33.

¹²⁸ Smith to Francis Wayland, 26 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁹ Smith to Charles Denby, 8 February 1851, FHS to Pike Powers, 26 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁰ Smith to Francis Wayland, 8 May 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³¹ Smith, College Reform, 23-25.

¹³² Register of the Officers and Cadets of the Virginia Military Institute, 1856 (Richmond: Macfarlane and Fergusson, 1856), 14.

¹³³ "Progress of Education in Virginia," Southern Literary Messenger 24 (March 1857), 165.

¹³⁴ "Home Education at the South," 661; Turnbull, "Southern Educational Revolt," 69.

¹³⁵ Franklin, Militant South, 146-70.

¹³⁶ Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 106-24; Morrison, Best School in the World, 15; Wettemann, "To the Public Prosperity," 368-69.

¹³⁷ Smith to William H. Richardson, 20 January 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁸ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1851, VMI Archives; Smith to William H. Richardson, 15 January 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. In this letter to the Adjutant General, Smith identified 55 graduates currently teaching and 119 who have fulfilled their teaching requirements. He then mentioned 45 other graduates engaged as professional engineers. Nowhere when boasting of the accomplishments of the Institute's alumni did he quantify or even mention the number of those who served in the militia or laud the accomplishments of an individual for his contributions to the state military forces. Only in the years immediately following the

Mexican War did Smith herald alumni participation in the militia but the numbers were much smaller than those involved in teaching and engineering during the same time period.

¹³⁹ Smith to Douglas B. Layne, 2 February 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁰ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1851, VMI Archives.

¹⁴¹ Daniel Harvey Calhoun, The American Civil Engineer: Origins and Conflict (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 167-75.

¹⁴² Smith to William Fitzhugh Lee, 20 July 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴³ Smith to George W. Robinson, 1 September 1851, Smith to Robert H. Simpson, 25 June 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁴ Wood, Creation of the American Republic, 610.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, Introductory Address, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Smith to John S. Millson, 30 July 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. William Mahone served as the chief engineer and eventual president of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad after completing his teaching requirement at the Rappahannock Academy. In his 1856 Introductory Address to the Corps of Cadets, Smith also lauded several other graduates who had left Virginia to pursue engineering positions elsewhere in the South and West. While he lamented the state losing their talents, he did take comfort in that their success beyond the Old

Dominion's borders further promoted the Institute's reputation and demonstrated the growing need for its particular academic training.

¹⁴⁷ Smith to Governor Henry Wise, 21 June 1859, 8 July 1859, 27 July 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁸ Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Henry L. Watson, Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁹ Wettemann, "To the Public Prosperity," 2-15. See also Charles F. O'Connell, "The Corps of Engineers and the Rise of Modern Management, 1827-1856," in Merritt Roe Smith, ed., Military Enterprise and Technological Change: Perspectives on the American Experience (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987).

¹⁵⁰ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 73, 113.

CHAPTER V

SMITH AS POLITICIAN

Southern military academies, although founded and forged in the Age of Jackson, are typically treated by historians as politically benign. To truly understand and appreciate their significance, however, they must be viewed in the context of a political culture skeptical of state supported institutions, elitism and privilege as well as the dynamics of the party politics of the era that shaped their destinies. Moreover, antebellum Southerners did not universally love military education as it challenged many of their preconceived notions of government. Given the political climate and prejudices of Jacksonian America, these schools provide yet another lens through which to analyze party philosophy and state political activity of Jacksonian America. When examining the leadership of military institutions, it also presents another crucial feature in understanding the significance of Francis H. Smith beyond his contributions as an educator and disciplinarian. Some of his most notable accomplishments came in the realm of politics, not in pedagogy or reform.

Historians such as Rod Andrew, Jennifer Green, and Marcus Cunliffe posit that state legislators openly embraced military schools because they espoused egalitarian and republican values for their state's youth.¹ Virginia's politicians, however, did not blindly support VMI when the time came to vote on legislation for its financial sustenance. This political affection only came from the tireless work of Smith drumming up support within the houses of government and throughout the state, writing letters, making visits, calling in favors, and spreading patronage. The long-term

successes of VMI tend to overshadow the difficult political challenges Smith endured and overcame during the antebellum period, oftentimes battling the Institute's pending financial ruin and the discredit brought on his own reputation.

Achieving and maintaining political support from the state government served one principal purpose for Francis H. Smith: financial security for his institution. Even with little experience as a professor and no experience as a college president, Smith learned at the very outset of his superintendency in 1839 the necessity of state support. He understood that regardless of how enlightened its curriculum or talented its faculty, a college could not survive without stable financial backing. But he faced a challenging situation as state-supported higher education in Virginia and the South was still in its infancy and most often the exception, not the rule, as far as funding options. Historian Paul Mattingly's study of antebellum colleges affirms that states willingly granted charters to new colleges but avoided responsibility for backing them financially.² State legislators rarely voted to appropriate funds to public institutions since they believed that private and denominational institutions met the citizens' educational needs without soaking up precious government money.³ Lack of sufficient financial support caused the failure of nearly seven hundred colleges before 1860, according to historian Frederick Rudolph.⁴ The Institute also carried an ever-growing price tag to cover many of the amenities unique to military education (uniforms, and so on) as well as Smith's *avant garde* pedagogical ambitions. None of his revolutionary educational ideas and philosophies could come to fruition without desperately needed money.

However, in an era of minimal government support, particularly in the South, for higher education, as college president Smith enjoyed arguably one of the most successful track records among his contemporaries in procuring funding to expand and develop his college. He recalled in his own written history of VMI that in the first two decades of the Institute he had secured over \$150,000 in appropriations.⁵ During those twenty years, VMI benefited from legislation that provided money for buildings, faculty salaries, library books, utilities, and even a \$10,000 statue of George Washington. Smith's greatest financial victory came in 1850 with the passage of a \$50,000 bill that paid for the erection of a new barracks building. Given the option to either repair the old barracks or move the school altogether, Smith and his political allies convinced the committees of the House of Delegates and the Senate to fund the construction of a modern living facility designed by one of the nation's foremost architects, Alexander J. Davis. Afterward, he boasted to his friends of his victories with the bill, preached the need of legislative support to his graduates and advice seekers and never took his success with state appropriations for granted.⁶

What makes VMI's founding and initial growth so compelling is how it coincided with a surge in partisan political activity in Virginia. Historian William A. Link observes that, "Like other Americans, Virginians practiced politics enthusiastically through a political culture, ideology, and language that was attuned to mid-nineteenth-century social conditions. . . Politics in Virginia, like politics elsewhere in nineteenth-century America, was partisan and participatory, with rich and elaborate rituals and a political culture that composed part of a larger spectacle. For most of the 1830s and

1840s, politics were highly competitive.”⁷ The birth of a competitive two party system in the early 1830s coupled with the advent of universal white male suffrage in the state Constitution of 1851 caused a sharp increase in voter participation. The strength of the two parties gave newly enfranchised voters a solid foundation to build their political interest. The state parties reflected those on the national level in respect to their political philosophies. The Virginia Democrats followed the negative liberalism of Thomas Jefferson, believing in strict constitutional construction, states’ rights, limited government and low taxes. The Whigs of the Old Dominion reflected the nationalism of James Madison, promoting positive liberalism, entrepreneurialism, and restrained individualism in the cause of the republic’s common good.⁸ Virginia’s various regions, from the conservative slave-owning Tidewater to the isolated non-slave holding Northwest, commercial interests, from expansive agricultural plantations to burgeoning manufacturing urban centers, and ethnic backgrounds, from descendents of the First Families of Virginia to newly immigrated Western Europeans, made the state a diverse hodge-podge of social systems, opinions and powerbases. Factions and partisan interests colored most of the political dealings in Virginia politics on nearly every issue.

Historian William Shade argues that after 1820, “Virginia developed a coherent, fairly modern and relatively democratic two-party system,” that carried the commonwealth through the subsequent four decades.⁹ Old Dominion politics enjoyed high voter turnouts in local, state and national elections particularly after the state Constitution of 1851. While Whigs enjoyed their power-bases primarily in the cities and Democrats in the slave-rich Tidewater and Piedmont regions of Virginia, geography

never dictated overall party strength in the state as allegiances varied and nearly evenly divided from county to county. Whig politicians won the office of governor from 1840 to 1846 before losing control to the Democrats for the next twenty years. Although the Whigs or their replacement parties never won back the governor's office, they forced remarkably close elections which forced the opposition to win by surprisingly slim margins in the late 1840s and 1850s. Representation in the state legislature maintained a relative even balance in the two decades preceding the Civil War in spite of the demise of the Whig Party. Between 1840 and 1860, the Democratic Party controlled the House of Delegate every year with the exception of two but only held between 53 to 59 percent of the seats.¹⁰ This competitive Second Party system in Virginia provided the vehicle for all to pursue their political interests and attempt to secure their vision for the future of the state.

Smith had his own interests as well and threw himself into the fray. This quest for state money placed Smith squarely in the middle of antebellum Virginia's political arena. As much as Smith proclaimed he wanted no part of politics, the desire to see his school flourish left him little choice. Consequently, given the political environment, the civic nature of the school's mission and the attachment to the legislature's money, Smith and his supporters had difficulty separating VMI from their own personal political philosophies. Francis H. Smith proudly supported the Whigs and provided an excellent model of a typical member of the party. He was raised in the thriving commercial city of Norfolk into the burgeoning middle class of his merchant father. While at the U S. Military Academy, he fostered a deep hatred for President Andrew Jackson for both

political and personal reasons. While he was a West Point upperclassman, the Secretary of War dismissed his roommate under questionable circumstances, inspiring Smith to write letter to President Jackson to request clemency. Smith anticipated sympathy from the Old Hero when he sent the letter to Washington, and a classmate delivered it personally. Incensed at the audacity of the request, Jackson informed the deliverer to “tell the young man who wrote this letter, if he don’t look out, I will have his ears cut off.”¹¹ This incident, along with several other questionable rulings made in Academy disciplinary cases, forced Smith to lose whatever faith and respect he had in Jackson and his political philosophies. As a proponent of using his school as a method of promoting internal improvements, a strong state economy and anti-foreign dependency, his values fell in step with the key components of Henry Clay’s American System, the backbone of Whig party platform. Pietistic, capitalistic and nationalistic, Smith embodied the “entrepreneurial moralism” of his beloved party.¹²

As superintendent of VMI, Smith openly expressed his personal political views amongst his closest friends and supporters. In 1845, he “grieved” at the election to the governorship of Democrat William Smith but wanted to “hope for the best.”¹³ He carried less optimism after the 1852 election of Joseph Johnson whom he considered a “slave of the [Democratic] party,” and could not understand why Virginians placed him in office.¹⁴ Conversely, Smith cheered the victories of Whig candidates such as Zachary Taylor winning the presidency in 1848, which he received as “glorious news.”¹⁵ He closely followed those political issues that steered the nation as well and developed strong opinions about them with his political friends. When Senate Democrats led by

President James K. Polk proposed to annex the Oregon territory, they met fierce resistance from their political opponents as Whigs lambasted the Democrats for unnecessarily provoking a war with Great Britain over Oregon.¹⁶ They eventually reached a compromise with the Democrats, much to Smith's relief. He wrote to former Whig governor James McDowell, "I am truly gratified to find you have at last settled the question relative to Oregon. As a Whig, I rejoice at the character of the notice passed—if passed at all, for soldiers – or quasi-soldier tho' I be – I am for peace. I don't expect you to respond to all of my Whig Doctrine but nevertheless am glad you voted for the report of the referees."¹⁷

Even as superintendent of one of the nation's budding military schools, Smith viewed himself as much a Whig as a soldier. Some members of his party reluctantly supported the declaration of war out of a sense of patriotism, many other Whigs in Congress and throughout the country openly opposed the conflict with Mexico, particularly because of the partisan conduct of the war by Democratic President James K. Polk.¹⁸ Smith agreed with this growing opposition and made his opinion known in Richmond. After lamenting the death of two of his West Point classmates early in the war, Smith encouraged other Academy alumni and political allies not to get involved in the conflict.¹⁹ He also chided two cadets, Richard Burks and Reuben Ross, for their decision to leave VMI early to fight in the war.²⁰ A recent graduate named George Porterfield consulted Smith in 1846 about possibly leaving his teaching position to join the army in Mexico. Old Spex encouraged him to remain behind and not get involved with the war, but he could not force him. "You are to consult duty first and that may

require you as much to remain where you are as to go to the war,” he explained to his former student.²¹ When his close friend and fellow Whig, Phillip St. George Cocke, failed to secure command of the Virginia Volunteer Regiment, Smith rejoiced at his being passed over. He rationalized his sentiment by assuring his friend that he did not take pleasure in his disappointment but that he believed “the war to be an unnecessary and unjust one, and with every effort to raise some feeling to enable me to defend or justify it, I have been unable to do so.”²² In the same letter to Cocke, he praised the comments of Whig leader Waddy Thompson, who claimed that if a foreign power were to invade American soil as it had invaded Mexico, then he hoped Mexican General Santa Anna would make “every mountain pass another Thermopile [sic].”²³ But once the war ended, Smith altered his views when he realized the political gains that America’s victory offered him. First, he applauded the rise of the war’s two great military heroes, Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott, who brought new promise to his Whig party.²⁴ More importantly, he used the success of the handful of VMI alumni who did fight in the war to achieve political capital with the legislature. He boasted in his 1848 Annual Report to the legislature that seven graduates and eighteen non-graduates had served with the army in Mexico and “whenever occasion for distinction has been presented, they have received special notice from their commanders.”²⁵ Yet during the war, the only excitement he showed for the conflict came when he cheered General Taylor’s victory at Aqua Nueva [also known as the Battle of Buena Vista] which would “add new laurels to him and make him President.”²⁶

Smith also opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 which called for “popular sovereignty” to decide if the two new territories would enter the Union as a slave or free state.²⁷ By condemning this bill, he supported the position of other Southern Whigs who supported the expansion of slavery instead of maintaining loyalty of Northern party members who viewed the legislation as an avenue of compromise between North and South.²⁸ Smith also followed the shifting trends of other Virginia Whigs in the 1850s. As party unity deteriorated after the loss of the 1852 presidential election, many Whigs in the Old Dominion attached themselves to the short-lived but active American, or “Know Nothing,” Party in the state. While Smith never officially endorsed this new party (he identified himself as a Whig until the Civil War), much of his rhetoric reflected the party’s anti-Catholic, nativist philosophy. In 1855, he wrote a scathing condemnation of foreigners in American politics and the opposition party courting their vote in a letter to a parent:

I sympathize with you in the issues of the late election. I consider it a great state calamity that the majority for the successful party has probably been secured for it by the foreign catholic vote. It makes me tremble for my state and country. Do our calm thinking Virginia people duly estimate the presumption and arrogance which a knowledge of this fact must give to those who direct this foreign element? They now secure foreign ambassadors and cabinet appointments. They will by and by demand the removal of our own brethren who are to the “manor born” that the hungry hordes of Europe may be fed.²⁹

Smith's commitment to Whig party ideology and fervor of antebellum Virginia state politics led inevitably to conflict between the superintendent and opposition within the state government. As a state institution, VMI could not avoid the reach of politics and, unfortunately for the Institute, often found itself caught in the crossfire of the Old Dominion's rival parties. The Second Party system in Virginia continued to be active in the 1850s but the Democrats slowly gained the upper-hand in the state in the final decade before the Civil War. They maintained sole possession of the office of governor from 1846 and nationally in the White House from 1852.³⁰ As the power shifted to the Democrats, relations with VMI and its Whig superintendent took interesting turns. Smith noticed changes in the political attitude towards the Institute after the election of Democratic Governor John Buchanan Floyd in 1849. That December, Smith received word from Richmond that his most fervent supporter and Whig friend, William H. Richardson, was in danger of being replaced as state adjutant general. Smith detected party politics behind the decision and pleaded to his friend "that if there is a single Democrat in the House who is a friend of the Institute that he will allow his party trammels to be forgotten when a question of great public interest is involved in your re-election."³¹ Richardson retained his position as adjutant general but did lose his appointment as secretary of the commonwealth to Democrat and fellow BOV member George Wythe Munford in 1852.³² As Richardson found himself increasingly alone in the growing Democratic control in both the state government and the Board, Smith noticed how the opposition party did not grant his Whig friend proper respect for his position or his contributions. Smith pleaded with state delegate and Board member

William B. Taliaferro to circumvent the “influence of party,” and pay Richardson more appropriately for his “great duty to the state” over the years.³³

Party politics continued to disintegrate Smith’s relationship with the Institute’s Board of Visitors. For the first decade of his superintendency at VMI, Smith enjoyed an amiable and productive rapport with the Board, particularly under the leadership of his friend and fellow Whig, Phillip St. George Cocke. But by early 1850s, the Board had become his fiercest enemy and greatest obstacle. Problems began with Cocke’s removal as president when Governor Johnson replaced him with Democrat Francis M. Boykin in 1852. While this proved a bitter blow to the Institute, Smith lost all patience with the governor when he learned of the appointment of Robert Gray to the Board that same year. Gray had matriculated as a cadet in the class of 1847 but had failed to pass his final examinations before graduation. Smith generously offered him a reexamination. Gray passed and attended the graduation ceremony in July. When he approached the stage, he refused to accept his degree and shouted at the Board, “I scorn your diploma,” in reaction to the injustice he believed he had received from the Institute.³⁴ Outraged at this display of impudence, Smith ordered Gray’s name stricken for the register of alumni but he promised publicly to seek revenge. His appointment to the Board in 1852, Smith feared, represented the threat that had come to fruition.

Gray’s appointment infuriated Smith who considered it an “outrage to the Institution” for allowing a “disgraced cadet” to sit on the board. More importantly, he viewed this as a larger conspiracy hatched by Governor Joseph Johnson to load the Institute with disciples of the Democratic party.³⁵ “Our new Governor has just

appointed his own Board, every man being a Democrat and it is possible that cadets may be selected with reference to their political faith," he lamented to a former BOV member, Peter Steenbergen.³⁶ Since the Board made the final decisions for all cadets admitted to VMI, Smith's felt increasingly powerless as nearly all new matriculates represented the opposition party. Many held the endorsement of some of the state's most powerful Democrats. Smith believed "members of the Board have solicited appointments to be conferred upon their friends not from their merits but from their personal considerations."³⁷

Not only did these new cadets appointed by the BOV threaten the school from the outside with their tight political connections in Richmond but they also jeopardized the school from the inside with their behavior. The Democratic appointed cadets, in Smith's view, represented the most unruly population of young men who had ever attended the Institute. He emphasized to Richardson in 1852 that "the materials of which our Board has been constituted for 2 or 3 years has changed very much from an introduction of a partisan caste to it. The consequence has been a great depreciation in the character of the material introduced into the Institution. If this is not arrested the Institute cannot maintain its high character. It is a notorious fact known among ourselves that rogues exist among the cadets and things had gone to such a pass in the rifling of drawers etc that I had a few days ago to assemble the cadets and speak plainly on the subject."³⁸ Naturally, all antebellum college presidents contended with the issues of unruly and undisciplined students but VMI's innovative character created even greater difficulties for Smith. With a Board of Visitors hand-selected by the governor solely

responsible for the appointment of each student, Smith had no control over the quality of student that matriculated to his school, and therefore, control of the school itself.

“Unless there is a change for the better in the appointing power,” he warned one state politician, “I cannot be responsible for the character of the school.”³⁹ Not only did he have no power over bringing the students in, he had almost no control now over getting rid of them. On several occasions, cadets dismissed by Smith appealed their cases to the Board and were summarily reinstated. As a man who held discipline as the core of his pedagogical ethos, this struggle over reinstating cadets distressed Smith who worried about the Board publicly undermining his authority. He could do nothing to punish many of the cadets, he told General Richardson, as they possessed too many “political friends,” such as dismissed Cadet Samuel Gresham who had at least two supporters in the House of Delegates.⁴⁰ This situation was far too familiar to Smith. During his own cadetship at West Point, he witnessed how his own superintendent and personal hero, Sylvanus Thayer, fought viciously with President Andrew Jackson who reinstated dismissed cadets purely as political one-ups-manship over Thayer, eventually forcing him to resign out of frustration.⁴¹ Smith spent the majority of that winter in a mild state of panic while writing political friends, pleading his case and seeking someone to curtail the partisanship of the Board.

It did not take long for the struggle with the poorly disciplined Democratic cadets to come to a head and gather state-wide attention. In 1852, Smith dismissed Cadet Miles C. Macon for hazing a younger cadet during the annual summer encampment. In response to Smith’s action, Macon’s uncle and sponsor, Peyton Johnston, a well-

connected Richmond slave dealer, complained to his political friends in the state senate of the injustice of his ward's expulsion. Johnston's friends in the legislature not only rose to his defense but created a special committee which launched an inquiry into the "general management of institute, and particularly into the conduct of the superintendent."⁴² The investigation, due to its frivolity, proved no wrong-doing on Smith's part but it gave him and his institution another public relations black-eye as political opponents forced him again onto the public stage to defend himself and the school.⁴³

Smith's peculiar reaction to the Senate investigation demonstrates another facet of his political acumen. Instead of sweeping the state inquiry under the rug, he urged the Board of Visitors to publish the committee's report in order that it might be viewed by the public. He argued that in any situation where the state charged "public officers with malfeasance," that the people of the state should be informed, particularly if vindicated.⁴⁴ Smith always felt an obligation to the citizens of the state but, more importantly, strove to protect his reputation in Richmond and beyond, which motivated his need to continually seek public exoneration when criticized. Smith made a habit of keeping the public well-informed since his first year of arriving at VMI. He explained to one board member on one of his first public statements, "This was done to inform the public who are comparatively ignorant of it. It will be indispensable to us to have it published in the newspapers. . ."⁴⁵ It was best that the citizens read the official records of the institution for themselves, even the negative issues, rather than having the newspapers skew the truth and cast VMI in a poor light. Likewise in the same letter, he

maintained the necessity of keeping parents informed directly instead of their gathering information through unreliable sources. Smith's public exoneration also benefited neighboring colleges, such as the University of Virginia, which cheered his triumph as a victory of college discipline and heralded VMI's superintendent as the great crusader in the state for the cause of proper student behavior.⁴⁶

These years with the Democratic-controlled Board represented the coldest period in Smith's relationship with the state government. While he did win over the legislature in a long campaign to obtain funding for a new barracks, his dealings with the governor proved less productive. He wrote only two letters to Democratic governor John Floyd extending brief and sterile invitations to the annual graduation exercises. He held even less regard for Floyd's successor, Joseph Johnson, who heard from Smith only once during his four years in office with an identically polite yet vapid invitation to the final examinations in 1852. Smith held such contempt for these two governors and their party politics that he never confronted them directly on his grievances regarding his problems with the Board, choosing instead to use political friends and proxies. He identified this faction of hard-line Democrats as the greatest enemy to VMI and the potential destroyers of his institution. In one desperate letter, he even forecast that the Democrats might force him to give up on VMI altogether. He confessed to Richardson, "We must expect the iron tyranny in the ascendancy of the Democrats of the present day. So sure am I of the destructive tendencies of their principles and practice that I expect an issue to be drawn at the approaching meeting of our Board which may sever my own connexion with this Institution. If party agency is to be set at work here to secure party ends, I will

wash my hands of the matter before the work shall result in the destruction of so many years of hard earned reputation.”⁴⁷ Smith had invested nearly all of his adult life into the Institute but now he predicted that something as trite as partisan politics would force him to make the same tragic decision to resign as his mentor, Sylvanus Thayer, did during his own cadetship.

His political opponents left him little reason not to reconsider resigning as they struck at him again shortly after the election of the new Board in 1852. One Democratic member of the Board claimed that Smith stated he “would rather have given up the \$30,000 appropriation than have the current Board of Visitors appointed by Governor Johnson.”⁴⁸ Smith denied ever making the comment, writing it off as another malicious attack, but confessed to Richardson that “money would not sustain the character of the Institute,” implying that his success with state funding meant nothing if the institutional leadership damaged the reputation of the school.⁴⁹ A political friend Delegate Samuel L. Graham assured him that the appointment of “rogue” Robert Gray and the removal of ally Philip St. George Cocke from the Board were inconsequential as long as he continued to secure appropriations from the legislature. Smith retorted that “money alone would not sustain the character of the Institute,” if the school’s reputation declined with the growing population of Democrat-appointed unruly cadets.⁵⁰ The superintendent could guess that it would be a matter of time before money would be impossible to come by if legislators associated the Institute with a lack of moral character.

The onslaught from the Democrats continued in 1852. In the fall, Democrat named Patrick Henry Aylett arrived in Lexington to present a speech to local citizens but Smith did not authorize his cadets to attend because the time of the speech conflicted with academic duties. An article appeared the next day in the Richmond Enquirer accusing Smith of using the Institute to support a Whig ideology in his students and promote his own political purposes. “Why is it that the cadets cannot listen to reason and argument from a Democratic speaker when they are allowed to hear the words and rants of such men as John Minor Botts?” cried the author writing under the pseudonym “Investigator.” “Can the Whig Superintendent explain this to the public?”⁵¹ The accusations dumbfounded Smith. He apologetically explained to Aylett, “if my goal was to serve only the interest of the Whig party then I should be labeled the ‘truest block-head in the world.’”⁵² For the next several weeks, he pleaded with Richmond that half of his faculty and student body supported the Democrats and to promote the rival party would be ridiculous. “If I granted permission to the Whig speakers which were denied to the Democratic would not the members of the Faculty be the first to know it and complain of it when half are democratic? Would not complaints exist from those cadets who are democrats numbering as they do more than half the entire corps?” he rationalized to Francis Boykin, president of the Board of Visitors and a Democrat.⁵³ To make amends in the public eye, he accepted an invitation to a “Democratic Jubilee” in being celebrated in the county as part of a continuing attempt to “avoid everything that might give to it the appearance of party bias.”⁵⁴ Fortunately, he established an

understanding with Boykin over his concerns and eventually arranged a shaky but peaceful coexistence with the rest of the members.⁵⁵

Even those who rushed to defend Smith's reputation during this situation caused him even greater controversy. When West Point professor and longtime friend Dennis Hart Mahan attended VMI's annual examinations in 1853, he wrote a private letter to an alumnus expressing praise for the school and the character of the superintendent. But when local residents published the letter in a Lynchburg newspaper, readers throughout the Old Dominion scoffed when Mahan blasted the state government for selecting a Board of Visitors solely on "party connections," and that VMI "might give more confidence to the whole state. . . with men well throughout the state for their sterling integrity and high moral worth."⁵⁶ These comments released remarkable ire from Smith's critics, who responded with a litany of allegations on how the superintendent had abused the power of his position. A response letter from "A Virginian," on 23 November 1853, accused Old Spex of multiple offenses such as refusing any literature written by Thomas Jefferson in the VMI library, preventing the cadets from forming a Southern Rights Society, and the making the aforementioned statement that he would trade his most recent \$30,000 appropriation from the legislature for a new Board of Visitors. In sum, the author considered Smith unworthy of state support and that fellow Virginians should send their sons elsewhere to be appreciative state citizens.⁵⁷ Supporters rallied around Smith, publishing wordy defenses in newspapers to debunk the accusations leveled at him.⁵⁸ Smith himself submitted his own letter of rebuttal to all of the charges in order to protect his good name. He rebuked each charge individually and

reminded readers of his previous vindication by providing a quote from the Senate's investigation on his practices during the Cadet Macon case earlier that year.⁵⁹ After the debates with the press subsided, the new Democratic president of the Board of Visitors, Francis Boykin, admitted his embarrassment at the behavior of his own party and reassured the superintendent not to worry about what the newspapers said as "they could do him no harm."⁶⁰ Smith's strength of character prevented him from truly caring about the slander he endured in the press but it could not console him on his concern over the damage to the Institute's reputation. He feared spending more time apologizing for his school than promoting it in a positive light to the public. As a publicly supported institution, he could not afford to utilize so much of his time on the public stage simply to repair the school's image.

Even the Institute's reputation of success brought Smith political controversy. The audacious experiment of transforming a state arsenal into a military school inspired several politicians to suggest a similar conversion of the arsenal in Richmond. Smith rejoiced at the creation of schools based on the model of his own but panicked at the prospect of a competing institution in the state capital. Private schools, such as the one established by Alden Partridge in Portsmouth provided little threat but having another state school compete for funding, students and patronage caused uneasiness at VMI and Smith to swing into political action.⁶¹ He explained to the politically well-connected superintendent of the Arsenal, Charles Dimmock, that he opposed the creation of a new school because he feared its failure, not its success. He worried about the prospect of Dimmock not having the ability to recruit students, maintain discipline or win favor with

the legislature. Smith warned him bluntly that “you will fail and your failure may injure us,” as its inability to succeed on the “VMI model” would forever reflect poorly on the original institution.⁶² Fortunately, political allies in the capital, particularly Governors McDowell and Smith, agreed with VMI’s concerns and ensured that the plan to create the Richmond academy never materialized.⁶³ While Smith’s advice may have benefited Dimmock by steering him away from a potential failure, he also acted in his own self-interest by eliminating any potential competition for state funding and, more importantly, he protected the prestige of being Virginia’s only state military institution.

There were also times when political controversy placed Smith in situations where he simply could not win. Smith labored tirelessly to keep the cost of running VMI at a minimum to prevent having to continually ask the legislature for higher appropriations and potentially inciting the ire of fiscally conservative Democrats in Richmond. Since the prices and quality of regional goods did not prove the most cost-effective for the Institute, Smith purchased several items such as books, buttons, and building materials from merchants in the North. This drew the attention of an editorial written in the Richmond Country Republican in 1850 in which an author named “Southern Power” criticized Smith for purposely bypassing Virginia merchants for Northern ones. The author called for the legislature to “see that the money of our people is not extended among those [in the North] who are daily robbing them of their property.”⁶⁴ Once again, Smith rushed to his own defense and refuted the claims of his aiding North states financially and not his own native Virginia. He retorted that nearly all of the products he purchased did come from state merchants and that he made the

decisions to buy goods outside of Virginia purely out of the public interest to save taxpayer money. These purchases, he reminded readers, did not overshadow all of the great contributions VMI had made in the past decade for the state's educational system and internal improvements.⁶⁵ But before sending his reply, he sent drafts of his letter to his political friends in Richmond, particularly those on the Board of Visitors, to confirm it would help his cause and for them to make revisions as needed.⁶⁶ Smith also sent follow up letters to key politicians to cover up the damage caused by the accusations. He explained to legislator George Yerby that the editor of the newspaper was a New Yorker by birth and could not be trusted. In a letter to the Speaker of the House of Delegates, Douglas B. Layne, Smith argued that if he had only purchased goods from Virginia vendors, he would have bankrupted VMI years ago.⁶⁷ Too often, Smith found himself walking the delicate line that divided patriotism and pragmatism in the governance of this school and leaning too close to either side brought him condemnation from either politicians or partisan journalists.

As much as Smith made himself out as a helpless target of the Democrats, he relied on several key members of that party to serve as his political allies in desperate situations. Political necessity forced Smith to reach across the aisle of the state legislature. By the mid-1850s, his Virginia Whig party was in decline, yet his need for state funding became more severe as the Institute grew year after year. Over his career, Smith had cleverly convinced a sizable contingent of Democrats to overlook his own political affiliation and support VMI as a party-less institution. In Smith's mind, the existence of his Democratic friends in Richmond provided the most convincing evidence

of his not advancing a secret Whig agenda. “Some of the warmest friends I have in the state are Democrats and these have stood by me and the Institution in trying times,” he explained to Boykin in the midst of his battle with the opposition party in 1852.⁶⁸

Naturally, nearly all of these Democratic friends represented the more moderate wing of the party. The two governors with whom Smith shared the best relationships, James McDowell and Henry Wise, both began their political careers as Whigs before converting to the Democratic party but continued to share similar views with him on issues such as public education and internal improvements. Other supporters from the majority party such as William Moncure, William B. Taliaferro, and John Brokenbrough, also agreed with Smith enough to register their sons as cadets there before the 1852 enrollment controversy.

This small band of Smith loyalists in the Democratic party also came to aid him in his own personal political pursuits. In 1855, Smith expressed a desire to serve on the Board of Visitors of his alma mater, West Point. Driven perhaps by the frustration by his own Board or the wish to reciprocate all the assistance he had received from his alma mater, seeking this highly respected appointment took a great deal of his political energies. He collaborated with his friend Dennis Hart Mahan on pursuing the open position but realized that his political allegiances most likely would obstruct his efforts. “I shall try and get an invitation on your next Board of Visitors, if the fact of my being a Whig should not disqualify me for such a post,” he told Mahan.⁶⁹ He spent much of the winter of 1856 writing politicians of both parties in Richmond and Washington admitting his allegiance to the Whigs but reinforcing his record of non-partisan politics

as the Institute's superintendent.⁷⁰ Remarkably, his campaign worked as he learned in March that the Senate not only place him on the Board but appointed him as president. Governor Wise had convinced his colleagues in Washington, including "some twenty of the leading Democrats of the House and Senate including the speaker Garnett, Floyd, Tomlin, Edmonds," of Smith's merit. Realizing his victory, Smith bowed at the feet of the governor and state representatives, thanking them repeatedly and admitted sheepishly his status as "a most favored Whig."⁷¹ Once on the USMA Board, he made a conspicuous effort to add teeth the Academy's dismissal policy for cadets who exceeded the maximum number of demerits, not coincidentally, the same issue that had caused him problems with the Democrats on his own Board who bypassed the regulation to reinstate several dismissed cadets.⁷²

Surprisingly, during all the controversy that Smith endured, he never let his bitterness affect his students' political activity. On the contrary, in order to instill a greater sense of attachment and service to their state, Smith encouraged political activity and literacy in all of his cadets. He continually invited many of Virginia's key political figures to speak to his students about broad philosophical topics such as patriotism and republicanism as well as current state and national political issues. Many of the cadets, through Smith's guidance, arranged for some speakers themselves through their cadet literary societies. Such renowned state political figures of both parties such as Democrats Littleton W. Tazewell, Henry Wise, Robert M. T. Hunter, James Kemper and Whigs John Minor Botts, James McDowell, and Alexander Rives, all gave lectures at VMI or in Lexington where the cadets attended en masse.

Historians, such as Andrew, identify the purpose of military education as making young men better citizens by instilling soldier-like qualities in them such as “courage, loyalty, patriotism, and morally correct behavior.”⁷³ But the very nature of soldierly duty requires him to act with political impartiality. Political scientist Samuel Huntington argues that professional soldiers have historically maintained a “tradition of neutrality” in American politics.⁷⁴ VMI cadets learned more about citizenship from those activities outside of military training as orchestrated by their superintendent. Smith complemented his curriculum of drill and military engineering with a real-life education in active political participation including a push to vote, participate in the blossoming dual party system, and serve their communities. Several graduates held local political offices in their towns while a handful served as representatives in state government. Acute political awareness and a practical education made the ideal citizen according to Smith’s model which reflected those ideas of the nation’s Fathers who, as historian J. G. A. Pocock argues, believed that the American republic could only survive as its citizens practiced republicanism through vigorous participation the political process.⁷⁵ Smith’s push for political consciousness reinforces the notion that VMI served a civic rather than a military mission.

Although Smith embraced the Whig party and its philosophy, he overtly supported clubs and activities of both antebellum political parties. A cadet who wrote to the Richmond Enquirer to defend his superintendent explained, “We know that Col. Smith is a Whig, but he ignores the discussion of all party questions in our societies and never touches upon politics in our private intercourse – thus leaving every Cadet to

follow the political faith of this fathers' without opposition in word or deed on his part."⁷⁶ Many antebellum college presidents encouraged political activity and awareness in their student bodies. They supported the development of debating societies, political clubs, and like Smith, invited prominent office-holders to visit the campus to give lectures. The University of Virginia brought in a number of civic speakers including nationally renowned political orator Edward Everett who gave a speech on the character of George Washington in 1856.⁷⁷ Princeton University's debating society dated back to the mid-eighteenth century and had its students debate political question in order to prepare them for "statesmanship."⁷⁸

What makes Smith remarkable in this respect is comparing him to some collegiate leaders who took this push for activism to the extreme. South Carolina College president Thomas Cooper purposely used his faculty and extra-curricular political activity to instill all his students with specific political opinions, namely anti-tariff, pro-nullification and a full support of the institution of slavery.⁷⁹ Smith may not have been excited about educating burgeoning Democrats but found consolation instead that at least his cadets took an enthusiastic interest as politically aware citizens, which was the ultimate goal.

Playing politics successfully, Smith learned, also required operating successfully with the local government as well as the state legislature. Keeping good relations with local community leaders often could be as crucial as state funding. Numerous antebellum college leaders failed to learn this lesson as poor relations with the townspeople, often over pithy issues, impeded their respective school's development and

broader reputation. Many schools committed to rugged individualism and refusing state aid found themselves dependent on local communities and their resources, particularly those in geographically isolated communities such as Williams College, Hampden-Sydney, or many of the new colleges springing up in the old Northwest Territory.⁸⁰ This dependency often soured relationships between colleges and the towns that reluctantly supported them, financially and otherwise. Other schools alienated their host towns simply by the rowdiness of their students who disturbed the peace when they wandered off campus. The resentment of townspeople over issues such as adolescent behavior often threatened the future and well-being of institutions of higher learning in the mid-nineteenth century, regardless of its size or reputation.⁸¹ Smith understood this philosophy well from his experience at Hampden-Sydney. The neighboring town of Worsham warmly enjoyed having the college as part of its community, offering support to both the student body and the faculty during its first three-quarter of a century of existence.⁸² He even preached this to his graduates who led schools of their own, advising one of his aspiring former students about to establish his own school that “You will find it best to keep aloof from all local quarrels. Your object should be to enlist the cooperation of all, without giving offence to any.”⁸³ Ironically, Smith himself did not always heed his own advice, as his political relations with the local population of Lexington created some of his most difficult opponents.

Relations with the town began poorly when Smith experienced several bitter business transactions with local merchants early in his career. When the quality of products he purchased in the town proved to be of poor quality, Smith soon moved on to

other vendors throughout the state and nation. He then disallowed store owners to give his cadets store credit in order that they might practice thrift with their money.

Outraged, the local entrepreneurs brought their case before the state legislature in 1844. Lexington merchants had several members on the Board of Visitors sympathetic to their cause and forced a compromise with the superintendent, particularly regarding the purchase of cloth for uniforms. Local state representatives, some of whom were on the Board, had to juggle their allegiance to their constituency in the district as well as their loyalty to VMI as a state institution. Since the agreement arranged by the Board did not meet their satisfaction, the merchants resumed their assault on Smith by accusing him of “selling goods without a license” for his operation of a military store which furnished items necessary for cadets at cost. State representatives who defended Smith at the trial defeated the prosecution when they could not prove any pecuniary gain made by the superintendent.⁸⁴ Animosity with the town continued over the next ten years with ongoing arguments regarding rights over the local water supply and property line disputes with local landowners.⁸⁵

The most brutal local altercation, however, occurred with the town’s other institution of higher learning. Neighboring Washington College, which had coexisted peacefully with VMI for its first five years, now singled out Smith and his Institute on a series of charges, claiming that an unnecessary competition had developed between the two schools that harmed Washington College. Professor George Armstrong presented a list of grievances to a committee of the legislature in hopes of proving the Institute as harmful to the college and the Institute as unnecessary, since the founders supposedly

always meant it as a branch of the college. Both Smith and Armstrong appeared together before the committee in Richmond to argue their respective cases. Convinced that that accusations did not carry enough validity for the legislature's judgment, the committee asked to be "excused from further considerations" in the quarrel by a vote of seven to two.⁸⁶ Unsatisfied with the ruling, Armstrong and the supporters of Washington College transferred the skirmish with VMI from the legislature to the public arena by continuing their assault on Smith in several newspaper editorials and local debate. Fortunately for his cause, Smith published brilliant response letters in these newspapers, revealing the accusations as merit-less and eventually established a political truce with their neighboring institution.

Smith's victory over Washington College actually provided several additional positive results for VMI politically. Unlike Armstrong, Smith got to the politicians first and won them over before the committee hearing ever convened. He pleaded his case in letters to delegates like Lewis E. Harvie, explaining that "no rivalry can exist" between the two schools and that the accusations were a waste of the legislature's time.⁸⁷ Smith's defense in the House of Delegates and subsequently in the local newspapers, succeeded in having the legislature and the citizens of Virginia accept two key truisms about VMI. First, he effectively demonstrated that VMI was an institution distinctive from other colleges. Its unique composition, curriculum and discipline placed VMI in own context, deserving special consideration when compared to other schools and a difference he expected to keep. When state education advocate John R. Edmonds proposed a compromise between the two schools, Smith responded to him, "How any

plan can be devised which will remove all the difficulties of this question without destroying the denominational character of the College on the one hand or the state character of the Institute on the other I am at a loss to know.”⁸⁸ Building on the theme of its exclusive nature, Smith also reinforced VMI’s identity as a state institution in the public mind. Any attempt to alter that identity, he argued, would not only harm the school but the citizens of Virginia as well. Much to the chagrin of Professor Armstrong, Smith proved his point about how VMI’s contributed to the state’s improved education system by arguing that the enrollment of Washington College had in fact doubled since the Institute’s establishment in 1839. Ironically, as Smith caused greater friction with the community of Lexington, he won greater support throughout the state. His local detractors always brought the fray onto the public stage in hopes of humiliating him and proving that he had violated the public trust. In actuality, it backfired by allowing Smith a broader audience to market his institution as a benefit to the state, winning him more political supporters in the Old Dominion.

In contrast to the controversy with Washington College, Smith maintained amiable relations with the University of Virginia, the other state supported college, in order to prevent another institutional rivalry and competition over money and patronage. Smith probably had greater respect for UVA because of its celebrated academic reputation and the handful of West Point allies he helped place on the faculty there. Much like Washington College, Smith carefully positioned the composition and mission of VMI in a separate light from UVA to demonstrate that it needed its own unique consideration for funding from the state. The university’s founder, Thomas Jefferson,

always wanted his school to have a truly national character. He desired to recruit the best American and European scholars for the faculty and hoped to gain a global reputation for academic excellence. Smith, on the other hand, always viewed the Institute as a state institution, created for the service of the Old Dominion, drawing cadets and, ideally, professors, from only within the state. At best, he hoped VMI to achieve the reputation as the great polytechnic institution of the South. He argued to state politicians that his school worked in conjunction with the state university, not against it. UVA offered Virginia's first law and graduate degrees while Smith saw VMI filling in the rest of the state's higher educational needs with its scientific and engineering curriculum. He did not protest when UVA and the state legislature adopted a program identical to VMI's mandating mandatory teaching service for "state" students in 1856 since the Institute had a firm monopoly in teacher placement in the state.⁸⁹ When the Institute struggled for state funding in the early 1850s, Smith quickly pointed out to legislators that VMI cost less money per student than the university.⁹⁰ But overall, Smith always stayed in good graces of Mr. Jefferson's university as its political base in the state proved just as powerful as his own with key alumni and supporters entrenched in the state political system.

In the end, conflicts with the local townspeople remained temporary affairs as Lexingtonians reluctantly acknowledged, as time progressed, that the town's prosperity was tied to that of the Institute. Given a turbulent decade of relations they endured with the school, locals should have pressed aggressively for the removal of VMI when the Board and state government mulled its future in Lexington in 1849. Smith feared that

lack of local support for VMI might obstruct his efforts to achieve funding for improvements in order to keep the school in the town. “Circumstances, many of which may be known to you, have for several years past alienated the people of this county from the Institute and hence it has not always received that support from our own representatives which duty as well as interest seemed to require. This fact has crippled us very much in our application to the legislature for indispensable appropriations,” he justified to Delegate William Moncure.⁹¹ Historian William Couper surmises, however, that the prospect of a \$75,000 legislative bill for barracks construction would also stimulate the local economy and it became too alluring to pass up.⁹² While it took time for the citizens of the town and county to warm up to the Institute, the politicians who represented the district understood from the outset the benefit of supporting the school. Local representatives to the House of Delegates and Virginia Senate, such as Charles P. Dorman, James B. Dorman, Samuel McDowell Moore, James G. Paxton, James H. Paxton and John Brockenbrough contributed greatly to the support of the Institute and stood by Smith as his most dedicated political allies.

Nevertheless, the superintendent always treaded cautiously with these local representatives as he often mistrusted their personal character. For example, when feeling out support for the barracks bill, Smith warned Richardson that he had “been a little annoyed that [Charles] Dorman has neither answered my letter nor taken any movement towards our Institute bill. We should move cautiously with him. He may not be able to do us much good by his being so irregular in his habits but he may do us much harm and therefore I think concert of action is important.”⁹³ In 1851, he lamented again

about two native Lexington politicians in the legislature: “I am not surprised at the ravings of [John] Letcher and [Samuel McDowell] Moore. One is suffering from dyspepsia and the other had been bitten by the spirit of progression and radical democracy. How can you account for the ultra zeal of these gentlemen?”⁹⁴ Regardless, Smith needed these statesmen in order to get what he wanted politically. Charles Dorman took command of pushing the barracks bill through the House of Delegates in 1849. Smith also used James H. Paxton as an insider in 1852 to learn the “tone of the Senate” gauge whether it was better to amend an appropriations bill for a heating system or simply ask for less money.⁹⁵ Rockbridge County representatives served VMI well during the antebellum period in spite of not always earning Smith’s trust and faith.

Playing the political game regrettably forced the otherwise forthright Smith to compromise his own personal feelings in order to promote a public visage that would better gain wider appeal for his institution. Oftentimes, what Smith proclaimed publicly contradicted his actions and oratory that occurred behind closed doors, occasionally bordering on hypocrisy. Most of these contradictory episodes centered around his claims of political neutrality. Smith complained throughout the 1850s about the aggressive “partisan politics” practiced by the Democratic party and how they had victimized the school as well as himself. Yet Smith himself resorted to partisanship by continually lambasting the Democrats, questioning their personal integrity, labeling his enemies with derogatory epithets, and pressing Whig allies to corner them politically. In personal letters, he went so far so to identify Democrats as the “enemy” and described the infamous contingent of Democratic-sympathetic cadets as borderline criminals. As

Democratic governors loaded the Board of Visitors with political cronies, Smith pleaded helplessness because of his own “political neutrality,” and likewise claimed that he would rather have a Board composed of non-friends to reinforce his impartiality. He suggested to Richardson that “in a community so hostile to me as this is, I may have a board of disinterested judges to examine my official acts.”⁹⁶ On several occasions, however, he composed letters to politicians suggesting individuals who would make ideal members of the Board, particularly members of his own party. In 1846, for example, he suggested to Richardson that “[Samuel McDowell] Moore or [James Dorman] Davidson would make good visitors – they are both Whigs.”⁹⁷ When opponents singled him out as a partisan Whig, Smith always retorted that he, as a political neutral and public servant, had close friends in both parties.⁹⁸ Several Virginia Democrats did indeed openly supported Smith and VMI in spite of his party loyalty. But many of them held a personal interest in the school because of the enrollment of their sons, wards or local sponsors. Moreover, the staunchest defenders of the Institute on the floors of the state House and Senate chambers always represented the Whig party. All of the Institute’s major legislative victories owed their success to the tireless work of Whig allies such as Dorman, Cocke, Richardson, Paxton, Leyburn, and McDowell.⁹⁹ Smith only reached out to Democratic allies when other Democrats attacked him or when he needed bipartisanship to carry legislation that Whigs supporters had initiated.

Smith also demonstrated hypocrisy regarding many of his own political philosophies. As he kept close watch on national politics, particularly the growing crisis of the Union, Smith scoffed at Northern college professors who became political

activists, particularly on the issue of slavery. He complained that educators in New England had no business taking any action or making any statement on key political topics as it reflected poorly on their institutions.¹⁰⁰ Ironically, Smith had instigated the confrontation by labeling the state of Massachusetts as “disloyal” because of its abolitionist reputation in his publicly published 1856 Introductory Address to the Corps of Cadets.¹⁰¹ He, meanwhile, openly embraced Southern nationalism, slavery, and eventually secession. No singular value meant more to Smith than the concept of service to the state as he preached it to student, politician and ordinary citizen alike. But when the call came from the state government for troops and political support for the Mexican War, Smith retreated because of his personal disapproval of the conflict. He discouraged cadets and friends from participating, contradicting his own gospel of selfless service. When the war ended, however, he took advantage of the success of the handful of cadets and alumni who did fight in the war by applauding their contribution in his annual addresses to the state legislature to gain better political standing.¹⁰² He never acknowledged the contradictions between what he spoke and how he acted politically in these situations but opponents, fortunately, never took him to task for it.

Much of Smith’s activity within Virginia’s public sphere mirrored the broader changes happening in the nation politically with the onset of Jacksonianism and the Second Party System. Party politics had become a more public and participatory affair. With expanded suffrage and more elaborate party structure, candidates made their campaigns popular events giving citizens a sense of agency in their democracy while elected officials gained political capital for their respective parties. Given this active

political environment, Smith could not remain content to rest idly in his office and expect support for VMI and let the reputation of his school filter through the state on its own. He could not maintain funding from the legislature on letter writing alone. He actively campaigned to win support for his institution from both politicians and the citizenry, aiming to expose as many people as possible to the benefit that VMI provided for them by showing them firsthand why the school deserved their esteem and patronage. With various enemies planted throughout the state, Smith needed to counter any negative conception of VMI in an on-going, multi-faceted publicity campaign, one which required as much energy and dexterity as his efforts in educational reform.

Smith's early efforts at promoting his school began innocuously during VMI's first year of existence. As with many of the academic customs he borrowed from West Point, Smith held the Institute's semi-annual examinations publicly where professors orally questioned each cadet on their subject material in front of the entire faculty.¹⁰³ Smith viewed this as the ideal opportunity to showcase his students' abilities in the presence of not only other academics but local politicians as well. Guests could not only observe the testing but were also invited to quiz the cadets. He audaciously invited Virginia's former governor, David Campbell, presiding Governor Thomas Gilmer, as well as several members of the state legislature to the examinations given in July 1841 and then to the summer encampment later that month. Building on these initial successes, Smith carefully crafted guest lists to each subsequent examination for the remainder of his career. He handpicked some of the nation's most respected intellectuals to challenge the intellect of his students as well as use their success to

broaden the Institute's reputation as an academic powerhouse. Exposure to the state's most prominent politicians demonstrated to them firsthand the product of the legislature's financial allocations. As a nascent author, Smith also used these ceremonies as an opportunity to promote his latest publications by handing out copies of his latest mathematics textbooks and essays on educational reform. In 1848, he assured his publisher after the release of his latest mathematics text that he was "more solicitous about it as a large assemblage of persons takes place here at our Annual Examinations and it would be a good opportunity to make it known in the State."¹⁰⁴ Smith achieved so much favorable attention from these early showcases that he quickly extended his guest list to include individuals of national prominence. VMI even enjoyed a visit from President Millard Fillmore and his Secretary of the Interior, Alexander H. H. Stuart, in September, 1851, as Smith entreated them to the most gracious reception possible.¹⁰⁵

Smith continued to experiment with more effective ways to promote his institution. In 1842, Adjutant General William H. Richardson arranged for the Corps of Cadets to travel to Richmond to serve as an escort at the funeral of Captain William Moore, a Revolutionary War hero from Lexington. Richardson and Smith agreed on this serving as an opportunity to show off the Corps in front of the state politicians. Arriving on 8 January, the cadets paraded proudly through Capitol Square, their bright uniforms and sharp drill impressing the members of the state legislature who had taken an hour recess to observe them. Large crowds of Virginians who "knew little of the School" gathered along the streets and "followed the splendidly drilled Corps, from place to

place.”¹⁰⁶ The cadets then were given their semester examinations before the House of Delegates to demonstrate their academic abilities and achievement.

The cadets’ magnificent display accomplished exactly what Smith had planned. Jennings Wise observes that not only had the Corps won over the citizens of Richmond, they also impressed the Assembly members who had been ambivalent about the school. A Richmond newspaper applauded the cadets’ exhibition. One editor commented, “the cadets have won more and more of our esteem.”¹⁰⁷ The verbal support from Virginia’s citizens and legislature soon transformed into funding as the legislature passed an act on 8 March 1842, increasing the Institute’s state annuity by \$1,500 and an additional \$500 every five years to build a library.¹⁰⁸ The act also solidified the terms of service for all “state” graduates, “to act in the capacity of a teacher in one of the schools of the Commonwealth, for the term of two years after finishing his course at the Institute.”¹⁰⁹ Victorious, Smith treated this new mission as a mandate of approval from the state as well as a confirmation of a long term investment. But Smith labored to ensure that the good citizens of Virginia did not misconstrue his intentions as grandstanding. He shyly confessed to local Whig delegates Dorman and Leyburn, “I thought it most proper to abstain from pressing the wants of the Institute upon the members unless called to do so by their inquiries I did not wish our visit to have the appearance of an electioneering trip, and I felt that my own connexion with it was too intimate not to lead to the suspicion that self interest might be the mooring principle in my patriotism.”¹¹⁰

By the 1850s, Smith had widely expanded the range and scope of his corps trips and, likewise, the exposure of his school to the Virginia citizenry. In 1855, he traveled

with his cadets to Petersburg and Richmond to attend the state agricultural fairs. While in the cities, the Corps held several parades, drilled with the local militias and enjoyed quartering with “local families,” who Cadet George Toole informed his sister treated them with “great respect.”¹¹¹ They made a similar trip to another agricultural fair in Norfolk in November 1859 covered in detail by the local newspapers.¹¹² Smith also varied the locations of the summer encampments with cooperation from various communities throughout the state. VMI graciously received gratis transportation to Warrenton Spring in Fauquier County where cadets held their camp in 1854. Smith warmly thanked the citizens for the gesture, telling them that, “It has long been a cherished wish to visit the section of the state through which your road passes. It has always been a liberal patron of this Institution and I am well assured that there is no part of Virginia in which we should be received with a more cordial welcome.”¹¹³ The Corps proceeded to Alexandria and then to Mount Vernon to visit the home of George Washington. Smith keenly not only called on the local populace to watch his cadets march and drill during these visits but also extended an invitation to key politicians such as state delegates Alexander Rives and James Barbour as well.¹¹⁴

Since the entire Corps of Cadets could only travel on rare occasions and letter writing could only accomplish so much, Smith found it necessary to visit the capital by himself in order to lobby for his school’s interest with the legislature. He recalled using this strategy in the effort to secure funding for the new barracks, “Having been directed by the Board of Visitors to appear before this committee, explain the necessity for the appropriation asked for, and to watch the progress of the bill in its various stages through

the two houses, much of my time was spent in Richmond after the 1st of January, 1850.”¹¹⁵ He understood that by meeting the politicians crucial to its passage face to face and personally appearing in the chambers of the legislature to present the case for his Institute, he put a living face on VMI and could better manipulate the opinions of those who held the future of the school in their hands. When compared to the most renowned college presidents of his day, such as Francis Wayland of Brown University, Philip Lindsley of the University of Nashville, or Eliphalet Nott of Union College, none of them put as much time or energy into winning favor with the politicians who supported their institutions. Smith set a new impressive standard for the labor required to maintain financial support from the political arena.

The litany of other military schools that Smith inspired and mentored also took a page from his public relations strategies. The Georgia Military Institute’s financial problems in the mid-1850s provided a harsh lesson for not seeking a firm and amiable relationship with the state government in order to obtain funding. VMI’s early years demonstrated how support and patronage from the legislature was more crucial than the quality of cadets or a competent faculty. This patronage had to be won not only by gaining the approval of the legislature but also their voters. Parading its cadets through Richmond in 1842, VMI captivated the local citizens, making the legislature's decision to increase the Institute's funding a popular one. GMI students made their first trip to the state capital in Milledgeville in November 1853 where they received accolades similar to those received by the Virginia cadets. One newspaper commented on how "their fine soldierly bearing, and gentlemanly deportment excited universal admiration."¹¹⁶ Four

years later, the GMI corps held its summer encampment in the capital and drilled with the state militia, demonstrating their military aptitude to the local citizens. The South Carolina Corps of Cadets embarked on a statewide tour in 1854, and citizens showered them with attention and praise in every town they visited. SCMA also rotated the location of its summer camp and commencement exercises in the upcountry and other regions to secure support from the entire state. Their march to the “upper counties of these state” helped heal the resentment of the citizens of that region against the more aristocratic tidewater as they spoiled the cadets with “picnics, dances and sumptuous dinners.”¹¹⁷ Statewide support worked for both the SCMA and GMI as neither was denied appropriations from the legislature during the antebellum period.

Smith also won over the state citizenry by weaving VMI into the fabric of the state’s cultural identity. While taking his cadets on their statewide Corps trips, he aimed to associate the Institute as a visible symbol of patriotism for the Old Dominion. During their first public relations visit to Richmond, the Corps of Cadets paraded through the streets of the capital brandishing a flag consisting of the Institute’s new coat of arms: the Virginia state seal with the school’s motto, “Virginia Fidem Praesto,” meaning “I am true to the Old Dominion.”¹¹⁸ In January 1850, Smith’s cadets traveled to Richmond again to participate in the high profile ceremony of laying the cornerstone for the new Washington Monument in the capital as well as present national war hero and Virginia native, General Winfield Scott, with a medal of appreciation. President Zachary Taylor, who attended the ceremony as well, donated a battery of six cannons to the Corps of Cadets because of their impressive soldierly bearing. VMI’s Corps created such a

popular impression on the townspeople that the citizens of both Petersburg and Norfolk invited the entirety of the Smith's cadet entourage to parade in their cities when they left Richmond. Many of these observers did not know, however, that Colonel Smith had planned this public relations trip several months in advance to put it in the same time as the state legislature's debate over the Institute's ambitious request for \$46,000 for a brand new barracks. He learned on the return trip to Lexington that his showcase had succeeded and the legislature appropriated the funds. The Corps returned again in 1856 for the official dedication of the monument and enjoyed a special invitation to the Executive Mansion of Governor Henry Wise. The trip to the capital caused a great deal of anxiety for Smith and his staff as they made the voyage in the middle of a winter storm and the exposure to the elements triggered a wave of illness upon their return. Regardless, they could not refuse the opportunity for publicity at such an important state event.¹¹⁹

Like any seasoned statesman, Smith relied on more traditional methods of political obsequiousness and flattery to achieve the allegiance and trust from much needed supporters. In 1846, he called for portraits of the original BOV to be painted and placed in Hall of Society of Cadets to give tribute to those who "gave the Institute its being," and subsequently informed each of the members of the deed.¹²⁰ Smith gave special attention to each governor under which he served. Upon the completion of his new children's mathematics textbook, Smith dedicated it to Governor James McDowell "as a friend and patron on universal education."¹²¹ William "Extra Billy" Smith received the honor of having the VMI summer training camp named in his honor during

his visit in 1847.¹²² Most of Smith's sycophancy came in his correspondence, where he always profusely thanked his supporters, particularly those who helped pushed bills through the legislature, labeling them as "true friends of the Institute" and patriots of Virginia for their assistance to its only state military academy.¹²³

Success in the legislature and public arena came at a cost as it was often not so easily attained and almost overshadowed by the various failures that befell them in political endeavors. Nearly every bill submitted to the General Assembly in VMI's behalf met some form of resistance and often perished altogether. Smith wrote as many letters begging for support to revive legislation than thanking and congratulating politicians for their help. Again, he relied on a variety of tactics to struggle through potential political defeats in Richmond. Most often, Smith resorted to kindness, flattery and charm when wooing politicians for aid. In 1860, he solicited the assistance Delegate George T. Yerby by asking, "I hope you will not think that I am trespassing too much upon that kindness which has marked your entire public life towards me, in the 20 years during which I have had the pleasure to know you, by enlisting your interest in the Senate Bill in behalf of the Va Mil. Institute."¹²⁴ When a stingy state delegate blocked the preliminary attempts to push the barracks bill because he claimed VMI would now cost the legislature over \$50,000 to support, Smith chided the comments in letters to his political supporters, pointing out that naysayers overlooked how the Institute returned at least that amount in the "cause of education" in counties throughout Virginia.¹²⁵ In other situations, he took the opposite tack by reminding politicians of the Institute's frugality and how it "practiced economy from necessity, to a degree which borders on

niggardliness.”¹²⁶ He also identified political enemies and troublemakers surrounding the debate over key legislation and cajoled his supporters to contain them, even the great bosses of his own party. “Can’t the Whigs of Richmond do something with [John Minor] Botts? He is the greatest Marplot of the Day,” he pleaded with Dorman during the initial debates for barracks funding.¹²⁷ Smith also utilized guilt as a tactic. After losing another appropriations bill in the Virginia Senate in 1856, he explained how the University of Alabama, now incorporating the VMI model, ensured that its graduates received nearly twice the salary for accepting a teaching position in the state.¹²⁸ In more desperate times, he sought sympathy from politicians by lamenting how he had to use his own personal money or that of Board members to pay for improvements.¹²⁹ Experience and a keen sense of human nature taught Smith which methods worked most effectively for deriving what he wanted out of the legislators.

Confident in his school’s contribution to the state, Smith proclaimed VMI the scientific institution of Virginia and campaigned to secure the Institute’s involvement in any and all engineering projects suggested by the legislature. He made it clear to everyone that VMI should be center of all state scientific activity. Whenever word reached the Institute of plans for a statewide trigonometric survey, topographical map of Virginia or the creation of a road, bridge or canal, Smith quickly scribbled letters to Richmond demanding that the state representatives bestow the project upon his cadets and faculty. Picking up on a suggestion from Delegate William Burwell, Smith persuaded political ally Charles J. Faulkner that not only was a new map needed for Virginia (the last one dated from 1825), that it also only made common sense for the Old

Dominion's native sons at the Institute to undertake the project.¹³⁰ He argued to his friend General Richardson:

This would be a noble work for the state and one of which she would be proud as long she exists and it is a work which one should esteem it our highest honor and discharge for the state. This brings me to remark that it has been my aim ever since this Institution was established to make it in all respects a state institution, state in receiving no cadets but our own citizens, state in training them as teachers and officers for the schools and military service and state in engaging in every legitimate duty that would develop her resources or promote her welfare. As a consequence to this prominent principle our young men have been always impressed with the duty of giving their services first to their state and hence comparatively few of our graduates have removed from us and gone out to other states. Let our legislature foster this important design and it will be better for the state and I am sure greatly to the advantage of our citizens.¹³¹

So obsessed had Smith become over gaining political capital from the map project that it caused him to lose a valuable personal friendship with one of the Institute's founders, Claudius Crozet. The first president of VMI's Board of Visitors in 1839, Crozet now had been commissioned by the state Board of Public Works to look into creating a new map, and openly disagreed with Smith's proposal to redo the map from scratch. Not convinced of the cadets' ability to take on such a vast task, Crozet suggested simply fixing the existing map with only occasional spot surveys to update it.¹³² Smith refused to give up on this opportunity for his institution. He replied to

Crozet on the necessity of VMI securing the map project stating, “It would stimulate our cadets, while engaged in their studies, by the fact that such a work might require their services. It would give employment to our pay cadet graduates, and familiarize them with an important branch of engineering and finally it would if successfully completed reflect great honor and reputation upon the Institute in a scientific point of view and do more to elevate its character among the institution of the country than anything else beside.”¹³³

Less than a decade later, Smith approached Governor Henry Wise directly to offer a team of six of his recent graduates to survey a canal route through Giles County.¹³⁴ He boasted in his 1851 Semi-Annual Report to the legislature of the Institute’s necessity to the state’s development as nearly every civil engineering endeavor in the state had a VMI student or graduate as a participant.¹³⁵ An army of successful alumni establishing a monopoly on the state’s internal improvements, Smith believed, could do as much to promote the school’s reputation as any tour of the Corps of Cadets or lobbying to legislators.

Studying VMI and other military schools reveals more complexity in the politics of the era than other students may have recognized. Some historical examinations have focused on the unique “state cadet” system, not the political activity of administrators as the ultimate expression of Jacksonian America and the Second Party system. Historian Rod Andrew argues that the state cadet system reflected a broader trend of egalitarianism in America with VMI and other military schools offering educational opportunities that had previously only been available to the elite. The military culture of

the schools fit beautifully into the mold of this philosophy with all students dressed alike (in uniforms) conforming to the same behavioral standards with no visible distinction of social class. As a political device, Andrew identifies the promotion of egalitarian ideals as the key to securing support from state legislatures. The rising age of the “common man” placed greater pressure on supporters of higher education to make colleges more affordable and accessible to the wider population of young men in order to erase the stigma of being labeled an aristocratic institution. However, the goal of making colleges more unrestricted could not reconcile with the contradictory Jacksonian political philosophy of small government spending.¹³⁶

Frederick Rudolph’s history of the American university labels the antebellum period as a “low point of legislative generosity to colleges.”¹³⁷ Jacksonian politicians could philosophically support the concept of allowing modest or poorer citizen the opportunity to better himself through education but the price-tag seemed to increase every year and place a greater burden on the state coffers. Smith had to bring much more to the legislators and governors in Richmond than the abstract concept of egalitarianism to win appropriations from a traditionally tightfisted state government. Arguments touting the benefits for the “common good” more often than for the “common man” graced Smith’s speeches and letters when pleading for funding. To be sure, historian Jennifer Green correctly identifies VMI as a successful vehicle for social mobility for many cadets by providing them with an education that could offer them a productive life in the much needed fields of science and engineering.¹³⁸ But Smith always had to place the necessity of his institution in a practical, cost effective context

whose benefits could be enjoyed by much more than its graduates. Smiths tirelessly argued in letters, in the press, and before the legislature that the existence of VMI improved the quality and quantity of education throughout the state by producing more teachers, inspiring the creation of new schools and introducing more scientific instruction. Since those who paid the bills, the legislature, worried about the approval of their constituencies, Smith had to justify the benefit that VMI brought to the state beyond the success of the handful its alumni, regardless of their “rags to riches” opportunity.

By VMI’s very nature, Francis H. Smith could not avoid having the Institute reflect the ideals and values of the Whig party. The Institute encouraged stimulating a growing market economy, expanding the state’s infrastructure through internal improvements. Smith also promoted a moralistic view of government and society. Even the school’s institutional hallmark of Jacksonian egalitarianism, the state cadet system, demonstrated a more Whiggish philosophy on poverty and opportunity. Smith assured one of his struggling graduates that “Poverty is no disgrace to anyone nor in this enterprising country is it always a misfortune. It stimulates to active energy and industry and thus is a happiness which the millionaire often seeks in vain.”¹³⁹ Whigs preached that economic failings could be remedied through the inculcation of proper habits such as diligence, self-control and morality, all qualities that Smith’s championed as the centerpieces of both his curriculum and extra-curricular environment. These attitudes also fit into his Whig inspired broader goal of creating a meritocracy of leaders who attained their position through talent, hard work and virtue. Historians of the Second

Party System, such as Michael Holt, Edward Pessen and Daniel Walker Howe argue that the Whigs regarded government action as a positive force in shaping the society of the future.¹⁴⁰ Smith, in full support of this philosophy, heralded VMI as a state institution that stimulated the state's educational system and economy, a service to its citizens and an instrument of social reform for Virginia's poor and uneducated.

The VMI model of "poor boy" education, however, often served other than altruistic means as many politicians supported the state cadet concept because of their own self interest. The system created by VMI's original Board of Visitors called for one state cadet to come from each of Virginia's thirty-two Congressional districts. The Board made the official acceptance decisions for prospective cadets but could receive nominations from anywhere and anybody. This plan gave politicians a golden opportunity to dole patronage amongst their constituents or at least bolster their reputation in their home districts. A state delegate who sponsored the son of a poor but respected citizen or perhaps a struggling widow could gain great political capital or strengthen public relations amongst his voters. Each state cadet also bore with him the reputation of his community as well as the representative who nominated him. Smith recognized the political implications of state cadets and played it up when dealing members of the legislature. Nearly every letter to a politician who had a sponsor at VMI consisted of two portions: a formal discussion of political business and then a parental-like update on their candidate's academic progress and behavioral development. Smith also used his duty of placing new graduates in teaching positions as a political advantage by allowing politicians act as intermediaries in the process. For example, in 1848,

Delegate Richmond T. Lacy of New Kent learned that a school in his district run by a Mr. Harris needed a new instructor. He sought out Smith to arrange the employment of Cadet Stephen Pendleton, earning favor for both himself and VMI in the process.¹⁴¹

Placing state cadets also had the potential to make Smith look unsuccessful in the eyes of the legislature. When Caleb Boggess refused to fulfill his teaching duty in 1845, Smith scolded him for the political damage his impudence caused by telling him, “Indeed, it is this admirable feature in our Institution which entitles us so highly to the support of the Legislature. If you are not discharging the duty imposed upon you, the delegates to the G[eneral]. Assembly for your district know it, and it weakens our influence by this much.”¹⁴² He deterred another graduate from making the same mistake two years later when he warned, “The Institute has many enemies who would gladly avail if your delinquency to injure it and there are some in the quarter of state in which you live.”¹⁴³

Smith also found that the state cadet system backfired politically in the early 1850s when the Board appointed an army of cadets loyal to the Democratic party. He voraciously argued that the abuse of the system by the Board by appointing cadets not on their merit but their political affiliation. “The character of the Board must influence the character of the Institution morally as well as intellectually,” he complained to Virginia Senator Charles Mason, “This is observable for the appointments of cadets for the last year where members of the Board have solicited appointments to be conferred upon their friends not from their merits but from their personal considerations. The effect is but too manifest here and unless there is a change or the better in the appointing power, I cannot

be responsible for the character of the school.”¹⁴⁴ History may identify military education’s practice of “poor boy education” as an enlightened concept but in practice, it more often became a selfish device of politicians.

The unique opportunities that Smith and VMI provided tend to skew perceptions of the socio-economic composition of the Corps of Cadets. Historian Jennifer Green’s study posits that Southern military academies gathered an “emerging southern middle class” and the ideals that connected that group to the developing “national middle class.”¹⁴⁵ The student bodies of these schools, she argues, consisted exclusively of those young men seeking to gain “advantage” through their education to attain the success and status of a burgeoning middle class in the South and “almost no elites.”¹⁴⁶ In actuality, the student body of VMI in its first twenty years represented a broad cross-section of Virginia society and Smith recognized this. He commented to one state senator, “These are Virginia’s young men of all classes, some rich, some poor, and many of them the sons of persons in moderate circumstances.”¹⁴⁷ Historians like Green neglect to acknowledge that the Institute educated several young men from some of the most elite and recognized families in the state. Table 2 presents a sampling of some VMI’s more well-connected cadets:

Table 2: VMI Cadets and Prestigious Relatives, 1842-1862

<u>Cadet</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Relation</u>
James B. Dorman	1843	Son of Charles P. Dorman, Virginia House of Delegates
William Richardson	1843	Son of William H. Richardson, Virginia Adjutant General
Lawson Botts	1844	Nephew of John M. Botts, US Congressman
Arthur C. Campbell	1844	Nephew of David Campbell, Virginia Governor
Richard T. W. Duke	1845	Son of Richard Duke, Justice of Albemarle County
Alexander C. Layne	1846	Son of Douglas B. Layne, Virginia House of Delegates
William C. Leyburn	1846	Son of Alfred Leyburn, Virginia House of Delegates
William H. Southall	1847	Son of Douglas Southall, Speaker, Virginia House of Del
Alfred L. Rives	1848	Son of William Rives, US Congressman
George H. Ritchie	1849	Son of Thomas Ritchie, Editor of <u>Richmond Enquirer</u>
William D. Stuart	1850	Brother of Alexander H. H. Stuart, US Sec of Interior
Charles T. Mason	1852	Son of Charles Mason, Virginia Senate
Thomas T. Munford	1852	Son of George W. Munford, Sec of the Commonwealth
Arthur L. Rogers	1852	Son of Asa Rogers, Virginia Senate
Charles L. Ruffin	1852	Son of Edmund Ruffin, President Va Agriculture Society
Edwin Barbour	1853	Son of John S. Barbour, Virginia House of Delegates
George N. Hammond	1853	Son of Allen C. Hammond, Virginia House of Delegates
Walter Jones	1853	Son of Gen. Roger Jones, Adjutant General, US Army
Francis Mallory	1853	Grandson of Charles K. Mallory, Virginia Governor

Table 2 continued

<u>Cadet</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Relation</u>
Thomas J. Moncure	1853	Son of William Moncure, Virginia House of Delegates
Alexander Bruce	1854	Son of James C. Bruce, Virginia House of Delegates
Walter B. Botts	1854	Nephew of John M. Botts, US Congressman
Stapleton Crutchfield	1855	Son of Oscar Crutchfield, Virginia House of Delegates
Robert P. W. Garnett	1855	Son of Muscoe Garnett, US Congressman
Edwin J. Harvie	1855	Son of Lewis Harvie, Virginia House of Delegates
Waller T. Patton	1855	Son of John M. Patton, US Congressman
Henry A. Wise	1855	Son of Henry Wise, Virginia Governor, US Congressman
Francis M. Boykin	1856	Son of Francis Boykin, Virginia Senate
Virginius K. Brent	1856	Brother of George Brent, Virginia Senate
Charles J. Buford	1856	Brother of Algeron Buford, Virginia House of Delegates
Edward L. Smith	1856	Son of Arthur R. Smith, Virginia Senate
John R. Strother	1856	Son of James F. Strother, Virginia House of Delegates
John B. Cocke	1856	Son of Philip S. Cocke, President Virginia Agr Society
Edward C. Edmonds	1858	Son of John R. Edmonds, Virginia House of Delegates
John T. Goode	1858	Son of William O. Goode, Virginia House of Delegates
Octavius Henderson	1859	Son of Gen. Archibald Henderson, Commandant USMC
Theodore Lubbock	1862	Son of Francis Lubbock, Texas Governor

Moreover, dozens of cadets each year matriculated to VMI from families of more than “modest” means, not far removed from Virginia’s political and social elite. Analysis of Smith’s correspondence reveals hundreds of letters coming from fathers and male relatives holding either honorary or standing militia officer titles. Some cadets could trace their lineage back to the state’s most respected military heroes from the Revolution and the War of 1812. Many represented the well-established professional class of the state including prominent doctors, lawyers, ministers, and judges. Cadets recognized the distinction of some of their classmates. John Hubard boasted to his father about the lineage of his roommate, “He is a son of Judge Lee of the Court of Appeals and a descendent of General Lee of the Revolution.”¹⁴⁸ Other letters to Smith hold addresses from plantations and large estates, demonstrating that wealthy landowners also sent their sons to the Institute. VMI provided an opportunity for some poorer “state” cadets to achieve middle-class success, as Green asserts, but countless other young men matriculated to the Institute having already come from established elite and modest income families.

The enrollment of these more esteemed students raises two more important points. Firstly, VMI quickly gained a reputation renowned enough for many of the state’s elite families to send their sons there. In its first twenty years of existence, the Institute could place itself in the same category as the University of Virginia, College of William and Mary, and Washington College as an institution worthy of the Old Dominion’s finest young men. Secondly, the enrollment of so many of the relatives of politicians gave Smith additional leverage in his relationship with the state legislature.

Personally teaching and mentoring their children allowed Smith to demonstrate firsthand the quality of a VMI education. Moreover, it gave him continual contact with many of the politicians instrumental in the support and survival of the Institute. When Smith cleverly divided his correspondence with these legislators and prominent citizens between politics and discussion of their children's progress, he also argued for better living quarters, money for professors, or new scientific equipment. Many of these politicians would consider his request with more interest as it often reflected the welfare and education of their own children. Smith always sent parents updates on their sons' progress, both good and bad, but also gave the politicians who had sons or wards at the Institute considerably more attention. VMI's reputation amongst the state's political elite also won him several key Democratic allies, as mentioned before, such as Lewis Harvie, William B. Taliaferro, John Brockenbrough, Francis Boykin, and George Wythe Munford, who enrolled their sons to the Institute. These men chose to support Smith instead of their own party because of the investment he put into their son's education. Smith never forgot, however, that having politically connected cadets, presented a double-edged sword as those with close ties to Richmond could promote the Institute in both a positive and negative light to state legislators as he learned in the ordeal with Cadet Macon.

Smith also relied on in his former students as another powerbase of support. As a West Point graduate, he understood the benefits of a dedicated alumni body and with a strong allegiance to their alma mater. The first VMI graduates of 1842 created a Society of Alumni and Smith actively promoted their development. As with cadet parents and

politicians, he kept the society informed of the major issues of the Institute, both good and bad, and encouraged them to remain active in the schools development. He had remained close to his graduates particularly to facilitate a network of fellow educators who would influence the improvement of education throughout the state. They also proved to be some of his fiercest defenders during the litany of controversies that he endured. Graduates wrote numbers of letters to newspapers to counter the barrage of slanderous editorials that criticized their superintendent and school. An article appeared in the Richmond Whig in 1846, for example, written under the pseudonym “Alumnus” who attempted to clear Smith’s name from the accusations leveled by Washington College.¹⁴⁹ They rallied around Smith when he protested Robert Gray’s appointment to the Board of Visitors. “The feeling is universal among others as well as graduates and when it is known that the appointment was the result of party solicitation the matter is presented in a more odious light,” Smith boasted to state delegate.¹⁵⁰ He saw graduates as key players in drumming up support for the school, particularly as he aimed to develop VMI’s reputation throughout the state. He assured the Board as early as 1844 that he now had graduates in every major city in Virginia to promote the school’s influence.¹⁵¹ A handful of graduates entered the political arena themselves, such as James B. Dorman (Class of 1843), John Echols (1843), Robert M. Wiley (1845) and James W. Massie (1849), and spoke on Smith’s and the Institute’s behalf throughout the period.

Public relations trips focused as much on winning over the populace as they did the government. Smith understood that their approval meant as much as the legislators

since they shaped their opinions and also paid the taxes. Lack of public support meant eventual loss of political, then financial support. Other contemporary college presidents ensured the survival of their schools as well by presenting their schools, albeit reluctantly, as community institutions to win the public's favor.¹⁵² Most struggled to shake the image of ultra-pietistic religious institutions in order to give them more mass appeal. Others, including Francis Wayland of Brown University, recognized that traditional colleges had not kept pace with changing society and therefore losing the support (and funding) of the wider public. In 1850, he planned drastic changes to the school's curriculum, degree requirements, and fiscal policies. These reforms, however, forced him to promote his institution as a public fundraiser, an activity that had "always been distasteful to him."¹⁵³ Some presidents failed to learn the lesson of public support altogether. Phillip Lindsley, president of the University of Nashville and one of the great educational innovators of the day, "was kept from his goals by lack of funds, popular indifference and the competition of denominational colleges," according to historian George Schmidt.¹⁵⁴

In spite of the passion for his own party, Smith cleverly had kept VMI as politically neutral as possible in the public eye, even in the wave of those who accused him of partisanship. He understood that overt party allegiance in an environment as politically volatile as antebellum Virginia could destroy the school. Catering to one party would undermine the ultimate mission of state service and, most importantly, jeopardize their financial support from the legislature. Smith facilitated the exposure of his cadets to both parties as much as the bounds of his own disciplinary system would

allow. Recognizing the vigor of Virginia's two party system also compelled him to befriend his political adversaries in the state legislature. His success in this endeavor came from his careful recognition of the political landscape. He understood the Democrats' fear of large state-funded public institutions. In 1842, he intimated to Richardson before pushing a new bill, "I fear the embarrassed state of the Treasury will forbid any encouragement from that quarter although the small addition ask for could not be more profitably appropriated. But the fear of the cry 'taxes' would cause many to vote against an increase of the public expense."¹⁵⁵ By promoting VMI as having public benefit that far outweighed the public cost, educating the sons of key state politicians, and nurturing personal friendships with those Democrats who could be persuaded from toeing the party line demonstrated Smith's firm grasp on the political landscape and how he used it to his advantage. He reflected on his success during the politically turbulent antebellum period in a letter to graduate Alexander Rives, son of Whig Congressman William C. Rives, in 1859:

I have been connected with it [VMI] from its organization in 1839, and I can scarcely conceive it possible for a public institution to be conducted by those who, from the nature of our free institutions have so much to do with politics and yet be freer from PARTY politics altho' the Democratic Party has been ascendant all the time I have held my office, with the known principles of a decided Whig and the President of our Board Col Cocke is also a Whig.¹⁵⁶

In sum, Smith kept friends close, and his enemies closer politically to ensure the future of his institution.

While Smith masterminded VMI's positive image in the public mind, he could also be identified oftentimes as the school's greatest public relations liability. All of the controversies and accusations that the Institute endured in its first twenty years implicated Smith personally in some way. Those who criticized VMI always called for corrective action against the superintendent with either his resignation, removal, apology or punishment, not closing the school itself. The Institute's continual attachment to the legislature coupled with Smith's public relation efforts increased the school's visibility and consequently made him a growing public figure in the Old Dominion. Unlike other college presidents, he proclaimed himself a public servant as the superintendent of the state-supported military school but in doing so, exposed himself to the public scrutiny if they believed he did not serve their interests. Few leaders of public institutions in Virginia enjoyed as much attention as Smith yet many citizens treated how he used his high profile position with skepticism. They treated Smith, in some cases, as a despot who used his highly visible public position to his personal advantage – either financial, political, or as will be discussed in the next chapter, religious. His opponents feared mostly his taking advantage of the young men in his charge by obtaining money from them unfairly, impressing his personal politics on them or filling their heads with false philosophies. Smith understood and acknowledged how all opponents of the Institute singled him out personally in their attacks. During his altercations with local Lexington merchants, he pointed out to Richardson how the accusers did not take the case to the Board of Visitors and instead slandered him in the community and the press. “It was a personal matter towards me,” he confessed.¹⁵⁷ He admitted this reality during other

political altercations and carried the guilt of the school's reputation becoming a casualty in assaults directed at him as an individual. Becoming the public face of the Virginia Military Institute, an unintended by-product of all his public campaigning, made him at times, more of a public institution than his state military academy and occasionally a detriment.

Nearly all college presidents of the antebellum period engaged in politics in one form or the other. Even the traditionally denominational schools, usually out of financial desperation, appealed to state politicians for assistance of some kind. Few institutional leaders, however, utilized as many different methods to maneuver lawmakers into supporting his school monetarily and politically as Francis H. Smith. Virginia's politicians witnessed the vast array of Smith's tactics such as promoting VMI's merits and contribution to the public good, flaunting his graduates, doling patronage through the state cadet system, comparing his school to those in other regions, and making repeated personal visits to the capital to argue for his cause. Smith used methods more becoming a politician than a scholar such as threats, guilt, name-dropping, favors, pleading, sympathy, patriotism, cronyism, flattery, networking, entrepreneurship, public promotion, and the occasional lie to get what he wanted for his Institute.

Notes

¹ Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 16-19; Green, “Books and Bayonets,” 14-15; Cunliffe, Soldiers and Civilians, 76-79.

² Paul Mattingly, “Political Culture of America’s Antebellum Colleges,” History of Higher Education Annual 17 (1997), 80.

³ Jurgen Herbst, “American Higher Education in the Age of the College,” History of Universities 7 (1988), 51.

⁴ Rudolph, American College, 219; See also Rudolph, “Who Paid the Bills,” 144-57.

⁵ Smith, History of the Virginia Military Institute, 129.

⁶ Ibid., Couper, One Hundred Years, 81-82, 161,178. Smith’s self-authored history provides a chart of his most successful legislative victories for appropriations.

January 1840	\$ 4,500	Mess hall and water
February 1847	\$ 1,000	New professorship
February 1848	\$ 4,500	Superintendent’s quarters and hospital
March 1850	\$46,000	New barracks
March 1852	\$30,000	Heating and lighting in barracks
March 1854	\$20,000	Addition to barracks
March 1856	\$10,000	Houdon statue of George Washington
March 1858	\$25,000	Barracks and water system improvements
March 1860	\$20,000	Buildings for agricultural school

⁷ William A. Link, Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 4, 7.

⁸ William G. Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System, 1824-1861 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 190.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 113. Although the Whig Party declined in power after the early 1850s, both William Link and William Shade include parties and factions such as the American Party and Oppositionists as the alternative options to which many of the party members regrouped in their opposition to the Democratic Party in Virginia and both historians include them in their analysis of state party politics in the 1850s.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 169, 172. Link, Roots of Secession, 63-65.

¹¹ Jackson quoted in Smith, West Point Fifty Years Ago, 4-5.

¹² Sean Wilentz, "Society, Politics and the Market Revolution, 1815-1848," in Eric Foner, ed., The New American History (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 79.

¹³ Smith to William H. Richardson, 18 December 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴ Smith to William H. Richardson, 4 June 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith considered Governor Johnson a Northerner as he was born in Orange County, New York and lived in New Jersey before moving to Winchester, Virginia, at the age of fourteen.

¹⁵ Smith to William H. Richardson, 18 November 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶ Michael Holt, The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 232.

¹⁷ Smith to James McDowell, 29 April 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 92-95.

¹⁹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 15 October 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁰ Smith to Richard Burks, 3 December 1846, 8 December 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²¹ Smith to George Porterfield, 24 November 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²² Smith to Philip St. George Cocke, 25 May 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²³ Ibid. Waddy Thompson served in Congress as a Whig representative from South Carolina from 1836-1841. In 1842, he was appointed as the minister to Mexico and composed an essay, "Recollections of Mexico," upon his return in 1846 which provided a calm, conciliatory view of Mexico on the eve of the war. See Waddy Thompson, Recollections of Mexico (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1846).

²⁴ Smith to Charles Dimmock, 5 April 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to William H. Richardson, 18 November 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁵ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1856, VMI Archives.

²⁶ Smith to Charles Dimmock, 5 April 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁷ Smith to John P. Wilson, 3 February 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Abraham C. Myers, 13 October 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁸ Howe, Political Culture of the American Whigs, 246-47; Holt, Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party, 816-21.

²⁹ Smith to William W. Mosby, 29 May 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁰ Link, Roots of Secession, 121-23; Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 260, 264.

³¹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 20 December 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³² Smith to William H. Richardson, 29 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³³ Smith to William B. Taliaferro, 27 January 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁴ Smith to George W. Munford, 8 December 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁵ Smith to George Brent, 24 July 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁶ Smith to Peter Steenburgen, 27 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁷ Smith to Charles Mason, 25 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁸ Smith to William H. Richardson, 19 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁹ Smith to Charles Mason, 25 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁰ Smith to William H. Richardson, 26 January 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith claimed Cadet Grisham had close connections with "Rice and Downing in the House of Delegates."

⁴¹ Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 108-10; Crackel, West Point, 100-02.

⁴² Virginia General Assembly, Report of the Select Committee on the Memorial of Peyton Johnston (Richmond: n.p., 1853); VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1853, VMI Archives.

⁴³ Peyton Johnston's son, Peyton Jr., matriculated to VMI in the Class of 1864 and was killed at the Battle of Cold Harbor on 1 June 1864. His ward, Miles Macon, was also killed during the Civil War at Appomattox Court House on 8 April 1865.

⁴⁴ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1853, VMI Archives.

⁴⁵ Smith to Bernard Peyton, 11 November 1840, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*; Couper, One Hundred Years, 271.

⁴⁷ Smith to William H. Richardson, 29 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁸ Smith to Francis Boykin, 23 July 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 13 July 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Richmond Examiner, 5 October 1852.

⁵² Smith to Patrick H. Aylett, 8 December 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵³ Smith to Francis Boykin, 5 October 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁴ Smith to James G. Paxton, 5 November 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁵ Smith to Francis Boykin, 11 January 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Francis Boykin, 11 February 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁶ Lynchburg Express, 22 November 1853.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 22 November 1853.

⁵⁸ Lexington Valley Star, 1 December 1853; Richmond Enquirer, 30 November 1853.

⁵⁹ Richmond Enquirer, 3 December 1853.

⁶⁰ Francis Boykin to Smith, 29 October 1852, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶¹ Couper, One Hundred Years, 155. Alden Partridge founded the Virginia Literary, Scientific and Military Academy of Portsmouth, Virginia, in 1839 but closed the school in 1856 because it could not compete successfully with VMI.

⁶² Smith to Charles Dimmock, 5 April 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶³ Couper, One Hundred Years, 138-39, 155.

⁶⁴ Richmond Country Republican, 29 November 1850.

⁶⁵ Richmond Country Republican, 5 December 1850.

⁶⁶ Smith to William H. Richardson, 16 December 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁷ Smith to George Yerby, 7 December 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith to Douglas B. Layne, 14 December 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁸ Smith to Francis Boykin, 2 November 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁹ Smith to Dennis H. Mahan, 28 November 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁰ Smith to William O. Goode, 21 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷¹ FHS to John Letcher, 15 March 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Henry A. Wise, 15 March 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷² U. S. Congress, Senate. Report of the Board of Visitors of the United States Military Academy. 34th Congress, 3rd Session, 1856, 303.

⁷³ Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 2.

⁷⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), 231.

⁷⁵ Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 506-52.

⁷⁶ Richmond Enquirer, 30 November 1853.

⁷⁷ Barringer, University of Virginia, 156.

⁷⁸ Wertebaker, Princeton, 100-01.

⁷⁹ Sugrue, "We Desire Our Future Leaders," 52, 61.

⁸⁰ Rudolph, Max Hopkins, 26-27; Rudolph, American College, 91-95; Brinkley, On This Hill, 201-04.

⁸¹ Mattingly, "Political Culture of America's Colleges," 80-85.

⁸² Brinkley, On This Hill, 131, 197-206.

⁸³ Smith to Benjamin Ficklin, 6 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁴ Smith, History of VMI, 71-75.

⁸⁵ Smith to Samuel J. Jordan, 27 November 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Samuel M. Moore, 27 April 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁶ Smith, Old Spex, 65.

⁸⁷ Smith to Lewis E. Harvie, 18 March 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁸ Smith to John R. Edmunds, 22 February 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁹ Barringer, University of Virginia, 151-52; Smith, History of VMI, 78-79.

⁹⁰ Smith to James H. Paxton, 17 February, 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹¹ Smith to William Moncure, 11 January 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹² Couper, One Hundred Years, 204.

⁹³ Smith to William H. Richardson, 16 December 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁴ Smith to Corbin Braxton, 20 March 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁵ Smith to James H. Paxton, 4 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁶ Smith to William H. Richardson, 4 April 1844, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁷ Smith to William H. Richardson, 10 March 1846; Smith to George Yerby, 10 February 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. He pressed Yerby heavily to consider lobbying for election to the Board since he was such a good friend to the Institute. Smith to William H. Richardson, 10 February 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith explained to Richardson, "I would like to see [George] Yerby or some eastern man on our Board. I think perhaps Yerby would make a good member and he would be able to see what he now only knows by rumor. His county is deeply interested in this Institution. Segar would also make a good member and I feel very sensibly his warm support. I merely mention these for your consideration."

⁹⁸ Smith to Francis Boykin, 23 July 1852, 2 November 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁹ Couper, One Hundred Years, 214, 259.

¹⁰⁰ Smith to John P. Wilson, 3 February 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to John Wheeler, 8 January 1857, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰¹ Smith, Introductory Address, 21.

¹⁰² VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1850, VMI Archives; VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1854, VMI Archives

¹⁰³ Morrison, Best School in the World, 87-88, 110.

¹⁰⁴ Smith to Thomas Cowperthwaite, 18 March 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Lexington Gazette, 4 September 1851.

¹⁰⁶ Jennings C. Wise, Military History of the Virginia Military Institute From 1839 to 1865 (Lynchburg, Va.: J. P. Bell and Company, 1915), 51.

¹⁰⁷ Richmond Enquirer, 10 January 1842.

¹⁰⁸ Henry Wise, Drawing Out the Man: The VMI Story (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1978), 20.

¹⁰⁹ Commonwealth of Virginia, Acts of General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1842 (Richmond: Commonwealth of Virginia, 1842), 13.

¹¹⁰ Smith to Charles P. Dorman and Alfred Leyburn, 27 January 1842, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹¹ George Toole to Jennie Toole, 1 November 1855, Toole Family Collection, Special Collections, Alderman Library, UVA.

¹¹² Norfolk Southern Argus, 5 November 1859, 14 November 1859.

¹¹³ Smith to H. W. Vandergrift, 15 August, 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁴ Smith to William C. Rives, 2 August 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Benjamin J. Barbour, 19 August 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁵ Smith, History of VMI, 125.

¹¹⁶ Milledgeville [Georgia] Southern Recorder, 15 November 1853.

¹¹⁷ Bond, Story of the Citadel, 41.

¹¹⁸ Smith to William H. Richardson, 20 November 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁹ Couper, One Hundred Years, 326-28. As a peculiar reminder of their public relations victory, a portion of that fund went to the acquisition of a George Washington statue identical to the one they had dedicated in Richmond to be placed in front of their new barracks.

¹²⁰ Smith to Bernard Peyton, 17 November 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²¹ Smith to James McDowell, 12 September 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith dedicated his textbook, The American Statistical Arithmetic: Designed for Academies and Schools (Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait and Company, 1845) to Governor McDowell.

¹²² Couper, One Hundred Years, 160.

¹²³ Smith to William B. Taliaferro, 28 February 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith to James H. Paxton, 4 March 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Paxton wrote Smith to announce the passage of his latest appropriations bill. Smith praised him and his efforts as "another evidence of the patient and faithful manner with which you have discharged your trust as the Senator from the District." He went on to "thank friends in the Senate – Dr. Smith, Mr Shands, Dr. Thompson, Dr. Harris and to thank friends in the House – Dr. Taylor, Mr Kirkpatrick, Burks, Yerby, Crutchfield, Dr. Mallory."

¹²⁴ Smith to George Yerby, 1 February 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁵ Smith to William H. Richardson, 12 February 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁶ Smith to Richmond T. Lacy, 1 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁷ Smith to Charles P. Dorman, 23 March 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁸ Smith to James H. Paxton, 28 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 15 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁰ Smith to Charles Faulkner, 2 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to James McDowell, 29 April 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³¹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 3 February 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³² Hunter, Claudius Crozet, 137-38; Smith to William H. Richardson, 24 February, 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to William H. Richardson, 7 December 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³³ Smith to Claudius Crozet, 24 February 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁴ Smith to Henry A. Wise, 21 June 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁵ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1851, VMI Archives.

¹³⁶ Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 15-18.

¹³⁷ Rudolph, American College, 212.

¹³⁸ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 6.

¹³⁹ Smith to Charles Denby, 6 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁰ Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 215; Holt, Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party, 66-70; Howe, Political Culture, 15-22, 32-42.

¹⁴¹ Smith to Richmond T. Lacy, 9 March 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴² Smith to Caleb Boggess, 26 March 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴³ Smith to Alexander C. Jones, 11 February 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁴ Smith to Charles Mason, 25 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁵ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 7.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 66.

¹⁴⁷ Smith to Asa Rodgers, 28 November 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁸ Cadet John L. Hubard to Robert T. Hubard, 17 October 1852, Hubard Family Collection, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

¹⁴⁹ Richmond Whig, 18 February 1845.

¹⁵⁰ Smith to Matthew McKinnie, 9 July 1852; Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵¹ VMI Semi-Annual Report, January 1844, VMI Archives.

¹⁵² Cremin, American Education, 486-87.

¹⁵³ Theodore Crane, Francis Wayland: Political Economist as Educator (Providence: Brown University Press, 1962), 38.

¹⁵⁴ Schmidt "Intellectual Crosscurrents," 65; James Woolverton, "Philip Lindsley and the Cause of Education in the Old Southwest," Tennessee Historical Quarterly 19 (March, 1960), 20, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Smith to William H. Richardson, 27 January 1842, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵⁶ Smith to Alexander Rives, 16 June 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵⁷ Smith to William H. Richardson, 20 April 1844, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

CHAPTER VI

SMITH AS MASCULINE MORALIST

With his educational system blossoming successfully at VMI and other institutions and the support of the government firmly entrenched, Smith took on the additional responsibility of not only educating his young charges but also shaping their moral character as well. Since he viewed the Institute's mission as having a broader impact on the state beyond that of a typical college, he placed great emphasis on the ethical values of his graduates as much as their knowledge. The goal of the Institute was not just to shape the Southern scholar but to shape the Southern man. Nearly every college president of the age made some claim to using their institution as method of contributing to the male maturation process. Historian George P. Schmidt posits that through methods such as strict regulations and courses in moral philosophy, antebellum college presidents carried the burden of instilling virtue in their often rambunctious young men.¹ While Smith supported this claim as well, many of his techniques, however, defied convention and social tradition. In spite of his duty as the superintendent of a state-supported institution, Smith placed Christianity as the centerpiece of his program to develop Southern masculinity. He also challenged the role of honor and violence as devices that defined manhood at a time when both institutions were at their peak in Southern culture.²

As the son of an English immigrant, Smith spent his childhood years as a member of the Episcopal Church which represented the dominant faith in his hometown of Norfolk and the wider Tidewater region. Sources conflict, however, on the

inspiration for his lifelong spirituality. An essay written by VMI alumnus Charles Walker in 1893 on Smith's spiritual life entitled "An Earnest Christian Soldier," identified his "spiritual awakening" happening during his youth under the teachings of Reverend Martin Parks who had a vast impact on the Episcopal community of Norfolk in the early nineteenth century.³ Smith's unofficial biography, written by his grandson Francis H. Smith III, explained that the superintendent had only loosely followed religion during his upbringing, in spite of his mother's devotion to the Church. Smith III stated that his grandfather did not officially become a confirmed member of the church until Easter Sunday, 1837, a monumental step which he attributed solely to the pietistic example of his wife Sara.⁴ Regardless of the origin of his conviction, Smith spent the entirety of his adult life as a pillar of faithfulness to the Episcopal Church and committed to evangelizing his religion.

When he arrived in Lexington in 1839, Smith lamented the absence of an Episcopal church due to his denomination being a small minority in the town. Like many of the communities in the Shenandoah Valley, Lexington and wider Rockbridge County had been settled by the Scots-Irish in the eighteenth century and established their Presbyterian faith as the prominent religion in the region. The handful of Episcopalians in the area met in a small congregation in Buchanan, twenty miles to the south of Lexington, in a church called Woodville Parish. Five of their senior members, including Smith, met in 1840 and composed a proposal for the Virginia Episcopal Convention to create a new parish in Lexington. Smith stood at the forefront of movement to establish this church, first winning the diocese's initial approval as the representative to the

convention, then persuading the members of the founding council in the election of their new parish's first pastor. Smith convinced them to elect newly ordained Reverend William Bryant, the same young man who had boarded with the Smith family in early 1820s before leaving for his cadetship at West Point and inspiring young Francis to pursue his education there. After Bryant left the army, he entered the Episcopal ministry, all the while keeping in contact with Smith and his family. He accepted the invitation to Lexington to rejoin the Smiths and assist in their building the town's first Episcopal parish.

Working with Bryant, Smith labored to persuade the diocese of their need for their own church building (they had been sharing structures with other denominations in Buchanan and Lexington during their first years). Smith won the attention of the head of the diocese, Bishop William Meade and his assistant, Bishop John Johns. Meade, in spite of the smallness of the congregation, took an active interest in the project and gave Smith advice on securing the funds necessary to begin construction.⁵ With their help and his own tireless fundraising, Smith succeeded in building a new Episcopal church on the outskirts of Lexington in 1844, naming it Grace Church. Bishop Johns arrived on 21 May to consecrate the new church and confirmed eight new members the following day. Smith never forgot the assistance from Meade and thanked him profusely for his support. He affirmed to the bishop, "It is regarded by judges as the prettiest little church of the valley. As you first gave the impetus to its erection we should all be greatly gratified could you be present with us also."⁶

The new enthusiasm for the Episcopal Church in Lexington reflected a new resurgent movement in the denomination occurring throughout the state. The traditional Episcopalians of the Revolutionary era projected a sedate and moralistic approach to their faith which continued under the leadership of Bishop James Madison into the early nineteenth century. His successors, Bishops Richard Channing Moore (1814-1841) and William Meade (1842-1862) shifted the direction of the diocese, changing doctrine and practices in order to bring Virginia's Episcopalians closer to other Southern evangelical denominations doctrinally in their focus on pietism and revival. With this new evangelical approach, the Church under Moore and Meade's guidance promoted emotional conversion and individual spirituality instead of the liturgical formalism of the established Anglican Church. While they met resistance from those traditional-minded Episcopalians and those who desired to move more toward Catholic doctrine, the evangelical Episcopalians of mid-nineteenth century Virginia broke away from the conventional principles of the Church of England and consciously moved closer to the attitudes and goals of the broader American evangelical movement.⁷

Pious and active, Smith also became a fixture in this broader Protestant Episcopal movement in the Old Dominion, as a committed follower and participant in the new doctrinal changes. After establishing Grace Church, he maintained a lifelong friendship with Bishops Meade and Johns. As the recognized expert in structuring educational institutions, Smith worked with Meade to establish and develop the Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia.⁸ Johns respected Smith's faith and educational accomplishments so much that he offered Smith the opportunity to replace him as

president of the state's premier Episcopal institution, the College of William and Mary. Smith also cultivated relationships with other leaders in the Episcopal Church including Bishops Leonidas Polk of the Diocese of Louisiana and Charles P. McIlvane of the Diocese of Ohio, both of whom Smith entertained at his home in 1859.⁹ He also maintained friendships with several other Episcopal ministers throughout the state including Reverends George A. Smith, George Dame, John P. McGuire, Charles W. Andrews with whom he discussed deep matters about doctrine and church dogma.¹⁰ Smith also kept abreast of the progress of the Anglican Church in England, boasting to one friend that the Church of England now represented the "bulwark of Protestantism in Europe," and joined in support of the evangelicals of his denomination in condemning the Oxford Movement of the mid-nineteenth century.¹¹ He attended countless conventions for the Episcopal Church, served in various offices in Grace Church and represented Lexington's Episcopalians in the Virginia Bible Society.¹² In 1852, Smith even ordered new curtains for the Literary Society Hall at VMI to duplicate the ones in St. Paul's Church in London.¹³

More importantly, Smith carried his religious fervor into his superintendency at VMI. Although a state-supported school with no official denominational affiliation, Smith incorporated religious activity as a major component of his educational program. He made church attendance compulsory in cadets' regulations and as part of the weekly schedule. The regulations stated, "Duties appropriate to the Sabbath, including attendance upon Divine Service, which shall be imperative, shall be prescribed by the Superintendent and each cadet shall be required to conform hitherto," with cadets

marching to their respective churches every Sunday.¹⁴ Moreover, Smith involved himself in the cadets' spiritual lives personally by holding private prayer meetings in his office every evening. These meetings proved to be the most effective on the cadets' faith because of their intimacy and his allowing various student to lead each gathering, giving them the opportunity to "make his address close and personal."¹⁵ Smith recalled at the end of his career that he enjoyed his most spiritually fulfilling moments at these meetings more than any other part of his experience at the Institute.¹⁶ His cadets created their own Bible Society in 1840, and it held regular meetings and invited several notable preachers to speak on religious topics. The Society maintained a high level of participation with nearly half of the Corps enrolling every year as it enjoyed the support of both the cadets and administration. Cadet John Early noted in his diary that the anniversary of the Bible Society's founding always brought a cessation of classes for the day and an eminent religious speaker to celebrate its achievements.¹⁷ While Smith primarily encouraged his graduates to become educators, if only for a short time, he also rejoiced when he learned that any of his alumni entered the ministry, particularly as Episcopalians. When Charles Derby, Class of 1848, informed his former superintendent of his decision leave teaching to take holy orders for the Episcopal Church, Smith joyously replied, "It may be that the various trials through which you have passed in your life as a teacher have been no more that the leading of Providence and that you may now be more usefully and doubtlessly more happily employed."¹⁸

Smith endeavored not only to bolster the faithful but also bring God to those who matriculated to VMI without any true faith. This effort began in 1844 with the

establishment of the new Episcopal Church in Lexington and its first service celebrated the baptism of eight new church members, including four of Smith's cadets. Religious conversions occurred with irregular frequency but Smith always guided the individual cadet through the process of making a commitment to God. In May 1856, an enigmatic wave of evangelicalism struck the Corps of Cadets; dozens of students sought out Smith seeking religious salvation. He wrote to one parent, "I have done for the last two weeks 2 or 3 cadets and sometimes 5 or 6 per day coming into my office in an agony of mind that is indescribably with the momentous inquiry 'what shall I do to be saved?'"¹⁹ He could not explain this "wonderful work of grace" but rejoiced at each opportunity to add "another trophy to the Redeemer's cause."²⁰ "There has been an unusual religious sentiment prevailing among us for some time and it is a gratifying thing to see the happy influence which is exerted upon those who sincerely is manifested by circumstances which will, I trust, give permanence to their impressions," he assured one friend.²¹ The conversions forced Smith to move his small daily prayer meetings that he normally held in his office into a larger classroom as the number of participants increased by over thirty (in Smith's estimation) in less than one week. Having such an overwhelming proportion of the Corps commit to Christianity conversely made Smith frustrated over those cadets who had not given their hearts to God. He expressed this concern in a letter to the mother of Cadet Thomas Smith: "I have often thought that while so many of his class are becoming members of the church he ought to think seriously of it also for I know that nothing on earth would gratify you more than that he should be pious."²²

Overall, Smith estimated that he oversaw the religious conversion of nearly 250 cadets during his career.²³

Smith's religious fervor, much like his political affiliation, financial practices, and complaints about members of the Board of Visitors, drew him into more conflicts with critics throughout the state. Their initial problems began from within Lexington itself as the rapid growth of Smith's Episcopal Church threatened the overwhelmingly Presbyterian population of the town. Fears became vocalized when the Presbyterians built a new church in 1844 and invited VMI's faculty and cadets to attend the dedication. During the ceremony, Reverend Benjamin Smith gave a lengthy sermon on the Presbyterian faith but ended it with the provocative promise that it would not take possession of the institutions of the state and use them to build up the strength of their denomination. He did not mention names but everyone in the audience, particularly those from VMI, knew he aimed the comment directly at Smith. The reverend later formalized his accusation into seven individual allegations claiming that the Institute had been consumed by Episcopalian "influence." He accused the Board of Visitors and Smith of giving preferential consideration to Episcopal faculty, students, and merchants while forcing all cadets to accept the Episcopal faith.²⁴ Acting again as a master of public relations, Superintendent Smith asked Presbyterian colleague J. T. L. Preston to answer the charges and defend the allegations against the Institute. Preston assured the public that the governor selected the Board and they then selected the cadets therefore Smith had no control over either process. Cadets could attend whatever denominational service they desired and that Smith selected merchants based on financial, not religious

considerations.²⁵ To quell further sectarian charges, Smith immediately implemented another brilliant plan to protect the school's public, non-denominational image. As of 1845, all cadets would rotate their attendance to a different church each Sunday according to their company in the regiment in order to demonstrate that VMI gave no denominational preference, as displayed in Table 3.²⁶

Table 3: VMI Church Rotation System

	Company A	Company B	Company C	Company D
First Sunday	Presbyterian	Methodist	Baptist	Episcopalian
Second Sunday	Episcopalian	Baptist	Methodist	Presbyterian
Third Sunday	Methodist	Presbyterian	Episcopalian	Baptist
Fourth Sunday	Baptist	Episcopalian	Presbyterian	Methodist

While Smith did not use VMI as a device to promote the Episcopal Church, one cannot blame his accusers for raising the issue. The circumstances that supported the accusations did appear, at the very least, suspicious. Smith boldly founded an Episcopal parish in a Presbyterian dominated town and subsequently converted several students at both Washington College and VMI.²⁷ The first two permanent faculty members that he hired, Thomas H. Williamson and William Gilham, became active participants in Grace Church with the former serving as secretary of the vestry for several decades.²⁸ In 1848, two-thirds of the faculty members were practicing Episcopalians. Much like his vast

network of educators who promoted a similar educational philosophy, Smith also maintained a smaller but just as viable connection to Episcopal clergy and church members throughout the state and nation. Smith's primary political connection in Richmond, General William H. Richardson, shared his activism in the Episcopal Church while many of his collegiate contacts, such as Dennis H. Mahan at West Point and Benjamin S. Ewell at William and Mary, were also devout members of the church. No statistics exist on the religious affiliation of cadets who enrolled at VMI but the number of those who matriculated from the primarily Episcopal eastern portion of the state most likely made critics uncomfortable.²⁹ Many of the "funnel" secondary schools that traditionally sent their students to VMI had an affiliation with the Episcopal Church, particularly the Episcopal High School in Alexandria where several Institute alumni served on its faculty, as well as close ties to Bishop Meade.³⁰ Smith's friends in the Episcopal clergy did little to conceal their connection to VMI. Smith's close friend Reverend William Bryant boasted after the establishment of Grace Church, "We are encouraged to commence our work at this place [because] there are numbers of youths of Episcopal families collected at the different institutions, chiefly at the Military Institute, claiming the use of the church."³¹

This often unabashed connection between VMI and the Episcopal Church brought the latter under as much criticism as it did Smith. When searching for a new chair of mathematics, the administration of the Presbyterian-affiliated Washington College passed over West Point graduate and Episcopal minister William Nelson Pendleton in 1853, claiming his "denominationalism" would get in the way. When

supporters of Pendleton questioned this judgment, Washington College president George Junkin explained that each denomination in the state had its own college, including the Episcopalians who had the Virginia Military Institute. When critics lashed out at Junkin for making such a contentious statement, he justified its legitimacy by claiming he received this proclamation from Bishop Meade himself. Both Smith and Meade acknowledged this statement as “false, and said with the intention of doing injury,” but it now implicated the entire Virginia Episcopal Diocese as guilty of collusion with VMI instead of Smith as the lone religious renegade.³² Smith rose to his bishop’s defense and demanded that Junkin meet with his Board to “correct” his malicious statement.³³ Much like the accusations leveled at Smith and the Church from Washington College a decade earlier, no one from either school pressed an investigation on the matter but Smith could never seem to separate the attachment of his school to the Episcopal Church regardless of the invalidity of the allegations.

The controversy over his bias towards Episcopalianism that Smith endured during his first two decades as superintendent presented a unique chapter in the long history of church versus state in Virginia’s history. In the eighteenth century, Thomas Jefferson labored tirelessly to separate the close relationship between the colonial (and eventual) state government and the Church of England, hallmarked by his authoring the Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1785.³⁴ Critics of Smith’s time, however, did not condemn their state institutions for supporting religion. They targeted their concern instead at someone’s promotion of individual dominations. Historian Thomas E. Buckley argues that by the nineteenth century, Virginians encouraged government

support of religion as it promoted public virtue among its citizens and reinforced republican government. By the 1830s, the Virginia General Assembly conducted a daily invocation and supported public prayer. Moreover, the legislature also tightly controlled churches in the state regarding their property and other legal freedoms. No one protested. Buckley posits, “Civil government supported religion in this fashion because the political culture demanded involvement not separation in Virginia.” In the view of many Virginians, government should have control and influence over the churches and denominations, not vice versa.³⁵ The only complaints that did surface came from within the churches themselves as they accused opposing denominations of usurping control of government institutions in order to expand their influence in the state. Alfred Leyburn, a Presbyterian graduate of Washington College and member of VMI’s Board of Visitors, warned Governor James McDowell of Smith’s Episcopalian agenda to make the school a bulwark for his denomination.³⁶ George Junkin viewed Smith’s allegiance to the Episcopal Church as part of a larger conspiracy to dominate the Old Dominion. In 1854, Junkin leveled an attack on Francis T. Stribling, one of the board members of the institution for the deaf, dumb, and blind located in Staunton, identifying his devout faith as another example of the “Episcopal influence in monopolizing state institutions.”³⁷

Again, if Smith genuinely did not intend to extend the influence of his denomination in this regard, he did a poor job of disguising it. He corresponded with faculty of the Old Dominion’s other state-supported college, the University of Virginia, to encourage their Episcopal professors to convert students as he had. In a letter to Professor John B. Minor, Smith cheered, “we have been favored with the Divine

blessing upon the hearts of many of our young men and in a way calculated to impress most deeply upon all the power and truth of our Holy Religion. Why may not all of our Institutions of learning be blessed every year? We have the promise upon the use of means and the fulfillment when means are used we should try and keep up a holy emulation with each other in seeking this blessing and thus we will all experience the value of our profession.”³⁸ Ironically, the University drew negative attention from the state, not for its commitment to religion but for its reputation of promoting no religion at all. Founded by deist Thomas Jefferson, who promoted liberalism and toleration of various beliefs, the school worried some supporters about its religious direction of the school when it hired professors of unorthodox faiths such as Catholicism and Judaism. Some took these hires as an indication of indifference to Protestantism. The University tried in various ways to demonstrate its support of Christianity but could never shake its stereotype as an atheistic institution.³⁹ Ironically, many Virginians feared their state institutions having no religion as much as supporting one denomination exclusively. Half a century earlier, Virginians worried that the Anglican Church exerted too much influence on public institutions; now they demanded the opposite.

Events happening outside of the South provided the greatest challenges to Smith’s faith and demonstrate the unique paradox of his character. Smith lived in an age of scientific discovery with Charles Darwin and other scientists introducing new arguments about human existence through geology and anthropological study. As a self-proclaimed man of science, Smith should have rejoiced at this new era of discovery. After all, he led one of the nation’s rising institutions of science, engineering and

mathematics and publicly hoped that a more practical education would make his state and the South more modern, productive and competitive. In the same year that Darwin published his seminal work, Origin of Species (1859), Smith successfully secured a \$30,000 donation to transform VMI into the great polytechnic school of the South based on the European models he had just visited on six month tour a year prior. With plans for new departments of scientific agriculture, botany, physiology, and veterinary medicine resplendent with laboratories, libraries and zoo, Smith prided himself on placing the Institute at the forefront of a new scientific revolution ready to sweep the last half of the nineteenth century. In a letter to graduate Daniel Trueheart, one of his prize pupils who accepted the esteemed position as an engineer on the U.S. Coast Survey, Smith inquired into the application of his scientific education. “I mean to know that our scientific course so far as it goes answers the demands of our graduates when they come to apply it. We wish to avoid the “stand still” system and to endeavor to keep up with the spirit of progress of the age. In physical science so much is yearly achieved by the labors of the men of genius that we should be left far in the rear if we could not learn from time to time what labor, skill and genius are developing,” he a told former student.⁴⁰

However, whenever forced to choose sides in the rising debate between science and religion, Smith always unquestioningly chose God. Smith gave particular attention to the popular discourse raised on new scientific findings questioning the validity of the Bible and its accuracy regarding the creation of the Earth. His passion on this topic drove him to defend Christianity in the public sphere by making speeches on the topic in

Alexandria and publishing an article in a religious journal.⁴¹ In his oratory, Smith criticized scientists for manipulating Scripture in order to prove their theories. He explained his stance on the issue to one clergyman, “I only remonstrate against receiving the conclusions or theories which geologists have drawn from the facts especially when they all assume that the same laws of nature which now operate have always and in the like manner operated and thus entirely ignore those moral causes which the scriptures affirm to have operated and by which supernatural agencies have more than conscience been brought to bear upon the earth.”⁴² He did not view the Laws of Nature and the Laws of God as interchangeable, particularly when justifying a truth. For example, in the argument over creation, Smith posited that a day described in the first book of Genesis did not equal “a natural day” as in the practical world of science but rather it was, in essence, “an immense period.”⁴³ Most importantly, he did not want the allegiance to scientific theory to weaken the moral judgment of God. Questioning the “settled principles of God’s moral government” would eventually encourage an amoral society and create a humanity which the laws of Nature could not even control. He did not believe that science was evil or a detriment to the human race but it was an institution that had to be held in check, as it could never truly explain or justify human existence.

Smith did not fear injecting religion into a state institution because he viewed religion as a key element to his mission of promoting good behavior in his students. He believed a traditional Biblical adage that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” and such a fear should be placed at the root of any school’s disciplinary ethos,

regardless if it had a military structure or not.⁴⁴ In both of his most noted educational pamphlets, Regulations of Military Institutions and College Reform, Smith proposed that all instructors incorporate religion into their disciplinary systems since parents desired religious teachers to ensure their children received proper lessons in morality as well as scholarly subjects. He viewed those pedagogues who were not professors of religion were entirely useless as educators. “The avowed opposer of the Christian religion,” Smith bluntly asserted, “is unfit for the trust of a public teacher.”⁴⁵ Possessing religious devotion was technically not a requirement for cadets at VMI but was an unspoken necessity to succeed in Smith’s system. He purposely merged religious dogma with his military regulations. Cadets who missed church services or even engaged in unsavory behavior on the Sabbath such as swearing or frolicking often faced dismissal from the Institute. Offenses such as drinking or card playing would always result in expulsion if performed on Sunday, however Smith would occasionally give a reprieve. Those who violated the Institute’s regulations, in his view, did not demonstrate an evil spirit but in fact simply succumbed to temptation, just as those who sinned against God’s laws.⁴⁶

Therefore, Smith usually connected poor behavior with a young man’s lack of religious faith. Those who broke the Institute’s regulations endured the double-edged sword of not only violating the disciplinary policy but also sinning in the eyes of their pious superintendent. Since the laws of a military institution and the laws of religion both endeavored to achieve the result of moralistic behavior, Smith viewed the two as mutually inclusive. He maintained a simplistic view on human behavior for Christians or cadets: “to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is a sin.”⁴⁷ On

some occasions, he used breaking the rules as an opportunity to find God. When he caught Cadet Richard Taylor absent without leave a few weeks before graduation in 1854, he suggested to his parents, “Perhaps he has been permitted to fall into this indiscretion to shew [sic] him how weak his own principles are with out the sustaining influence of Divine grace in the heart. . . Shall this year close and none bow the knee to the King of Kings?”⁴⁸ Conversely, he attributed improvement in behavior in those students who finally accepted the Christian faith. “For a part of his time here he was careless and neglectful of studies but having some 8 to 10 months since become a subject of Divine Grace, I think he has undergone a radical change in every respect,” he proudly explained to one guardian in 1848.⁴⁹ Smith’s standards of behavior took on a deliberate Protestant connotation. When the father of traditionally well-behaved Cadet Robert Rodes asked if his son could use his good record to keep him out of trouble in the future, an incredulous Smith explained that “We are too protestant in our character to adopt the Romanist doctrine of works of supererogation.”⁵⁰

Focusing on academics and errant behavior, Smith also kept parents updated on their son’s religious progress as he viewed parental interaction just as crucial to developing a young man’s faith as well as his education or conduct. “You will be gratified to learn that your son has within the last month determined to devote himself to the service of God by a public profession of his Religion,” he told the father of Cadet Walter Williams. “The godly admonitions and pious example of parents will be blessed sooner or later to their sons and this case is one out of many in which the truth of the Divine promises has been realized.”⁵¹ When converting his cadets into the Episcopal

Church, he also sought parental permission, particularly if the cadet already belonged to a different church back home.⁵² Smith also reached out to parents to solicit their cooperation in bringing their children back into religious faith. In 1853, Cadet William E. Harrison asked Smith for permission to be removed from Bible recitations permanently. The superintendent acquiesced but only on the condition that his father granted approval. Smith immediately wrote to his father, begging him to talk young Harrison out of “leaving the recitations and to quell his rebellious spirit against the Divine Truth.”⁵³ Other parents, like the widowed mother of one cadet, admitted their embarrassment for not having given their son religion and hoped Smith would attend to the boy’s “spiritual welfare.”⁵⁴

Like much of his educational philosophy, Smith borrowed the concept of combining religion and discipline from his mentor, English schoolmaster Dr. Thomas Arnold, of the Rugby School. The opening page of his pamphlet, Regulations of Military Institutions, contains a quote from Arnold, expressing their shared views on the goals of faith and proper conduct, “What I want is a man who is a Christian and a gentleman -- an active man, and one who has common sense, and understands boys.”⁵⁵ Smith then imparted this methodology into his graduates who pursued careers in education. To William Fair, a graduate of VMI’s inaugural class who became principal of the New Glasgow Academy, Smith quoted a verse from Scripture, Mark 10:15, to demonstrate the need to incorporate religion into his instruction and disciplinary system: “Verily I say unto you whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.”⁵⁶ If boys did not have strong faith when entering school,

Smith claimed, the instructor must make it his duty impress the benefits of religion early on their students. He confidently asserted that VMI's religious instruction had the power to guide those who had not accepted God. "Few cadets, comparatively, who are professors of religion when they are admitted. They are at once brought under religious instructions and our experience has been that they are very accessible to such influences," he explained to one preacher inquiring into the Institute's spiritual education.⁵⁷ His advice on religion in education carried over in his advice to his West Point friends who entered the education profession. When Daniel Harvey Hill became superintendent of the North Carolina Military Institute in 1859, he and Smith exchanged letters and texts focused on inducing Christianity into their respective curriculums and disciplinary systems.⁵⁸ Hill's own pamphlet on educational reform, College Discipline, borrowed much from Smith and reflected many of his views on the necessity of faith in education.⁵⁹

Smith also promoted religion at his state-supported institution because he viewed strong Christian faith as essential to the survival of the republic, an idea shared by many of his fellow Virginians. Pursuing a life in Christ not only produced better cadets but also made better citizens as well. He inculcated this belief into all of his cadets as they left VMI to enter their pursuits in civil life. At graduation, he presented each graduate a Bible along with their diploma. These two items provided the two best tools for any young man to ensure their future success, particularly their Bible. In each one, he personally inscribed the verse from Luke 22:32, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." His enthusiasm for those graduates who entered the ministry rivaled his

excitement of those who entered the fields of education or engineering as he viewed religion as equally essential for the state's improvement. When the son of Governor Henry Wise, Class of 1855 member Henry Jr., informed his former superintendent of his intentions to leave a promising career in politics to enter the Episcopal ministry, Smith rejoiced at the decision. He responded to Wise that he hoped more young men would improve their state by making the same choice. Smith emphasized, "when the Christian sees the youthful talent of the state withdrawing itself from the fields of distinction in the professions and in politics and laying all on the altar of God in the work of holy philanthropy, the heart is filled with gratitude for the grace thus mercifully given."⁶⁰

Religion, working in tandem with educational reform, would improve the overall character of the Old Dominion in the eyes of Smith, as his home state had always been a Christian republic. He believed Virginia's Founders created a new government built on a foundation of faith and saw a distinct connection between their success in the American Revolution and their connection to the Episcopal Church. He explained to state delegate Hugh Blair Grigsby that during the Revolution, "The council and the legislatures were vestry men [whose] love of liberty was dear to them and the Washingtons and Randolphs and Pendletons and Masons and Pages and Nelsons and hundreds of others who had fought the battle of religious freedom in the vestries were among the first and most active for civil liberty in the greatest struggle which gave us our Freedom."⁶¹ Smith, like many evangelicals, worried about the moral decay of society, particularly in his own state, and believed spiritual morality to be the key to social progress. "I must lament the low state of public morals in my state," he confessed

to one political friend in 1855.⁶² This attitude not only reflected the sentiments of many Christians during Smith's time but also those of his political party as well. Like many Whigs, he believed that social problems, such as poverty, drunkenness, violence, and inequality, came from individual moral failings that could be remedied by accepting the tenets of Christianity. Religious righteousness provided a much needed step to the progress of society, ridding it of its ills such as squalor, violence, sloth, and drunkenness. Whigs asserted that a population of moralistic citizens created a better republic, one focused on productivity and commitment to the common good. Evangelical religion provided an effective means to incorporate this moralism and, more importantly, social control. Economic progress not coupled by religious commitment exposed citizens to the potential evils of self-indulgence, depravity and sin, all qualities they associated with their opposition party, the Democrats.⁶³ Smith openly defended Whig Party paragons Henry Clay and Daniel Webster from a slanderous article questioning their respective religious commitment since Clay attended society balls in Washington and Clay openly drank brandy. He heralded these two great politicians for their religious faith as well as their minds as they, unlike other great thinkers of history, were devout Christians. Smith posited to one clergyman that, "Gibbon, Hume, Voltaire, D'Alembert and La Place were men of great intellect but they lacked the cultivation of the heart which led both Clay and Webster to receive as true what they reject as false."⁶⁴

The wave of evangelicalism that consumed Smith was as much a product of a broader religious movement in the South as that espoused by his Whig Party. The first half of the nineteenth century marked a spiritual reawakening in the South which gained

momentum with the onset of the Second Great Awakening spreading throughout the nation. By 1860, church membership in the South had more than doubled from the beginning of the century with fiery sermons, tent revivals and emotional prayer meetings inspiring thousands into houses of worship seeking salvation. The movement invigorated Southern Protestant denominations in their pursuit of evangelicalism and the spiritual health of the individual soul. Southern evangelicals, like Smith, made moral behavior a crucial part of their doctrine aimed at creating the ideal pious society. Historian Anne Loveland posits that these evangelicals viewed themselves as the true guardians of spiritual and moral purity of the Southern people and made it their mission to enforce such behavior in order to protect the social order.⁶⁵ As a Whig, evangelical Christian and superintendent of a military school, Francis H. Smith also dedicated himself to this Southern social order by shaping the behavior of the young men under his charge and acting as an advisor for others pursuing the same ennobled mission.

A boy could not complete the road to manhood, in Smith's opinion, without first committing himself to God. He viewed faith as an essential element of masculinity, equal to more commonly accepted values such as bravery, courage, or self-reliance. Smith articulated this belief in a letter to one graduate by advising him that, "Religion must be the chief thing for man for it not only gives the promise of the life that now is but of that which is to come. If you will make it a rule to read a chapter in the Bible every day you will discover an elevating influence imperceptibly taking hold of you – a purifying principle pervading you and for the reason that the Bible makes to regulate the heart to purify the foundation and thus to ensure the life of a man."⁶⁶ Smith's obsession

with religion reinforced his ultimate goal of creating a new mold for Southern maleness. Having a strong education meant nothing to the individual or society without inculcating proper standards of behavior, reflected in Puritanical morality, as part of the maturation process of young adolescent boys. If he could not coerce all of his students into serving as soldiers of God, Smith at least endeavored to make each cadet as much of a proper, upstanding man as possible.

The crusade for developing male moralism at VMI began with the practice of temperance towards alcohol for all of Smith's students. His efforts reflected a larger national movement initiated by evangelical Christians and moralists who sought to cure American society of the evils of intoxicating liquors. Controlling the individual intake of alcohol, reformers believed, would have a broader positive effect on society, increasing productivity and harmony in communities while reducing crime and the dissolution of the American family. The national anti-liquor campaign began in earnest around 1810 by evangelical Calvinists in New England. Their message soon spread throughout country with various organizations throughout the Northeastern United States and eventually coalescing into more national groups such as the American Temperance Society, which numbered over a million members at its peak in 1834.⁶⁷ Unfortunately for schoolmasters, instilling temperance in the nation's young college men did not meet with as much success. College presidents labored to keep their campuses dry but the antebellum college as a whole endured the reputation of allowing drunkenness and disorder within its student body. Institutions such as the University of Georgia, Washington College and Roanoke College, among others, fostered temperance societies

but their effectiveness declined once the initial excitement of creating them wore off.⁶⁸

The official Institute regulations mandated by the Board of Visitors expressly forbade the drinking of alcoholic beverages by cadets but Smith took this rule to heart when he enforced it. He viewed drunkenness not only as a military or disciplinary infraction but a failure of the moral spirit, warranting punishment as a sin as much as a breach of martial conduct. Considering the partaking of liquor an “evil habit,” Smith made it his duty to rid any student of such sinful practices. “I do feel deeply the responsibility which rests upon me in guarding the morals of the cadets,” he boasted to the father of one cadet recently caught under the influence of alcohol.⁶⁹ As a moralist and a Whig, he supported Temperance Societies but did not see them as the end-all cure for drunkenness. Since he considered over indulgence in alcohol as a sin, the Gospel provided the only true source of recovery. Refraining from drinking could only succeed with a devotion to the Bible and a broader commitment to living a moral Christian lifestyle.⁷⁰ While other college presidents turned a blind eye to drinking among their students, Smith treated consuming intoxicating drinks with unusual severity. Regulations stipulated that drinking spirituous liquors would result in immediate dismissal. The sternness of this policy, however, did little to deter many cadets from drinking as they searched for more clever ways to partake. On several occasions, cadets attempted to circumvent the regulation through such techniques as eating peaches soaked in brandy, arguing that by definition it was not drinking. Smith did not accept this potential loophole in his anti-alcohol policy and punished brandied peach eaters with equal harshness. Only on occasional episodes of benevolence did Smith allow a student

to resign instead of “subjecting him to the mortification and disgrace of a public dismissal.”⁷¹ Making an example of pledge violators occasionally made an impression on other cadets. Cadet George Toole wrote to his father, “The sight of this youth who has just left his home and giving away to temptation [of] the worst kind made me stick stronger to my pledge not to drink.”⁷²

But given the young age of his charges, Smith viewed his crusade against the vice of spirituous liquor as an opportunity to be proactive in guiding his cadets’ decision making rather than simply reactive in punishment. He attributed most violations of the drinking policy to youthful indiscretion. When he caught one cadet under the influence of liquor, Smith explained to his father that he recognized the difference between “‘hardened youth’ who does wrong by himself and lead others astray and the inexperienced youth who is the dupe of the vicious and designing.”⁷³ Youthful cadets could be easily swayed into the evils of drinking but conversely persuaded into dedicating themselves to a life of sobriety. Therefore, Smith invested tireless energy into what he considered his greatest deterrent against drinking in the Corps of Cadets, the temperance pledge. Cadets used this method commonly utilized by the wider Temperance movement which encouraged fellow students to voluntarily avoid all alcoholic liquids in order to live a lifestyle of physical and spiritual sobriety.⁷⁴ On rare occasions, Smith would reinstate a cadet guilty of drinking if he promised never to imbibe again and to subscribe to the temperance pledge. In one instance, Smith threatened to expel Cadet Kirkwood Otey for violating the pledge but received such an overwhelming protest from his classmates because of the boy’s popularity. Each

member of the class vowed to take the temperance oath if the superintendent would not dismiss Otey. Presented with the opportunity to have such a large number of students subscribe to his temperance program, Smith warmly agreed to the terms. He told Otey's father, "I could not resist such an appeal. It came upon me with all its force as demonstrating the noble and generous feelings of the cadets for their associates in misfortune and as giving me the highest hopes for the future."⁷⁵ An identical situation happened three years later with the entire Corps volunteering to take the pledge to save the cadetship of William Eliason, inspiring Smith to proudly explain to the boy's mother, "now all the cadets are temperance men."⁷⁶

The temperance pledge became a useful selling point to parents worried about their son's behavior, working in conjunction with his broader philosophy of *in loco parentis*. As other colleges suffered from reputations for allowing reckless adolescent behavior, the sober environment that Smith offered to prospective students made the Institute a welcome draw for concerned parents. He also used it shrewdly to win the confidence of politicians as well. During the Corps trip to Richmond in 1850, Smith (both a boast and a warning) let the citizens of the capital who would be boarding the cadets know that they had taken a pledge of temperance and for them to honor it.⁷⁷ When welcoming the sons of staunch political supporters state senators Robert Mayo and Charles Mason, Smith wrote their fathers immediately to encourage their sons to take the pledge, boasting of its popularity and success among the cadets.⁷⁸ Since the state university continued to struggle with its reputation for drunkenness and rowdiness

among its students, the sobriety of Smith's VMI cadets made continued support of his institution more appealing to Virginia's politicians.⁷⁹

Consequently, when trying to promote the rigid moral environment in which he reared his cadets, Smith severely lost patience with those students who intoxicated themselves in public. He angrily wrote the father of Cadet Lewis B. Williams, describing the embarrassment his episode of drunkenness caused during a summer encampment in Northern Virginia, stating, "We were upon a public visit to a region of the state never before visited with the critical eye of the public watching every action of the Corps all these facts aggravated greatly his case."⁸⁰ Smith also lost face when cadets drank locally. He chided Cadet Thomas Blackburn's intoxication in a Lexington tavern as bringing "great discredit to the Institute."⁸¹ For those students who came from families of notable reputations in their home communities, dismissal from VMI for drinking created equal mortification for their parents. Before Cadet Kirkwood Otey had been officially caught violating the Institute's alcohol policy, Smith acted on a suspicion that he had been imbibing secretly and gave the young man a stern lecture, warning him of the "shame and mortification which he would bring upon his family," if found guilty.⁸² Otey took the temperance pledge the next day, but as mentioned earlier, succumbed to the temptation two years later. Even the intemperate habit of alumni brought Smith aggravation. Smith learned from one graduate that Charles Derby, a alumnus who earned a place in his former superintendent's heart for joining the Episcopal ministry, had developed a reputation among his congregation for alcoholism, including giving Sunday sermons while under the influence of alcohol. Smith

questioned the validity of the accusations but quietly worried about the school's moral reputation, regardless of the truth of the rumors.⁸³

No matter what Smith tried, drinking among students still occurred year after year. Fervor for the temperance pledge only peaked among cadets when one of their comrades faced dismissal for drunken behavior. In spite of the moralistic message of those in the national temperance movement, drinking still remained an acceptable social function for Americans as a whole, particularly on college campuses.⁸⁴ Condoning such a practice as a cultural norm signaled a dangerous direction for Southern manhood and for VMI's superintendent. Alcohol caused a man to lose self-control and act irresponsibly, both behaviors antithetical to Smith's strategy for shaping proper manhood. Pressing for sobriety and restraint for all of his students, the superintendent intended to erase many of the accepted mores of Southern society in hopes that his young men could set the new moral standard for his state.

The puritanical tone of VMI's regulations also forbade such aberrant activities as card playing and smoking. Smith considered these both immoral vices. The difficulty of catching cadets in the act of violating these rule actually encouraged its stringent enforcement, he told one parent.⁸⁵ Card playing resulted in the occasional dismissal but Smith showed more lenience in his punishments and focused instead on attempting cure what he considered a potential long term habit. He instilled in his cadets the evils of card playing in any form, even casually. After dismissing one student for the offense, he justified the decision to his father by stating, "when one as young as he is thinks there is no harm in playing a 'social game of clubs,' he had better be at home."⁸⁶ Smith even

punished cadets for simply finding cards in their room citing the potential temptation could be as harmful as the actual act of playing.⁸⁷ Cadets who took a similar casual attitude toward smoking also received Smith's paternalistic correction. He refused to accept Cadet Richard Pollard's explanation for smoking as "only to have a little fun."⁸⁸ The superintendent also failed to find the humor in Cadet William H. Southall's cheeky explanation for smoking, claiming it as a "medical necessity."⁸⁹ As with drinking, Smith made examples of those caught in the act, as he explained to one parent of a guilty student, "I regard your son's arrest as a most fortunate occurrence. It has brought him and many others to a sense of the impropriety of any kind of card playing, and they are now taught by the decisive action of our Board how determined our authorities are to root out such a vice." But he hoped that the punishment would have a long-term effect by adding, "I have no doubt the lesson now taught will last him through life."⁹⁰

No offense wrought by adolescent masculinity vexed Smith as much as cases of sexual impropriety. VMI's Corps of Cadets suffered from outbreaks of venereal disease on at least three separate occasions during the Institute's first two decades. Smith maintained concern for the overall health of all of his students but he always viewed these particular illnesses as failures in ethical character. He lamented how these outbreaks caused the institution and himself great embarrassment, and as he labeled these maladies as "immoral diseases." Smith became so fearful of the effects of such infractions that he successfully lobbied to punish any cadet guilty of contracting the disease with expulsion, making a formal regulation in 1848: "Any cadet who shall contract any immoral disease during his connexion with the Institute shall be ipso facto

dismissed.”⁹¹ He harbored almost no sympathy for those who contracted sexually transmitted diseases as they brought shame on all of those involved. Smith explained to one offender’s parents, “You know that all well regulated institution[s] can take but one view of the conduct of a student whose respect for his parents & regard of his own health & the well-being of the Institution, cannot restrain him from a vice such as that involved in this case. I do not know how long it has been upon him -- but the regulations of this Institution place the vice among the most serious against which its penalties are attached.”⁹² Treating sexual promiscuity and the diseases they caused like any other moral vice, Smith viewed religion as the only solution to recover from such a moral “illnesses.” When discussing the circumstances to David W. Barton of his how his son contracted venereal disease, the superintendent spoke of only how the young man would recover spiritually, not medically. Smith asserted, “Acting however with these young men as with those who are endeared by the God of Nature with moral sensibilities, I have thought that my duty in the first place was to appeal to conscience. May we not hope that he has now realized the helplessness of his more human strength and is therefore the better fitted to embrace the mercy and grace offered to him in a Saviour’s love?”⁹³

In his struggles with cadet sexual activity, Smith occasionally found himself contending with broader social mores tolerated by Southern culture. More than once, he dealt with cadets guilty of having intercourse with local female slaves. Historian Kenneth Greenberg states that Southern law imposed no punishment on white masters who sexually violated female black slaves while society as a whole accepted the practice

as a possible application of white dominance.⁹⁴ On three separate documented occasions, someone had caught cadets who had slipped out of barracks in order to engage in a tryst with a slave girl: once with a girl in Lexington, once with a professor's slave and once with one of Smith's own house servants.⁹⁵ While such an enterprise may have been accepted in their society, even at other colleges, Smith would not tolerate it. He lambasted each guilty perpetrator for engaging in such an "immoral purpose" and scolded them for the embarrassment they caused. Frustration over sexually transmitted diseases and miscegenation only represented the extreme in Smith's broader impatience with the overall distraction that females caused his students. Regardless of the level of the interaction, whether sexual or casual, he often viewed women as bringing out the worst in his cadets. He blamed the lack of academic progress of such cadets at Daniel Langhorne and Thomas Smith for their paying too much attention of young ladies with whom they had friendships. For Langhorne, he told the boy's father, "He is a fine student and now and then loses a little when some of your fascinating Campbell [County] girls pay us a visit."⁹⁶ In 1851, Smith expelled a cadet for being absent without leave, explaining to his family, "I attribute his neglect of duty and absence from Barracks entirely to a love affair against the effects of which I had repeatedly cautioned him."⁹⁷ Smith labored to instill a sense of self control in his students but found dealing with the opposite sex to be as great a challenge to overcome as liquor or gambling.

Stealing rarely occurred among the Corps of Cadets, at least to the point where it was brought to Smith's attention. Most incidents could be attributed cadets playing tricks on friends or faculty, such as in 1848 when two cadets stole a pair of horses and

rode them off of the post for amusement.⁹⁸ He did comment on a small outbreak of larcenies in 1852 but blamed the thefts on the influx of Democratic appointed cadets whom he viewed as having an overall poor moral standard. When presenting his case to William H. Richardson about the decline in quality of cadet character since the appointment of the new Democrat-laden Board, Smith confessed, "It is a notorious fact known among ourselves that rogues exist among the cadets and things had gone to such a pass in the rifling of drawers etc that I had a few days ago to assemble the cadets and speak plainly on the subject."⁹⁹ In 1854, an Institute official caught Cadet Edward McConnell stealing sugar from the mess hall. Smith intended to give him a light penalty but when McConnell's excuse proved to be false, the superintendent gave him a court martial instead and had him dismissed.¹⁰⁰

The most common dealings with cadet honesty came when confronting them about confessing to breaking certain regulations. When facing certain punishment from an Institute official, many cadets willingly sacrificed their integrity in order to avoid punishment. Cadet James L. Hubard admitted to his father that "all the cadets are in the custom of telling fibs in their excuses to get off with demerit, as they say in such cases there is no harm in it."¹⁰¹ Smith, however, found much harm in the practice as he caught several cadets lying to him personally when accounting for their infractions, both large and small. All too often, students made up stories to explain their absence from duty, skipping church services, or class recitations. Some went to great lengths to substantiate their alibis. Cadets Edward McConnell and William A. Thompson drafted a false official report including a forged signature as an explanation to Institute authorities but

were eventually caught and expelled.¹⁰² Other audacious students feigned illness in their excuses but occasionally failed to take into account Smith's omnipresence. In 1851, Cadet James A. Walker excused himself from duty because of a wrist sprain. Later that day, however, the superintendent witnessed him in the town riding a horse and buggy using his supposedly injured hand.¹⁰³ Most malingerers simply used vague illnesses to miss attending class, drill or religious services as an easy method to avoid duty because of the difficulty in its discovery.

Cadets attempted bold tactics such as lying or malingering because Smith always took them on their word, treating anything they said as truthful until proven otherwise. When Cadet Alexander Rives gave an inconsistent story as to why he missed class, Smith allowed the excuse as he "place[d] unqualified reliance upon the word of a cadet."¹⁰⁴ This policy of mutually assuming one's honesty reflected one of the key foundations of Southern culture, individual honor. The institution of honor, as defined by historians Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Kenneth Greenberg, dictated that an individual's reputation and good name reflected his social worth and therefore was defended vigorously by white Southerners.¹⁰⁵ A man's social status and manhood became devices of public perception as the community determined his conception of his character. The principles of honor demanded that one must deal with any reproach or insult to their reputation immediately and with violence if the offender did not offer a satisfactory explanation for his actions. College students demonstrated active allegiance to this ethos. Away from parental supervision and anxious to assert their manhood, many collegiate pupils engaged in the traditional practices of the Southern code of honor

including insults (accidental and intentional), challenges (written and verbal), and violence (fisticuffs and dueling). Historians Robert F. Pace and Christopher A. Bjornsen posit that these young college men learned these behaviors from parents and other influential adults and used them as a model for demonstrating their adulthood.¹⁰⁶ Many cadets brought these values with them when they matriculated to VMI and unwittingly complicated the cultural dynamic their superintendent had invented through his disciplinary and educational systems.

Smith, on the other hand, argued that the traditional construct of Southern honor had no place in the South and he dedicated himself to quelling allegiance to its tenets among his students. Whenever confrontations arose between his cadets, he consistently punished those involved and condemned their reliance on what he considered a violent and counter-productive code of behavior. Core tenants of the Southern code of honor such as dueling, responses to insult, defending personal reputations conflicted directly with the maintenance of the formal military regulations that Smith used as the backbone of his disciplinary system. But more importantly, the concept of honor conflicted with his broader vision of the South and especially its future. He envisioned a culture where meritocracy would dictate financial and social success. At VMI, Smith created a system where a young man built his status on his skills, ability, determination and work ethic, not the reputation of his family name, and hoped this approach would translate into society beyond the Institute's walls. Virginia, and eventually the South, needed young men who would embody a new set of values such as self-control, productivity, patriotism, republicanism, and philanthropy while working to counteract the typecast

how many of those outside the region viewed their youth: self-centered, hot-headed, impulsive, aggressive, and backward thinking.

Historian Jennifer Green's dissertation explores the role of Southern honor in antebellum military schools, focusing her examination on an incident that occurred between two cadets at VMI, William Gordon and John A. Thompson, to showcase her argument. In February 1852, Cadet Captain Gordon, acting as the ranking member of the Corps of Cadets, reported Cadet Thompson for "disturbance in the ranks," specifically, deliberately kicking a rock while marching to the mess hall. Thompson took the accusation as an insult and wrote a letter to Gordon rejecting the personal affront, calling his accuser a coward. Instead of confronting Thompson on the issue, Gordon took the letter to Superintendent Smith who called a court-martial for the former and had him dismissed a week later. Seventeen cadets then petitioned the Board of Visitors, demanding Thompson's reinstatement but they rejected the cadets' appeal. Embittered at his pusillanimous conduct, the Corps socially ostracized Gordon for retreating to the administration to solve what they viewed as personal matter of honor that he should have settled with Thompson by himself. According to Green, this incident demonstrated two separate examples of the concept of honor. Gordon, following the impulse to follow Institute regulations by enforcing a rule and utilizing his chain of command demonstrated "military honor" while Thompson, who viewed Gordon's charge as slanderous and an insult to his reputation, demonstrated the notion of "Southern honor."¹⁰⁷

This episode illustrates, unfortunately, how historians have extended the term “honor” into an all-encompassing word to describe various masculine behaviors almost to the point where it loses its effectiveness. It has been stretched so far to cover so many assorted attributes that it occasionally has been used as a single definition for two contrasting ideas. In this particular situation, one needs to reexamine what transpired first by placing more appropriate definitions on the different concepts applied by the two cadets. Gordon’s commitment to following the rules and fulfilling the requirements of his cadet officer billet reflected more a sense of “duty” than “honor.” These two concepts are similar, but not identical, particularly in the military context. The United States Military Academy, an icon of the American military ethos, chose to differentiate between the two ideas within its own motto: “Duty, Honor, Country.” Duty meant subscribing to a formal code of rules and regulations, following orders prescribed in the Articles of War (or in this case, the VMI Regulations), obeying the law and fulfilling the obligation to serve a formal institutions, either one’s military unit, school, or government.¹⁰⁸ While Green correctly identifies the basic elements of the expectation of a soldier or cadet such as obeying orders, respecting the hierarchy of rank and maintaining martial bearing, the term “honor” more clearly connotes a personal sense of reputation, self-worth and character, not a set of responsibilities to an institution, particularly the military.¹⁰⁹ The duty of a soldier was dictated by law and regulation where the honor of an individual was dictated by his culture or communal tradition. Gordon justified his actions against Thompson by fulfilling his duty as a cadet captain and enforcing the regulations of the Institute, as the superintendent would have wanted.

The label of “military honor” becomes stickier since the U. S. Army of the antebellum period accepted many of the facets of traditional Southern honor, even its code of extra-legal violence, among its officer corps. Historians William B. Skelton and Edward M. Coffman assert that the professional military accepted challenges and duels as an accepted part of army life in the early nineteenth century. Regulations outlawed the practice of dueling but almost no one on any command level enforced them. General Winfield Scott issued challenges for several duels during his career even though he created the anti-dueling law for the army.¹¹⁰ Many officers justified dueling by tracing its origins to the officer corps of the British and French army from centuries earlier and an acceptable method to resolve quarrels. The Army’s officer corps demonstrated a melding Green’s concepts of “Southern” and “military” honor into a single ethos that dictated their behavior as professional officers as well as their status, reputation, and masculinity.¹¹¹

The “Southern honor” practiced by Thompson exemplified an informal code of rules, one dictated by tradition and social standards, and its centerpiece was a person’s own reputation. Historian Edward Ayers defines this code as a system of values in which an individual had exactly as much worth as others conferred upon him. This system obligated a Southern man to respond to insults to reinforce his manhood in front of others, often through violence.¹¹² Green states that this “honor” came from outside the institution, not within the framework of law or regulation. Having Gordon single Thompson out in front of his peers for a questionable infraction made him look weak and helpless. Therefore Thompson lost face in a public setting. Thompson worried as

much about his reputation among his immediate peers than the actual punishment levied by Gordon. Thompson reacted to what society expected of him as protecting his good name instead of applying the expectations of duty.

Smith recognized the difference between doing one's duty and the need to protect one's reputation. He acknowledged how his teenage cadets confronted making these decisions in having to choose between these contrasting expectations as part of the adult maturation process. However, without hesitating, Smith emphasized that his students should always choose their duty first. Smith accepted many of his matriculates brought with them the traditional notion of "honor" from their households and communities. As a Southerner, he understood this as an inherent part of his region's culture. Indeed, he had been raised with the concept of honor. Yet, he never embraced or endorsed the Southern conception of honor and instead identified it as an impediment to his society and committed himself to eliminating the concept from the value system of his cadets. Instead, he sought to instill duty ahead of honor.

Moreover, Smith's attitudes also deviated from another key variation of the Southern honor concept presented by historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, that of "gentility." On the surface, VMI's ethos reflected the basic tenets of gentility by promoting calmness, justice, restraint, compassion, dignity, civility, selflessness and refinement; all those qualities, as Wyatt-Brown argues, exuded by Robert E. Lee in his personal character. Gentility also called for a proper gentleman to pursue a rigorous education in order to use knowledge, rather than passion to engage the world. Although these values appear to conform comfortably to the aims of Smith as a mold of young

men, gentility did not fit squarely with the superintendent's intentions. The behaviors and characteristics prescribed by gentility were devices used to refine men of the planter elite and often met with difficulty in their compatibility with lower ranking Southern whites. The "learning" required for gentility meant a thorough reading of the classics (poetry, ancient languages, and literature) in contrast to the practical and scientific education that Smith promoted. While Smith labored to have his cadets embrace a learned and altruistic morality similar to Robert E. Lee's, his aims did not serve to reflect the values of inherited from the landed gentry of Cavalier England or Southern plantations.¹¹³

Smith demonstrated these skeptical prejudices against the traditional sense of honor in his treatment of the Gordon-Thompson case. After Gordon punished Thompson for the first time, the latter marched into the superintendent's office to argue that Gordon's reports were personal attacks, not official business. Smith convinced him that if Gordon had violated Institute policy, he would be punished and the superintendent promised to organize an official investigation into Gordon's actions. When the investigation revealed that Gordon had indeed done his duty, Thompson pledged to Smith that if Gordon came to the superintendent one more time that he "would take personal satisfaction out on him."¹¹⁴ Smith warned Thompson of the repercussions of such actions and advised him to make an official grievance to the Board of Visitors. He ignored this advice and challenged Gordon with the letter only weeks later, leading to his dismissal.

The solutions that Smith provided to Thompson for his complaint against Gordon contradicted the Southern code of honor as well. Instead of agreeing that Thompson deserved an opportunity to seek satisfaction for a perceived personal insult through personal satisfaction, Smith insisted that he solve his problem through the formal system of law and the Institute's regulations, first through the superintendent and then the Board of Visitors. Historian Edward Ayers confirms the incongruity of honor and legalism by arguing that these two concepts traditionally have been "incompatible."¹¹⁵ Smith could not comprehend the logic in Thompson's argument since the boy admitted to kicking the rock and would have received only one demerit for the infraction but instead he was willing to be dismissed from the Institute just months before graduation over this perceived insult. Smith attempted to impart the lesson that emotion could not trump nor justify violation of the rules. He explained this through his own example to Thompson's uncle. Even though Smith liked Cadet Thompson personally, he could not let his emotional ties to him obstruct his duty. Smith elucidated to Thompson's uncle, "you know me well enough to be assured that in questions of duty I am compelled often to act in violence to my personal feelings."¹¹⁶

The struggle with cadets' sense of honor continued to grow out of control after Thompson's dismissal. Gordon submitted his resignation to Smith because he could no longer live with his soiled reputation among his classmates who had now ostracized him because of his unpopular treatment of Thompson. A group of dissatisfied cadets submitted a strongly worded letter to Smith demanding the reinstatement of Thompson. Outraged, the superintendent lambasted this "obnoxious note" in a letter to Philip St.

George Cocke complaining, “Their letter was couched in very proper terms and stated that their ‘personal honor as military men is involved in the maintenance of the Regulations.’”¹¹⁷ He condemned the demand by the cadets and refused Gordon’s resignation, telling him that leaving would only prove to his tormentors that they had succeeded. He suggested instead that they hold a formal hearing to review his actions during the incident to confirm his innocence and reveal that he acted solely in the name of his duty. This solution continued to demonstrate Smith’s belief that personal injustices could be solved simply and objectively through a legal system, in this case, a court of inquiry, to restore a young man’s reputation and good name, making a duel or fistfight unnecessary. Unfortunately for the scorned Gordon, the superintendent misread the prejudices of his students, placing too much trust in their sense of duty. Fellow cadets continued to chastise Gordon, who eventually carried a sword to protect himself against reparations from his classmates. Smith could not take this nonsensical view of honor any longer.¹¹⁸ He opined to Board president Cocke, “There should be a decided order correcting the erroneous views of what constitutes honor and gentlemanly deportment in the corps otherwise the conduct exhibited towards Gordon will be soon extended to the professors.”¹¹⁹ Smith then had to deal with accusations from Thompson’s father, who complained that the superintendent had “harshly treated” his son and sent personal challenges against Smith to defend his son’s honor!¹²⁰ Although these insults grated on Smith personally, he promised to answer Mr. Thompson “calmly and dispassionately,” to reinforce his commitment against the fallacy of violence to uphold honor.¹²¹

As Smith had anticipated, cadets sometimes extended this pattern of misconstruing punishment as personal insult to their adult authority figures as well as cadet authority. In certain instances, students accused professors of treating them poorly or with “ungentlemanly conduct” in order to account for their poor progress in the classroom. Some of these cadets verbally challenged their instructors or tactical officers (in charge of barracks discipline) in order to redeem their good name since they supposedly had been treated improperly. Smith saw this as another tactic used by lackadaisical students who did not have the self-esteem or moral fiber to take warranted criticism or punishment. Much like those situations dealing with insubordination to cadet officers, Smith sought to instill a sense of accountability for individual action instead of falling back on the premise of personal honor as an escape from disciplinary repercussions.

Cadets would have to accept responsibility for their own mistakes instead of automatically identifying a reprimand from an Institute official as a malicious affront. For example, when Professor J. T. L. Preston charged Cadet Roger Steger with spitting on the lecture room floor, Steger protested that he had not committed the act and accused Preston of making the accusation maliciously.¹²² Smith learned of Steger’s challenge and immediately punished him. In cases such as this, Smith loyally defended his faculty, not only to exhibit support for his teaching staff but to impart a social lesson to his students. Young men should respect their faculty and administrators and acknowledge their subordinate role in order for the disciplinary system to function properly. By presenting challenges to professors, cadets identified them as social equals, thereby

removing the formality of their superior status in order to place them on equal footing to deal with their grievance. Sometimes poorer white Southerners challenged gentlemen from the upper-class as a way to erase their own lower status and assert themselves as if in the same social standing.¹²³ Steger's case may reflect a similar intention by provoking a conflict with a professor to erase the obstruction of hierarchy. Moreover, as historian Robert Pace argues, much of the antebellum pedagogy centered on shame through such methods as recitation, oration and public exams which used the student's "public face" as a motivation for academic achievement. By accusing professors of making a false indictment of their performance or behavior, the student then turned the shame on their professors, provoking them to defend their own honor.¹²⁴

Smith insisted that students accept their judgment and punishments as their superiors, while respecting their rank. He also hoped that they would also respect the person behind the rank and show proper deference for the individual's character and accomplishments. Smith fumed when cadets showed insolence or disrespect towards instructors such as William Gilham and Thomas J. Jackson since both had distinguished themselves as West Point graduates and as war heroes in Mexico.¹²⁵ Commitment to Southern honor violated Smith's mission to create a culture based on principles of meritocracy. Just as he wanted his cadets and eventual graduates to judge each other for their accomplishments, talents and contributions to society, not their bravado, Smith expected the same respect afforded to his faculty.

In another example, Cadet Joseph H. Harris created several such controversies with professors who identified him as not applying his academic potential.¹²⁶ The

faculty brought Harris before Smith on two separate counts of insubordination, once by a math instructor, Captain William Stuart, and once by French instructor Raleigh Colston. Harris justified his abrasive attitude towards his teachers by explaining that both had insulted him. Stuart, he claimed, purposely offended him by asking him a question that he “should have known a year ago,” making him look foolish in front of his peers. With Colston, Harris refused to answer a question in class to which the instructor insisted it was “too easy for him not to know.” Harris answered that Colston accused him of being a liar for withholding the proper answer. After the recitation period, Harris then approached Colston and asked if he believed his conduct in class to be ungentlemanly. Colston inadvertently took the baited trap and admitted that Harris had acted in such a manner, causing Harris to take his admission as an official challenge to his honor. Instead of settling this dispute through the traditional duel, Smith forced Harris to take his complaint against the professor to the Board, which could potentially punish Colston officially if it found him guilty of the charge. Unfortunately for Harris, he let his emotions and commitment to receive a more traditional sense of “satisfaction” for his honor betrayed him at the Board of Visitors inquiry. When a Board member kindly asked Harris to consider dropping the charge against Colston, he indignantly replied, “I’ve made up my mind, the charge shall be investigated!”¹²⁷ The Board then closed the inquiry because of Harris’ belligerent attitude and exonerated Colston.

Cadets appeared more inclined to accuse junior faculty of honor violations, since all were VMI alumni and typically only a year or two removed from graduation. Captains Colston and Stewart had actually attended VMI as upperclassmen at the same

time as Cadet Harris only a few years before. Smith warned these younger instructors how cadets might try to lure them into altercations as they showed less fear for their authority. Occasionally, his faculty strayed from his advice. In 1855, Latin instructor Lieutenant George Smith engaged in a fistfight with Cadet Joel Haden after the latter broke into his quarters and soaked his bed with “slop-water.” Infuriated at both parties, Smith scolded all of his faculty as well as cadets, advising them of the “dangerous precedent” arising as “cadets might commit outrages with the view of provoking personal issues on the one hand and the discipline of the Institution be seriously impaired by assistant professors taking personal cognizance of offenses which should only be dealt with officially.”¹²⁸

Taking the concept to an extreme level, several audacious students even accused the superintendent himself as the source of their honor being violated and confronted him personally to discuss his offenses.¹²⁹ Smith most frequently received the charge of not treating all cadets by the same standard and consequently singling out certain individuals and giving them unfair treatment. Cadet Lewis Williams complained that Smith allowed other cadets to offer official “explanations” to the superintendent as a means to lower their demerit totals but, in his case, insulted him by purposely refusing the same opportunity. Smith cautioned Williams that this was a “heavy accusation against him,” by accusing him of “running a partial administration.”¹³⁰ He suggested making a formal complaint to the Board as it could act as “the only common umpire,” instead of relying on the traditional one-on-one confrontation. Williams dropped the charge and never pursued the matter any further. Some cadets proved so temperamental

in their sensitivities that their diatribes against on Smith bordered on the absurd. Cadet John Alexander Marks not only refused the superintendent's direct order to get a haircut, but he also wrote him a written excuse for his actions laced with personal insults towards Smith. As with the Thompson incident, Marks' father supported his son's decision and challenged Smith with an equally offensive letter.¹³¹ Again, Smith redirected this discontent for violating a cadet's honor back onto the cadet himself for disobeying the regulation to begin with and for not taking responsibility for his own actions.

Smith recognized that cadets who challenged his honor or integrity had retreated to this tactic to regain control in a situation which they had lost either through poor grades or conduct. Taking Smith to task on his conduct toward them was intended to place the superintendent on the defensive, bringing the punished cadet on more equal footing. As a negotiating tactic, Smith often conceded the possibility of his error and offered the accused the opportunity to address his failures through a formal investigation.¹³² But at the same time, he refused to forfeit control of the situation by allowing aggressive or impudent methods on the part of either cadets or parents. He confirmed this attitude with one guardian by stating, "I could never consent to be controlled by anyone as to the manner in which I discharged my duty as an instructor."¹³³ In many of these cases Smith also accounted for the excitability of his young men and tried not to condemn them for being swept up in the exhilaration of a tense situation. After the Williams incident, Smith wrote a letter to the boy's father describing the son's "excitable temperament" and conceded that he tried "always to

discriminate between deliberate disrespect and that which may have resulted from the heated feelings of the moment.”¹³⁴

Occasionally those who used honor as a tactic on Smith inadvertently proved the superintendent's adage that a typical cadet would rather be dismissed for poor conduct rather than academic reasons. Having their ignorance exposed caused them personal embarrassment bringing several ultra-sensitive cadets to act aggressively rather than admit their own weakness. For instance, Cadet Jacob Deitrick stormed into Smith's office demanding to resign his cadetship. When Smith would not allow it without a proper reason, Deitrick accused the superintendent of being a liar since he allegedly allowed others to leave without official justification. Smith corrected him on his assumption, frustrating the cadet and prompting him to insult the superintendent hoping to receive a dismissal for disrespect. Deitrick stomped out of Smith's office but returned shortly to admit that he forced the confrontation because he feared expulsion for his poor standing in mathematics.¹³⁵ Another cadet accused Smith of insulting him simply by asking him to write a sentence in English to see if he qualified to enter the 3rd Class.¹³⁶ In 1853, Cadet James Hubard approached Smith and accused of singling him out academically by giving him a more difficult examination and therefore purposely trying to make him look poorly in front his peers, acting “damned rascally” toward Hubard.¹³⁷ Calmly, Smith assured him that he received treatment identical to his classmates and that he should look at his own actions for causing his academic failure, not that of others. Smith viewed actions such as Hubard's as demonstrations of the adolescent preoccupation with self-esteem and reputation intertwined with the complex social

construct of honor, and therefore did not take offense as an honor-centered Southerner would. He explained to the boy's father, "I know feelings of mortification which sometimes momentarily influence a young man who has failed at his examination and although I have rarely had such a manifestation of it, as your son indicated, his conduct left only a transient impression upon me for I feel conscious he felt sorry for it a moment afterwards."¹³⁸

When applying the ideals of Southern honor, historian Robert Pace posits that antebellum college students, many of them still in their adolescence, simply incorporated many of the honorific values they observed growing up from their parents in an attempt to act as mature adults in their first time away from home and on their own.¹³⁹ Many VMI cadets carried with them these notions of honor they had been exposed to during their upbringing and their home communities to the Institute. As historians Bertram Wyatt-Brown and Kenneth Greenberg indicate, Southern concepts of honor flourished during the antebellum period because region's culture of slavery. Greenberg asserts that when studying this Southern society during this time period, one must note that "all issues of honor relate to slavery."¹⁴⁰ While cadets who engaged in honor-oriented altercations made no direct references to their family or community values, a connection to their actions and a Southern slave society may be inferred. Of the aforementioned five cadets who had claimed to have their honor challenged (Hubard, Deitrick, Marks, Williams, and Steger), each one was raised in a family who owned sizable agricultural estates and several slaves in some of the Virginia's most densely slave-populated counties.¹⁴¹ VMI itself was also staffed with over a dozen bondsmen who were a

constant visible presence to the cadets, as one cadet remembered, “all the menial but essentially necessary work was done by negro slaves.”¹⁴²

Smith’s reaction in each of these instances, however, exhibited a consistent pattern of remarkably composed behavior. He set an example and therefore expected his young students to follow his example of restraint. In each instance where a cadet confronted him and challenged his integrity, Smith maintained his composure by reacting calmly and logically. When Hubard lashed out at him with various verbal insults, Smith recalled it “[could] have led to a personal altercation had not my own self-respect enabled me to exercise control over myself.”¹⁴³ Instead of immediately identifying these charges as slanderous in nature, he always conceded to the accuser the possibility of his guilt and offered him the opportunity to prove the validity of the allegation. In a more typical situation, Southerners expected a man who had his honor called into question to immediately deny the indictment and accept the accusation exclusively as a personal insult.¹⁴⁴ Smith allowed his cadets to pursue their grievances but only in an official capacity by placing a formal complaint against this conduct with his superiors, the Board of Visitors. If the Board had proved him guilty of wrong-doing, Smith would gladly accept responsibility for his actions and acknowledge the original charges as valid. No duel or violence would be required to prove anything. Smith’s grievance policy departed from traditional Southern honorific methods of protecting personal reputations violently by pushing cadets to pursue the process of having their wrongs righted through a formal, legalistic process, allowing the law to bring them satisfaction, not personal altercations. With the “code of honor” acting as an extra-legal

form of conflict resolution, Smith aimed to bring his cadets back into the realm of formal law as their source of justice. He particularly demonstrated this ideology when updating the Institute's Regulations. In the 1848 edition, Smith added rules to prevent the act of dueling by addressing any of the conditions that might lead up to it, including insulting or defaming another cadets or Institute official, sending or accepting a challenge, striking another cadet or citizen, and the requirement to immediately inform the superintendent if a challenge had been given.¹⁴⁵

Smith also demonstrated these methods in his own dealings with those outside of VMI who challenged his honor publicly. When critics in the press slighted him by questioning his integrity, his leadership using his power as superintendent, Smith conspicuously broke from the traditional pattern of behavior for a Southern gentleman. Several detractors had labeled Smith with damaging epithets such as a liar, manipulator, swindler, despot, and Yankee sympathizer. If he had followed traditionally accepted reaction to such insults, he would have identified these attempts to ruin his credibility as personally slanderous in nature and called on the author to step forward and answer for his accusations. Smith, instead, always turned the other cheek. He responded to these criticisms by referring to his accomplishments as superintendent, focusing on the positives he brought to the school and the state. As with his cadets, he invited any of those who doubted his integrity to submit a formal inquiry with state officials in which he would gladly accept the results. Such an instance happened in 1853 with the Peyton Johnston case where the state legislature ruled after an investigation that Smith had been acting in a professional and objective manner as superintendent. Personal accusations

did not bother Smith. He actually welcomed them as long as it drew attention away from anything negative about the school as a whole. Moreover, if he performed his duties in accordance with the expectations and laws of the citizens of the state, he never acknowledged harmful comments from critics. When a handful of detractors questioned Smith's decision-making after a cadet altercation in 1854, he replied in earnest on his indifference to their opinion, "Duty to society as a conservator of peace, [and] duty to the cadets. . . were the motives which prompted me and if public sentiment throughout the state does not sustain me in these respects, I would not give a 'fig' for that sentiment."¹⁴⁶ With this attitude, Smith hoped to set an example to his cadets and to his fellow Southerners as well in regards to their behavior by having them think of the greater good when dealing with criticism instead of their person feelings. The health and prosperity of Virginia and its institutions meant more than that of one's individual reputation.

VMI and other military schools confronted a unique variable in their overall enforcement of student discipline. Through the military structure of the Corps of Cadets, military institutions gave its senior pupils direct authority to enforce the school's regulations by virtue of their rank and responsibility in the Corps. The military system burdened each cadet officer or non-commissioned officer with the duty of ensuring that their fellow cadets followed the rules during formal military occasions such as in parade formations, marching to class or in the mess hall. This approach allowed young men the unique opportunity to develop leadership skills by having direct governance over the activities of their peers, not only carrying orders and receiving punishments but having

the authority to give them as well. While the peer-enforced disciplinary method made military schools stand apart from other institutions of learning with this unique system intended to develop leadership and character in their students, this approach also created numerous confrontational problems within the dynamic of the student body itself.

Jennifer Green's study acknowledges that the harsh conditions and rigid discipline of the military environment created a strong bond among cadets. As all students endured the same restrictive system, they found a common cause in enduring its strict guidelines and consequently, finding ways around those guidelines to make life more bearable. This created a culture that condoned breaking rules and encouraged disobedience to authority.¹⁴⁷ By contrast, cadets viewed those comrades who charged other students with rule infractions as extensions of the authoritative system that subjugated them. Demonstrating loyalty to the administration's interests instead of those of their peers exposed some cadet officers to criticism and contempt from their friends. Green's labeling this informal credo of loyalty created by cadets (and their subsequent defense of it) as a form of honor, but again, this interpretation stretches the definition of honor too far. The young men created a bond of friendship within this adversarial system and tacitly vowed to protect each other from its oppressive restrictions. This code of loyalty did not reflect the same cultural endstate as the broader construct of antebellum Southern honor. The latter concept reflected an intangible chivalric code of defending one's family and own reputation as well as upholding a high standard of gentlemanly behavior. What cadets invented derived itself more from adolescent bonding and the inherent impulse of young men, regardless of geographic

origin, to challenge authority.¹⁴⁸ Green argues that the “honor” that cadets applied in resisting the system came from outside of the institution and justified breaking the rules.¹⁴⁹ Rather, cadets forged their code from within the institution and from their shared experience of surviving a repressive system of rules and from their friendships creating a loyalty to each other, not to a broad cultural convention such as honor.¹⁵⁰ Ironically, Smith’s interpretation of honor contributed to the forging of this cadet loyalty.

Classmates considered Cadet William Gordon just as guilty for violating the collective loyalty of the Corps against the authority of the administration as for challenging Cadet Thompson’s reputation or honor. Adolescent psychology better describes the ideological substance of this code of cadet loyalty. Cadets could accept reprimands from an adult authority figure but receiving it from a peer made the punishment more embarrassing and bruising to the ego as all conceived themselves as equals under the same broader oppression. This demonstrates the inherent difficulties of the peer-enforced disciplinary system. Thompson did not accept the charge from Gordon in the same manner a professional soldier would from an officer. Thompson viewed it as an indictment from one peer equal to another and therefore took it in the context of personal insult. To deal with this predicament, he borrowed from the outside code of Southern honor which dictated (through a written letter) his grievances of the insult and challenged Gordon to answer to it if it was a personal assault on his character, potentially to result in an altercation to resolve the issue. Such altercations were common throughout the 1840s and 1850s as cadets retaliated against their comrades for

reporting them for violating regulations. In another instance in 1848, Cadet Lucas Thompson threatened to report Cadet Harrison to the commandant for smoking. Accusing Harrison of snitching, Thompson invited him to settle the argument in a fistfight behind barracks surrounded by a crowd of their peers. After a series of punches, a spectator named Pollard, who had a similar run-in with Harrison, struck him with a large stick in the back of the head, knocking him unconscious.¹⁵¹ Earlier that year, when a cadet Sergeant of the Guard caught Cadet James Forbes deserting his guard duty post, Forbes instigated fisticuffs with the lad for not letting him get away with the violation.¹⁵²

Smith unenthusiastically contended with the confrontation between those cadets who boldly reported on their comrades but had an even greater difficulty with students who refused to turn in friends who violated regulations, especially related to hazing. Cadets perceived turning in a fellow student to adult authorities as distasteful a violation of cadet loyalty as cadet officers handing out punishments themselves. Therefore, pupils habitually withheld information on infractions to Institute officials in order to demonstrate devotion to their peers. No other offense suffered from this cadet toleration as much as the practice of hazing younger students. Within the insular, adolescent culture of the military academy, an informal social hierarchy existed complementary to the formal one created by the military rank system of the cadet battalion. Upperclassmen, naturally, constituted the social superiors in this system and consequently invented rites of passage for first year students seeking acceptance into the informal fraternity of cadets. Most of these rituals consisted of childish pranks on the new cadets or the innocuous “quizzing” from upperclassmen who teasingly tested them

on relevant institutional knowledge, particularly in their first summer encampment before classes began. Cadets at other military institutions, such as the Hillsborough Military Academy in North Carolina, Western Military Institute in Kentucky, and the Georgia Military Institute recalled incidents of having tricks played on them, particularly as new cadets.¹⁵³ Such practices even existed in civilian colleges throughout the country with older students harassing younger ones as a practice of general peer approval, joining clubs or fraternities, or simply for sport. One student of Randolph-Macon College recalled the various “initiating” ordeals he endured such as name-calling, dressing in embarrassing outfits and other pranks.¹⁵⁴ As a West Point graduate, Smith recognized some of these customs as inherent to college culture, particularly in military schools, but never sanctioned the “maltreatment of cadets.” He criticized cadets for treating the new matriculates so poorly but never harshly punished offenses of “quizzing” or pranks as long as they remained physically harmless.

By the 1850s, Smith noticed many of these pranks had become more physical or violent in nature. Most cadets confessed they meant no ill will toward their victims and only carried out such pranks in a sense of fun. The cruelty of these confrontations with new cadets could escalate quickly but innocuously, “commencing originally in innocent quizzing but gradually merging into abuse and painful torture,” as Smith noted to one guilty party’s father.¹⁵⁵ He reported to this parent how his son had cornered a new arrival at summer camp to quiz him and bent his fingers back until it caused him pain. Upper-class cadets soon invented a new ritual known as “strapping” by requiring a plebe to sit with his head between his legs and strike him with a leather strap or stick.¹⁵⁶

Smith remonstrated to both cadets and parents on the evils of such practices. “If then they considered the mortification to their friends, their own discomfort the injury such things did to the Institute, [and] the unjust reflection to which the superintendent was subjected for not suppressing it they would see the propriety of doing all they could to prevent it in the future,” he complained to Walter Taylor, whose son had been caught strapping a new cadet.¹⁵⁷ Hazing became so rampant that it eventually drew the attention of the Board of Visitors. It implemented a strict policy to prevent it, stipulating that, “Any cadet who shall wantonly abuse the person of any cadet by playing unjustifiable tricks upon him shall be dismissed or otherwise less severely punished, according to the degree of the offense.”¹⁵⁸

Support from the Board warmed Smith’s resolution but he found it did little to deter the acts of abuse. He commented to one politician that the Board’s new policy simply forced cadets to adjust their tactics and go underground. No matter what Smith tried, upperclassmen found ways to continue their hazing, and it sometimes became maltreatment. He increased guard tours during summer camp, punished confirmed “ring leaders” of habitual offenders, and even accepted a corps-wide pledge condemning the practice of mistreating new cadets but nothing stemmed the increasing tide of abuse. His theories on the source of such behavior frustrated his efforts to prevent it even more. Smith accused the violators of a “want of proper home training,” and arriving at the Institute with “rude and coarse behavior,” making his job that much harder. He also feared that the abused cadets might take this example of brutal activity as the model for acceptable masculine conduct at the Institute for the remainder of their cadetship. Smith

elucidated to the father of one hazing victim, “At all events I feel sure that the manly bearing which he has sustained since he has been here gives the best evidence that he will not be affected by the bad example of the vulgar ones, but will lend his influence to sustain the high position which the more genteel and thoughtful ones have always maintained. . . [I]n the end we do receive our reward of young men as a body present a manly honorable and moral bearing.”¹⁵⁹ Smith viewed solving the maltreatment problem as one of correcting values as well as evil deeds. Unfortunately for the Institute’s disciplinary system, he misidentified these incidents as isolated and practiced by only a few bad apples acting in violation of what the cadets themselves viewed as wrong.

The Corps of Cadets, as a whole, actually approved the practice of initiating new cadets and boldly protected all those involved from punishment when caught in the act. The cadet’s loyalty to each other, not poor home training, prevented Smith from effectively enforcing the Board’s policy. On countless occasions, students approached the superintendent to submit complaints about maltreatment from older cadets. When Smith asked them to identify their tormentors, the abused cadets almost always refused to implicate anyone. Between 1854 and 1855, for example, Smith investigated four separate cases of new cadets who complained to him personally about abuse from upperclassmen but all four of the victims did not want to name their tormentors to the superintendent.¹⁶⁰ A handful of cadets did give the superintendent names but fear of retribution and embarrassment at having compromised the trust of their peers forced the informers to leave the Institute before he could bring their abusers to justice. They

placed greater priority in avoiding the shame and consequences of tattling on their peers rather than see their tormentors receive punishment.¹⁶¹ The small number of cadets who did step forward to identify who had hurt them did so regretfully, worrying about their reputation for violating the loyalty of their fellow cadets. Smith assured the brother of new cadet Philip Page that his sibling “had no agency in the dismissal of the cadets engaged in maltreated him.” His testimony only confirmed the truth and his comrades would feel no ill will toward him. Still, Page worried about his reputation now among his friends instead of “relief that the offenders were caught and punished.”¹⁶² Some victims of mistreatment admitted they actually consented to the acts or confessed they made no efforts to resist. A bewildered Smith wondered why hazing victim James Towson “opposed no objection to being tied if they would not soil his new clothes. When asked why he did not opposed it, he said because he did not wish to have any difficulty with them and he did not think they would either hurt him or carry him out of his room.”¹⁶³ Compounding Smith’s frustration, the Board of Visitors, allowed the hazing case of Cadet Sanders to go unpunished. He questioned President Francis Boykin on the Board’s commitment to upholding their new mandate against such practices if they refused to enforce it. Because of their inaction, “The reinstated cadet returns with a spirit of exultation and defiance and encouragement is given to the next offender to do likewise,” he complained. The Board waffled again the next year in 1854, permitting an accused hazer to return to the Institute. Every adult associated with the administration of VMI (faculty, staff, Board members and politicians) admitted to

the wickedness of hazing but Smith could never get anyone to actively do anything about it.

Smith never gave up on his campaign to eliminate hazing from VMI but he became more ambivalent over time. With cadets, refusing to consistently prevent the practice and Board members undermining his punishment of hazers, he accepted that he could never completely stop it from occurring. In 1854, Smith told Cadet Andrew Shrewsbury that if he chose not to offer the name of his hazers than he had better defend himself since he had given Smith no means to protect him by remaining quiet.¹⁶⁴ He maintained vigilance during cases of harmful violence but became increasingly tolerant of the less brutal acts of teasing and quizzing younger students. Smith reached the point where he even acknowledged such rituals as part of the Institute's masculinity development process. In 1859, he admitted in a letter to a friend that the maltreatment new cadets endured in summer camp had inadvertently become a positive benefit for developing their manhood, stating, "These early trials are a necessary part of the discipline of many young men, and coming early in life, they tend to form the character, to develop men of virtue & true manliness."¹⁶⁵ He advised several parents for their children to accept the ridicule and not be so sensitive to the teasing, particularly if they refused to name who abused them. If young men could not withstand name calling or pranks, Smith asked, how could they expect to be tough enough to endure the challenges of real life after college? One father received a note from the superintendent urging his son to "remember that in all schools boys would sport and play pranks with each other and if he would takes these things in a proper spirit he would thank me for the

advice.”¹⁶⁶ Most of the messages targeted the parents of those who left VMI after only a few weeks and their first encounters with upperclassmen harassing them. To comfort worried parents, Smith cited examples of plebes who left because of the harsh treatment but realized their immaturity inspired the rash decision and returned to duty shortly after.¹⁶⁷ He also calmed parents by explaining hazing as part of the broader collegiate experience with the treatment of plebes at VMI being not different than many other schools. “There had been some thoughtless and mischievous young men who had been making merriment at his expense,” he told one father, “in the way usual among young men at College.”¹⁶⁸ But to appease parents and supporters, Smith also promised that those cadets who engaged in maltreatment only represented a small portion of the cadet corps with the remainder of the students represented an honorable and well-behaved stock of young men.

Smith also publicly recognized these pranks as part of the course of masculine bonding. “I would advise him to take in good part the sports to which he was subjected that he would find in time that those who were now making merriment at his expense would be his best friends and endeavored to explain to him the views which these took who engaged in these practices viz. that the tendency was to identify all with each other and as a consequence the young men of this school stood to each other as a band of brothers who would do anything for each other.” A few weeks later, Smith gave similar guidance to another guardian explaining that his ward, “ought to know that young men were full of their sports and that by taking them in good heart as others had done, he would soon feel at home and get on as well as others.”¹⁶⁹ Not only had Smith concluded

that hazing provided a necessary step in manly development for the victim, it represented an important stage for the perpetrators, as Smith noticed that most of those issuing the abuse had been recipients of maltreatment in years prior. “It is a little remarkable that those who are most the dupes of these practices one year are the most pertinacious in their ill treatment the next,” he observed.¹⁷⁰ And when Smith reached the peak of his frustration at preventing hazing among his students, he pleaded with parents and cadets that such situations presented an opportunity to apply manliness not only for standing up for what was right in prosecuting their tormentors but also physically by fighting back, resisting the exercise of being forcibly overpowered and exploited.¹⁷¹

Former students and colleagues in education sought out Smith’s advice on the issues of hazing and honor just as they had with academic concerns. During the years when he suffered through his own struggles with cadets using loyalty to avoid punishment, schoolmaster and longtime friend Pike Powers solicited Smith’s guidance on a similar situation at his own boy’s academy in Staunton. Several of Powers’ students had vandalized a classroom after lecture hours but all refused to implicate any of their classmates in the crime. Smith encouraged him to make an example for the rest of the student body by dismissing all of those associated with the break-in to send a message that such mutual protection among students would not be tolerated. Promoting the infallibility of the school’s regulations could be the only way to protect the integrity of law among the students. He also added, “By the way of encouragement I will say discipline properly administered never did and never will injure a school. If it did I

would not keep a school. But there is too much good sense among our people to allow injury to work against a school where discipline is inflicted in the various cases of outrage in which boys sometimes engage.”¹⁷² In 1859, Smith informed one of his graduates-turned-teachers, William D. Stuart, that a former pupil of his had just been found guilty of hazing at VMI. He used this opportunity to remind Stuart to keep mindful of controlling the mistreatment of students at his own academy and to ignore any attempts by his charges to offer a pledge never to engage in such abuses. Such promises, as Smith had experienced, did nothing to deter these “disgraceful practices” and only widened the chasm of trust between student and instructor.¹⁷³

Cadets embraced the concept of loyalty to their friends more than duty or even honor. Examination of their conduct during these “maltreatment” cases complicates and confounds conventional interpretation of the broader institution of honor. Several of these young men endured harsh treatment in direct conflict with their sense of personal honor. These incidents were abusive (physically and mentally), caused personal embarrassment and whose unhealthy intentions could easily be defined as “ungentlemanly.” Maltreatment by upper-class cadets most certainly damaged the “public face” that so many white Southern males has become so protective of in the context of how they were viewed by their community, reflecting their sense of self-worth.¹⁷⁴ But remarkably, almost all of victims of this abuse accepted it and never challenged their tormentors as violators of their honor nor demanded satisfaction. If certain cadets were willing to risk their cadetships in order to defend their reputation over receiving one demerit from another cadet, surely they would never stand for the

humiliation of such degrading physical abuse such as beatings with a leather strap or having their fingers almost broken by a bullying older cadet who issued such abuse solely for reasons as trivial as doing so for his own personal amusement or the luxury of having a contrived sense of authority over him. The non-physically abusive acts proved shameful enough to warrant demands for satisfaction under the code of honor, if not revenge. Even Smith noted the mortification some cadets endured. He recalled how a new cadet was “placed on post with his shirt over his pants and he was in other respect dressed in a most grotesque manner, made the laughing stock of the negro and Irish labors who were working upon the public buildings. . . [and] another cadet was stripped naked and made to stand in the middle of the parade ground.”¹⁷⁵ But with the exception of one instance, no maltreated cadets ever fought back, demanded honorific recourse or even accused the abuser of shaming them. To cadets, enduring the hazing in order to gain or keep the loyalty and acceptance of their peers meant more than their “honorable” reputation.

A lone known exception to cadets relenting to physical abuse occurred in 1849 when an older cadet named Gray attempted to tie the newly matriculated John Archer Clarke to a standing tent pole as a joke. Clarke broke free from Gray, punched him in retaliation and retreated to his tent to retrieve a loaded pistol to confront him. When brought before Smith to answer for his attempt to murder Gray, Clarke confessed no remorse for his actions and explained he only acted as his father had taught him when suffering an insult. Smith desired younger cadets to resist maltreatment from older students but not within the framework of the code of dueling or resorting to violence. In

fact, this incident offered the superintendent a foundation to preach on his feelings on the institution of honor. Murdering those who caused personal offense offered the worst option when a system of laws existed to protect individuals, he explained. Young men needed to control their tempers and not resort to extra-legal methods promoted by Southern culture to resolve quarrels. He argued to Clarke and to all of his comrades that they owed their allegiance and duty to the state of Virginia, “above all the claims of self-interest.”¹⁷⁶ Smith allowed young Clarke to remain at the Institute but warned the boy’s father about the damaging values of honorific violence he had taught him at home. “He will have to give up all those *false notions of honour*, which led him into the difficulty with young Gray. He must be so sensitive and when any one imposes upon him, or gives him grounds for complaint, if he will make the matter known to me he will have justice done him.” The honor that many cadets brought from the outside world had no place at the Institute or in Smith’s agenda for shaping their values as developing young men.¹⁷⁷

This pattern of refusing to report fellow cadets because of peer loyalty carried over into other infractions. When someone broke into the guard room in 1855 and stole a musket, Smith questioned one cadet as a potential suspect. The boy admitted his presence during the forced entry but refused to name any of those involved in the robbery. Smith assured him if he did nothing wrong, he had nothing to fear by helping him with the investigation.¹⁷⁸ Rather than violate the loyalty of his friends, he remained silent forcing the superintendent to dismiss him. Early that year, the Cadet First Captain Robert Allen failed in his duty to report a handful of cadets who had caused a violent

ruckus in the mess hall while intoxicated. Perhaps taking a lesson from the repercussions of a former First Captain, William Gordon, Allen submitted a report but did not offer the names of the offenders as he did not want to risk making the unpopular decision of having his classmates dismissed so close to graduation. Smith chastised him for not taking responsibility for his actions and complained to one Board member that “his leniency would tend to encourage such practices on the one hand and to weaken the authority of the 1st Captain on the other.”¹⁷⁹ Had Allen chosen to follow the same action as Gordon had three years earlier, he would have pleased the superintendent but risked ostracism from his peers. Rather than jeopardizing his reputation or lose acceptance from his friends, as most young men would, he opted to sacrifice his position of authority for their approval. Nothing in this choice blatantly reflected uniquely Southern values or a direct connection to a broader social code. The isolated world cadets created through peer-pressured loyalty within the Corps forced Allen’s decision, not Southern honor.

Cadets utilized the strength of their loyalty to each other to occasionally instigate collective protests against the administrators when they judged their authority had become arbitrary or irksome to the student body. Historian Rod Andrew argues that when cadets staged these “walk-outs” or “strikes,” they called upon the revolutionary tradition of the War of Independence and applied the uniquely Southern cultural traits of personal autonomy, individualism and rebellion against authority. Andrew also identifies the social bond of loyalty created by cadets to each other as the catalyst for these demonstrations as they chose to commit themselves to the well-being of their

friends rather than to the authority of the regulations. The same sense of communal protection that encouraged cadets to not report each other from punishments also occasionally inspired mass revolts against their own faculty.¹⁸⁰

Smith, however, never made concessions with the rebelling cadets out of respect for their application of democratic ideals during the antebellum period, as Andrew posits.¹⁸¹ On the contrary, he used these insurrections as an opportunity to more forcefully instill his philosophy on the necessity of law and self-control. For instance, in Smith's absence Professor Preston refused to allow the senior class permission to travel to town in order to attend an alluring murder trial at the county court house, but the cadets disregarded his order and absented themselves from duty.¹⁸² Smith returned from his trip and struck boldly against the insubordinate cadets by dismissing 24 out of 29 members of the class, only two months before graduation. His justification for such a harsh punishment reflected similar language he used in other conflicts between the ideologies of duty and personal feelings. The superintendent told Richardson, "The conflict between duty and feeling has been severe but with every mitigating circumstance to operate in favor of mercy, the Regulations made my duty so clear that I could not do otherwise than I have."¹⁸³ Respect for authority and a love of order should trump all other passions in a man's character, he explained. Smith boasted to Richardson that his punishment inculcated this simple ideology. "It has crushed every vestige of an insubordinate spirit among the other classes. The majesty of the law has been fully asserted...." Obedience, not rebellion, was a trait to be treasured and rewarded in young men, regardless of any affection for the nation's Revolutionary

heritage. He chided those members of the class who reluctantly joined the insurrection who had no real desire to violate the regulations but held a greater fear of criticism of their classmates for a lack of loyalty. “A young man’s pride would hush his voice rather than plead poverty as a reason for refusing to unite with his class. Hence many of those in the class are unwillingly involved in that which the fear of class odium did not allow them to stand up against,” he lamented.¹⁸⁴

Smith also confessed to a state delegate his disappointment in how his cadets thought of themselves first and not the damage they could have done to the Institute.¹⁸⁵ Exemplifying his own respect for law, Smith passed the judgment of the case to the Board of Visitors as his superiors in the matter and confirmed his desire to maintain neutrality in their decision. The Board reinstated the senior class after a collective contrition for their actions, as they publicly admitted the wrongness of their insubordination and as well as their shame for disappointing their superintendent. Smith warmed to the fact that the punished cadets never held animosity toward him for his strictness and actually respected him for being so steadfast. “The class did not complain of the action which I took after I had fully explained to them the reasons and necessity of it. Their conduct on so trying an occasion was marked with great respect to my feelings personally and evinced a deep sense of the injury which their thoughtlessness might have done to the Institute without this summary action.”¹⁸⁶ More importantly, he rejoiced at they and all those who learned of the incident learned of his commitment to order in the education of Virginia’s young men.

Arguably the most climactic event in which Smith confronted honor, violence and rebellion occurred in January 1854. A local law student named Christian had taken an affectionate interest in a Lexington girl named Mary Anderson. When her cousin, Cadet Thomas Blackburn, learned he had asked to escort her to church, he warned her not to go as Christian had a roguish reputation. Christian learned of what Blackburn had said and confronted him about his influence over his cousin's decision. The two young men engaged in gentlemanly conversation on the issue and departed amicably. Having heard about this peaceful resolution, Christian's law school friends shamed him into re-confronting Blackburn and challenging him to a duel. The next day, Christian, armed with several weapons, cornered Blackburn in an alley next to the Presbyterian Church before service. While no one witnessed the altercation that transpired in the alley, it resulted in Christian stabbing Blackburn in the throat, killing him instantly.

Word of the murder quickly reached VMI's barracks where cadets, outraged at this atrocity, immediately mustered all of the remaining members of the Corps in barracks, armed themselves with their military accoutrements and marched into the town to bring Christian to justice. Colonel Smith, who had been bedridden by pneumonia, heard the commotion and understood what was about to transpire. He quickly ran from his house, still in his nightgown and slippers, and dashed in front of the cadets to prevent them from pursuing their revenge. The cadets halted, and after a few indecisive moments of tension, one student yelled to his comrades to ignore Smith's pleas and continue their march into town to avenge Blackburn's death. The superintendent immediately grabbed the youth by the throat and ordered him to be placed under arrest.

The remainder of the cadets remained frozen with fear at the reaction of their usually docile superintendent. With tears in his eyes, Smith begged the angry cadets to let the faculty exact justice for the murder through the legal system and for them to honor their fallen friend by attending to his body and arranging an honor guard. Moved by the superintendent's passion, the cadets returned to barracks and handed in their weapons.¹⁸⁷

Once the tensions of the situation subsided, Smith depicted an entirely different version of what occurred with the cadets after Blackburn's death to the politicians in Richmond. He boasted to the Institute's supporters in the state capital of the calm and orderly conduct the cadets displayed instead of resorting to the violent vengeance warranted by the Southern code of honor. In a letter to the Speaker of the House of Delegates, he expressed, "the beautiful exhibition of high toned honorable feeling which has marked the conduct of every cadet in the submission to lawful authority which has characterized them under the trying circumstances through which they have recently passed."¹⁸⁸ Thomas Michie, the well-known lawyer who prosecuted the Blackburn case, learned from the superintendent that in spite of the situation that "arouse[d] vindictive feelings of the cadets, they have exhibited throughout the entire affair a most commendable respect for law and order."¹⁸⁹ Even in his official report to the Board of Visitors, Smith testified on how his cadets did not react under the heat of passion and instead rested their confidence that the legal authorities would execute a fair and impartial trial for Blackburn's murderer. Smith reinforced that his cadets acted in full accordance with their duty as representatives of the state, placing their trust in the laws of the government and embracing the value of good public order.¹⁹⁰ Self-control and

responsibility to the commonwealth meant more than vengeance and pride. Smith knew this to be untrue but had to put the proper face for his publicly supported institution. In a private letter, Smith admitted to Board President Francis Boykin that his cadets freely subscribed to the tenets of Southern honor in seeking violent, retributive vengeance and it was only Smith's daring action that prevented the eventual murder of Christian. "I believe under God the course which I pursued was the only one that saved the effusion of more blood by the application of the lynch law," he confessed months after the murder.¹⁹¹

This incident reinforced Smith's numerous reasons justifying his skepticism of Southern honor. From his experience as a disciplinarian, the Southern concept of honor proved to be conveniently flexible when utilized by adolescents. For example, cadets condoned bending the truth to avoid duty or escape punishment but expressed outrage when a comrade or professor labeled them a liar. The practice of taking an oath, a sacred element of the code of honor according the historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, lost all validity for Smith as he witnessed countless vows cyclically broken then reestablished by cadets as they repeatedly took oaths against drinking and hazing.¹⁹² Cadets also used honor as an escape for personal accountability for poor grades or behavior by blaming professors or authority figures for purposely trying to humiliate them. Lastly, honor encouraged students to seek resolutions to problems outside of the guidelines of the regulations, promoting extra-legal forms of justice instead of through the formal governing institutions. When commenting on the core values of Southern culture, Wyatt-Brown asserts that Southerners embraced honor and shame instead of

conscience and guilt.¹⁹³ This generalization did not apply to either Smith's actions or philosophies. He intended for all of his young charges to rely on logic and duty to dictate their behavior and to learn from their mistakes, particularly if their errors were caused by the impetuous passion of youth.

Southern culture acknowledged the violent tenets of honor as accepted rites of passage for manhood and social acceptance. Smith countered this traditional precept by promoting a disciplinary policy that condemned dueling, hazing and fighting and charted a new direction for Southern youth in direct contrast to the region's social standards. In Smith's system, he redefined masculinity as the application of order, discipline, duty, faith, control, restraint, law, and responsibility. He made allowances for the passion and recklessness of youth but if cadets did not actively curb their own impulses, Smith punished them vigorously. If citizens expected VMI graduates to accept the responsibility of leadership in the state and region, they had to embody Smith's values and set the proper moral example. What Smith demanded of his cadets, he demanded of all Southern manhood if their society was to ever assert its cultural and economic independence. Smith campaigned for the slave-holding states to break free from the dependence on the North and Europe through their own educational systems but he also pressed for the moral superiority to support this independence. His region needed to embrace his views of control, self-reliance, faith, knowledge, law, modesty, and thrift rather than unwarranted aggressiveness, youthful impatience, hostility, and unjustified lawlessness. Southern men, Smith believed, should arm themselves with virtue and law, not weapons. As the superintendent of a public institution, he ensured his school

reflected these idealized values of his people. Military academies operating under the design of Smith were not intended to be an extension of a violent culture but were, ironically, institutions created to impede and prevent a violent culture.

Notes

¹ Schmidt, Old Time College President, 77-145.

² The study of masculinity in nineteenth century America has grown into a varied and engaging historiography. Mary P. Ryan's Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida, New York, 1790-1865, examines manhood in the context of the family during the rise of mercantile capitalism of the mid-nineteenth century and how attitudes in the American home shifted from patriarchal authority to domestic affection. E. Anthony Rotundo's American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era traces the development of masculinity, particularly in the North, over the last two hundred years from a concept created by a man's community during colonial times, to a self-made man of the Market Revolution, to passionate manhood exulting self-expression and competition at the turn of the century. In Manhood in America: A Cultural History, historian Michael Kimmel echoes many of Rotundo's conclusions of early American manhood being centered on land ownership but transforming with the rise of market forces and centering on the self-made man concept to prove their masculinity in the public sphere.

Much of the scholarship on American nineteenth century masculinity has come in the form of essay collections including Marc C. Carnes and Clyde Griffin's Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian Manhood, and J. A. Mangan and James Walvin's Manliness and Morality: Middle Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940. Both provide various studies of masculine social constructs in diverse cultural and geographic settings at different points during the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries. Another of these collections, Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover's work, Southern Manhood: Perspectives in Masculinity in the Old South, is the first to focus specifically on the study of Southern masculinity with essays examining not only elite whites but also Indians, blacks, and lower class urbanites. An article drawn from Jennifer Green's dissertation provides analysis of masculinity in antebellum military schools.

³ Charles D. Walker, "An Earnest Christian Soldier: The Work of General Francis H. Smith at the Virginia Military Institute," Protestant Episcopal Review 7 (January 1893), 188.

⁴ Smith, Old Spex, 22.

⁵ Smith to William Meade, 15 December 1842, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶ Smith to William Meade, 26 April 1844, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷ John F. Wauckechon, "The Forgotten Evangelicals: Virginia Episcopalians, 1790-1876" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 2000); Christine Leigh Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997). Wauckechon argues that in spite of the inspired leadership of Bishops Moore, Meade and Johns, the Virginia Episcopal Church remained, at best, only the fourth largest denomination in the state during the antebellum period. Although not as successful as the other Protestant churches in the Old Dominion, Wauckechon does lament that lack of historical attention, even in such acclaimed works on the topic such as Christine

Heyrman's Southern Cross, given to the Virginia Episcopalians and their understated similarities to the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists during this time period. These Episcopalians borrowed such theological doctrines from their Protestant counterparts such as salvation by faith alone and "emphasis on the atonement of the crucified Christ," as well as Protestant practices such as revivals, prayer meetings and Scripture based services. Yet they still maintained their appeal to the landed gentry of the state, remaining just loyal enough to the old practices and values to keep their allegiance.

⁸ Smith to William Meade, 21 June 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹ Smith to Leonidas Polk, 12 September 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Leonidas Polk (1806-1864) was the Episcopal bishop of Louisiana. A West Point graduate of the Class of 1827, he left the army to join the Episcopal ministry where he served as an assistant to Bishop Richard Channing Moore, William Meade's predecessor in the Diocese of Virginia. Polk also founded the University of South at Sewanee with Smith's friend, the Reverend John Otey, who sent both of his sons to VMI. Both Polk and Otey wrote to Smith often for advice on creating their new college as well as religious issues. Polk is more famously known for his exploits as a Confederate General, given the sobriquet the "Fighting Bishop." He was killed during the Atlanta Campaign in 1864. Charles Pettit McIlvaine (1799-1873) served as the Episcopal bishop of Ohio from 1831-1873. He also served as the Episcopal minister of the U.S. Senate (1822-1825) and as chaplain and professor of Ethics at West Point (1824-26). He then became president of Kenyon College in Ohio

from 1832-1840. During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln solicited McIlvaine to travel to Britain to argue against England recognizing the Confederacy.

¹⁰ Smith to Charles Andrews, 20 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to George Dame, 23 December 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to John P. McGuire, 31 May 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Topics in these letters included scripture interpretations, salvation, Calvinism, sacraments, religious education and the progress of the Church in Virginia.

¹¹ Smith to "Doctor," 21 July 1843, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. The Oxford Movement, also known as the "Tract Movement," was a theological revolution which occurred in the Anglican Church from 1833 to 1845. A loose confederation of Anglican clergy and philosophers from Oxford University attempted to renew the Church of England by reviving certain doctrines and rituals from the Roman Catholic Church. By returning to pre-Reformation liturgy, doctrine and practice, they hoped to make Anglicanism a valid part of the global Catholic Church and restore the Church of England as truly national church of Great Britain once again. Although the movement dissipated after 1845 when several key founders converted to Catholicism, it did succeed in recruiting millions of members worldwide and creating modern Anglo-Catholicism. John Wauckechon argues that Virginia's Episcopal leaders such as Bishops William Meade and John Johns vehemently opposed the movement and counter-productive to their mission to make the Church more evangelical. Smith supported the bishops in the Old Dominion for opposing the Tracts and cheered those in

Great Britain for slandering Queen Victoria for her defense of the Oxford Movement.

See Wauckechon, "Forgotten Evangelicals," 328-65; Marvin R. O'Connell, The Oxford Conspirators: A History of the Oxford Movement, 1833-1845 (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1969).

¹² Smith to E. O. Dunning, 6 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³ Smith to William Ritter, 18 September 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴ Regulations of the Virginia Military Institute, 1848 (Richmond: Macfarlane and Ferguson, 1848), 28-29.

¹⁵ Smith, History of the Virginia Military Institute, 257.

¹⁶ Edwin L. Dooley, Jr., "Gilt Buttons and the Collegiate Way: Francis H. Smith as Antebellum Schoolmaster," Virginia Cavalcade 36 (Summer 1986), 36.

¹⁷ Cadet John Fletcher Early Diary, 1 May 1850, VMI Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

¹⁸ Smith to Charles Derby, 18 December 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁹ Smith to W. W. Crump, 6 May 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁰ Smith to William H. Fowle, 7 May 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²¹ Smith to George Ker, 7 May 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²² Smith to Evelina Smith, 25 February 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²³ Smith, History of the Virginia Military Institute, 256.

²⁴ Smith to John Thomas Lewis Preston, 29 August 1844, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. The accusations against Smith were enumerated in this letter from Preston to Smith as follows:

1. That the superintendent exercised his influence in framing the denominational character of the Board of Visitors.
2. That he exerted an influence in the appointment of some of Episcopalians as cadets, to the exclusion of others.
3. That his dealings with the merchants of Lexington [and] the patronage of the Institute, [were] given to Episcopalians, and that like influence was exerted in the dealings of the cadets.
4. That the Superintendent was arbitrary and partial in requiring the attendance of cadets at the eservices of the Episcopal Church to the neglect of other churches.
5. That he afforded privileges of access to the cadets to Episcopal clergymen which were denied to other clergymen.
6. That he secured the appointment of officers to the Institute who were either Episcopalians or who might be influence to become Episcopalian.
7. That the Superintendent himself was a zealous Episcopalian.

Smith denied all of these charges except for the last one which he took particular pride in although he reinforced his religious affiliation had no influence over this duty as a superintendent of the state's military school.

²⁵ John Thomas Lewis Preston to Smith, 29 August 1844, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁶ No statistics exist regarding the percentages of the denominations of individual cadets but nearly all were of some Protestant faith. The number of Catholic and Jewish cadets represented a small enough minority in the Corps of Cadets as to not be represented in the rotation system before the Civil War.

²⁷ Katherine L. Brown, Hills of the Lord: Background of the Episcopal Church in Southwestern Virginia, 1738-1938 (Roanoke, Va.: The Diocese of Southwestern Virginia, 1979), 59-60.

²⁸ George M. Brooke, General Lee's Church: The History of Protestant Episcopal Church in Lexington, Virginia, 1840-1975 (Lexington, Va.: The News-Gazette Press, 1984), 6.

²⁹ George M. Brooke, "The Episcopal Church and VMI in the Early Years," in Proceedings of the Rockbridge Historical Society, 10 (1990), 320.

³⁰ Smith to William N. Pendleton, 30 March 1844, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. VMI enjoyed one of its most fruitful relationships with the Episcopal High School as it served as a member of the informal "feeder" school program into the Institute. Several member of its faculty graduated from VMI and it

sent a number of their high school graduates to the Institute during the antebellum period.

³¹ Bryant quoted in Brooke, "Episcopal Church and VMI," 320.

³² Smith to William Meade, 13 March 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³³ Smith to George Junkin, 24 March 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁴ Thomas E. Buckley, Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776-1787 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1977), 47-51.

³⁵ Thomas E. Buckley, "After Disestablishment: Thomas Jefferson's Wall of Separation in Antebellum Virginia," Journal of Southern History 61 (August 1995), 476-80.

³⁶ Thomas E. Buckley, "The Use and Abuse of Jefferson's Statute: Separating Church and State in Nineteenth-Century Virginia," in James H. Huston, ed., Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America (Lanham, Md. : Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 51-52.

³⁷ George Junkin, quoted in Couper, One Hundred Years of VMI, 283.

³⁸ Smith to John B. Minor, 20 April 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

³⁹ Bruce, History of the University of Virginia, 3: 133, 136.

⁴⁰ Smith to Daniel Trueheart, 19 March 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴¹ Smith to David May, 15 December 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Smith to Henry Anthon, 29 February 1857, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁴ Smith, College Reform, 52.

⁴⁵ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 29.

⁴⁶ Smith to Robert Conrad, 18 July 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁷ Smith to "Doctor," 21 July 1843, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁸ Smith to Waller H. Taylor, 15 May 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁴⁹ Smith to E. A. Darlymple, 13 June 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁰ Smith to David Rodes, 30 October 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵¹ Smith to John Williams, 22 December 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵² Smith to James Bryan, 2 December 1842, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵³ Smith to Burr W. Harrison, 21 November 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁴ Eliza Muse to Smith 4 June 1847, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Muse 22 June 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith explained to the concerned mother that she had nothing to worry about regarding her child's spiritual development. He admitted he actually caught the young cadet having slipped into a classroom after hours to study his Bible and pray.

⁵⁵ Smith, Regulations of Military Institutions, 12.

⁵⁶ Smith to William D. Fair, 28 February 1843, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁷ Smith to C. H. Nourse, 11 January , 1858, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁸ Smith to Daniel H. Hill, 29 May 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵⁹ Daniel Harvey Hill, College Discipline: An Inaugural Address Delivered at Davidson College, N.C. on the 28th February, 1855 (Salisbury, N. C.: The Watchman's Office, 1855), 4-8, 12.

⁶⁰ Smith to Henry A. Wise, 18 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶¹ Smith to Hugh B. Grigsby, 8 April 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith argued to Blair that the history of the American

Revolution could be told by reading the vestry books of the Virginia Episcopal Church as all the great heroes of the War of Independence were devout Episcopalians as were their families dating back to the seventeenth century.

⁶² Smith to Thomas A. Harris, 13 March 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶³ Howe, Political Culture of the American Whigs, 150-80; Watson, Liberty and Power, 222-23.

⁶⁴ Smith to Charles W. Andrews, 10 January 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁵ Anne C. Loveland, Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), ix.

⁶⁶ Smith to Edwin J. Harvie, 12 July 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶⁷ W. J. Rorabaugh, The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 202.

⁶⁸ Coulter, College Life in the Old South, 122-25; Crenshaw, General Lee's College, 103; William E. Eisenberg, The First Hundred Years of Roanoke College, 1842-1942 (Salem, Va.: Trustees of Roanoke College, 1942), 87.

⁶⁹ Smith to Robert Blackburn, 29 December 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁰ Smith to "Doctor," 21 July 1843, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷¹ Smith to George W. Thompson, 12 January 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷² Cadet George Toole to John Toole, 8 September 1855, Toole Family Collection, University of Virginia.

⁷³ Smith to Daniel Smith, 27 August 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁴ Rorabaugh, Alcoholic Republic, 194-95. Drafting and signing temperance pledges served as a common tactic of temperance advocates to have drinkers commit to a lifestyle of sobriety. Rorabaugh notes that some labeled these pledges as "temperance constitutions," offering explicit symbolism to America's Fathers and their commitment to freedom.

⁷⁵ Smith to John M. Otey, 8 June 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁶ Smith to M. L. Eliason, 3 January 1850, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁷ Smith to John Dorman, 18 December 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁸ Smith to Robert Mayo, 31 July 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; FHS to Charles Mason, 1 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁷⁹ Bruce, History of the University of Virginia, 3: 129-33.

⁸⁰ Smith to Lewis B. Williams, 4 September 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸¹ Smith to Robert Blackburn, 29 December 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸² Smith to John M. Otey, 25 October 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸³ Smith to Robert Rodes, 30 September 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁴ Robert Pace, Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 61-62.

⁸⁵ Smith to Carter H. Page, 31 January 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁶ Smith to Peter H. Steenbergen, 6 February 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁷ Smith to James A. Sydnor, 17 March 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Andrew Kevan, 17 March 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Joseph D. White, 17 March 1856, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁸ Smith to William H. Richardson 10 October 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁸⁹ Smith to Valentine W. Southall, 28 March 1846, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁰ Smith to John Bruce, 19 September 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹¹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 10 October 1848, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Minutes of the Board of Visitors, 17 October 1848, VMI Archives. This rule does not appear in either the published VMI Regulations of 1848 or 1854. However, the Board of Visitors documented that it adopted the following regulation, "Any cadet who shall be guilty of immoral practices or who shall contract any immoral disease shall be dismissed or otherwise punished according to the nature of the offense." No medical documentation exists to identify the number of cadets who contracted venereal disease during these outbreaks or how they were transmitted among the cadets through either heterosexual or homosexual activity.

⁹² Smith to D. L. Wooldridge, 17 June 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹³ Smith to David W. Barton, 9 December 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁴ Kenneth S. Greenberg, Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 37.

⁹⁵ Smith to Claudius Crozet, 11 March 1841, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Edward Butts, 17 July 1849, Superintendent's

Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to John F. Wiley, 4 December 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁶ Smith to Maurice Langhorne, 9 April 1844, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁷ Smith to William H. Clark, 19 May 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹⁸ Minutes of the Board of Visitors, 12 January 1848, VMI Archives. The Board chose not to punish the two cadets since their actions could be attributed to the "thoughtless indiscretion of youth."

⁹⁹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 19 May 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁰ Smith to Edward McConnell, 14 March 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰¹ Cadet John L. Hubard to Robert T. Hubard, 16 November 1851, Hubard Family Collection, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

¹⁰² Smith to W. W. Thompson, 18 November 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Edward McConnell, 30 November 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰³ Smith to Phillip St. George Cocke, 18 July 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁴ Smith to Alexander Rives, 15 April 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 46-66, 73-76; Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 7-15.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Pace and Christopher A. Bjornsen, "Adolescent Honor: College Student Behavior in the Old South," Southern Cultures 6 (Fall 2000), 10-12.

¹⁰⁷ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 114-62.

¹⁰⁸ Although the U.S. Military Academy did not design its official crest and motto until 1898, its creator, Colonel Charles W. Larned believed that the writings of early superintendents, professors and graduates resonated with the recurrence of the words "duty," "honor" and "country." Colonel Larned and his design committee believed Duty, Honor, Country represented simply, but eloquently the values of West Point. See Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, 214.

¹⁰⁹ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 116-19.

¹¹⁰ Allen Peskin, Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2003), 11-13, 70-78. The exact number of challenges and actual duels Scott engaged in remains unclear. Scott fought one duel in 1810 outside of New Orleans but biographer Allen Peskin notes that Scott had gained a reputation amongst his colleagues before this altercation for being a duelist, once having received two challenges in one day early in his career. Scott also nearly fought in duels with two nationally renowned figures (and political rivals) DeWitt Clinton and Andrew Jackson.

¹¹¹ William B. Skelton, An American Profession of Arms: The Army Officer Corps, 1784-1861 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 55-56, 195-96;

Edward M. Coffman, The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 32, 69.

¹¹² Edward Ayers, Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century American South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 13-14.

¹¹³ Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 88-114.

¹¹⁴ Smith to George W. Thompson, 25 February 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁵ Ayers, Vengeance and Justice, 18.

¹¹⁶ Smith to George W. Thompson, 14 February 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹¹⁷ Smith to Philip St. George Cocke, 21 February 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith scoffing at the letter writers claim at "military honor" reinforces his distinction between the "duty" and responsibilities of a soldier and the contrived sense of "honor" centered on an individual's sense of self-worth and had no place in his VMI's structure or discipline.

¹¹⁸ Minutes of the Board of Visitors, 28 June 1852, VMI Archives. The Board of Visitors not only condemned Thompson's actions but also Gordon for brandishing a sword against another cadet. Although he claimed the use of the weapon in self-defense, the Board chastised the action as "ungentlemanly."

¹¹⁹ Smith to Philip St. George Cocke, 21 February 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁰ Smith to George W. Thompson, 28 February 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to George W. Thompson, 17 March 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Thompson to Smith, 18 February 1852, 9 March 1852, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²¹ Smith to George W. Thompson, 17 March 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²² Smith to John M. Steger, 27 April 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²³ Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 355; Jack K. Williams, Dueling in the Old South: Vignettes in the Old South (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1980), 26-39; Elliot J. Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," American Historical Review 90 (December 1985), 43.

¹²⁴ Pace, Halls of Honor, 21-22.

¹²⁵ Smith to Nathaniel Alexander, 23 September 1847, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Alexander to Smith, 18 September 1847, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁶ Cadet Joseph Harris, Class of 1856, was the son of Hilary Harris, one of the largest slave owners of Powhatan County, Virginia, owning over 50 slaves in 1860.

¹²⁷ Smith to Hilary Harris, 9 July 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁸ Smith to William B. Taliaferro, 28 February 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹²⁹ Although historians Robert Pace and Rod Andrew examine antebellum student rebellions against authority, they only explore mass demonstrations and riots against the administration, not individual altercations with professors or administrators. Pace, Halls of Honor, 82-90; Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 64-88.

¹³⁰ Smith to Lewis B. Williams, 13 March 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³¹ Smith to Edward A. Marks, 1 June 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Marks to Smith, 28 May 1853, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³² This tactic reinforced Smith's aversion to the tenets of Southern honor. He risked damage to the reputation of his "public face" by admitting to the potential validity of the harmful accusations about his character. Instead of construing such charges as slanderous or made specifically to defame his good name, he offered his accuser the benefit of the doubt that their statements could be true and that a formal legal investigation would decide its legitimacy. Smith let the structure of law do the fighting to protect his reputation.

¹³³ Smith to M. L. Anderson, 27 April 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁴ Smith to Lewis B. Williams, 13 March 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁵ Smith to William A. Deitrick, 31 January 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁶ Smith to John J. Clarke, 28 August, 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁷ Smith to Robert T. Hubbard, 7 July 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁸ Smith to Robert T. Hubbard, 25 August 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³⁹ Pace, Halls of Honor, 5-6, 56-81, 84, 96-97.

¹⁴⁰ Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, xiii. See also Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 15-18, 24, 369-80.

¹⁴¹ Cadet files, James L. Hubbard, Jacob Deitrick, John A. Marks, Lewis B. Williams, Roger W. Steger, VMI Archives.

¹⁴² E. M. Morrison to Unknown, 9 May 1930, Miscellaneous Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴³ Smith to Robert T. Hubbard, 7 July 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁴ Williams, Dueling in the Old South, 13-25, 41-59.

¹⁴⁵ Regulations of the Virginia Military Institute, 1854 (Richmond: Macfarlane and Ferguson, 1854), 47-49.

¹⁴⁶ Smith to John Echols, 17 June 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁴⁷ Green, “Books and Bayonets,” 130.

¹⁴⁸ Joseph F. Kett, Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), 59.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁵⁰ Pace, Halls of Honor, 82-85. Pace’s study confirms this argument as he asserts that antebellum Southern college students created an insular, adolescent loyalty among themselves that shunned the authority of the administration and promoted allegiance to their peers rather than school regulations.

¹⁵¹ Smith to William H. Richardson, 10 October 1848, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵² Smith to William Forbes, 15 January 1848, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵³ Ross, “Prepare Our Sons,” 20; Shaw, “Student Life at Western Military Institute,” 82, 102; Keith Bohannon, “Not Alone Trained to Arms but to the Science and Literature of our Day: The Georgia Military Institute, 1851-1865” (M. A. Thesis: University of Georgia, 1990), 39-40. Examination of the social backgrounds of those involved in VMI’s hazing incidents supports the assertion that most inflicted maltreatment as a method of acceptance into the peer group. There is no identifiable pattern in these incidents to indicate broader class, geographic or political conflict. Both rich and poor hazed each other, as did those from all regions of the state and various political affiliations. None of those who committed these abuses mentioned any

personal or social agenda nor did any of those abused identify any social or political prejudices by their attackers.

¹⁵⁴ Fitzgerald, "A Southern College Boy," 238.

¹⁵⁵ Smith to Oscar M. Crutchfield, 28 August 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵⁶ Smith to William Green, 25 September 1857, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵⁷ Smith to Walter H. Taylor, 23 July 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁵⁸ Regulations of the Virginia Military Institute, 1854, 48. Starting in the late 1840s, the Board of Visitors expressed its frustration with the maltreatment of cadets and continually made warning and suggested measures to prevent such abuse, such as increasing the number of guards on duty in summer camp and holding the guards equally as responsible as the abusers.

¹⁵⁹ Smith to Alexander Rives, 11 August 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Rives to Smith, 8 August 1853, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith wrote this letter in response to a concerned note from Rives, both a supportive politician and parent. Rives stated, "I hope you will excuse my feeling on this occasion perhaps these pranks may seem so usual and command at your college as not to excite your sympathy for me but still I am sure you will defer sufficiently to a father's peculiar sensitiveness as to give me the opportunity of such a remedy as may be in my power. The recurrence of another mock

duel makes me believe things may be as bad in this season in the encampment as ever heretofore.”

¹⁶⁰ Smith to M. Alexander, 3 October 1854, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to W. W. Dabney, 5 October 1854, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Samuel Shrewsbury, 10 October 1854, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to A. Michaels, 30 July 1855, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶¹ Smith to W. W. Dabney, 5 October 1854, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith wrote, “I found that some of the old cadets were amusing themselves at this expense in their various tricks which are usual among those at school. The Rules of this school forbid such things and if your son would have furnished me with the names of those who annoyed him I would have dismissed them. He gave me the names but refused to give me an opportunity of bringing them before a court martial.”

¹⁶² Smith to Frederick Page, 27 August 1852, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶³ Smith to Moncure Robinson, 10 February 1853, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶⁴ Smith to Samuel Shrewsbury, 10 October 1854, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶⁵ Smith to John H. Otey, 5 August 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶⁶ Smith to Alexander Aldridge, 4 August 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶⁷ Smith to R. H. Boston, 4 September 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith commented to Boston, "Boys in all schools will sport more or less with each other and such things should be borne in good spirit. A young man who had left here this summer from taking a wrong view of these things has returned today and gone to his duty."

¹⁶⁸ Smith to M. Alexander, 3 October 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁶⁹ Smith to Samuel Shrewsbury, 10 October 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷⁰ Smith to Betsy C. Turner, 26 August 1852, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Alexander Rives 11 August 1853. In a letter to Alexander Rives, Smith, again, borrow from the philosophy of his pedagogical idol, Dr. Thomas Arnold of the Rugby School in England. He recounts Arnold's similar views on boys maltreating each other:

Impressions at some periods of life, and in some minds fade so quickly, that I verily believe many boys when they are behaving with unkindness to others absolutely forget how much they a little while before suffered from the same treatment themselves and they have not perhaps thought or learned enough to

know how apt it is to harden they temper and how a boy finding himself teased or laughed at or ill-used is driven at last in a sort of self defense to check his own gentler and softer feelings to answer ill usage with sullenness and to endeavor to escape from laughter by turning it upon some new subject where feelings are still more susceptible than his own. . . It seems to me that in this extract Dr. A has given the outline of what passes more or less in every school. To correct his mischievous tendency is the problem of the teacher and his work he meets the difficulty before adverted to – defective home culture.”

¹⁷¹ Smith to George W. Munford, 23 August 1852, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. There is no clear explanation why Smith changed his attitude toward hazing by the mid-1850s. His reluctant acceptance of such practices seem to contradict his early crusade to eliminate all maltreatment of new cadets. His assertions of hazing contributing to manliness most likely came out of frustration at being able to curtail these abuses. Since older cadets would not stop hazing younger cadets and those who were hazed refused to turn in their tormentors, there was nothing Smith could do. His vague sanctioning of hazing sent a message to all cadets that if they would not allow him to defend them, they would have to defend themselves.

¹⁷² Pike Powers to Smith 3 February 1855, Superintendent’s Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Powers, 6 February 1855, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷³ Smith to William D. Stuart, 2 August 1859, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷⁴ Pace, Halls of Honor, 8; Greenberg, Honor and Slavery, 9; Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 45-48.

¹⁷⁵ Smith to Francis Boykin, 14 February 1853, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷⁶ Smith to John J. Clarke, 28 August 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Clarke to Smith, 24 August 1849, 1 September 1849, 3 September 1849, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷⁷ Green, "Books and Bayonets," 129; Smith to John J. Clarke, 21 August, 1849, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives (emphasis added). After her discussion of the Gordon-Thompson incident, Green admits that there is no documented evidence of a duel ever occurring at VMI. Smith also commented to the father of John Archer Clarke on the rarity of the use of weapons in altercations between cadets. He stated, "Such occurrences are very unusual here. This is the 1st instance I have ever known and I have felt it to be my duty to condemn in the plainest terms to your son the act as well as the expressed determination to repeat it. I have pointed out to him what his duty was, both for his own happiness and honor – and hope the advice I have given him may have its full effect."

¹⁷⁸ Smith to John Gooding, 28 November 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷⁹ Smith to William B. Taliaferro, 17 March 1855, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁸⁰ Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 64-77.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 75-77.

¹⁸² Smith, Old Spex, 87.

¹⁸³ Smith to William H. Richardson, 29 April 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁸⁴ Smith to William H. Richardson, 6 May 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁸⁵ Smith to Henry Carrington, 12 May 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.; Smith to William H. Richardson, 10 May 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; VMI Semi-Annual Report, 4 July 1851.

¹⁸⁷ Walker, "Earnest Christian Soldier," 194-95. Smith created another controversy that drew major criticism from across the state for hiring a lawyer to prosecute Christian and using state funds to pay for his services. Smith defended himself by asserting that Blackburn, as a cadet guarding the state arsenal, served as a soldier (an employee) of the state. He also argued that given the chaos of the events after the murder, the superintendent legally too the prerogative of acting *in loco parentis* by hiring legal counsel. After a long public trial which focused more on Smith's actions than the alleged murderer's, the court exonerated Christian of all charges.

¹⁸⁸ Smith to Oscar M. Crutchfield, 24 January 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁸⁹ Smith to Thomas Michie, 17 January 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁹⁰ VMI Semi-Annual Report, 4 July 1854.

¹⁹¹ Smith to Francis Boykin, 1 May 1854, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁹² Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor, 55-57.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: SMITH AS RELUCTANT CONFEDERATE

By the end of the 1850s, Francis H. Smith stood poised to fortify his reputation as one of the most accomplished innovators amongst American college presidents. Bolstered by his European educational fact-finding trip and subsequent publishing of his findings and recommendations in the lengthy pamphlet, Scientific Education in Europe, the superintendent had everything in place for his next great contribution to higher education by making VMI the model polytechnic college of the South. He secured \$30,000 in private donations, successfully persuaded the state legislature to nearly double the Institute's annuity, and distributed his pamphlet to hundreds of fellow educators nationwide to ensure the success of his new academic program. His comprehensive plan calling for separate schools for engineering, agriculture, and fine arts including laboratories, museums, husbandry facilities and the latest engineering instruments incorporated the best of what he observed in European universities and would be a remarkable innovative combination among American colleges. Smith's new educational vision for VMI amplified the school's already blossoming reputation and provided Smith with the capital (both financially and by reputation) to implement other improvements to his design.

In 1859, Smith opened enrollment to out-of-state students, an opportunity that he had always planned to offer but could not because of political and funding constraints. With this expanded admissions policy, VMI would still maintain its state-cadet program for Virginia students but also could draw from some of the brightest young minds in the

South (Northern boys applied but were not given consideration). By the late 1850s, VMI enjoyed a now national reputation for its academic and civic success in spite of its only being open for less than two decades. Applications in 1859 quadrupled from the previous year, allowing Smith to double the size of the incoming classes as he drew from an increasingly broader national applicant pool. Above all, Smith envisioned that the academic reputation of the Institute would rival that of West Point, or even the internationally renowned schools he had recently visited in Europe. Smith exuded ultimate confidence in the potential of his plan, concluding his European essay with the following optimism, “I cannot doubt ultimate success of such a scheme. It may be delayed for want of means; but the upward spirit which has placed it in its present position, will still press it forward to higher and higher fields of usefulness, until it has reached the summit of the proud destiny that awaits it. Let us do our parts now, and the generations following will reap where we have sown.”¹ Eighteen months later, Smith’s vision was destroyed as the Civil War forced him to abandon the vision in order to shift the Institute’s focus to an exclusively military purpose. His pre-war European-model scheme would never come into existence either before or after the conflict.

VMI’s formative years did not occur in a vacuum unexposed to the development of the impending crisis between North and South.² On the contrary, sectional tensions had long been developing beneath the surface of Institute’s academic and civic prosperity during the antebellum period. At the core of his pedagogical vision for the Institute, Smith always promoted his school as vehicle of Southern exclusivity and intellectual independence from the Northern states and Europe. With its youth educated

only by Southern instructors, the region could protect its own “institutions” which the influence of “foreign” education always threatened.³ While Smith shared equal fervor for educational reform as many of his counterparts leading New England colleges, he mistrusted their ultimate intentions of spreading abolitionist and other anti-Southern philosophies in their students. Smith also lobbied for the use of only Southern text books. As he explained to the president of the University of Mississippi, “I am now making arrangements to have all my books published in Richmond and if Southern Institutions will sustain the efforts now being made in this and other Southern States, northern books like Northern [teachings] will be driven out of the South.”⁴

The one “Southern” institution that Smith defended with the most vehemence was slavery. Spending his childhood in the Virginia tidewater region, being raised by a black mammy, and owning slaves his entire life, Smith always viewed the institution as a positive good for the Southern economy and society. Publicly, he conveyed a more ambiguous stance on the issue. As a staunch believer in Whig doctrine, Smith had joined the protests of other anti-slavery members of his party by condemning the Mexican War. In 1860, Smith stressed to friend Bishop Charles P. McIlvane (a Northerner from Ohio) that he was “not arguing that slavery is right,” just that the North’s opinion of it was misconstrued and potentially dangerous.⁵ He diligently followed the mandate from Virginia Diocese Bishop William Meade to educate slaves on Christianity and to make them followers of God just like their masters.⁶ In fact, Smith wrote several letters offering advice from his own experiences about providing Sunday school classes for local slaves. He admitted that teaching the blacks anything

was unpopular amongst many Southerners but he believed firmly in the utility of having slaves live a life in Christ as whites should.⁷

Still, his justifications for the existence of slavery mirrored the mainstream arguments presented by most white Southerners. Like the majority of his fellow evangelical Christians in the region, he identified the institution as supported in Scripture. He told one preacher, “I have thought that if slavery can be sustained by the Bible, and I believe it can, we can only have in conscience holding this kind of property by exercising an authority over them as we do our own children.”⁸ When Smith visited Europe in 1858, he was taken aback by the poverty and squalor of the white working class, particularly the Scottish and Irish. He returned believing that American slavery could not be construed as cruel compared to the plight of most working men in Europe, an idea echoed by some of the South’s most outspoken defenders of slavery, such as George Fitzhugh.⁹ VMI, like numerous Southern plantations and factories, relied on slaves, both permanently and seasonally hired, to accomplish all of its manual labors on campus including cooking, cleaning, construction, and domestic service in the professor’s homes. Overall, Smith believed slavery to be a necessary evil but definitely one that the South could ill afford to live without and he incorporated this conviction into his educational philosophy and curriculum. He explained to the Board of Visitors that part of the civic education of his cadets included an understanding of their state government and its function. All citizens, Smith asserted, should be instructed in the “science of government,” as well as understand, “the foundation of that divine institution

of slavery, which is the basis of the happiness, prosperity and independence of our Southern people, and thoroughly fortified to advocate and defend it.”¹⁰

Commitment to the defense of slavery served as the catalyst for nearly all of the state’s major political and social discourse in the decade preceding the Old Dominion’s secession from the Union. Historian William S. Link asserts that the fear of slave uprisings and the influence of abolitionists in 1850s, in particular, exacerbated the already growing sectional tensions in Virginia.¹¹ VMI’s administration demonstrated these fears of servile insurrection as well. In January 1851, Smith kept an excited dialogue with state Adjutant General William H. Richardson about the rumors of an impending slave revolt in Lexington which included a plan to attack the Institute by over 300 bondsmen. Although the rebellion never materialized, Smith’s comments during this exchange with Richardson reflected his deep-seeded mistrust and fears of the local slaves. “The negroes in this county are impudent and free enough to attempt anything,” he proclaimed, pessimistically adding that the enslaved blacks would “keep attacking” until they attained either freedom or death.¹² A slave revolt later in that decade, however, instilled a permanent fear and anxiety in nearly every Virginian and would forever change the character of Smith’s VMI.

On the night of 16 October 1859, Ohio abolitionist John Brown made a daring but unsuccessful attempt to capture the federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia, in an attempt to incite a slave uprising. Local and federal military forces thwarted his operation, capturing Brown and his surviving followers that night after a brief skirmish. His audacious assault, created a panic throughout the state. Paranoid theories abounded

throughout the Old Dominion including rumors of future conspiracies predicting Brown sympathizers attacking other arsenals, kidnapping Governor Henry Wise, and liberating Brown himself from prison. Given this state of emergency, Smith offered the services of VMI's Corps of Cadets to the governor and adjutant general. Both responded promptly to his offer as they called for the superintendent to mobilize a contingent of cadets and travel to Charles Town, where Brown was being tried, by the first of December.¹³ Once they arrived, the company of eighty-five cadets served as the escort for Wise to the execution of Brown on 2 December and provided security around the gallows for fear of an attack by Brown's sympathizers. The governor also designated Smith to superintend the execution. Once the noose had been placed around the convicted Brown's neck, Smith announced to the sheriff, "We are all ready, Mr. Campbell," who released the trap door of the platform, ending Brown's life.¹⁴

The state continued to demand the services of VMI, particularly its faculty. Their value for the Old Dominion, however, came from their military expertise not their academic skills. Governor Wise tasked Professor Major William Gilham to revise the manual of drill and instruction used by Virginia's militia forces.¹⁵ Gilham, who had been key player in newly proposed agricultural school at VMI, now devoted nearly all of his time and efforts to offering his proficiency in infantry drill to military units and schools throughout the state. In the fall of 1860, Major Thomas Jackson and his artillery class tested new cannons for the state militia, and made recommendations to the governor about which ones to purchase. The Institute's entire faculty received commissions in Virginia's militia, making them officially part of the state's military

forces. But no one was in greater demand than VMI's superintendent. In January 1860, Virginia's legislature passed the Public Defense Act appropriating \$500,000 for the purchase of arms and equipment for the state's defense. In order to determine how to use these funds in the procurement of weapons, Governor John Letcher appointed a three-man Commission of Public Defense which included Captain George W. Randolph (future Secretary of War for the Confederacy), Colonel Philip St. George Cocke (recently reappointed president of VMI's Board of Visitors), and Colonel Francis H. Smith. The timing of this appointment could not have come at a worse moment for Smith. He had just secured the funding and political support for his new academic expansion plan and desired to commit his efforts to fully promoting the Institute's educational innovations. Smith confessed to friend, Adjutant General William H. Richardson, that if he accepted the position, "it will be from a sense of duty, not of inclination."¹⁶ As a reluctant but diligent participant on the Commission, Smith and his fellow experts spent much of that spring traveling throughout the Virginia taking inventory of the state's arms and munitions. They also took an extensive trip to the Northeastern states to tour the nation's most prestigious armories in Springfield, Massachusetts, the West Point Foundry and the Cold Spring Foundry on the Hudson River, where they tested all of the latest technology in rifles, cannons, and gunpowder. Smith appreciated the honor of serving on the Commission as a patriotic obligation to his governor but privately lamented the time it took away from his academic duties at the Institute.

Smith's actions, particularly his assistance to the governor, secured him a great deal of political capital but his opinions drew him much negative political attention. When the town leaders of Lexington gathered on 4 December 1860 to discuss the repercussions of South Carolina's secession from the Union, all of those who attended the meeting condemned the decision as rash and illogical. Local politicians, VMI faculty and church leaders all criticized the Palmetto State but calmly asserted their confidence that Virginia would maintain a more sensible course of action. In contrast with the tone of the hearing, Smith rose and announced his support and sympathy for South Carolina. While he did not condone a similar future for Virginia or armed conflict with the North, he considered South Carolina's position completely justifiable as it took the proper means necessary to defend its constitutional rights. The townspeople immediately charged Smith with disloyalty and treachery. A week later, the Richmond Dispatch published a letter that he wrote to a friend echoing many of the same ideas he argued at the Lexington meeting. Smith again claimed loyalty to a "Constitutional Union," but identified the Northern states as the greatest threat to that Union for violating constitutional liberties in both action and principle. For this, Smith demanded redress from the North and called upon Southern states to unite against the impending peril.¹⁷ Other Virginians, still condemning secession and supporting compromise with the federal government, denounced Smith for his radical rhetoric. In March 1861, the state legislature denied a much needed appropriations bill for VMI because of the "treasonable" comments Smith made a few months earlier.¹⁸

Smith openly supported slavery, the constitutional right of secession and lambasted the North's increasingly "abolitionist" attitude but he could not share in his cadets' enthusiasm for war. However, he continued to nurture unrealistic expectations by not realizing that his support for secession and slavery war could result in war. Smith commented in a letter to General Winfield Scott that their native Virginia would "place herself in a position of armed neutrality . . . which may not only operate favorably in modifying the unfriendly sentiment of the North but temper them in some degree the extreme view of the South."¹⁹ The sectional crisis not only exposed Smith's political naïveté but also the enigmatic nature of his overall political allegiances and attitudes. As a self-declared loyalist of the Whig Party, he bolstered their platform in all respects even openly opposing the Mexican War, even as many in his own party members from the North argued the conflict promoted the expansion of slavery. Even when his party fell apart in the 1850s, Smith still considered himself a member until the beginning of the Civil War as fellow Whigs melted away into other parties and factions that took on more moderate stances towards the rising sectional tensions. Yet many of Smith's attitudes towards slavery and secession reflected those of Democrats in the South. His beliefs in the divine and political protection of slavery, fear of abolitionism, participation in the John Brown execution, promotion of Southern economic independence from the North and defense of the right of secession place him closer to the South's most ardent defenders of slavery and states' rights, almost with the "Fire-eaters" of the opposition party. But as war loomed closer, Smith retreated to those Southerners who believed a peaceful solution and compromise could be reached with the North. While Smith

demonstrated various feats of political dexterity when dealing with the both parties of the state legislature, there is no clear explanation for the inconsistent nature of his personal political philosophies.²⁰

After South Carolina left the Union in December 1860, a fever of secession that Smith could not control swept through the Corps of Cadets. During a formal ceremony commemorating the birthday of George Washington in February 1861, two cadets climbed to the top of barracks and unfurled a homemade banner made of bed sheets and shoe polish which read “Hurrah for South Carolina” and “Sic Semper Tyrannis” (Virginia’s state motto) underneath. Similar banners appeared frequently throughout barracks during that winter of 1861. Smith declared them against regulations and ordered their immediate removal.

The cadets’ pro-secession fervor caused problems outside of barracks as well. The residents of Lexington did not share the excitement of Smith’s students regarding the prospect of Virginia leaving the Union. Almost two-thirds of the voters in the town and surrounding county submitted their ballots for Unionist John Bell of the Constitutional Union Party during the 1860 presidential election as most supported his platform of peaceful compromise between Northern and Southern states. On 12 April 1861, the Unionists of Lexington erected a long flagpole in the town square and planned to hoist the Stars and Stripes to demonstrate their support of the national Union. That night, cadets slipped out of barracks into the town and bored holes in the pole, preventing the flag from being raised. The next day, a party of frustrated and intoxicated local Unionists confronted a pair of cadets walking in the town and instigated a fistfight.

Reacting in an almost identical fashion as they had after the murder of Cadet Thomas Blackburn, the Corps of Cadets quickly gathered on the parade ground after learning of the incident, donned their weapons and accoutrements and marched towards the town to exact revenge for the assault on their comrades. Again, Smith observed his students gathering en masse and immediately headed them off before they entered the town and prevented the altercation from escalating into more violence.²¹

Future conflicts with the local townspeople, however, never transpired as word arrived two days later about the surrender of Fort Sumter. On 17 April, a Virginia convention voted to secede from the Union. Lexington residents quickly changed their minds and rallied to support their state and the new Confederacy. The next day, Governor Letcher called on Smith again to report to Richmond to serve as an advisor to the state government on military matters. This Executive Council, known unofficially as the “Council of Three,” consisted of Smith, renowned oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury and Justice John James Allen, president of the Virginia Court of Appeals. Over the next several weeks, the council labored over mobilizing the state’s disorganized military forces, suggested changes to the state infrastructure and resources to support the army, authorized manuals and uniforms, and appointed officers to newly formed regiments. Smith and the council also found themselves awkwardly in the middle of a disagreement between their governor and Confederate President Jefferson Davis over the control of Virginia’s military forces. After an exhausting two months, the council completed its advisory role and Smith anxiously returned to his duties at the Institute.²²

During his absence, Smith asked his old friend and colleague J. T. L. Preston to serve as acting superintendent and adjust the Institute to the new wartime environment. Preston suspended all academic courses not dealing directly with military topics and established a new schedule consisting of infantry and artillery drill and military engineering. Professors from neighboring Washington College soon approached the acting superintendent about having him detach some of his faculty and cadets to train their students in military drill. However, just days after Smith's departure, Governor Letcher summoned the entire VMI Corps of Cadets to Richmond to serve as drillmasters for the growing number of Confederate recruits gathering in the capital. The Institute's purpose to society, a vision that Smith had crafted over the last twenty years, seemed to change overnight. VMI cadets, once coveted by the citizens of their state for their abilities to contribute as teachers and engineers, were now demanded strictly for their military knowledge. Smith envisioned his institution at the forefront of a Virginia and Southern independence movement but always in the form of academic solidarity, not through force of arms.

The cadets arrived in Richmond at the end of April and remained the rest of the spring training the newly enlisted Confederate soldiers, serving as the state's experts on infantry and artillery drill. Other Southern governors summoned the services of cadets from the South Carolina Military Academy, Georgia Military Institute and the newly militarized University of Alabama for the same purpose in their states.²³ Once their training assignment ended in June, Institute officials had to make the critical decision regarding the immediate future of the school. Since the majority of the cadets and

faculty promised to leave at the end of the term in July, if they had not left already, in order to join the Confederate Army, Smith was left little choice. The Board of Visitors closed VMI indefinitely that summer. Smith himself took a commission as Colonel of Engineers in the Confederate Army and accepted an assignment as the supervisor of the defenses on Craney Island near his native Norfolk. As a West Point graduate and former army officer, he relished his new assignment as a rare opportunity to apply his knowledge in artillery and military engineering instead of simply teaching it.

Later in the summer of 1861, Smith received a communication from Richmond ordering him to return to Lexington and reopen VMI on the 1st of January. Ironically, Smith protested the decision, believing it to be a futile endeavor. He argued to Board of Visitors President James C. Bruce that reopening the Institute during the war would be folly as the school could not accomplish its mission given the supply restrictions of a wartime economy, the need for manpower of the army, the restlessness of cadets wanting to go to war, and the need for faculty as Confederate officers, all of this assuming he could reassemble the Corps of Cadets and his professors. All had departed for the army earlier in the summer.²⁴ In spite of all of his objections and protests, the order to reopen VMI came directly from the governor and President Jefferson Davis who convinced Smith of the Institute's necessity in producing officers for the Confederate army. Reluctantly, Smith left his post at Craney Island in early December and returned to VMI to begin the daunting task of putting the school back together.

This reaction demonstrated an unusual and ironic denouement to Smith's monumental accomplishments as one of the premiere educational innovators of the

antebellum period. State officials had to coerce him into returning as the superintendent of the institution he had spent nearly his entire adult life forming into a model of civic contribution and educational innovation. The legacy he desired for VMI would forever be changed by the war. The schoolhouses throughout the state that he either inspired or staffed with his graduates were now empty; many would never open again. Instead of an army of army of teachers, engineers, businessmen, and clergy, the Institute's graduates joined the ranks of Confederate military forces and would forever be known more for their martial exploits than in classrooms, internal improvements' projects or pulpits. The war far overshadowed the Institute's antebellum academic prowess. Smith viewed the war as an opportunity to demonstrate the values of patriotism and selfless service to the state government. But at his core, Smith was always an academic and viewed education as the ultimate avenue for actualizing citizenship.

After the war, the state-cadet program would continue to produce teachers for Virginia's schools but the overall complexion of military education had been too far altered to duplicate their antebellum influence on the state's schooling. VMI and the South Carolina Military Academy were the only two pre-war schools to survive the conflict with their military structure (SCMA did not reopen until 1882).²⁵ The postwar wave of military schools that appeared in the South, encouraged by the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, did not have the same ideological inertia as VMI did before the conflict. Smith's post-war graduates played key roles in developing some of these new schools, foremost among them Texas A&M University and Virginia Polytechnic and State University, but these institutions rooted themselves in the ethos of the Lost Cause

and the memory of their Confederate ancestry rather than focusing on the use of educational development to establish the region's identity.²⁶

Regardless of adversity, Smith persevered through the trying times of Reconstruction. He succeeded where many other antebellum schools failed in securing desperately needed funds to reopen his college. His efforts earned him the lasting sobriquet of the "builder and re-builder of VMI." Smith also continued to offer advice and promote the benefits of military structure to education, much as he had before the war. Smith maintained his position as superintendent until 1889, completing fifty years of service in that capacity as one of the longest serving college presidents in American history. His legacy, however, would almost always reflect that of a military school instructor, his contributions to the Confederacy during the Civil War and his efforts to reconstruct the Institute from its destruction after the Civil War. There is a tantalizing speculation: had the conflict never occurred, Smith may have confirmed his place in history as a champion of liberal education for Virginia, the South, and the nation, not as one of its heroes of the Lost Cause.

Notes

¹ Smith, Scientific Education in Europe, 54.

² Andrew, Long Grey Lines, 20, 22. Andrew argues that sectional divisions were not an issue as, “North-South tension provided only a vague and often unspoken justification for the original founding of the first military schools,” and that “sectional tension was one of the least important factors,” in the development of Southern military education.

³ See for example: Smith to George Yerby, 18 February 1848, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. See also Ezell, “A Southern Education for Southrons,” 303-27; John McCardell, The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830–1860 (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 177-226.

⁴ Smith to John M. Phipps, 4 February 1860, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁵ Smith to Charles P. McIlvane, 3 February 1860, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁶ Wauckechon, “Forgotten Evangelicals,” 412-64.

⁷ Smith to Adam Empie, 5 June 1845, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to T. L. H. Young, 16 March 1855, Superintendent’s Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Dr. Adam Empie was an Episcopal minister and former president of the College of William and Mary (1827-1836).

⁸ Smith to Adam Empie, 5 June 1845, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

⁹ George Fitzhugh, Cannibals All! or, Slaves Without Masters (Richmond, Va.: A. Morris, 1857). Fitzhugh argued that the system of free labor in the North was by far crueler and more dangerous than the system of slavery in the South. Smith to Charles P. McIlivane, 3 February 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Smith also argued to Bishop McIlivane about trust he put in his servant in while traveling in Europe, "While I was traveling in Europe, my wife and six children were locked up every night by my man servant & the key put to his pocket, and he sleeping in the outside kitchen. And such is slavery in Virginia."

¹⁰ VMI Semi-Annual Report, July 1856, VMI Archives; Couper, One Hundred Years at VMI, 316. Smith continued to boast in the Semi-Annual Report on how his student learned to appreciate slavery through his assigning Thomas R. Dew's Lectures on the Restrictive System (Richmond: S. Shepard, 1829) for the general history course.

¹¹ Link, Roots of Secession, 1-10, 35, 100-01, 178-79.

¹² Smith to William H. Richardson, 2 January 1851, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹³ Henry A. Wise to Smith, 17 November 1859, Superintendent's Incoming Correspondence, VMI Archives; Smith to Wise, 19 November 1859, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives. Ironically, the man chose to defend Brown was a VMI alumnus, Lawson Botts who practiced law in Charles Town, Virginia, after leaving VMI.

¹⁴ Lexington Gazette, 15 December 1859. The Gazette published a letter that Preston sent to his wife on 2 December 1859 describing the execution in detail. The location of the original letter is unknown.

¹⁵ William Gilham, Manual of Instruction for the Volunteers and Militia of the Confederate States (Richmond, Va.: West & Johnston, 1861).

¹⁶ Smith to William H. Richardson, 28 January 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

¹⁷ Richmond Dispatch, 13 December 1860.

¹⁸ Smith III, Old Spex, 140. See also Bruce S. Greenawalt, ed., "Unionists in Rockbridge County: The Correspondence of James Dorman Davidson Concerning the Virginia Secession Convention of 1861," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, 73 (January 1965): 78-102.

¹⁹ Smith to Winfield Scott, 26 October 1860, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives

²⁰ Charles G. Sellers, "Who Were the Southern Whigs?" American Historical Review 59 (January 1954), 335-46. Sellers article is still the best study that examines the unusual composition and ideology of the Southern members of the Whig Party.

²¹ (Lexington) Valley Star, 18 April 1861; Ollinger Crenshaw, General Lee's College : Rise and Growth of Washington and Lee (typescript) (Lexington, Va. : Washington and Lee University, 1973), 475.

²² James I. Robertson, "The Council of Three: Advisors to Governor 'Honest John' Letcher," Virginia Cavalcade 26 (Spring 1977), 176-183.

²³ Conrad, Young Lions, 37-45.

²⁴ Smith to James C. Bruce, 16 July 1861, Superintendent's Outgoing Correspondence, VMI Archives.

²⁵ Schools such as the University of Alabama and Louisiana State University eventually dropped their military features after the Civil War and became exclusively civilian institutions.

²⁶ Andrew, Long Gray Lines, 46-63. VMI graduates such as John G. James (Texas A&M), Hardaway H. Dinwiddie (Texas A&M), James H. Lane (Auburn, Virginia Tech) and Mark B. Hardin (Clemson), George Edgar (University of Arkansas), and James T. Murfree (Samford University) served on the faculties and administration of the South's new land-grant military schools, just as Smith's graduates had done before the war. These schools prospered through other personal connections with Smith such as Thomas Clemson, founder of Clemson University, whose son attended VMI.

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