

## LOOKING BACK AT OUR CIVIL WAR

# After war began, Naval Academy temporarily moved to Newport

At the start of the Civil War, the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md., was moved to Newport, where it remained for the duration of the war. Though it remained in the Union, Maryland was a border state and had seen civil unrest from the outset, with many citizens who were sympathetic to the South. To protect it and to ensure its undisturbed operation, the academy's move took place within a month after the firing on Fort Sumter.



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On April 27, 1861, the War Department issued the order: "Fort Adams, Rhode Island, is hereby placed temporarily under control of the Secretary of the Navy, for the purposes of the Naval Academy now at Annapolis, Maryland."

On May 8, 1861, the U.S.S. Constitution, "Old Ironsides," and the steamer Baltic arrived in Newport with the officers, professors, families and midshipmen of the academy.

Upon arrival, they were welcomed with a 24-gun salute from Fort Adams, and Old Ironsides returned the salute. On board were the academy commandant, Capt. George S. Blake, and some 130 midshipmen. Crowds of Newporters gathered to watch and to enjoy the military music springing from both Old Ironsides and from the band on Fort Wolcott, Goat Island.

After the personnel and furniture had disembarked, the press noted that all were gladly "welcomed to our city, and no pains spared by our citizens to make their residence among us agreeable."

The midshipmen hailed from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, Utah, California, Oregon, Kentucky and the District of Columbia. A few came also from the states in rebellion.

Among the officers were Lt. Cmdr. C.R.P. Rodgers, a descendant of a Rhode Island family; Lt. Edward Simpson, later an admiral; and Lt. Stephen B. Luce, later the founder of the Newport Naval Training Station and the Naval



Fred Zilian photo

A sign marks the Civil War site of the Naval Academy in Newport, where the Parkgate building (Elks Lodge) stands today.

War College.

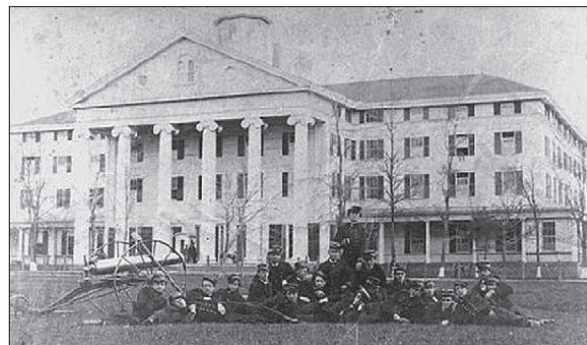
Drill for the midshipmen began soon after their arrival. The Naval Academy band played for the marching middies, soon attracting crowds of visitors. A dress parade was held each morning at 9 and ended with tactical drill against a force acting as an enemy.

Old Ironsides became a popular attraction, and eventually the volume of visitors proved to be distracting to the studies of the middies onboard.

In the succeeding months, it became clear that the quarters at Fort Adams were not suitable, with many families complaining that they were too damp, cold and unhealthy. The officers then began to move their families to houses within the city.

On Aug. 30, 1861, negotiations were completed to lease the Atlantic House Hotel, a fashionable hotel at Bellevue Avenue and Pelham Street. Fort Adams was given up on Sept. 20, and the academy began operations at its new location the next day.

This hotel lasted until 1877, when it was demolished, making room for the current Parkgate building, purchased in 1920 by the



The Atlantic House Hotel at Pelham Street and Bellevue Avenue became the home of the Naval Academy during the Civil War. The hotel was demolished in 1877.

Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks.

George Bancroft, the former secretary of the Navy who spent summers at Rosecliff in Newport, must have been delighted about the move of the Naval Academy, as he had founded it in 1845.

A retired Army officer, Fred Zilian teaches history at Portsmouth Abbey School and Salve Regina University and is a member of

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