

*Bread Loaf Director Jim Maddox delivered the following informal address to a group in New York City in December 2005. It may serve as a useful introduction to the Bread Loaf School of English.*

Thank you for granting me the time to talk to you today. What I've put together to say is based on the guess that most of you know much more about the undergraduate college than about Middlebury's summer programs, one of which is the Bread Loaf School of English. And so I'm going to give you a little history, talk about what Bread Loaf has done in the past and plans to do in the future, and detail a few of the ways in which the School of English is in perhaps unexpected ways an integral part of the whole of Middlebury College.

First, the history. If you've been around Middlebury for any length of time, you will be familiar with the name of Joseph Battell. You will know of Battell Hall on the main campus; you will maybe know of Battell Bridge, the structure uniting downtown Middlebury; you will maybe know that a central downtown stretch in Middlebury is the Battell Block. But in starting my story, I need to tell you a few things about Joseph Battell himself.

One fine day in the 1860's, Battell, still a young man, and a prosperous one, rode his horse up Sand Hill, beyond East Middlebury, on past Ripton, to a farmhouse on a plateau, within sight of Bread Loaf Mountain. He apparently found the farmhouse sitting on one of the most beautiful sites he had ever seen, for he proceeded to buy it, and the

surrounding countryside. Before he was done with his purchases over the next decades, he owned some 40,000 acres. He liked to brag that as he stood on the front porch of the farmhouse he had purchased, he owned all the land he could see from there. When he died, he owned more land in Vermont than any other resident.

Battell soon set about transforming the farmhouse into an inn. One of the most characteristic architectural forms in Vermont is what I would call the added-onto house: the farmhouse that the nineteenth-century owner built onto as his prosperity and his family grew: you can see many farmhouses, within driving distance of Middlebury, that look something like trains, with additional cars built onto the original structure as the number of children increased. That's how Battell set about constructing an inn at Bread Loaf. The original farmhouse is in fact still embedded there, in the lobby of today's inn. But Battell added on wings and then added first a second and then a third story. But he didn't end with anything ramshackle. He had the splendid architect Clinton Smith build the major buildings that stand at Bread Loaf today, the same architect who built the major structure at the Morgan Horse Farm out from Middlebury on the way to Weybridge. The elegantly simple buildings that were the result are, I think, the architectural equivalent of what antique furniture dealers call country formal.

Battell was a member of the generation of the first great wave of American capitalists, and he was himself a supremely savvy entrepreneur, full of Yankee ingenuity. He built the inn and the other structures that now line route 125 in order to attract paying customers to come and stay at Bread Loaf in the summers. He allowed some of his

friends to build their own cottages there, so long as they agreed to sell him the structures at a later date. Today, all of the structures painted cream and green at Bread Loaf were built during Battell's lifetime; all the structures painted white were built after his death.

But if Battell was an entrepreneur, he was also a philanthropist. If he was a member of the generation of the great American capitalistic robber barons, he was also just a little older than the great American trust-buster and environmentalist Teddy Roosevelt, who began the system of America's national parks. Battell didn't buy up his 40,000 acres simply out of greed; he bought them up out of an appalled concern that the American wilderness was disappearing. When he died, he left his many acres to Middlebury College and to the state of Vermont, with the devout hope that they would be preserved for future generations, in perpetuity. Battell may accurately be called the founder of a tradition that today makes Middlebury arguably the most environmentally conscious college in the country.

Battell left many legacies to Middlebury College, on whose board of trustees he sat for many years. Today, on campus, there is Battell Hall and there is also Forest Hall. Until just a few years ago, I had always thought that Forest Hall, one of the grandest structures on campus, was named after the family of a benefactor, although it did register with me that Forest, with one r, was a curious family name. Only later did I learn that the building was in fact named to honor the forest that Battell left to the college, some of which the college had sold off to the U.S. Forestry Service, to finance this building.

But Battell's major legacy to the college was of course the Bread Loaf campus itself, although the college wasn't at first entirely sure that it was very lucky in receiving the bequest. For a few years, the college simply ran the place as Battell had run it, as an inn and a collection of cottages for paying customers. But Middlebury was a less successful entrepreneur than Battell, and the enterprise began to lose money.

What to do? In fact, Battell, with his usual canniness, had chosen a good year to die in: 1915. That was the year in which the first of the Middlebury Language Schools was founded. Does anyone else find it as historically interesting as I do that the first Language School founded--after the outbreak of World War I, mind you--was the German School? I think there are very interesting historical reasons for that, but that is the subject for another talk some day. As the German School and, subsequently, other Language Schools were founded, someone at the college--and no one is sure quite who it was--had the fortunate idea of founding a similar school for teachers of English. And that was how the Bread Loaf School of English came into existence, in 1920. Famously, Robert Frost was closely involved in the founding of the school. There is a letter from Frost to a friend, written just a couple of years earlier, in which he entertains a fantasy of founding a school where people could come and do nothing but study and discuss literature. Frost got his dream with the founding of Bread Loaf. He purchased his own acreage in the immediate vicinity, and he subsequently spent more than 40 summers coming to the school and giving lectures there.

A few years after the founding of the school, Director Wilfred Davison noticed that

students were coming to Bread Loaf with two different sets of interests: those wishing to study literature and those wishing to write it. The result was the formation of a second Bread Loaf institution in 1926: the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the granddaddy of what are now the dozens, if not hundreds, of writers' conferences in the United States, which budding writers attend in order to sharpen their skills. The School of English itself, however, continues to teach creative writing and has had on its staff for almost a decade, among others, the Pulitzer Prize winning poet Paul Muldoon. I can attest, alas, that, ever since the breaking off of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference from the Bread Loaf School of English, not a single person living more than a mile away from Middlebury, Vermont has been able to keep the two institutions straight.

Now, good people, even I, the person lucky enough to have directed the School of English since 1989, even *I*, am not going to argue that a group of English teachers assembling each summer to talk about books are likely to constitute for most sane persons the most exciting idea in the world. And yet, I think it's fair to say that while they are attending, many Bread Loaf students would confirm that their Bread Loaf summers are the most exciting events in their year. Here are a few statistics. It usually takes 4 or 5 summers to complete a Bread Loaf M.A. degree program. This is an extraordinarily full commitment for students, especially since the majority of them are at an age when they are getting married and starting young families. Yet, astonishingly, of those who come for one summer, many of them intending to come *only* that one summer, some 80% stay on to complete the degree. Moreover, Bread Loaf offers a second degree, the M.Litt., as well, also requiring some 4 or 5 summers. Right now, we have

approximately 25 students who have already received the Bread Loaf M.A. who are returning for the M.Litt., meaning that they will have spent 8 to 10 summers at Bread Loaf. There is a serious addiction problem here.

The major reason for the excitement of the Bread Loaf summers has to do with the self-selection of our applicants. Students who come to Bread Loaf for four or five summers are, well, exceptionally committed students. Slightly over 80% of them are teachers, mostly high-school teachers. And, although teaching would seem to be a gregarious profession, since during the academic year you are in the same building with so many other teachers, it is in fact often an extremely isolating experience, as you teach the students in your own classroom, stay long hours after class, and then depart for the day. Many Bread Loaf students show up each summer starved for conversation about the subject they love most, literature. And the Bread Loaf faculty, which we draw from many of the best colleges and universities in the United States, including, of course, Middlebury, are infected by this same enthusiasm. In my own days of teaching at Bread Loaf, before I dwindled into an administrator, I found my six Bread Loaf weeks by far the most educationally and emotionally exciting experience of my year.

Bread Loaf is a unique place; but for more than the first fifty years of its existence, Bread Loaf did little to take advantage of its uniqueness. We continued to bring in between 150 and 200 students each summer, and we rather complacently chugged along. But then, in 1978, we began to expand. In that year, we opened a second campus, at Lincoln College, one of the smallest and most beautiful of the colleges at the University of Oxford. The

logic of the founders of our school there, Paul Cubeta and Olin Robison, seems to have been, “scratch an English teacher and find an Anglophile,” and they were right. Then, in 1991, we began to increase our expansion in earnest. Like the undergraduate college, we were a national institution, but, again like the undergraduate college, we found that this institution in a remote corner of Vermont’s Green Mountains was less and less well-known the further away you got from the Northeast. So, in 1991, we struck out westward and opened a third campus, in Santa Fe, New Mexico. We had an added reason beyond geographical distance for this expansion into New Mexico. Vermont vies with Maine for being the whitest state in the union. There are actually altogether honorable reasons for this, since Vermont was the first state, and to the best of my knowledge (although I admit I could be wrong about this), the first political entity in the world to outlaw slavery and never had an appreciable population of people of color. It has always been, for Bread Loaf as well as for the undergraduate college, a challenge to attract a population of diverse students. New Mexico, with its unique population of Hispanic, Native, and Anglo residents, presented us with a setting in which to increase the diversity of the Bread Loaf population. Then in 1996, the University of Alaska Southeast in Juneau invited Bread Loaf there, to start what the university hoped would be the premiere M.A. program in English in the state. We had always noticed an affinity that Alaska’s teachers had for Bread Loaf (that’s another subject for another day), and so we accepted the invitation. Look at the map. Vermont, New Mexico, and Alaska. We were missing one entire quadrant of the country. And so, this coming summer, Bread Loaf will open its fifth campus, in Asheville, North Carolina, chosen not simply for the beauty of its location and the warmly welcoming attitude of our host institution, the University of North

Carolina at Asheville, but also because, at some 2,500 feet of altitude, we will avoid most of the heat and humidity that have always made us pause before opening a summer campus in the Southeast.

So we have grown into a school with campuses in all four quadrants of the country, plus Oxford. We now have some 550 students each summer, and we send about 100 graduates out into the world each year. We are large enough to have at least a noticeable impact upon education, nationally.

What lies before us in the future? I will not conceal from you the fact that the favorite parlor game among the Bread Loaf faculty is: Where shall we open a campus next? I blush on their behalf to report that their two very self-interested choices right now are Provence and Tuscany. But more seriously, should we expand further, and if so, where? I don't, by the way, rule out Provence and Tuscany, nor do I rule out Ireland, which I think would attract scads of American teachers. But another possible direction is suggested by a recent, imperfectly successful experiment. In 2004, Bread Loaf opened a campus in Guadalajara, Mexico. Through a combination of circumstances (and that's the subject for another talk as well), our summer there was only partly a success, and I elected to withdraw after one year. But I'm determined to go back into Mexico (my dream campus would be in Oaxaca). After all, the demographics of the United States at this time make the idea of a Mexican campus immensely attractive. Teacher after teacher at Bread Loaf reports returning home after a Bread Loaf summer, to find that there has been a huge demographic shift in her community, with a large proportion of her students

being recent immigrants and native Spanish speakers. Little Gainesville, Georgia, from which a small cadre of teachers comes to Bread Loaf, has suddenly found itself transformed from a traditional southern town to a town with a very substantial population of Spanish-speaking workers in the local chicken industry. Sleepy little Gainesville, Georgia now has almost all its signage in English and Spanish. These teachers are filled with good will, but many of them know very little about Mexican or Central or South American culture. The overwhelming reason for most Bread Loaf students' attending our Guadalajara campus two years ago was to gain greater knowledge of cultures that their students were from. Moreover, more than half of the Guadalajara students and even members of the faculty did that most necessary of things for learning another culture: they enrolled in elementary courses in Spanish. Intriguingly, if and when we return to Mexico, and as we consider other options, there is the possibility that the Bread Loaf School of English, in coming years, will cease to teach all of its courses in English. If we do move into non-English-speaking countries, it seems folly to continue to teach all our courses in English. I predict that, to some extent, over the next decade, even the Bread Loaf School of English will come to participate more fully in the realm of international studies, which is so central to the vision of Middlebury College. It may even be that in the future some Bread Loaf campuses will in some respects come to resemble our fellow summer institutions, the Language Schools, in the courses we offer. Now let me tell you my wildest idea--and I do know that at about this point in my discourses about Bread Loaf's future my listeners' eyes begin to glaze over. We have in recent summers had success in bringing to Vermont teachers from Moslem schools in Kenya, Pakistan, and India. When these teachers go home, they hold workshops for large numbers of their

colleagues, so that today, in those countries, there are hundreds of teachers who call themselves Bread Loafers. Can you imagine the possibilities of reaching out more strenuously, at this point in history, to Moslem-affiliated schools, where English is a major language and whose teachers actually *want* to reach out to the West? Stay tuned.

But let me return from speculations on Bread Loaf's future and tell you more about what we already do, today. One crucial fact. In general, if Bread Loaf makes no efforts to raise money from foundations, state educational agencies, and other potential funders, then the inevitable tendency is for students to come to us overwhelmingly from independent schools. The reason is simple. Most independent schools will pay for their teachers' continuing education and professional development, and public schools will not. And even though Bread Loaf is not outrageously expensive, many public school teachers cannot afford it, even with the benefit of Middlebury College's generous financial aid packages. Don't get me wrong. I'm overwhelmingly proud of Bread Loaf's prominence in the education of independent school teachers; many of the most elite independent schools in the country have had practically their entire English departments educated at Bread Loaf. But, emphatically, I want the Bread Loaf population to reflect the American population, and so we must take pains to recruit more public school teachers. Over the past 25 years, then, my Bread Loaf colleagues and I have worked to identify populations of teachers whom we can interest funders in assisting to come to Bread Loaf for their continuing education. We have gone to the Wallace Funds, the Annenberg Rural Challenge, the Educational Foundation of America, and a host of other funders. We have at some point convinced the state departments of education in Alaska,

Kentucky, Ohio, and South Carolina to fund their teachers to attend. Reflect on that: state departments of education taking the politically slightly risky step of funding their teachers to go out of state, the implicit premise being that there is nothing in-state of comparable quality. And when several years ago Kentucky had to bow out of the funding, Middlebury Trustee Betty Jones and Dave Jones with great generosity put me in touch with two Kentucky foundations with which their family is connected, and they picked up the slack. We've convinced individual school districts in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in Greenville, South Carolina, in Trenton, and in the aforementioned Gainesville, Georgia to fund their teachers. We have recruited many teachers of underserved populations. We have targeted rural teachers from the Mississippi Delta, numerous Indian reservation teachers, teachers from the Alaska bush, and teachers from numerous inner-city settings. And one result has been to democratize Bread Loaf, to make the face of Bread Loaf at least roughly resemble the composite face of the United States.

A short digression. Perhaps the most immediately relevant example of Bread Loaf's work with teachers in marginalized communities has to do with New Orleans. Bread Loaf in 2003 used a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to form mutually supportive networks of teachers in five sites across the country, including New Orleans. We worked most closely with Jim Randels, a teacher in New Orleans who had started a project called Students at the Center, in which he devised pedagogical means of bringing his extremely low-income students to the consciousness that they could be in greater control of their own destinies. Then, more recently, Katrina came. Middlebury College invited Jim to Middlebury in October, and we have gradually brought together a coalition of

Jim's Students at the Center project, the New Orleans-based Bread Loaf teachers, and a group of 12 Middlebury undergraduates who will take a winter-term course on New Orleans, to be taught by Will Nash. The class will visit New Orleans for a week and attempt to set up tutorial relationships with students there that can be continued electronically after the class's return. Bread Loaf, for its part, is applying for emergency grants to bring to our Asheville campus sizable numbers of teachers from New Orleans, but also from the Mississippi and Alabama coasts, to help the teachers give each other the kind of mutual support that we have helped to create among teachers many times in the past.

Now these funders whom I've mentioned, not surprisingly, want assurance from us that they are getting their money's worth in sending their teachers to us. And so, as a part of the funding agreement, Bread Loaf pledges to work year-round with these teachers. Much of our work with them involves the use of Bread Loaf's telecommunications system, BreadNet, which we founded in 1984, which was, in all truth, the Stone Age for the development of such electronic networks. BreadNet is open to *all* Bread Loaf students, alumni, faculty, and staff; but students on the special fellowships provided by these outside funders are *required* to learn it and to use it during the academic year. During the summer, the special fellows take their two Bread Loaf courses, learn the rudiments of BreadNet, and plan, with another Bread Loaf teacher, a cross-classroom exchange, a writing project, usually based on a text that their two classrooms will be reading at the same time in the subsequent academic year. What we have found is that when students are writing on BreadNet to other students, what we call an authentic

audience, rather than to their teacher, they realize new things. They realize that they are represented only by their writing, and very often for the first time in their young lives, they become interested in it. They want it to represent them well. The sheer volume that they write increases dramatically. And they are not writing in e-mail slang. They are writing supple and polished prose. Well, okay, very often supple and polished prose.

What can we point to as results? Funders, even very intelligent funders, want to see test scores from students that show marked improvements after the teachers of the students have attended Bread Loaf. That seems reasonable, but this is very tricky stuff. Out of all the variables involved, how do we isolate the teacher's training at Bread Loaf as the factor that sent the quality of a student's writing up or, heaven help us, down? The best we can do so far is to bring forward principals of schools in which a substantial cadre of teachers has attended Bread Loaf, so that the entire teaching of English has been affected, to testify that their test scores have risen dramatically over the several years of the teachers' education at Bread Loaf. And we have multiple principals who will do just that. And my personal favorite as a proof of our success involves two Bread Loaf teachers in tiny rural towns on the high plains of Colorado. These farming towns are so small that these two Bread Loaf-educated teachers are the only English teachers in the schools. So we have a perfectly controlled situation. Several years ago, after the teachers had been attending Bread Loaf for several years and involving their students in BreadNet exchanges, the annual statewide writing scores for these two schools came in at numbers 1 and 2 in all of Colorado.

Let me close by asking myself two rhetorical questions and then attempting to answer them. First, how, in the final analysis, does Bread Loaf actually benefit teachers and their students across the country, and, second, how are we, this summer school of graduate students, an integral part of Middlebury College?

In approaching that first question--how, in the final analysis, does Bread Loaf actually benefit teachers?--let me make a confession to you. When I took over as Bread Loaf director in 1989, I was hired because I had been a Bread Loaf faculty member for ten years. I had been teaching for about 20 years before that, at the University of Virginia and the George Washington University, and I had been spending my research time writing books on James Joyce and articles on eighteenth-century British fiction. I am not being unduly modest if I say that I was in many ways your garden-variety professor of English. I was no expert on secondary education, except as I had gradually picked up some small expertise as a Bread Loaf faculty member, talking with my summer students. As I learned more about secondary education, I was startled by some pretty basic facts. For example, fewer than half the secondary-school teachers in the United States have bachelor's degrees in the fields in which they teach. Most of them have degrees in education. Call me naïve. I was bowled over. The first benefit that Bread Loaf gives its students, then, is a superb education in sheer content knowledge. Believe me, good people, we have an astonishingly good faculty, and the great, electric excitement each summer comes from the effect that a great faculty has upon students eager to learn. One Bread Loaf student who graduated several years ago taught in a small town in the Southwest. A jaw-droppingly true fact about him is that prior to coming to Bread Loaf,

he, an English teacher, had never read a word by William Shakespeare. Shortly after his graduation--and his introduction to Shakespeare at Bread Loaf--this teacher wrote a convincing and well-informed proposal that secured an NEH grant for the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet* to his middle-school students. That's an especially vivid example of how Bread Loaf can empower its students by sheer, intense, excellent classroom education.

Another shocking fact that I learned--shocking to naïve me, at any rate--was that over a third of all beginning teachers fail to last as long as the end of their third year in the profession, and that the burn-out rate among more experienced teachers is just extraordinarily high. Bread Loaf gives teachers a sense of a supportive pedagogical community to which they belong, both during the Bread Loaf summers and, through BreadNet, throughout the ensuing academic years. BreadNet was in fact originally founded, not as a pedagogical instrument, but as a means of sustaining the high-intensity feeling of community that is one of the most appealing qualities of the Bread Loaf summers. One sad truth is that teaching can be a harrowing as well as a rewarding experience, and many Bread Loaf teachers, both new and experienced, have testified that the support of the actual and virtual Bread Loaf community has allowed them to keep at it.

When Jessica Liebowitz asked me for some relevant reading material, I suggested that we send out to you *The Neglected "R,"* published by the National Commission on Writing, and I apologize for not having mentioned it before now. The commission is a

blue-ribbon panel , first conceived by Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board. It has been touring the country, attempting to build national support for a highly increased emphasis on the teaching of writing in the United States. When I attended the commission's session in Washington more than a year ago, I was completely stunned to see that the major video presentations that the commission had to make its case nationwide were selections from a film that South Carolina Educational TV had made about Bread Loaf teachers and the effect of their work on their students' writing. Bread Loaf, in other words, was being used by the commission as the gold standard for the teaching of writing in the U.S. I want to single out two threads from *The Neglected "R"* that I think characterize education at Bread Loaf. First is the statement early on in the report: "If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else." That is a statement made with unusual and admirable clarity. If knowledge is to benefit our students, the students must be able to articulate it, or it is useless to them. The teaching of reading and writing at Bread Loaf has this philosophy at its heart.

Second, *The Neglected "R"* has a great deal to say about the use of technology in the teaching of writing. In my years as director, I have made many, many visits to U.S. schools. I have been shown by proud principals shiny new computer labs, filled with state-of-the-art machines. When I have asked how the machines are being used, the principals have often told me that the major use of the machines is for students to learn keyboarding skills. My private thought was, "Why did you leave the typewriter behind?"

Certainly technology has to do more than *this*. Through BreadNet and other technologies, we have, I believe, shown teachers how technology can be not just a set of bells and whistles, but something that can be the *servant* of learning, the *medium* for the students' use of writing to gain control over their own futures.

And that other rhetorical question to myself: How is Bread Loaf an integral part of Middlebury College? Well, in several ways, Bread Loaf acts in synergy with virtually all the other constituencies of Middlebury College. One fact about Middlebury undergraduates always used to puzzle me. They endure the almost Arctic winters and the mud season of spring, but then leave just as the glorious summer (and what summer is more glorious than a Vermont summer?) is beginning. Then one day, as I was making a survey of the undergraduate backgrounds of our Bread Loaf students, the scales fell from my eyes. Many Middlebury students *do* stay for the summer. Middlebury College produces many great teachers from its student body, and many of those potential teachers attend the Bread Loaf School of English. In any given summer, somewhere between 5 and 10% of the Bread Loaf population is made up of Middlebury graduates. It is also true that Bread Loaf is reaching out to other constituent parts of Middlebury. I have earlier mentioned the ways in which Bread Loaf's experiments with campuses outside the U.S. may draw us closer to the Language Schools. And my excellent friend Michael Collier, director of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, and I are well into discussions about the possibility of a joint Master of Fine Arts, to be offered by the Bread Loaf School of English and the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. This is still very much in the discussion stage, but can you imagine the excitement that would be caused

by an MFA program sponsored jointly by the School of English and the Writers' Conference? Stay tuned. And finally, I think that the Bread Loaf School of English contributes to one of the most admirable aspects of Middlebury's undergraduate college: its ethos of public service: service to the community and service to the world. Many Bread Loaf faculty members over the years have told me that the greatest inspiration about teaching at this place is that they can sense that their pedagogical efforts have an immediate impact upon America; their efforts, as it were, go directly into the American bloodstream, as, at the end of the summers, more than 500 teachers return to their classrooms, at Exeter, in Gainesville, in Peetz, Colorado, to put their Bread Loaf experience to work.

That's not a bad thought to end with. Thank you very much.