William B. Catton
Charles A. Dana Professor Emeritus of History

William B. Catton, Charles A. Dana Professor Emeritus of History, died at his home in Lancaster, PA, on December 22, 2018, with Hospice Care. His wife of forty years, Lynn, was at his bedside. He is also survived by his son David, wife Agnes, and children Owen and Diane. Bill was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on March 21, 1926, the son of Cherry and Bruce Catton. He entered the U.S. Army during World War II at 18 and was training for the invasion of Japan when the war ended. He received his A.B. and M.A. from the University of Maryland and his Ph.D. from Northwestern University. He was teaching at Princeton University when James Armstrong, who became President of Middlebury College in 1963, brought him to the College's History Department in 1964.

College Professor Emeritus Nicholas Clifford, who joined the Department two years later, has stated that Bill's career at Middlebury "was inextricably bound up with the College's progression from a good, but still fairly regional, New England college to its eminence today as one of the top undergraduate liberal arts colleges in the country. Department Chair Travis Jacobs asserted in Bill's Faculty Retirement *Minute* in 1984*,* "After one year of Bill's teaching the two-semester American history survey course, the enrollment more than tripled." He quickly became, "one of the most respected and popular teachers for a generation of Middlebury students." In lectures "he somehow stimulated in students a desire to learn about their nation's past. In seminars and in writing their senior theses they would benefit from his demand for clarity in writing and from his insistence on the wealth of and beauty in the English language." As President Emeritus John McCardell, who joined the Department in 1976 and in a few years would take over the survey course, has written, "Bill was not only a highly effective teacher at

all levels in the Department, but he also was a wonderful mentor. In making History come alive, he attracted large enrollments and also majors, and he left large shoes to fill when he retired."

At one time or another Bill was Chair of the Educational Policy Committee, which successfully proposed the 4-1-4; as Chair of the Social Sciences Division for a decade he was on the Teaching Resources Committee, which recommended faculty increments and leaves; and he was a member of the three-person Faculty Council (Committee on Reappointment) which, as Nick Clifford has recalled, "in those days was central in determining the shape of the faculty and its role in the building of the College."

Bill's selfless service to the College is memorable. "During the Kent State and Cambodia crisis of 1970, when a building on campus burned down," the Retirement *Minute* emphasized, "he spoke poignantly to a tense College community. His perspective, his firm convictions, and his faith in the youth of Americas—when few dared articulate it—were bravely evident. This has not been forgotten by many here. A year later, in a practice soon discontinued, he delivered the principal speech at Commencement. Several years later, on the College's 175th Anniversary, he was the Faculty Orator to an overflowing crowd in Mead Chapel."

"Much of the change that has taken place" at the College, Nick Clifford has written, started with President Armstrong's vision, and he "formed a new leadership team to help him realize this vision. Bill was an essential part of this leadership team, and I have the sense that the president leaned heavily on him for advice." All this brought "a new sense of professionalism and a new sense of forward movement . . . And the same was true to the growth and development of the History Department itself" which grew in size and course offerings. "Bill was absolutely essential to all of this. Not only was he a superb teacher, but he

was always a steady leader, always encouraging to his colleagues, with a clear vision of the direction in which we should be moving." As Churchill Franklin, a student at the time and later Chairman of the Board of Trustees, simply recalled: Catton was a "Lion." Murray Dry, Charles A Dana Professor of Political Science, emphasized: "He was a giant figure on our faculty and a very congenial colleague, and we were very close."

Jacobs, who regularly taught discussion sections in Bill's lecture courses and co-taught many research and reading seminars with him throughout his tenure, concluded the Retirement *Minute* with a favorite passage Bill frequently quoted from Lincoln's Second Annual Message to Congress:

> Fellow citizens, we cannot escape History….We--even we here--hold the power and bear the responsibility. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last best hope on earth.

In remembering Bill, John McCardell wrote that the words of Henry Adams are most Appropriate: "A teacher affects eternity. He can never tell where his influence stops." John concluded: "A long line of Middlebury students are part of the eternity Bill Catton touched. Their gratitude matches that of his colleagues for the many ways in which his generous friendships made a difference in all our lives.

Travis Beal Jacobs
Fletcher D. Proctor Emeritus of American History
December 31, 2018