

2. BACKGROUND

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Middlebury College enjoys a stunning visual relationship with the vast geographic landscape of which it is a part. It is located in the Champlain Basin, between the Adirondack Mountains to the west and the Green Mountains to the east. Lake Champlain is not visible from the College, but the two mountain ranges are a daily visual reminder of the uniqueness of the place, and the ecology of the region has a direct relationship to the details of the campus's ecology. This is discussed more fully in the Natural Systems chapter later in this report.

The north-south topographical striation of the region also affects Middlebury's urban relationships. With a population of about 624,000, Vermont is America's second least populous state. Its towns and cities are small, and are organized by the north-south grain of the geography. For example, Middlebury (population ca. 8,000) lies almost equidistant between Rutland (population ca. 17,000), about 33 miles and 50 minutes to the south, and Burlington

(population ca. 39,000), about 35 miles and 55 minutes to the north. The mountains and the lake make east-west travel more difficult.

This geography is important because Middlebury College is a significant regional consumer, employer, and generator of housing need. For various reasons sufficient housing cannot be completely provided locally; consequently, it must be provided by the region. Some staff, for example, commute to the campus from New York state. Therefore, Middlebury's location means there is a significant impact on the College's sustainability efforts, as consumption of resources must be carefully balanced against contribution to the regional economy.

FIGURE 1

Plan showing Middlebury's location in the Champlain Valley

FIGURE 2

View west from Route 30, near Cornwall





TOWN AND COLLEGE CONTEXT

When the Middlebury residents west of Otter Creek won the right to found “The Town’s College” in their neighborhood in 1800, they could never have imagined the ultimate size of “their” College. Even after the construction of the College’s first substantive building, Painter Hall, in 1816, on the slope overlooking South Main Street, no accurate prophesy could have been made. Today Middlebury College occupies an area rivaling that of central Middlebury, and the two are blended to the extent that they are clearly distinguishable only at their respective cores. Neither the College nor the Town possesses clear physical and social boundaries. Not only are their physical forms blended, but to a large degree, so are their economic, social, political, and environmental issues.

The Town of Middlebury’s identity is clear. The Town may not have a clear edge, but it has a clear center: the Town Green that lies at the intersection of routes 7 and 30. The surrounding businesses and institutions are also readily apparent. From this core, residential neighborhoods develop along linear streets fanning out from the center. The limited pattern of streets on both sides of Otter Creek is exacerbated by the single bridge crossing—thus creating a scale of circulation problems unexpected in such a small place. Debate about these issues is a decades-long tradition.

Questions of Middlebury College’s institutional identity—involving such terms as edge, entry, gateway, front, arrival, etc.—defy clear resolution in such blended circumstances. Like the Town, Middlebury College has a clear center—the Main Quad—but it is internal to the campus. There is no single “entrance” to campus from the Town. Today, Old Stone Row provides the College’s only public face; it is partially hidden by the Town Offices at the bifurcation of College Street and South Main, and the new Library beyond. Thus, more subtle strategies of identity and cooperation are required. Proposed improvements to College Street, South Main Street, and Storrs Park have the potential to clarify and enhance the relationship between college and town. These include adjustments to street side parking, improvements to lighting, the removal of utility lines, and most important, tree planting.

The complement to the close relationship between college and town is the need to consider neighboring

residential areas. Proposed planting in buffer zones will help, and existing buffer areas, such as the one north of Atwater, should be preserved. Perhaps more important, however, is the need to prevent further encroachment into the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Where possible, for example, the Plan recommends converting the College-owned houses in town not used by academic programs from students to faculty. This would benefit the neighborhoods, and reduce automobile use.

Cooperative and continuous planning by the Town and the College is both salutary and imperative.

FIGURE 1

Aerial plan of the Town of Middlebury and Middlebury College

FIGURE 2

Aerial view of the Middlebury Town Green

FIGURE 3

Aerial view of the Middlebury College Main Quad

FIGURE 4

Plan of Middlebury College property



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LEGEND

- Middlebury College Property
- Middlebury College Buildings

FIGURE 1
*Plan showing major views
out from the campus*

FIGURE 2
*View from Mead Chapel
looking east*

FIGURE 3
*View from Alumni Stadium
looking east*

FIGURE 4
*View of the Green Mountains
from campus*

FIGURE 5
*View from Battell Field
looking northeast*





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THE CAMPUS CONTEXT

Perched on a ridgeline in the Champlain basin, Middlebury College enjoys spectacular views over the near landscape to the Adirondacks on the west, and to the Green Mountains on the east. These intermittent views reconstitute themselves in our minds to form an imaginary, continuous panorama, at once intimate and vast.

Many of these views are general—part of the continuum of daily life. Others, however, seem more special because of the place from which we see them. For example, the view of the Green Mountains seen through the opening between Wright Theatre and Le Chateau is moving, but the same general view seen from Alumni Stadium is an unforgettable life experience. Likewise, the view from the porch of Mead Chapel seems more important than the same scene viewed from fifty feet to either side. Indeed, we need both local and global relationships.



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FIGURE 1

*Drawing,
View of Academy Building, c.1865*

FIGURE 2

Engraving, View of Old Stone Row

FIGURE 3

*Engraving, Aerial View of
Main Quadrangle*

FIGURE 4

*Proposed Plan, Shepley Bulfinch
Richardson and Abbott, 1968*

FIGURE 5

*Proposed Master Plan,
Albertson, 1909*

FIGURE 6

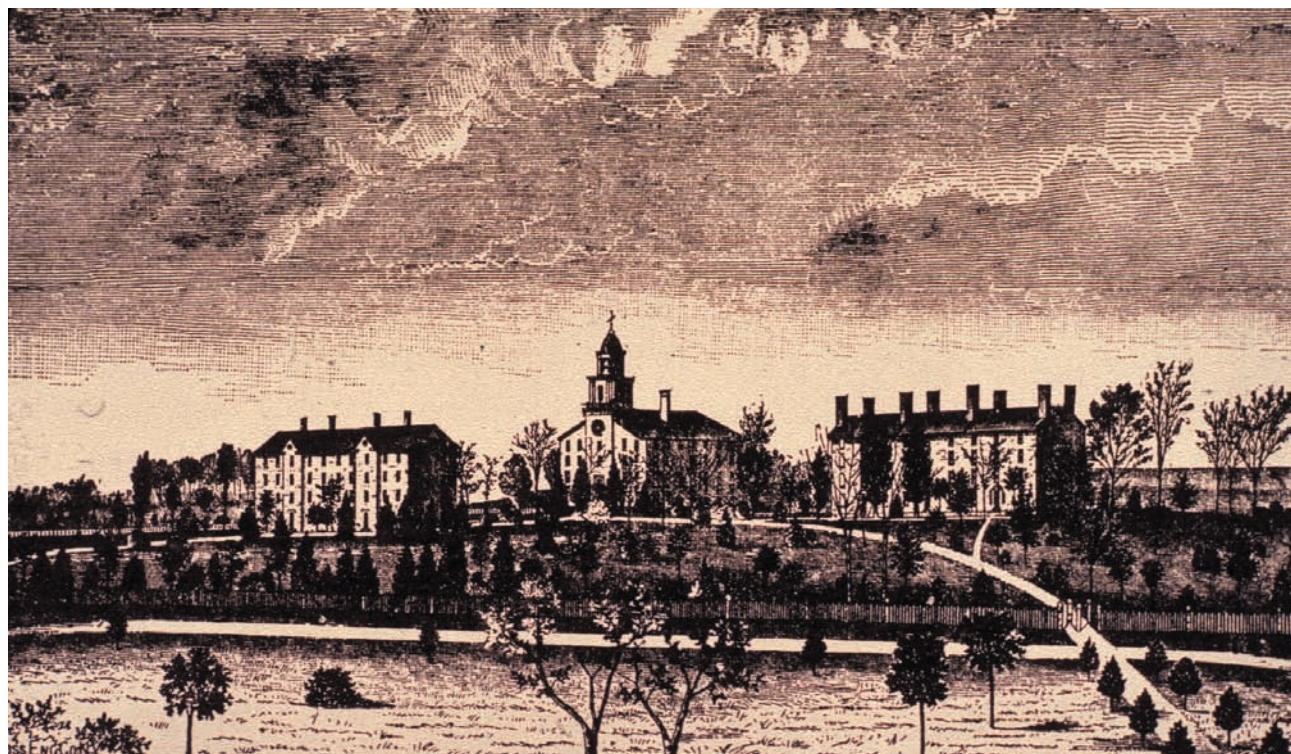
*Proposed Plan,
York and Sawyer, 1931*

FIGURE 7

*Proposed Plan,
Dwight James Baum, 1933*

FIGURE 8

*Proposed Plan,
Wallace Floyd Associates, 1999*



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CAMPUS PLANNING AT MIDDLEBURY

Just as a campus's past can be read through its form, the effects of previous master plans are also legible in the contemporary campus. Clear, strong decisions remain valid across time; mistakes never go away.

One thing that is revealed by Glenn Andres's *History of Campus Planning at Middlebury College* (see the Appendix) is that the College has never actually had an effective Campus Master Plan. On occasion it has had effective campus planning, but never an effective Campus Master Plan.

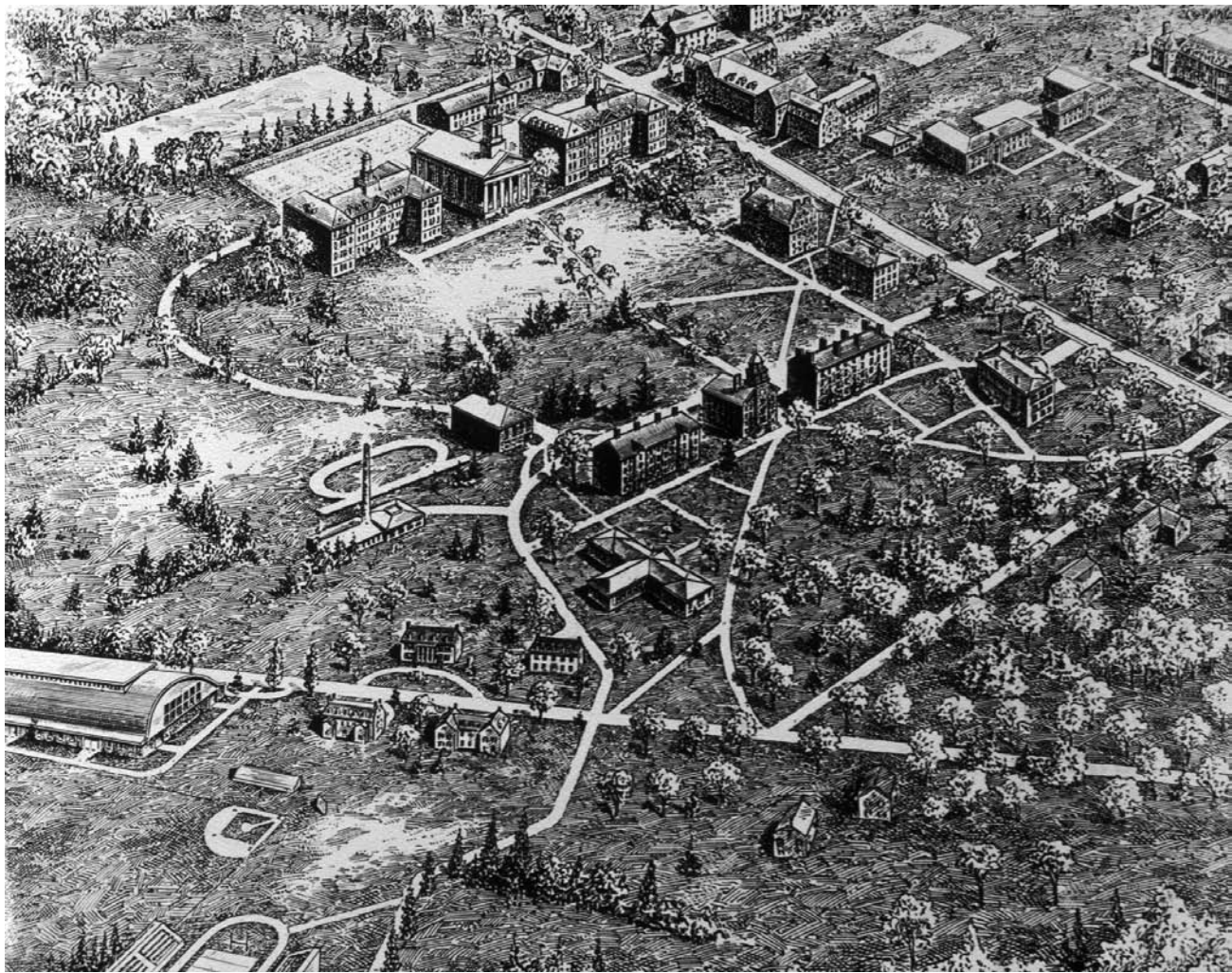
There are three distinct stages in the development of the Middlebury campus: the first century, resulting in Old Stone Row; the next half-century, resulting in the Main Quad; and the next half-century, resulting in the contemporary campus.

The first century (1800–1901)—that resulting in Old Stone Row—is characterized by incremental additions of buildings in which the total is greater than the sum of the parts. It is not known if there was an actual plan for the development of these buildings, but they do represent an *ensemble* with a civic intent: that of a great public face for the College.

During the next half-century (1901–1945), at least three actual plans were made for the campus: the Albertson Plan,

in 1909; the York and Sawyer Plan, in 1931; and the Dwight James Baum Plan, in 1933. Despite the fact that this was the golden age of American campus planning, the plans for Middlebury College were ineffective. As products of the City Beautiful Movement, they were grand, symmetrical, totally designed Beaux Arts concoctions that could never be (and never were) realized. Fortunately, the previous system of incremental placement of buildings was continued, so that by 1945 the Main Quad was fully formed. Gifford, Mead Chapel, and Hepburn added to the composition by reinforcing the idea of Old Stone Row further up the hill. These two compositions alone establish the core of the campus. Other buildings provide continuity and definition to the Main Quadrangle. Pearson, Forest, and Le Chateau were lonely additions on the north campus, but they had some potential for relationship to the main campus.

In the mid-twentieth century, however, a dramatic change occurred in the way college campuses in the United States, and the values underlying their design, were understood. Prior to this, campus planning had focused on the art of making public space. Public space was understood as the framework that links the various functions and programs of a campus. After mid-century, however, campus planning focused on accommodating programmatic growth by positioning discretely conceived, internally organized buildings in what was seen as a neutral and undifferentiated landscape.

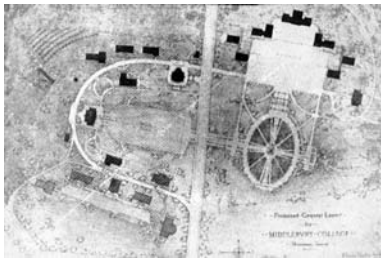


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By the end of the Second World War the art of campus planning was dead, yet the next half-century would be Middlebury College's most expansive period of growth. Two campus plans were done during this period: The Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott Plan, in 1968; and the Wallace Floyd Associates Plan, in 1999. The 1968 plan would have been destructive if it had been more fully implemented. Fortunately, little was executed. The 1999 plan was a step in the right direction in that it was more modest and less formally prescriptive, but it was largely

overwritten by subsequent nonconforming architectural decisions.

Indeed, the postwar period was one in which individual building decisions were made almost entirely outside the planning context of any larger ideas. In other words, individual architectural events replaced planning. This tendency has persisted until the present. In many ways the progression of plans for the Middlebury College campus parallels the disintegration of the art of campus planning in America.



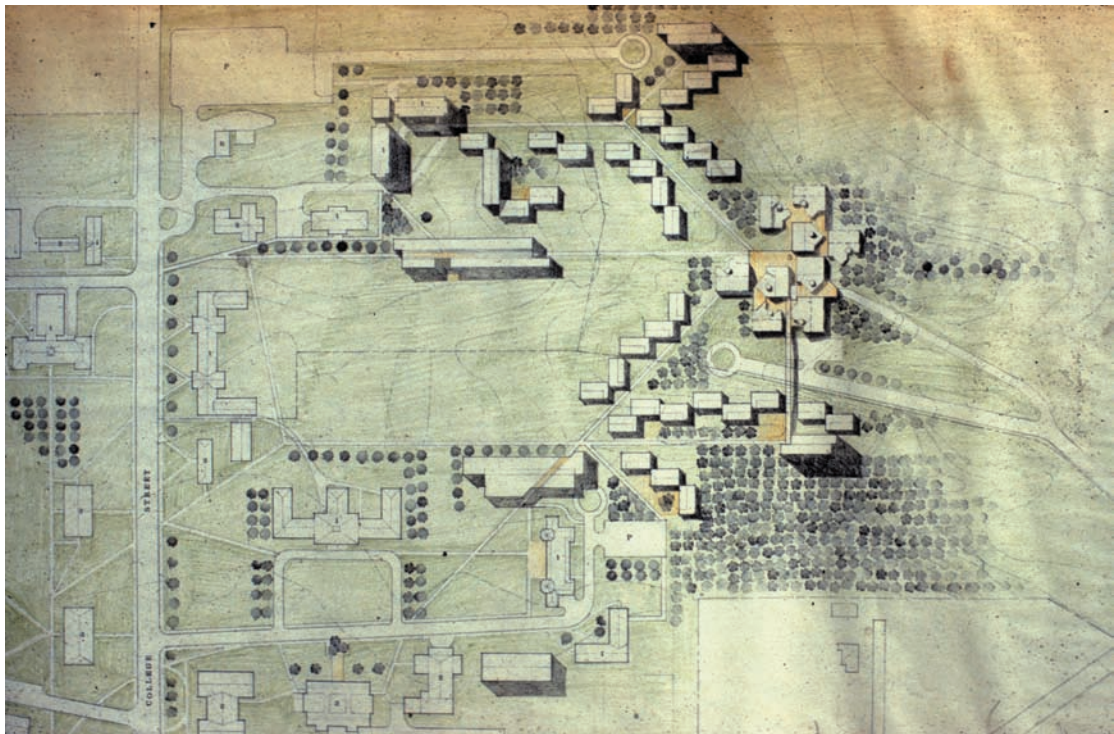
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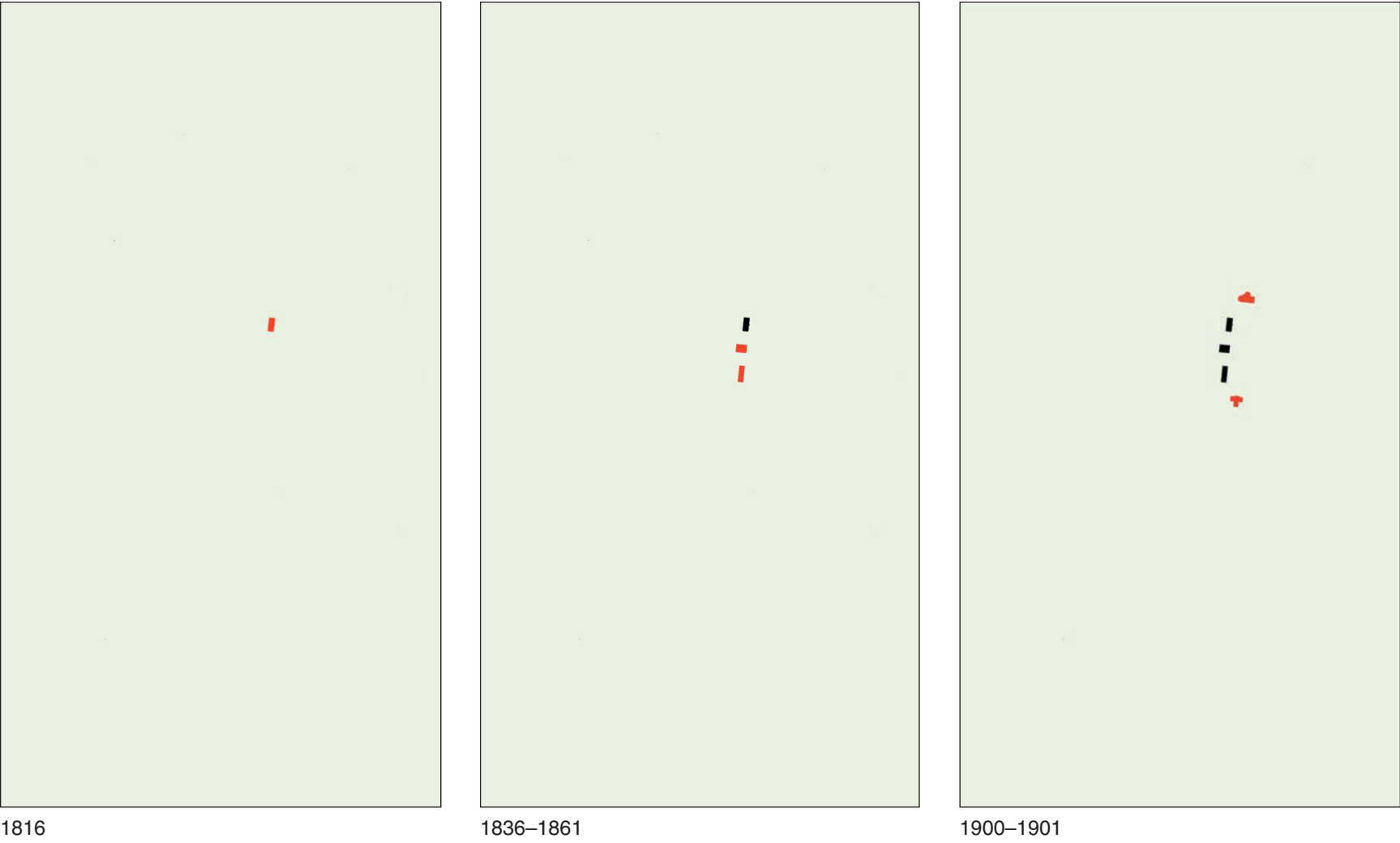
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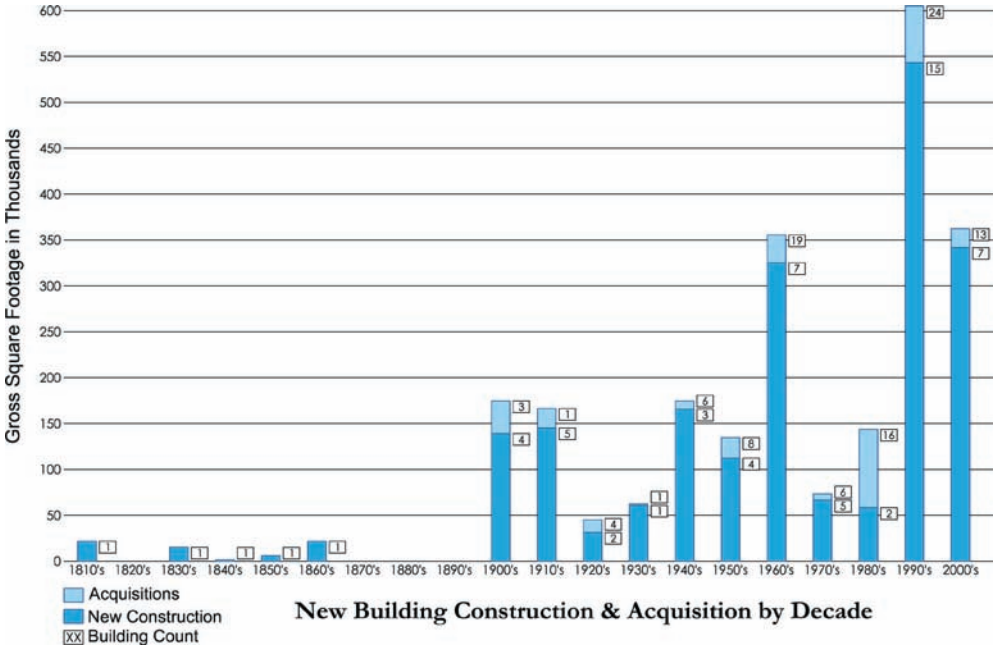
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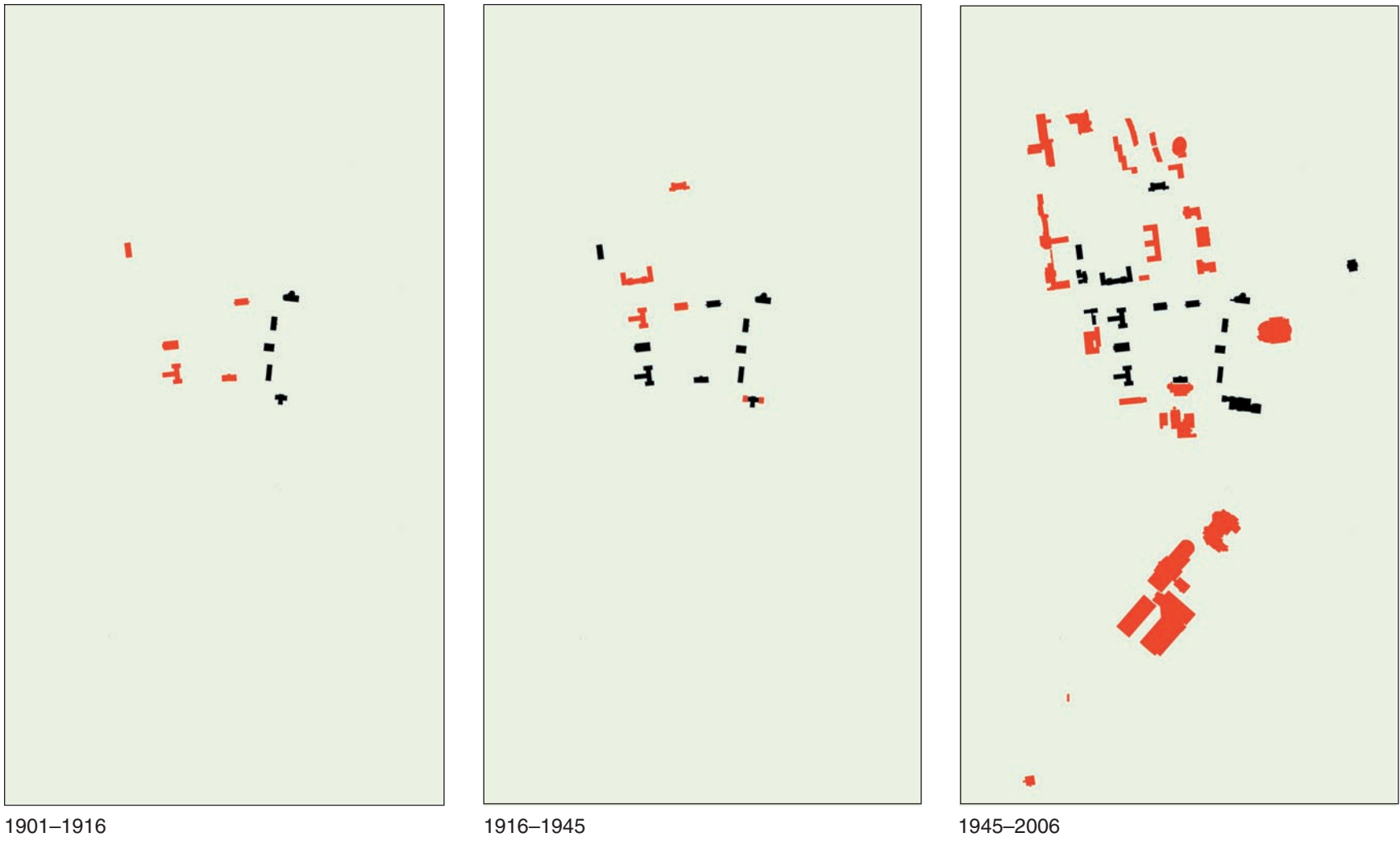


FIGURES 1-6 (ABOVE)
Plans of campus growth

FIGURE 7
Graph showing new College buildings by decade

FIGURE 8
Graph showing growth of student enrollment and building area





CAMPUS GROWTH: 1816–2006

The campus grew slowly until the end of the nineteenth century, but nevertheless, the character—the most memorable aspects of the campus—was firmly established when the expansion of enrollment and facilities began at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Up until 1945, the campus still consisted of a compact, walkable community of 1,000 students and 650,000 gross square feet in fourteen buildings—mostly related to the main quadrangle. As a remote, figurative building, only Le Chateau sat in the open landscape, detached from the community of buildings.

In the next fifty years, by 2006, the enrollment more than doubled, the building area more than tripled, and the campus expanded to over a mile from one end to the other. It is now a twenty-minute walk from Atwater Commons to Alumni Stadium.

