



“Work of national importance”: Conscientious Objectors in Civilian Public Service in Vermont during World War II

By the time World War II ended, forty-three men—several with their wives—had done service as conscientious objectors at the Brattleboro Retreat under the auspices of the Civilian Public Service program. Fifteen COs served in another CPS project in Vermont, testing dairy herds for butterfat content and diseases.

By MICHAEL SHERMAN

“**W**ar Objectors Due Next Week,” was the headline on an article in the *Brattleboro Daily Reformer* on February 13, 1943. The newspaper reported that twenty-five conscientious objectors (COs) were to be transferred from Civilian Public Service camps in Gorham and West Campton, N.H., and assigned to the Brattleboro Retreat as a unit that would have an official designation as CPS Camp No. 87.¹ Although this was doubtless news to many residents of Brattleboro, it had been announced three weeks earlier, on January 25, 1943, when the *Burlington Free Press* reported on an agreement between A. S. Imirie, chief of the Camp Operations Division of national Selective Service headquarters, and Lieutenant Colonel Warren B. Steele, state Selective Service executive officer for Vermont, to bring

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the conscientious objectors to the Brattleboro Retreat to work as ward attendants. In his announcement of the arrangement to the press, Lt. Col. Steele explained that with many men leaving to join the military or work in more lucrative jobs in war-related industry, “the labor situation in Vermont hospitals for the mentally ill ‘has been at a low ebb.’” The state Selective Service, Steele explained, “made a thorough study of the type of men who would comprise the group. ‘These men . . . are conscientious objectors who, due to their religious training for years past, have been adverse [*sic*] to war and are also indoctrinated with the idea of helping their fellow men.’” All had volunteered for this service which, he asserted, “is a step in the right direction in solving the acute labor situation in Vermont’s hospitals for the mentally ill.”²

The *Brattleboro Daily Reformer* article provided more details of the negotiations and arrangements. The article reported that Dr. George A. Elliott, superintendent of the Retreat, initiated the request for the unit the previous November, “when it was apparent to him that institutions such as the Retreat were facing an employment crisis due to the war drain on a field of employment in which, even in normal times, there is a limited supply.” Elliott sought the cooperation of Governor William H. Wills and Lt. Col. Steele to secure the transfer under a provision of the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940 that established the Civilian Public Service (CPS) program and designated projects for men who received classifications from their draft boards as “conscientious objectors to both combatant and noncombatant military service.”³

By the time the war ended, forty-three men—several with their wives—had done service as COs at the Retreat under the auspices of the CPS program. Fifteen COs served in another CPS project in Vermont, testing dairy herds for butterfat content and diseases.

In May 1993, some of those men and women gathered for a reunion at the Retreat. This article has its origins in that gathering and owes much to the generosity of those who agreed to be interviewed on that occasion, subsequently corresponded with the author about their backgrounds and experiences as COs, and shared materials they collected and saved from that time.⁴ The generation of COs who lived through World War II is now mostly gone; and with them we are losing voices that challenged the interpretation that that war, or any war, can be thought of as a “good war.”⁵

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS AND CIVILIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

As Europe drifted into war, beginning with Adolph Hitler’s invasion of the demilitarized Rhineland in 1936, and culminating with the invasions of Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland in 1939, the United States,

although officially neutral, slowly but steadily prepared to enter the conflict. At first limiting participation to providing war materiel to England —making the U.S. “the great arsenal of Democracy,” as he called it— President Franklin D. Roosevelt started putting in place the mechanisms for raising an army. On September 16, 1940, Roosevelt signed a new Selective Service Training and Service Act,⁶ passed by the Congress to replace the Draft Act of 1917 under which the United States raised troops for World War I.

Conscientious objectors had fared poorly under the Draft Act of 1917, which acknowledged only those who were members of recognized sects and religious groups—the so-called “traditional peace churches”—that forbade their members from participating in warfare of any kind under any conditions. These included primarily the Society of Friends (Quakers), Mennonites, the Church of the Brethren, Molokans, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Those who belonged to other denominations, opposed war for philosophical or political reasons, refused noncombatant duty, or resisted any form of compulsory military training and service were nonetheless forcibly inducted, court-martialed, and sent to prison, or assigned to service jobs in military camps. Men placed in military camps were subjected to ridicule, physical abuse, and cruel punishment by officers and enlisted men. Of the 545 objectors who were court-martialed as COs in World War I, 17 received death sentences, 142 were given sentences of lifetime imprisonment, 85 received prison sentences of 25 to 50 years, and 301 received sentences of fewer than 25 years. None of the death sentences were carried out, and after the war the sentences were reduced for all others. But some men did die as a result of the harsh treatment meted out in the military camps.⁷

During the 1920s and 1930s, in reaction to the devastation of World War I and reflecting the idealism that hoped to prevent the repetition of that disaster, several antiwar and pacifist coalitions and associations formed or flourished in Europe and the United States. Foremost among them was the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Founded in 1915 to support COs during World War I, FOR in the postwar years actively recruited members in the U.S. on college campuses and through religious and quasi-religious organizations such as the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Social action committees formed within many other religious denominations not among the traditional peace churches, and as war again loomed on the horizon, these groups also began to prepare to protect pacifists.

Public opinion in the United States concerning intervention in the war in Europe was starkly divided as late as the summer of 1941. A

Gallup poll taken in February 1941 showed that 85 percent of those questioned favored staying out of the war, although 65 percent supported aiding Great Britain, even if that would eventually lead the country into war.⁸ According to historian Roland H. Bainton, writing in 1945 on Christian churches' attitudes on war for the magazine *Social Action*, "opinion in the churches was not far different from that in the country at large. The prevailing sentiment was in favor of staying out of the war."⁹ Disillusion with the outcome of World War I was a major factor influencing public and ecclesiastical opinion.

Nonetheless, anticipating a new struggle to guarantee the rights and safety of conscientious objectors if the United States did enter the war, representatives from the peace churches and other groups coordinated efforts to redefine and clarify the meaning of conscientious objection, assure a procedure by which individuals could state their position, and build into the Selective Service System arrangements for COs that would avoid the harsh treatment they had previously received while performing alternative service.

The result of this negotiation was Section 5(g) of the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, which described the criteria and process whereby men could apply for CO status:

Nothing contained in this Act shall be construed to require any person to be subject to combatant training and service in the land or naval forces of the United States who, by reason of religious training and belief, is conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form. Any such person claiming such an exemption from combatant training and service because of such conscientious objections whose claim is sustained by the local board shall, if he is inducted into the land or naval forces under this Act, be assigned to noncombatant service . . . or shall, if he is found to be conscientiously opposed to such participation in such noncombatant service, in lieu of such induction, be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction.¹⁰

The act thus created two distinct groups of conscientious objectors: Those who were opposed to combat service (classified as 1-O-A) were assigned to non-combat duty within the armed forces; those who were opposed to war in any form (classified as 4-E) were assigned to alternative service. In Vermont, a total of sixty-five men qualified as conscientious objectors. Forty-eight were classified 1-A-O; seventeen were classified 4-E.¹¹ With one exception, none of the seventeen 4-E men were allowed to serve in CPS units in the state.

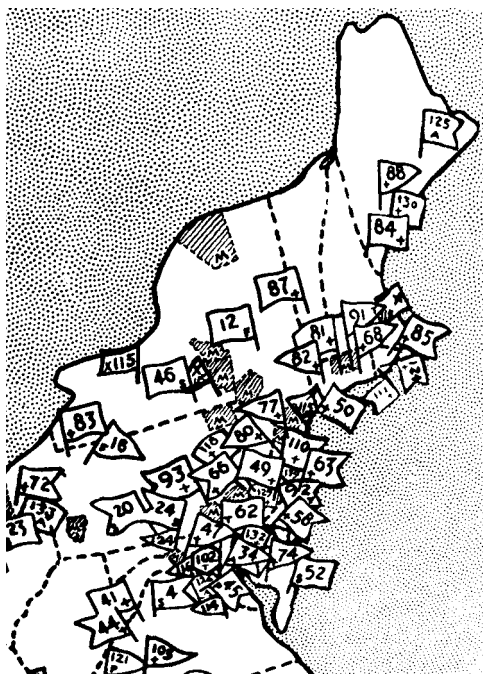
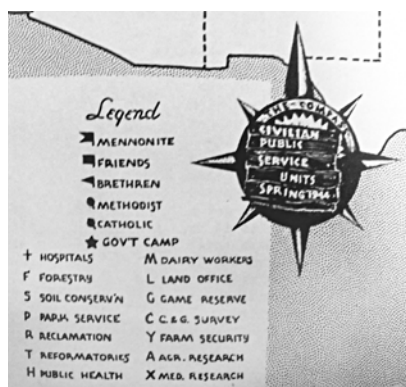
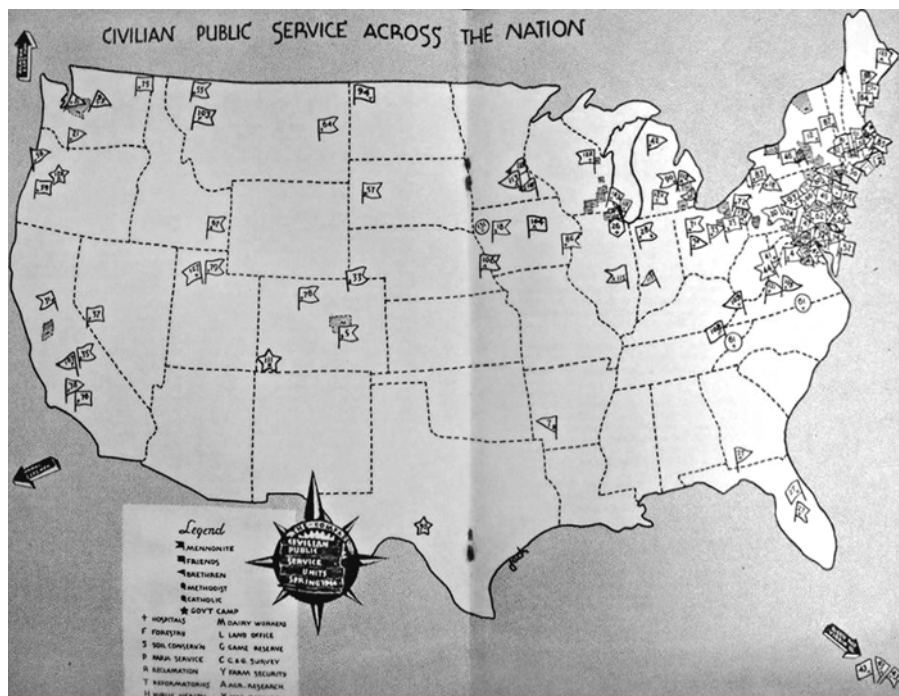
Almost immediately after the enactment of the law, the coalition that had helped forge section 5(g) organized itself as the National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO). Under the leadership of Paul Comly French, the NSBRO began to work out details for alternative

service for COs. In December the National Headquarters of the Selective Service System in Washington, D.C., issued a memorandum to all the state directors reminding them of the provisions for COs under section 5(g) and clarifying some of the terms. First, the memorandum reminded the local boards that the new law specifically provided consideration for all such persons on a basis of their individual conscientious convictions and did not require membership in a religious organization or sect as evidence of the sincerity of those convictions. The memorandum then broadly defined several key terms in the law:

Religious training or discipline may be considered as having been received in the home, in the church, in other organizations whose influence is religious though not professedly such, in the school, or in the individual's own personal religious experience and conduct of life. . . . Religious belief signifies sincere conviction as to the supreme worth of that to which one gives his supreme allegiance. . . . "conscientiously . . . opposed to participation in war in any form" may be interpreted as meaning that a person may have become a conscientious objector to war, either by specific teaching . . . or by specific application of fundamental doctrines.¹²

It fell to Clarence A. Dykstra, national director of the Selective Service System, to work out the details of civilian service with Paul Comly French and the NSBRO. This was accomplished in December 1940 and on February 6, 1941, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8675 authorizing the director of the Selective Service to establish or designate "work of national importance" for COs who refused to accept noncombatant service. A six-month experimental period followed, in which COs doing civilian public service were sent to several former Civilian Conservation Corps camps—recently abandoned as the CCC began closing down operations following Congress's vote in 1940 to discontinue the program. In this first phase of the CPS program, COs worked on projects under the technical supervision of the Soil Conservation Service, Forest Service, National Park Service, Farm Security Administration, General Land Office, Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, and Fish and Wildlife Service.¹³ By the end of the experimental period, Clarence Dykstra had resigned as head of the Selective Service System and was replaced by General Lewis B. Hershey, who agreed in November 1941 to extend CPS to at least January 1, 1943, with the option of negotiating for continuation as necessary. By then it had been agreed that COs assigned to CPS would do service for the duration of the war plus six months—the same as military duty for draftees. This condition later became a cause for much controversy and anger among COs.

By the spring of 1942, the NSBRO had negotiated with General Hershey to expand CPS to include "special projects." These included



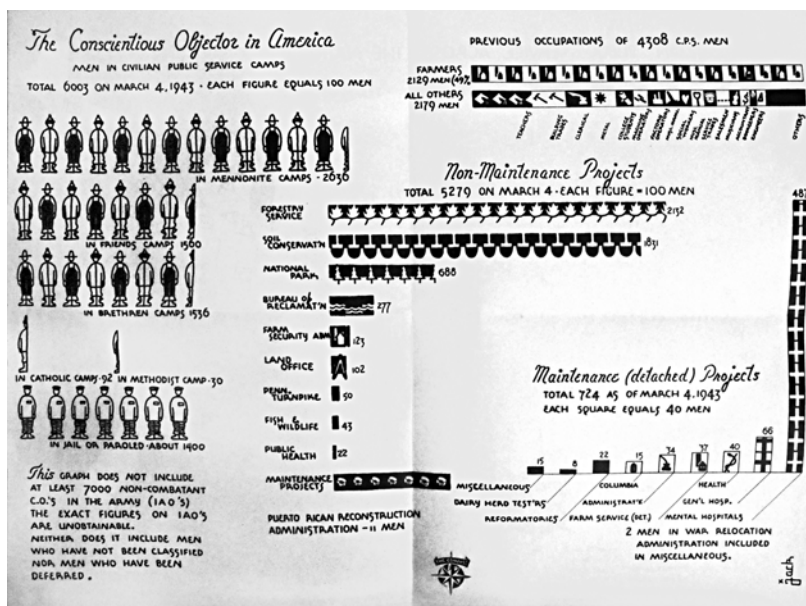
"Civilian Public Service across the Nation, a Map" from The Compass: An Instrument of Direction [Ames, Iowa] 1: 4&5 (May 1944), 1-2.

detached service to work as farm hands on dairy farms; work in agricultural experiment stations; work as attendants and kitchen aides in general hospitals; training as “smoke jumpers” to fight forest fires; mapping uncharted sections in western forests and national parks; building and improving sanitary facilities in Florida to control and prevent hookworm; hospital, health, and recreational projects in Puerto Rico; and work in state mental hospitals and training schools. Projects planned for relief and reconstruction work in South Africa and China were cancelled when members of Congress objected to sending COs abroad, but the Alexian Brothers hospital in Chicago, which had set up a “China unit” to prepare for volunteer relief programs, began accepting CPS men later in the war years.

Altogether, CPS enrolled 11,950 men nationwide in 151 administrative units. Two CPS special project units operated in Vermont. CPS 87, assigned to the Brattleboro Retreat, was authorized to accept twenty-five men. Another special project unit, known officially as CPS 100, was created as an administrative structure to account for men sent to several states around the country to test dairy herds for butterfat content and diseases. CPS 100.13 was assigned to Vermont. Working under the supervision of the Vermont state agricultural extension division, these men did not live or work as a unit, but were assigned to one of six regions and traveled singly and on their own to dairy farms in several parts of the state. A total of fifteen men did this work as alternative service from September 1943 until discharged in June 1946. One man, Robert Wehmeyer, served in both Vermont units. Wehmeyer entered CPS 87 in March 1943, transferred to the dairy testing unit in November 1944, and returned to Brattleboro in January 1946 to serve out the remainder of his term.

WHO WERE THEY?

Of the fifty-eight men who did service under CPS in Vermont, only one had been inducted while living in the state, although he listed his place of origin as Buffalo, N.Y., and was probably inducted through that draft board. Most of the men were living in New England or Mid-Atlantic states at the time of induction into CPS. Two came from Illinois, two from Ohio, one each from Indiana and Kansas. Their training and work careers were as varied as their places of origin. The “Communiqué from Brattleboro”—a mimeographed publication written and produced by the CPS members in February 1944—noted that “our occupations prior to CPS were quite varied. A half dozen of us were undergraduate students. Joe Albrecht had been teaching bookkeeping



"The Conscientious Objector in America. Men in Civilian Public Service Camps" (March 4, 1943), from The Compass [West Campton, N.H.] 1:3 (Spring 1943), insert.

for seven years; Lu [Luther] Kirsch taught English; Jim Eastman and Ben Pierce were librarians; Roger Harnish a statistician, Henry Ormsby a mechanical draftsman, Howard Pedersen a commercial artist. Others have been clerks, factory workers, salesmen, social workers, etc."¹⁴

Although CPS was the result of a coalition of churches working as the NSBRO, each unit was sponsored and supported by a participating denomination (see Table 1). Some units, for example, the medical experiments projects (CPS 115 and 140, with thirty-two and nine subunits respectively) were sponsored with pooled money from all the religious organizations. In a few cases, two denominations cosponsored a unit; the Selective Service System sponsored eight units on its own, one in cooperation with the Brethren Service Committee and seventeen in cooperation with the Friends Service Committee. NSBRO sponsored one unit. The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) placed no religious test or restriction on membership in units it supported. Units sponsored by the Mennonites and the Brethren were restricted to members of those denominations. One CPS camp in New Hampshire was for members of the Catholic Church.

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TABLE 1 Sponsorship of CPS Camps by Organization*

<i>Sponsoring Organization</i>	<i>Number of Units Sponsored</i>
American Catholic Conscientious Objectors (ACCO)	4
American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS)	2
Brethren Service Committee (BSC)	47
Disciples of Christ (DOC)	1
Commission on Christian Social Action of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (EARC)	1
Friends Service Committee (FSC or AFSC)	22
Mennonite Central Committee (MCC)	77
Methodist World Peace Commission (MWPC)	1
National Service Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO)	1
Selective Service System (SSS)	8
Joint Sponsors	
BSC-MCC	5
BSC-SSS	1
BSC-FSC	1
FSC-MCC	3
FSC-SSS	17
Cooperative, by all religious agencies	3 [†]
Total	147 [‡]

*Source: Swarthmore College Peace Collections, DG2, 32c and 36d.

[†]This number does not include the 34 subunits of CPS 97 (Dairy Farm Project) and 13 active subunits of CPS 100 (Dairy Herd Testing), each of which was sponsored by one denomination and is included in the count for that denomination.

[‡]Four units were administratively approved and received numbers but were never active.

CPS 87 was sponsored and supported by the AFSC. But of the forty-three men who served in the unit, only six identified their religious affiliation as Friends. CPS 100.13 was also sponsored by AFSC, but only three of the fifteen who served in the unit identified themselves as Friends. The men in both Vermont units listed as their religious affiliations a wide range of other Christian denominations. One was Jewish, and five did not list any religious affiliation (see Table 2).

Many of the men in CPS came from deeply religious backgrounds. Religious principles and training had been one of the criteria by which local draft boards and federal courts had assessed commitments to conscientious objection, and some men (and their wives) were either in the ministry or planning on entering the ministry. Thus, in CPS 87 at Brattleboro, religion played a significant but not necessarily central part in the personal and daily life of many members of the unit, who

TABLE 2 Religious Affiliation, CPS 87 and CPS 100.13*

<i>CPS Unit Number</i>	<i>Religious Affiliation (Number of Men Claiming Affiliation)</i>
CPS 87 (<i>n</i> = 43)	Baptist (5) Catholic (1) Christadelphian (1) Congregational (4) Disciples of Christ (1) Episcopal (3) Evangelical/Reformed (1) Friends (Quakers) (6) Jewish (1) Lutheran (4) Methodist (3) Methodist-Episcopal (1) Oxford Movement (1) Presbyterian (5) Unitarian (1) Universalist (1) None/not listed (4)
CPS 100.13 (<i>n</i> = 15)	Baptist (1) Catholic (1) Christadelphian (1) Congregational (1) Evangelical/Reformed (1) Friends (3) Meggido Mission (1) Methodist (3) Presbyterian (2) None/not listed (1)

*Source: Swarthmore College Peace Collections, DG2, 32c and 36d.

found time for private devotion. Several members of the CPS unit at the Retreat formed a non-denominational devotion and study group, but attendance was voluntary. A few of the men and their wives attended religious services in local churches in Brattleboro, and one local minister, Robert White of the Methodist Church, was sympathetic with the conscientious objectors and befriended several of them. Early in the history of the unit, Reverend White hosted a gathering of a dozen Brattleboro members of the local chapter of the Fellowship of Reconciliation with COs at the Retreat.

All of the men who served in CPS did their initial service in one of the larger CPS units located at former CCC base camps. Transfer to any of the CPS special projects was an option to men only after they had received orientation and done at least sixty days of service at the CPS

base camps. Many men moved from one base camp to another, and service in the CPS is notable for the numerous transfers of men.

Few men, therefore, did their entire alternative service in a single CPS unit. Of the forty-three men who served in CPS 87, twenty-five went on to serve in one or more additional units during their term of service. One served in seven different units from the time he entered CPS in June 1942 until his discharge in February 1946. Two others served in six units. Of the fifteen men who served in CPS 100.13, ten served in three or more units, and one served in seven, including units in Ohio, California, Montana, and New York. Service assignments thus typically took the men to many parts of the country.

Applications for transfer from one unit to another were usually reviewed by the supervisor of both the sending and receiving unit. In the case of CPS 87, Dr. Elliott insisted on interviewing each man of the initial group that came from the West Campton and Gorham, N.H. camps. But as the mental hospital project expanded and applications began arriving from more remote areas, personal interviews became impractical and only the applicants' files were forwarded for his approval.

In the case of the dairy herd testing unit (CPS 100.13), the Agricultural Extension Service supervisor in charge of the project reviewed applications. Prior experience was preferred but not necessary. Wesley Herwig, originally from New Britain, Connecticut, was preparing for a career as an artist when he entered CPS in 1943. By the time he arrived in Vermont in January 1944, he had been at the forest camp in Gorham (CPS 53), and had done mapping and forest fire service under the supervision of the U.S. Forest Service in Nevada and in Colville, California (CPS 37). His prior agricultural experience was limited to occasional work milking cows on his uncle's dairy farm. He knew how to milk cows but little else about the details of farm management, herd health, or butterfat testing. Like all the others assigned to the dairy herd testing units, Herwig received thirty days of training, was handed a box of supplies, and was sent out on his own to test butterfat content in herds on farms in Randolph, Bethel, Sharon, and other Orange County towns. He reported the test results to the farmers and sent weekly reports to the Extension Service agent who supervised his work. He had only occasional contact with some of the other dairy herd testers.

WHY THEY CAME

Petitioning for exemption from military service as a conscientious objector was not an easy choice in a war that quickly gained wide public support after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Until that time, American entry into another European war had been controversial and had met with resistance in Vermont, as elsewhere in the

United States.¹⁵ But by 1942 most of the opposition to the war had faded, partially the result of the Japanese action, and partly the result of an intense public relations campaign coordinated by the federal government's Office of War Information. War bond sales—sometimes featuring public appearances by stage and movie stars—scrap metal drives, and civilian paramilitary efforts such as “plane spotting” corps and civilian defense units, had succeeded in generating popular support for the war effort. Choosing to be a conscientious objector thus had its risks.

Although the 1940 Selective Training and Service Act had described criteria and a process for claiming CO status, there were still areas open to interpretation and local draft board discretion. In 1940, Clarence Dykstra had ruled that religious belief could include purely moral considerations, and this had been confirmed by a U.S. Court of Appeals decision that defined religion as a “response to an inward mentor, call it conscience or God.” Two years later, General Hershey, the new director of Selective Service, insisted on a narrower definition, going beyond statements of ethical or moral principle to one that “contemplates recognition of some source of all existence, which, whatever the type of conception, is Divine because it is the Source of all things.”¹⁶ To further complicate matters, discretion to grant or deny CO status started with each draft board, and an applicant denied that status at the local level had to appeal to a federal judge for review and possible reclassification.

The men who came to Vermont brought with them a variety of backgrounds and personal journeys toward their position on the war. They also experienced a wide range of treatment by their local draft boards. Many came to be conscientious objectors through their religious training or upbringing; others mentioned their involvement with the YMCA, pacifist youth groups that flourished in the post-World War I years, high school friends and discussion groups, and sometimes college pacifist groups and associations. Lee Hebel, who later became a minister, wrote about his self-study of the New Testament and prayer. Henry Ormsby wrote, “My training as a child by my mother and father was that ‘Killing is not the answer to any problem.’ My twelve years in Quaker Schools helped reinforce my conscientious stand against war.”¹⁷ Robert Wehmeyer wrote: “I could not envision myself killing any other human being. They [his draft board] thought I must be deranged and referred me to the appeals board. I appeared before a Federal Judge in N.Y. City with my Dad (a German-born émigré) and was granted C/O status. My mother was Italian by birth and father German. I had visited both countries and spoke both languages. Father left Germany to escape the military prior to W.W. II.”¹⁸

Luther Kirsch was the younger of two sons in a Lutheran family. His father and brother, both Lutheran ministers, were pacifists, and encouraged his own reading and thinking in that direction. Kirsch concluded from his reading in scripture, and also from reading Henry David Thoreau “and other such people . . . that I could not conscientiously serve two masters. So I chose to serve the master Jesus as I interpreted what he was saying.”¹⁹ Kirsch wrote about how he and his colleagues in CPS followed news of the war and what they thought about the events they read and heard about at the battlefield:

I don't remember any group discussions on the subject, but I'm positive we mentioned to one another what was going on and felt concern for all the men and women caught up in the war.

I suppose know we commiserated with those in the Armed Forces, feeling they were caught up in the evil of war and that man has to come up with better ways to solve problems between nations. They were doing a dirty job they shouldn't have been forced to face. Doesn't mankind ever learn?²⁰

Robert Dick was a student at the Universalist Crane Theological School, part of Tufts College (now Tufts University). He recalled that some of his fellow students were pacifists who belonged to the Fellowship of Reconciliation, and that the dean, Clarence Skinner, was “an outstanding pacifist.” Through Skinner, Dick was introduced to John Haynes Holmes of the Community Church movement in New York City. “[W]henever I had a chance I would attend services where John Haynes Holmes would be the speaker in Boston. As a matter of fact, on December 7 [1941] . . . I heard John Haynes Holmes speak. His topic was ‘the ten commandments of peace.’ And he said that in light of what had happened that very day, this was a purely academic presentation. But I kept very careful notes on that whole presentation.”²¹

Once he had come to a pacifist position, Dick had to decide how to act on it. Under the Selective Service Act of 1940, ministers and ministers in training were assigned the exempt classification status 4-D. “I waived my theological exemption because I had just recently come to the pacifist position. I had read this little booklet called ‘Creative Pioneering’ by a Quaker author—CPS director Thomas E. Jones. I was tremendously impressed by this. It was an accounting of the work camps that had been directed by the . . . Quakers—and I just felt that this would be a way to make a constructive contribution.”²²

Robert Dick's wife, Helen, was also at Crane Theological School at the time, but left school to join Robert at the Retreat when he was assigned there after a short stay at the base camp at West Campton (CPS 32). She elaborated on the issue of Robert's decision to waive his

exemption from the draft as a minister in training in order to register as a conscientious objector and the reluctance of his draft board to register him as a CO: “[T]here already had been a court case saying that it was possible to do that. A student at the University of Chicago had wanted to waive his theological exemption [and] many of the other students tried to do that, but their draft boards said, ‘Sorry, you’re in theological school; you’re going to be a minister.’ This was partly because they didn’t want to have so many COs. If they could classify them anything else but CO, the draft boards were anxious to do that.”²³

Thomas Shipley arrived at Brattleboro from the Powellsville, Maryland, camp (CPS 52) in November 1944 and served until demobilized in June 1946. Just nineteen years old, he was one of the younger members of the CPS group. He described how he came to the decision to apply for CO status:

I grew up in a Quaker family, and that undoubtedly had an influence on [me]. Also of influence was going to a Quaker school, Germantown Friends School [in Philadelphia]. There weren’t many Quakers there, but we got into all sorts of arguments and discussions in the school. So very often I wound up discussing this with my good friends, some of whom then went off and went into the army. . . . Of course, it wasn’t an issue until the war broke out for real. Pearl Harbor really made it happen. . . . I was drafted in ’43 and of course at that point you said ‘yea’ or ‘nay.’

I was one of the first that [my draft board] actually called in to interview on this topic and they interviewed me and they asked me for my reasons. It was a relatively benign interview. I was relatively quickly classified as 4-E.²⁴

William D. Foye came from Middletown, Connecticut. “Officially, I was a Baptist,” Foye explained, although, he added, he had not been active in any religious denomination. The Baptists “had something called the Peace Foundation,” but the church that his family attended had no association with that splinter group. Foye therefore arrived at his decision to be a CO from a combination of philosophical and religious perspectives. While enrolled as a student in 1939 at Wesleyan University in Middletown, he took a course called “The Problem of War.” Listed as an interdepartmental course offered by the Religion and Ethics Department at Wesleyan, it was taught jointly by faculty from history, economics, religion, and philosophy. The philosophy professor was Cornelius Cruse. “He was a Quaker,” Foye recalled, “and fairly active in the Society of Friends. I knew Professor Cruse [personally], and he was a pacifist. He’d been a pacifist in World War I and had gone to France to do reconstruction work after the war. And he was the one who really influenced me.”²⁵

Foye left Wesleyan in 1940 to complete his education at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y.

When I was a Pratt I became active in the Fellowship of Reconciliation and kept contact with friends there. I was drafted when I was in Brooklyn. But since I lived in Middletown and I was registered in Brooklyn, there was some confusion. Both draft boards seemed to not want me on their rolls because I was a CO.

I was denied the status eventually [because] they didn't want anybody in it. They didn't say why, they just said 'No.' So I had to go before a federal judge in New York City for an appeal to see if I could get this status upheld. And they finally granted me a CO. You see, partly it was that I wasn't at that time a member of a peace church, and that probably influenced them some.²⁶

Foye and several of his acquaintances at Wesleyan signed the Oxford Pledge, a statement of personal commitment not to fight in a war.²⁷ "There were quite a few people at Wesleyan that signed up—probably there were eight or ten that eventually did become COs. But as soon as the war started, most of them decided that they didn't agree with that anymore. But it was the time when you thought, a lot of people thought, well, that was the last war and there wouldn't be any more war." When he transferred to Pratt Institute he made contact with Quakers, largely through his associations with members of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. By the time Foye was called before his draft board, he had his own interpretation of biblical text: "I didn't believe that you should take other people's lives. And the way I interpreted the New Testament I felt at that time, I don't know that I do now, but at that time I placed a lot on the teachings of Jesus."²⁸

Information about the rise of the Nazi party in Germany was not plentiful, according to Foye:

Kristalnacht: I knew about that. But my first recollection of Hitler, for instance, was reading in what used to be called the *Literary Digest*, and I remember reading at that time that he was considered a very strange character that would never get anywhere; and that they couldn't quite understand how he'd got as far as he did and what were these Germans thinking about, and that sort of thing. . . . I don't remember when I heard about the concentration camps, or what went on in them. I don't think I knew at that time.²⁹

Many of the men who served in CPS 87 had the support of their families. Several mentioned that their families either agreed with their position to become COs or did not voice active disagreement. Luther Kirsch's whole family supported his decision; his mother also encouraged his pacifist thinking and during his time in CPS, she organized a

group of women in their home church to send “books and goodies.” Theodore S. Horvath, who went on to become a minister, wrote:

My family background was in the Hungarian Reformed Church . . . where pacifism was a relatively unknown concept in what was still a second-generation immigrant church. My father, an ordained minister, died in 1929. My mother and my [younger] brothers, however, gave me moral support, as did the pastor of my home congregation, even though all four of my brothers later went into the military . . . as did all of the other young men of my home congregation. One of my brothers was killed as an infantryman in the invasion of France, . . . but even then none in my family, church, or community turned against me for my CO position. I received open support in my community from the minister of the South Norwalk [Connecticut] Congregational Church, who was a life-long war resister, and from a Quaker who was on the national staff of the YMCA at its New York headquarters and who held to the peace witness.³⁰

Several men received modest financial support from family or wives to supplement the meager pay that the CPS members received during their terms of service. In the diary Wes Herwig kept throughout his service in CPS and in numerous letters home he noted the arrival of boxes of clothing, supplies, subscriptions to magazines and auction catalogues related to his intense interest in circuses, and even food sent by various members of his family, supplemented with a few modest gifts of cash. His family never faltered in their support of him and never questioned his decision to be a conscientious objector.

This was not uniformly the case, however. One member reported that “some tolerated it (grudgingly); two uncles cut me off completely.” Robert Fleisher, a native of New York City, was from a German-Jewish family, but had been brought up in the Ethical Culture Society. His family had been mostly antiwar and angry about the treatment of Germany after World War I. But after the family started to hear about the Nazi persecution of Jews, they became pro-war. His persistence as a conscientious objector angered the family and caused a split that never healed.

Robert Dick’s decision to declare himself a CO elicited a variety of responses in his family. His brother-in-law, who was active in the American Legion, wrote: “As to being a conscientious objector: If one could not be, we certainly would not be a democracy, and I do not feel it is acting the part of a good American citizen to ridicule anyone taking that attitude. At the same time, it does not meet with my approval or rather my personal opinion at all.” A nephew wrote: “I think you are kind of crazy to get exempted because of religious beliefs. I do not want to criticize you but I think you are doing very wrong.” But the harshest criticism Dick received was from his older brother, whom he had “always admired”: “I am concerned in the attitude you are taking in this

present crisis. Do you realize you are ruining your life by doing as you are? Think of the many boys just from this town that are doing their part. They write home and ask about the slackers. I shiver to think that you are in that list.”³¹

DOING “WORK OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE”

Section 5(g) of the 1940 Selective Service Act provided that conscientious objectors who refused noncombatant duty would be assigned to do “work of national importance under civilian direction.” Neither President Roosevelt nor General Hershey wanted COs in highly visible places. Consequently COs mustered into service at the relatively remote CCC camps, where they continued the work of the now terminated Civilian Conservation Corps, working on forestry and conservation projects, building roads, clearing trails, digging irrigation ditches, and fighting forest fires. Nonetheless, many COs resented the forest service assignments at the base camps, which they considered merely make-work, unimportant, and punitive. They especially resented the obvious and to them demeaning strategy of hiding them away from view, where their “witness” to pacifism would be invisible and could be ignored. Robert Dick had been in the CCC before going to seminary. When he was assigned to the base camp at West Campton, N.H., he was disappointed because “I felt that this was simply a continuation of what I had done in the CCC—it was not work of national importance.”³²

By 1943, however, shortages in the workforce in other sectors of the economy provided the opportunity to expand the scope of CPS assignments. The “special projects” or “detached units” were assigned to Agricultural Experiment Stations, the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Service, the Office of Scientific Research and Development, the Weather Bureau, the Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, and to sixty-five public mental hospitals and state training schools around the country.³³

The detached service thus offered a greater variety of work opportunities that met a variety of needs and goals for the COs. Some of the men who volunteered to work at the Brattleboro Retreat did so from personal interests in mental health. Roger Harnish wrote that he was motivated by his “innate interest in [the] medical field and a desire to help others.”³⁴ Henry Ormsby, who was at Brattleboro from September 1943 to March 1946, wrote:

In 1942, when I was first drafted, I was sent to Royalston, Massachusetts, to an old C.C.C. camp [CPS 10]. The project there was to dig waterholes in the forest to be used for fire protection. I did not feel this was important work and after three months I applied for hospital work and was accepted by Columbia Medical Center in N.Y.C. I worked there for about a year as a bus boy in the nurses’

dining room. While there I became friends with another C.O. He talked me into applying for work in a mental hospital because they were short handed for patient care and my wife could work in the hospital, too.³⁵

Like Ormsby, several men were married and their wives were allowed to live and work with them, and earn more money as regular employees of the Retreat than the \$15.00/month that men earned as CPS members.³⁶ The 1944 issue of “Communiqué from Brattleboro” noted that eleven of the men were married—almost half the population of the unit at that time. Six couples were working at the Retreat, the wives of four other men worked elsewhere, and one member was about to marry. When Helen Dick left seminary to follow her husband Robert, she was hired at the Retreat and earned \$60/month, still a paltry salary for her sixty-hours-a-week job.

Barbara Griffith was the sister of Tom Griffith, one of the men serving in CPS 87 in 1944. In late October that year she traveled by horseback from her family home on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, to visit her brother and his wife. During the visit she met Herbert Beam. Barbara later moved to Brattleboro, where she took a job as a bookkeeper at the Hotel Brooks. After she and Herbert married in August 1945, Barbara took a job at the Retreat and they lived on the grounds.³⁷

Married couples were allowed to live together in rooms on the grounds of the Retreat. Initially, married men had to live on the grounds but when they were not on duty could stay overnight with wives living off the campus. Later, married couples were allowed to live together full time off the grounds and a few found apartments in town. Robert and Avis Fleisher were among those who moved into town. Robert recalled that they, like other COs and their wives, were looked upon with distrust if not outright dislike in town. He recalled being booed and hissed at. Their upstairs neighbor in the house where they lived banged on the floor all day to disturb them, and when they complained to the landlord, they were told that the upstairs tenant was there to stay, whereas they were only temporary tenants. Eventually the Fleishers moved out of town and walked two miles to their work at the Retreat. Robert mentioned trying to thumb a ride, but no one would pick him up.³⁸

The wives of COs who worked at the Retreat mostly did the same kinds of ward attendant and “housekeeping” work assigned to the COs. Some of the women had limited nursing duties, although few had any formal nursing training and relied on principles of pacifism and their religious training to get them through difficult moments with patients and staff. Avis Fleisher reflected on a year at the Retreat in the February 1944 issue of “Communiqué from Brattleboro”:

After a year's experience of evils inherent in the mental hospital system, and of course in conscription which made this experience possible, there are still many advantages apparent at the Brattleboro Retreat.

From a personal viewpoint, living conditions and working environment are better than average for such institutions. Husbands and wives have the privileges of living and working together, and exploring the field of psychology. . . .

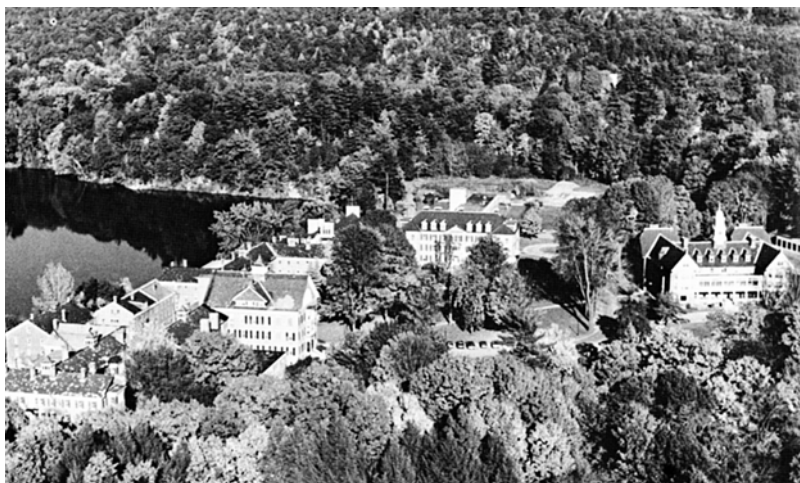
Most important is the test of pacifist principles in our associations with others of opposing views and in dealing with patients whose reasoning powers are nil.³⁹

Helen Dick, in her contribution to the same publication, commented on the need—in the absence of any formal training—to improvise in dealing with patients:

My first reaction as an attendant in a mental hospital was one of bewilderment. The primary concern of the institution is to serve the patient, but just how was one who had no training in this work to help most? It was reassuring to learn from a former patient that one's most effective contribution can be made through the daily practice of basic Christian principles such as kindness, courtesy and understanding.⁴⁰

Barbara Beam wrote of using principles from Quaker reading that she began after her marriage to Herbert, who was a Quaker, to solve problems with both patients and staff. Assigned to night duty on a ward that housed “the most disturbed women patients,” Beam worked with a young woman attendant “who took no nonsense from any of the patients.” One night they had to deal with a restless patient, who had earned the sobriquet “The Tiger” because of her violent outbursts that included scratching and clawing. When the staff attendant suggested “putting her to bed”—which meant subduing the patient and restraining her in straightjacket—Beam received hesitant permission to try an alternative approach. She described slowly, cautiously, and softly calling to the patient. When the patient stopped screaming “as suggested in the Quaker book, I held out my hand and asked her to put hers in mine. Each passing second seemed an age. I wondered if she would jump me, but finally she gave me her hand. Then I asked if she would walk with me. She got up from the bench, and hand in hand we walked the long corridor. At last she asked in a very small voice, ‘Do you think I should go back to bed?’” Having successfully gotten the patient back to bed and “feeling pretty good,” Beam returned to her station where the attendant eyed her carefully and admitted “You two didn’t see me, but I was down there hiding out of sight close by, just in case.” Beam concluded that “in spite of her tough, no-nonsense demeanor” the attendant “really cared about the people in her care, me included.”⁴¹

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Brattleboro Retreat, 1940. From Esther Munroe Swift and Mona Beach, Brattleboro Retreat, 1834–1984: 150 Years of Caring (1984), 126.

Beam's application of Quaker nonviolence was used by many of the COs in their relationships with patients and staff. Much of this they learned from each other or from materials that the NSBRO and its member organizations prepared and distributed to COs working in the mental hospitals and training schools.

WORKING AND LIVING AT THE RETREAT

The members of the unit performed clerical work, served as attendants on the wards, and worked as farm hands at the Retreat's farm under the direct supervision of the superintendent of the Retreat. Dr. Elliott noted at the time the memo creating the unit was drafted that he anticipated having opportunities for the men to use their specific skills in the Retreat's occupational therapy programs for patients (music, art, woodworking, dance, and sports). He also anticipated using two or three of the men in the hydrotherapy unit, where he had a shortage of workers, and he committed to providing the COs training in nursing and first aid.

The draftees of CPS 87 assigned to do general ward duties at the Brattleboro Retreat, which housed both publicly funded and private patients, worked on the men's wards in both areas of the hospital. They served food, washed and groomed the patients, cleaned up after incontinent patients, and sometimes took patients on walks or attended

to other personal needs. Because of the shortage of employees, CPS men were also assigned to some routine cleaning duties in the women's wards.

Theodore Horvath described the work on the wards in some detail:

The duties were to work under the supervisor of the ward (a non-professional who had risen from the ranks of the attendants) in keeping the patients occupied in maintaining their rooms and the ward as a whole and in keeping the patients from harming one another. Since I worked only on wards four and five for the most severe cases, very little group activity was possible. A few on ward five were well enough to qualify for the daily trips to occupational therapy classes, which meant that an attendant would escort them to another building for the classes and remain with them for the return trip to the ward. From other wards where patients were farther along the road to recovery an attendant might be assigned to escort a patient for a walk around the grounds or even into town, to see the sights or even to have a lunch in a restaurant, as part of the recovering therapy. On the wards, the duties were mainly supervision of the patients, looking after their physical welfare and physical cleanliness, and at meal times feeding those who were unable to feed themselves. I remember being assigned at times to ward four for night duty, as the lone attendant for the forty or fifty patients, and having to be especially on the alert for any emergency, should one or more patients become disturbed or become ill. My ward duties did not change over the eight months.⁴²

In the February 1944 issue of "Communiqué from Brattleboro" several men described their work in similar terms—adding to the list of routine ward and grounds-keeping work, assisting patients in the occupational therapy shops. Roger Harnish, who had experience cutting hair, became "a part-time tonsorial specialist; I cut about thirty heads of hair a day." Jim Jamieson, a music major in college, noted that "I have had the chance to work with patients both in ensemble playing and teaching. We have a choral group; I also have led a small amount of community singing." Luther Kirsch, who had a night shift, described getting the patients to bed, trying to keep them there, keeping records of sleep patterns of some patients, and changing soiled beds or waking patients for bathroom purposes during the night. "Most night attendants find, during the eleven hours stretch, leisure moments for reading, studying, and correspondence. The job is a lonely one for most, for which we compensate by a monthly party."⁴³

The men worked a regular rotation—that is, the same rotation as the civilian employees: six days a week, twelve hours a day, with an hour and a half off for meals. They could accumulate their one day off each week to a maximum of three consecutive days off. Pay was stipulated at \$2.50 a month plus maintenance, which included room, board, and

suitable working clothing. They received free medical and dental care, paid for by the Retreat, upon authorization by the hospital director. They were eligible for a two-week vacation or furlough after one year of service.

The COs were free to come and go from the grounds of the Retreat when they were not on duty, and to use the facilities for meetings, recreation, and education “as long as they conduct themselves with gentlemanly decorum”—words that Dr. Elliott wrote into the memo of understanding.⁴⁴

Although CPS 87 was about the average size for a unit assigned to a mental hospital, the Brattleboro Retreat was among the smallest of the facilities that received CPS units. This provided some opportunities for closer interaction with the medical and professional staff than at the larger mental hospitals that had CPS placements; but it also meant that personnel shortages put extra pressure on the CPS units to fill in the gap. Both situations seem to have occurred. Working in the infirmary and other wards where patients received nursing service gave some of the men opportunities to interact with the professional staff, but that was always on a limited basis.

Relations with the professional staff were for the most part cordial but distant. Although many of the men in CPS 87, and their wives, had some college education or had finished college by the time they were drafted into service, the Retreat professional staff seemed to take little notice of that or try to use it to any particular advantage in assigning work. One member commented that he was allowed to assist in one of the treatment rooms, but this was clearly the exception. A few men noted that they had good working relationships with Dr. Catherine Armstrong and with Dr. Neils Anthonisen, clinical director at the Retreat.

Dr. Elliott himself kept his distance from the COs. With over 150 employees and 750 to 800 patients to supervise, it might have been unreasonable to expect the hospital director to give the twenty-five CPS men and their wives any special attention. Yet several of the men and women associated with CPS remarked on Dr. Elliott’s uneasy relationship with them. Thomas Shipley remembered Dr. Elliott as “very stiff and ‘proper’” who had “very strong opinions about how people should behave on the wards. You never really saw much of him. You knew he was there and he was looked upon as a very strict administrator, if not a martinet.”⁴⁵ But Shipley also remembered that when he told Elliott of his interest in psychology and psychopathology, Elliott showed some flexibility and looked at some notes Shipley had made on patients. At the conclusion of his November 1943 report to AFSC, Huston Westover remarked that “Dr. Elliott apparently is quite authoritarian in his

Dr. George Albert Elliott, superintendent of the Brattleboro Retreat, 1940–1949. From Esther Munroe Swift and Mona Beach, Brattleboro Retreat, 1834–1984: 150 Years of Caring (1984), 125.



treatment of employees; however, as yet this has brought no particular reaction from the men of the unit with the exception of a few minor cases. He never meets with the unit.”⁴⁶ Invited to contribute some comments in the February 1944 “Communiqué from Brattleboro,” which was devoted to reflecting on the past year of service, Dr. Elliott wrote two short paragraphs on the theme of “service.”

The relationship between Dr. Elliott and the CPS unit continued to be stiff, and over time several conflicts concerning large and small issues emerged. These were handled primarily through the CPS unit’s assistant director, an administrative position created by the AFSC to serve as liaison between the members of the unit, the AFSC administrative staff, and the hospital’s administrative officer, in this case, Dr. Elliott. Soon after his arrival at Brattleboro, Theodore Horvath was assigned by AFSC to be the first assistant director—or as they came to be known, “AD”—of CPS 87. He described his working relationship with Dr. Elliott as “always on the best of terms. He was a man of strong temperament and ran a tight ship. But even when we had some difficult problems to handle . . . I do not recall any blow-ups on Dr. Elliott’s part—he was firm but fair in the way he handled all administrative problems.”⁴⁷ All of Horvath’s successors as ADs, however, had rockier working relationships with Dr. Elliott.

Robert Dick was selected to be the AD in 1944. By then, the organization of the COs at Brattleboro, as elsewhere, had become more elaborate, with the addition of a personnel secretary—or “Persec” as it was

known—to coordinate on-site educational and training programs and arrange for appearances by guest speakers sent out by NSBRO, AFSC, and other peace groups. Over time, the reporting and programming duties of the assistant director and personnel secretary, and eventually also an education secretary, “Edsec,” had grown to such proportions that they had negotiated with Dr. Elliott to give each of these people time off from ward work, as was the case with most other CPS sites. To minimize the impact of these released hours, the AD was usually assigned to the night shift. But these adjustments of work schedules developed over time into a major source of conflict between Dr. Elliott and the men of the CPS unit. Reluctantly conceding hours, and complaining to AFSC that his own administrative staff was perfectly capable of doing the required paperwork, Dr. Elliott continued to argue that his first concern was the well-being and care of the patients. He therefore objected to the amount of time he had to give away from ward work for unit administrative work.

Joseph Albrecht became the third AD for the unit in August 1944, following Robert Dick’s departure to participate in medical experiments at Rochester, New York. Albrecht, too, tangled with Dr. Elliott over the amount of time he would be released from ward duty to accomplish the administrative and record keeping work required by AFSC in its reporting responsibilities to the Selective Service System.

Luther Kirsch was the unit’s fourth AD, elected in April 1945. He and Dr. Elliott had a rocky relationship from the beginning, in part because of Elliott’s growing irritation that the administrative structure of the CPS unit interfered with their service on the wards. This dispute apparently triggered a much deeper disagreement between Elliott and the unit. In a letter to AFSC in July 1945, Kirsch reported Elliott saying that “a question has been plaguing him for quite some time.”

The question is: “Just how far does conscience go?” I am not certain what he meant by it, but I suppose he is wondering how men of conscience (his phrase) can act the way they do by always questioning his actions and bringing up issues. Along with this he said that we were all selfish, interested primarily in ourselves and our own comfort and enjoyment and not really concerned with the patients’ coming first. Every time he says “no” to us on some issue we revolt and become rebellious, he says, and I suppose he thinks that is conduct unbecoming to a c.o.⁴⁸

Despite his difficult relationship with the COs, Dr. Elliott continued to try to bargain with the Selective Service for additional men for the unit. But AFSC and the Selective Service System resisted Elliott’s plea for more manpower, noting first that the Retreat served both public and private patients, and that the CPS units were meant to serve only

public institutions; and second that “it should not fall upon CPS men to attempt to cover the whole shortage of an institution.”⁴⁹

The problem of administrative duties never came to a satisfactory conclusion, although Dr. Elliott appears to have reconciled himself to the fact that he would not get any additional men and would have to accept the released time arrangement.

Kirsch and Elliott also tangled over personal leave time and procedures, how many nights out would be allowed to single men in CPS, who controlled which personnel records, and who reported to which authority about the performance and policies of the unit. Dr. Elliott objected to AFSC and Selective Service policies that ran counter to those adopted by his board of trustees, and at one point discussed ending the relationship with CPS entirely. On their side, the men of the unit and the AFSC staff in Philadelphia had similar misgivings about continuing the relationship and discussed withdrawing CPS from Brattleboro. But Elliott was desperately short of workers and for all his complaints, did not finally recommend pulling out of the program. Similarly the CPS men, when they weighed the alternatives, decided that they preferred to stick it out at the Retreat rather than disband and relocate at some other mental hospitals. Several transferred, however, to different units and to different special programs.

Another ongoing area of disagreement between Dr. Elliott and the unit—and indeed between Dr. Elliott and the AFSC—was over training and education of the men for the work they were doing. This problem emerged early in the history of the unit and apparently was never adequately resolved. Dr. Elliott claimed that the small population of the unit, the constant turnover of men, and shortages of professional staff at the Retreat made it inefficient and difficult for him to provide the professional training that had been an item in the original agreement. At the end of June 1943, J. Huston Westover from the American Friends Service Committee visited the Retreat on his circuit of visits to CPS units at mental hospitals sponsored by AFSC. While he noted with approval the living and working arrangements for the CPS men and wives, he also commented on the education opportunities: “There has been some small-scale education here: a series of evening lectures. Dr. Elliott seems open, however, to a real educational program, especially if 15 more men will be forthcoming in the fall. . . . He wants the men to be trained ‘with their feet on the ground.’” Westover was concerned, however, by the delay in getting a full education program going and recommended that “we should not waste any more time than absolutely necessary in getting our minimum educational plans set up, as there is great danger, in my mind, of the men getting patterned after

former attendant standards before their courses start. . . . There are very apparent morale and job proficiency differences where men are properly trained. Wives should be included in this program also.”⁵⁰

When he visited again in November 1943, Westover noted the lack of progress in setting up a training program. “Dr. Elliott is interested in introducing some instruction for the men, and they in turn are greatly interested in job education, feeling it quite improper that they have been there so long without orientation or teaching of procedures. I encouraged Dr. Elliott to use part time of one nurse, as other even more needy hospitals have done, to train these men to give better service.”⁵¹

In the absence of substantial training offered by the Retreat, the unit created some of its own educational programs and drew upon resources provided by the NSBRO and its member organizations. AFSC gave each unit \$250 a year for educational activities, programs, and library purchases. The unit’s personnel secretary, and later the education secretary, used this fund to schedule educational programs and guest speakers, purchase books and educational materials for the unit library, and circulate training materials that came from NSBRO, the member churches, and the Mental Hygiene Program of the Civilian Public Service, which took shape as several units formed to work in mental hospitals and training schools. In his November 1943 report to AFSC, Westover commended the unit: “For their part our men have done well in advancing their own information. From the educational funds allotted them by us, the entire required book list for attendant training has been purchased, as well as other valuable books. The library in general is quite excellent for a unit of this size.”⁵²

The formation of a network of training and educational materials coming from the peace churches and pacifist organizations to CPS units suggests that the problem in Brattleboro was not unique, and that the training that CPS created for its members either filled a vacuum at the hospitals that had CPS units or supplemented (and perhaps replaced) the training that the hospitals routinely offered attendants. As early as January 1943, leadership within the CPS recognized this effort as both its mission and its contribution to mental health care. A memo circulated to CPS units at mental hospitals observed:

Our unique contribution which we can make to mental institutions is the preparation of orientation and training material. Many of us have come to work in mental institutions without receiving adequate instruction in the care of patients. As a result, we have frequently used trial and error methods which sometimes have been to the disadvantage of our patients. But another result of this trial and error experience has been the gradual refinement of old techniques and occasionally the development of better ones.⁵³

A year later, the first issue of “The Attendant” appeared, published for CPS members by the Mental Hygiene Program of Civilian Public Service. Published monthly as a typeset and printed pamphlet, each issue of “The Attendant” ran a feature article with a byline and shorter articles or symposia, with unsigned contributions from members of CPS units in mental hospitals around the country.

There were also periodic but infrequent training sessions for the assistant directors, for which they received furlough time from the hospital and travel expenses from AFSC, to help them learn what was expected of them as liaisons to the sponsoring church and indirectly to NSBRO.

The nonprofessional staff who were at the Retreat when the CPS draftees arrived for the most part kept their distance from the COs and initially disliked them as a group. In part, the ill will was because of the men’s declared pacifism—not a popular position under the best of circumstances. In part, the tension between hired staff and COs was based on concern and suspicion that the CPS men would replace hospital staff. This was not a realistic expectation, since there was a great shortage of labor for the hospital. Dr. Elliott had informed the hospital staff of the arrival of the COs ahead of time, and in fact had each staff member sign a statement that they would agree to work with conscientious objectors; and he had negotiated with both the American Legion and local labor leaders to secure if not their agreement then at least their acquiescence in bringing the COs to the Retreat.⁵⁴

In part, too, the distance between the regular staff and the CPS members and their spouses was clearly an issue of class—real or, sometimes, perceived. Most of the members of the CPS unit had some college education or had completed college; some had advanced degrees, including one who was a candidate for a Ph.D. in astronomy. Few if any of the regular staff of the hospital had gone beyond secondary school in their education. Most of the regular staff were not highly trained or highly skilled workers and were not highly paid. Average salary for workers at the Retreat was \$69 a month, plus room, meals, and laundry.⁵⁵ They were just getting by economically; some were single parents with children; some had husbands or brothers in the armed services. While the CPS members came from a diverse background of social and economic circumstances, the perception among staff members seemed to be that these men and their wives had independent means, were being supported with room and board by the government or by the Retreat, and were enjoying benefits that staff members did not have access to.

Moreover, there were few areas of overlap in the lives, experiences, and core beliefs of the staff and the CPS unit members. The CPS members were by law assigned to duty outside their home states or outside a

100-mile radius of their home town. Although some came from rural environments, most of the men had some urban experiences and had seen more of the world, or at least more of the nation, than most of the ward staff workers. Even in their religious convictions, staff and CPS unit members found little in common; the CPS members finding in their religious traditions, beliefs, or practices, a philosophy of pacifism that the staff members did not share.

Over time, according to most CO reports, the CPS men and the other staff worked out some live-and-let-live relationships at work and most got along without conflict. There are few reports of socializing between the CPS unit and the other staff, and what success the CPS population had in meeting other workers and other people from the Brattleboro area were primarily in one-to-one contacts. But relationships with the other staff were complicated. Luther Kirsch reported that the staff night attendants typically had a get-together and, while they did not like to associate with the CPS members, nonetheless resented it if the COs did not show up. "Usually regular employees refuse to participate [in social events] if they know CO's are going to be there too. . . . Now the condition is reversed, and people feel hurt if we don't take a part in activities with them. . . . I think some of the regulars believe we consider ourselves superior to them, and thus show our contempt of them and their inferiority by not attending. . . . I was struck by this desire on the part of regular employees for CPS men to attend the party, when usually the feeling is to be glad if the CPS men don't appear."⁵⁶ Kirsch also wrote a long account of an exchange with an off-duty attendant in a local tavern that almost came to blows. But he also reported that an informal and unofficial get-together of staff and COs at CPS member John Pullman's farm near Brattleboro was congenial and relaxed, until one of the attendants mistook the swastika-like figure on a traditional Indian blanket for a pro-Nazi sentiment.⁵⁷ Robert Dick remembered that some attendants were friendly in individual contacts but would strike a pose of hostility and insult in groups or in public. Helen Dick never felt comfortable or welcomed by the nursing and female attendant staff, and Barbara Beam's story of facing down "the Tiger" suggests that the COs and their wives won acceptance slowly and grudgingly, and only by showing enormous patience.

Contacts with other members of the Brattleboro community were spotty and irregular. The twelve-hour shifts, six days a week, left little time or energy for socializing or other activities, and what there was seems to have been spent in individual study or activities on or close to the Retreat. Some recreational facilities at the Retreat were available to the CPS members, including a bowling alley and a gymnasium that

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Sunday evening Quaker Meeting (also known as “Vesper Service”) with CPS 87 members and families, and Brattleboro residents, on a hillside above the Brattleboro Retreat, 1943 or 1944. Clockwise from left: Joe Albrecht, Cassie Albrecht, Peggy Ormsby, two unidentified women (in hats) and unidentified man from Brattleboro, Ben Cates (with guitar), Mary Harnish, unidentified woman, Helen Dick (back to camera), Robert Dick, two unidentified women. Photo courtesy of Robert and Helen Dick, who also provided information about the photo.

was used for Saturday night dances. Many used off-duty time to work at the Retreat’s thirty-acre farm, three miles from the hospital grounds, where they worked in the vegetable gardens, kitchen, and barns, helped with canning, and organized informal evening social activities. They used the town library and on their rare day or night off went into the town for entertainment. The married couples who lived in apartments off the Retreat grounds often hosted the others at evening get-togethers, for lectures, study groups, and informal sing-along evenings. And CPS member John Pullman and his wife bought a farm near the village where the CPS members gathered to get away from the Retreat altogether.

There were a small number of pacifists in the Brattleboro area, organized by Methodist minister, Rev. Robert White, and some CPS members remembered making friends in town. Bob and Helen Dick also recalled that the Congregational minister, Milton Czatt, was “quite

supportive.”⁵⁸ He served as a chaplain and director of human and social services at the Retreat in 1943, and later became executive assistant and admissions officer for the hospital. Others reported a pervasive and persistent hostility, being publicly booed and reviled, and called “yellow” or “yellowbellied”—which was the almost universal epithet applied to COs, suggesting cowardice rather than principled resistance to war. Luther Kirsch wrote about being taunted by a man selling newspapers at the Brattleboro rail station. Aside from the first notice in the *Brattleboro Reformer* that the unit was going to be stationed, there are no mentions of the COs in the local paper.

These responses to the COs by members of the community are typical of what CPS members around the country reported, although the reaction of people in Brattleboro seems to have been milder than what many COs encountered elsewhere in the country.⁵⁹ Wes Herwig, working as a dairy herd tester in the Randolph area, reported a similar range of encounters. One farmer, a World War I veteran who was an officer in the local chapter of the American Legion, initially refused to let Herwig on his farm and it took a year before the farmer finally allowed him to test the herd. The one-to-one contacts that Herwig had as a solo worker, doing work that area farmers considered important and necessary, sometimes doing other farm chores that were not part of his assignment, and always—he said—taking an interest in the farmers and their families and speaking with them, made it easier for him to break through the barriers of ideology. In his first months on the job, Herwig had no car of his own and depended on farmers driving him from one farm to the next and letting him stay overnight at times to complete his work and make his circuit in the most efficient way. “The first few months were hard,” he commented. “There were stars in the windows” (indicating that a family member had died in the war), and “you were unsure of your reception at each farm. If the kids liked you, the dog liked you, the woman of the house liked you, you were all set.”⁶⁰ Many farmers, however, did feed and house him, apparently without malice or resentment of his position as a CO; and he made many connections and friendships in the area that later flourished when he decided after the war to settle in Randolph. The farmer who initially refused to let Herwig test the herd eventually came to him and said he was “‘getting old; my wife’s getting old; I need somebody to be an overseer for me. I wondered if you would do it.’ I said, ‘When you’re ready, holler.’”⁶¹ Herwig’s diary entries and letters do not record that he spoke much, or was asked much, about his position on the war or being a CO; but in the oral history interview it was clearer that because the extension service agents had contacted farmers before the CPS men started their

duty, it was obvious, or at least known to the farmers, that his assignment as a dairy herd tester was alternative service.⁶²

AFTER BRATTLEBORO; AFTER THE WAR

Information about special programs and openings in existing programs circulated in camp newsletters, newsletters and bulletins published by the sponsoring church organizations and the FOR, and often by word of mouth. *The Compass*, published at West Campton, N.H., and other CPS base camps, informed men in the unit (and from it; men who moved on could continue to subscribe and receive it by mail) of activities and accomplishments, spoke to the pacifist traditions that had brought them into CPS, and informed them of opportunities for other kinds of alternative service through special projects, openings at other camps, and postwar rehabilitation service. The sponsoring peace churches or pacifist groups within other denominations also published newsletters for CPS; NSBRO published a newsletter, called at different times, *Camp Information Bulletin*, *Bulletin*, and *The Reporter*; and the Fellowship of Reconciliation published a magazine called *Forward*. All of these publications helped the CPS members and their wives feel part of a larger community, isolated though they often were from the larger communities around them, or within the institutions where they were assigned to do alternative service.

A few of the men assigned to Vermont moved on to other special projects. Robert Dick left Brattleboro in August 1944 to join the medical experiments unit at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, N.Y. (CPS 115.21 [?]).⁶³ Another member of CPS 87 volunteered to be a medical “guinea pig”—as they called themselves—in CPS 140.3: the neurotropic virus project at Yale University.

William D. Foye left Brattleboro in October 1944 to join the China Unit at the Alexian Brothers Hospital in Chicago (CPS 26). “I thought that on the whole I’d had a pretty easy time of it during the war years and I thought maybe I should do a little more and maybe try to do some relief work and rehabilitation work after the war.”⁶⁴

Lee Hebel transferred to CPS 103 in Missoula, Montana, where he trained to be a smokejumper. One of the dairy herd testers also transferred to the smokejumpers project in Montana. Another dairy herd tester in the Vermont unit transferred to Byberry, the State Mental Hospital in Philadelphia (CPS 49).

Although the fighting stopped in Europe in May 1945, and in Asia in August 1945, and the war ended with the signing of a peace treaty in September 1945, according to the terms of the Selective Service Act of 1940, all those called into service would be held “for the duration” and

for up to six months following the end of the war. While pressure in Congress mounted for a more rapid demobilization of the armed forces, there was simultaneous pressure in Congress and from local draft boards and veterans organizations not to demobilize conscientious objectors at the same pace. As a result, although 60 percent of the armed forces had been demobilized by December 1945, only about 10 percent of those in Civilian Public Service were released from duty. In June 1946, President Truman signed legislation extending the life of the Selective Service Act of 1940 for an additional nine months. While this affected both military and CO draftees, the rate of release for the CPS continued to lag behind that of military units, so that the last of the CPS camps closed in March 1947.

Although an elaborate point system for discharge based on length of service, age, and other factors applied equally to military and non-military service, many COs complained bitterly that they were again being punished for acting on their principles and core beliefs and directed their anger against the NSBRO, which, they now claimed, had simply caved in to political pressure and failed to represent the interests and principles of pacifists. Held to longer service and thereby prevented from getting back into the labor force, paid lower wages than military draftees or civilians, denied the financial benefits, education, mortgages, and health care that were granted to those who did military duty, COs argued that they, too, had done service and were suffering continuing discrimination. At some of the CPS camps, men walked out or refused further labor when the overseas fighting stopped, and some were jailed as a result, although most were later released under a “selective amnesty” proclamation signed by President Truman on Christmas Eve, 1947.⁶⁵

The Brattleboro unit began demobilization in early 1946. At the beginning of February the unit had twenty-one members; at the end of the month only fifteen were on the roster. The last members of the unit were discharged from CPS duty on July 10, 1946.

Despite his ongoing conflicts with the COs, Dr. Elliott was reluctant to see the unit demobilized, for he continued to have serious problems recruiting staff for ward attendants. In September 1945 he told Luther Kirsch that he needed 100 staff members, but even as Brattleboro was gearing up for a postwar revival of industry with reconversion to civilian production, the Retreat struggled to find workers. In a letter to the Friends Service Committee, Kirsch reported that there were over 1,000 jobs available in Brattleboro, that the Estey Organ Company and A. G. Spaulding and Brothers had taken out big ads in the *Brattleboro Reformer* recruiting workers, promising permanent work, good wages

(Spaulding advertised “60¢–85¢ cents an hour with piece work earnings of over \$1 an hour for men; less for women”), forty- to fifty-hour work weeks, and benefits including hospitalization and rest periods. Estey offered to pay five cents a mile for workers who had to travel six miles or more to the factory. By contrast, Kirsch added, the advertisements for the Retreat “often do not state the name of the hospital, but merely mention that an institution is in need of help. Their ads are small, hardly designed to catch the eye, they speak of good wages but say nothing definite, they tell of good hours, but twelve hours [a day] are hardly good.”⁶⁶ A few of the CPS men and their wives stayed on as paid employees of the Retreat, but most left as soon as they were released from service.

Where the CPS men went after completing their service reflects in part the convictions and concerns that had brought them to the Retreat and into CPS. Joseph Albrecht went to work for the Board of World Peace of the Methodist Church in Chicago. Daniel Allen, who served as the unit’s last assistant director, stayed on at the Retreat for a few weeks and then moved to Middletown, Connecticut, to teach history at Wesleyan University, eventually retiring from Hartwick College in Oneonta, N.Y.

Bob Currier walked out of CPS 87 on April 27, 1943, as a protest against the CO programs and policies. He was arrested and imprisoned in Danbury, Connecticut. In his autobiographical statement for the CPS 87 fiftieth anniversary reunion in Brattleboro, he wrote: “As ill-conceived and youthful as that plunge might have been, I don’t regret my prison experience leading up to our strike against segregation and my expulsion while others went into prolonged isolation.” After the war, Currier was a musician in New Orleans, Indianapolis, and Providence, Rhode Island, where he taught violin, and continued to be involved in civil rights and antiwar activities.⁶⁷

Robert Fleisher, who had worked steadily on his Ph.D. dissertation in astronomy throughout his service in CPS, went directly to a position teaching physics and astronomy at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute until 1962, worked for the National Science Foundation until 1976, consulted with colleges and universities on federal relations, then retired to do part-time farming.

After completing his training at the Alexian Brothers hospital in Chicago, William Foye went to China with a Friends Ambulance Unit, started and staffed by British doctors and medical assistants, and worked in a kala-azar unit in Honan province for two years.⁶⁸ He returned to the United States in 1948 and went to architecture school at Syracuse University, then settled in his family home in Middletown, Connecticut.

Roger Harnish went back to a job as a production planner at Eastman Kodak in Rochester, N.Y., where he retired after forty-four years. H. Lee Hebel, who left Brattleboro to join a CPS smokejumpers training unit in Montana, found work with the U.S. Forestry Service as a smokejumper and fire fighter, then became a Lutheran minister. Ernest Hixon found a position teaching at a private school for boys, then worked for Oxford University Press. When he retired, he moved back to Brattleboro. Henry Ormsby, whose wife had worked with him at the Retreat, had trained as an engineer before the war. His daughter was born while he was in CPS, and after his release from the unit, Ormsby went back to Philadelphia to look for work in engineering. When Robert Wehmeyer left the Retreat to do dairy testing in Windham County, his wife stayed on at the Retreat through the war years. Two of their children were born while he was in CPS, and after demobilization he moved his family to Manchester, N.H., to become a youth director and summer camp director for the YMCA.

Robert Dick completed his training for the ministry in the Universalist Church. In the summer of 1949, recognizing his experience at the Brattleboro Retreat, the Universalist Service Committee asked him to direct an Institutional Service Unit (ISU) at the Danvers, Massachusetts, State Hospital. The fifteen college-age participants worked on the wards for ten weeks, forty hours a week. Dick later did clinical pastoral training programs at Ann Arbor, Michigan, and at the Boston State Hospital to qualify as a chaplain in a mental hospital. He served as a minister in Acton, Massachusetts; Canandaigua, N.Y., where he also did some work in a state mental hospital; rural Ohio; Springfield, Vermont, where he and his family lived from 1967 to 1976; and Elkhart, Indiana. He retired from the ministry in 1984. In his ministry, Dick commented, he maintained an unwavering commitment to pacifism, making public presentations on the rationale for being a conscientious objector and with his wife, Helen, doing draft counseling during the Korean and Vietnam wars to help men who wished to register as COs.

Thomas Shipley was among the last to leave the CPS unit Brattleboro. Finally discharged in June 1946, he used his final months there to plan for completing his college education. He had started at Haverford College, intending to study law. The time he spent at the Brattleboro Retreat influenced him to transfer to the University of Pennsylvania to study psychology. He received his B.A. and M.A. in psychology at Penn, his Ph.D. at Harvard, and returned to Philadelphia to participate in a project with the Department of Psychiatry working with men and women on skid row. This eventually became the area of concentration in his research, writing, and clinical work at Temple University. Speaking

of his experience as a CO at the Retreat, he characterized it as “a determining influence on my life . . . [b]ecause of the psychology, which at the time was a real challenge. These people had problems: what do you do about it? What the hell’s the matter with them? What the hell’s the matter with me? It became a very important experience.”⁶⁹

According to the records of CPS 100.13 at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Wes Herwig was discharged from duty as a dairy tester on May 26, 1946. But Wes had no recollection of being informed that his service as a CO had come to an end or that the CPS unit he served in had closed down, and his diary entries for 1946 do not mention being discharged. In an interview he recalled being informed of his discharge in July 1946. By that time he had developed such good rapport with the farmers that they convinced him to stay on with the Extension Service. He kept testing dairy herds in the Randolph area for sixteen years, meanwhile doing other kinds of work.

On May 18, 1946, apparently still unaware that he was about to be discharged from duty, Wes married Miriam Boyce (known as Mim) of Williamstown, Vermont. After their marriage they settled in Randolph Center, where Wes had made many friends through his CPS service. He owned a sign painting company, was a circus booking agent, and worked as an advertisement salesman, writer, and photographer for the *Randolph Herald*. The couple ran a small publishing company and helped establish a historical museum and the local historical society in Randolph.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CPS

For many of the members of CPS, the program was a mixture of frustration, humiliation, and gratifying alternative service. Most spoke of the work at the forest camps as anything but “work of national importance,” and considered their time there as little more than a way for the federal government and Selective Service to hide away from public view the existence and extent of pacifist objection to war. Some acknowledged that if they did nothing else, the camps brought together men of widely varied cultural, social, economic, and education backgrounds (although not much in the way of racial differences) for a brief time around a single shared idea of principle. That, of course, had value and significance for the COs, for it helped them to know that they were part of a community of like-minded citizens (if only on this one point of conscience), and it helped them organize themselves to accomplish activities that reflected their own ways of doing work of national importance as alternatives to combat. Only Wes Herwig, however, spoke of the camp as doing much good, because while he was at Gorham, N.H.,

the men cut wood to distribute in the nearby community of Berlin, where workers lost their jobs when International Paper Company closed its factory in response to a strike for higher wages.

By contrast, the detached service units for medical experiments, smokejumper training, mental hospitals, and dairy farms were seen by many participants as worthwhile activities that had some important and lasting effects on their lives as well as on the lives of others. Robert Dick spoke with great pride of his participation in medical experiments in lice control, diet, and high-altitude adaptation. William Foye was grateful for the training he received at the China Unit of the Alexian Brothers Hospital because it enabled him to work in the kala-azar hospital in China and allowed him to see a wider world.

Living in China and associating with people from other countries gave me a chance to see conditions and problems from the point of view of other people and other cultures and strengthened my growing belief that since we all live on one small planet, we must find ways to live together and share the earth's resources without exploiting them.⁷⁰

For Thomas Shipley, CPS opened the way to a career in clinical psychology; for Lee Hebel the service, though less than a year, taught him “much of value to me in 35 years of active Christian ministry.” Henry Ormsby wrote that “the work I did at the Retreat added much to my life experiences. It helped me overcome my fear of being in a hospital[,] and the life-long friendships I have made with fellow COs have been very special. I am still volunteering in a hospital trauma unit.”⁷¹

In addition to being among the “most rewarding as well as the most advertised work” of CPS, the detached service of COs in mental hospitals has been interpreted—at least by COs themselves—as reformist and revolutionary. In 1994 Alex Sareyan, a former member of CPS who worked at the Connecticut State Mental Hospital in Middletown, published *The Turning Point: How Men of Conscience Brought about Major Change in the Care of America's Mentally Ill*. The subtitle states one thesis of the book: that the commitment to nonviolence among COs assigned to work on the wards in mental hospitals had a revolutionary and enduring effect on the treatment of patients by ward staff; that the COs brought to their work on the wards attitudes of empathy and humaneness antithetical to the rough treatment, restraints, beatings, physical abuse, isolation, and anonymity routinely inflicted on mental patients by the staff and at least tacitly tolerated by hospital administrators; and that the Mental Hygiene Program initiated by detached units working in mental hospitals helped hospital administrators and the public at large reconsider the nature, causes, and institutional treatment of mental illness.

But change, when it came about, came slowly, as most CPS participants admit; and CPS might better be discussed as having been a catalyst for that change rather than a cause. Dr. Elliott at one point wrote approvingly of the helpfulness of the CPS unit, but he did not discuss if or how their presence altered the care of patients by his ward or professional staff. His main concern appeared to be having enough bodies to maintain basic services for patients. The Brattleboro Retreat was not among the mental hospitals that were or became notorious for the poor treatment of patients. Most of the members of CPS 87 commented that the patients were treated fairly well and that because the facility was relatively small and because it had private patients as well as those who were supported with public funds, conditions overall were better—cleaner, less crowded, less harsh or abusive—than what they saw or heard about at the larger state mental institutions. And because Dr. Elliott resigned as director of the Retreat shortly after the war, it is difficult to identify or trace institutional changes related to the presence of the CPS unit.

It is more difficult to assess the importance or influence of the CPS members who worked as dairy herd testers or who worked as farm hands. Without question, their availability to make up for the shortage of farm hands helped some farmers get through the war, and their work testing herds for butterfat content and some diseases helped preserve the always fragile but socially and economically important dairy industry in Vermont.

Nonetheless, many of the participants in CPS, and the peace churches themselves, were not altogether satisfied with the results of CPS. One area of concern was the deterioration of the separation of church and state implicit in having churches both sponsor and administer a program of alternative service designed by and in many cases operated under the direction or authority of government agencies. Critics within the religious communities argued that CPS made the churches, whose doctrines included nonviolence and pacifism, complicit in condoning war as a legitimate activity by accepting alternative service as a requirement imposed by the state. These critics argued that the Selective Service itself should have taken responsibility for the program.

A second area of concern had to do with the fact that participants in CPS received little or no pay for their work and were held to longer terms of service than members of the armed forces. The COs argued that this amounted to punishment for their commitment to their principles of nonviolence rather than acknowledgement of and accommodation to those principles. One of the most difficult and annoying aspects of CPS for those who worked in it was the ambiguity of their status. Were

they to be considered and treated as if they were doing military duty, therefore under strict supervision, with limitations on their freedom of movement and action? Were they to be considered as if they were political prisoners? This was a question of the civil rights of CPS members and, at a higher level, the civil rights of conscientious objectors.

A third area of concern was in the definition of conscientious objector. The Selective Service Act of 1940 had restricted CO classification to those whose religious practice or beliefs included nonviolence or pacifism. The sponsoring churches had no quarrel with such a definition, but interpreting that definition was left to the director of the Selective Service, and application of the definition to each case was left largely to the discretion of each draft board, subject to judicial appeal. In effect this excluded men who professed no religious doctrine, claimed no religious training or tradition, or came to pacifism from secular ethical or philosophical grounds. For some, this constituted a religious test and hence raised questions about the constitutional basis for the 1940 Selective Service law that laid the groundwork for alternative service.

Each of these issues played out in the three decades that followed World War II. A succession of Supreme Court cases and Congress's renewals and revisions of the Selective Service laws from 1948 through the 1970s revised and refined the definition of conscientious objector, eventually arriving at a definition that acknowledged the authority of philosophically derived moral and ethical principles in addition to religious credos and traditions.⁷²

These changes probably would not have affected the choices made by the men who registered as conscientious objectors and agreed to alternative service under the CPS program. Describing themselves and their choices in 1941 and 1942, the men of CPS who served in Vermont understood that they were making an absolute commitment to pacifism, even if, in some cases, they now acknowledge that the information they had about Hitler and Nazism (in particular) was incomplete. Bob and Helen Dick asserted that they have been pacifists "all our lives."⁷³ Wes Herwig reflected on his decision at the time by insisting,

I was convinced all the way through that I'd done the right thing. . . . What I was really looking for was to do what I felt was right, and I give you the same. If you thought what you were doing was right, that's okay by me, you know, I'm not going to argue that, but don't ask me to do what you were doing because I didn't think it was right, really. Even to this day it bothers me to see the government spending such a vast amount of money on war stuff.⁷⁴

Such statements of conviction have not ruled out for these men the understanding that it is easier for young men to make absolute commitments than it is for people of wider experience and riper years. Thomas

Shipley commented: “[I]t’s funny about second thoughts. I mean, in many respects I was convinced that this was an appropriate stand to take. I don’t know that I ever thought that this was the only one.”⁷⁵ And William Foye acknowledged that making his decision was easier at the age of twenty than it would be as a much older man: “Well, I’m not quite as absolute as I was before. You know, after you saw what was going on in those concentration camps, I thought if there ever was a good war that might have been it. I still didn’t like the idea of war. I thought it was counter-productive. But there are wars and there are wars, and I can see that there are differences.”⁷⁶

In the years following World War II, especially in the 1960s through 1980s, the executive branch and Congress, in some ways mindful of what had been accomplished by the Civilian Conservation Corps and Civilian Public Service, created new opportunities for national service outside the context of military duty, through freestanding federal programs such as Peace Corps, created in 1961; Job Corps and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), created in 1964; and the Corporation for National and Community Service, created in 1993, which serves as an umbrella organization for national, state, and local service programs such as Job Corps, AmeriCorps, Learn and Serve America, and the National Senior Service Corps.

Even before Congress created these organizations, however, it had set aside the structure, if not the principles, of Civilian Public Service as a model for alternatives to military duty. Because the peace churches felt compromised by their collaboration with the Selective Service System, Congress, when it rewrote the law in 1948, placed responsibility for finding alternative service in the hands of the director of Selective Service.⁷⁷ While Congress retained from the experience of CPS the goal of ordering alternative service that addressed “the maintenance of the national health, safety, or interest,” it eliminated an intermediate agency—the peace churches directly or indirectly through coalitions—as administrators and financial supporters of alternative service; and substituted a fixed term of service for the former requirement of “for the duration” plus six months.

The most obvious change in the way alternative service would be handled was the elimination of large units of COs: no more forest camps or detached units at mental hospitals. From an administrative point of view, of course, this saved the Selective Service System both financial and human resources, because the men granted CO status and assigned by the System to alternative duties found their own placements, were hired and supervised by the institution where they served, and supported themselves from their wages. And whether by design or

as a consequence of individual assignments, COs would no longer be an easily identifiable or easily self-identifying community, working at common tasks. CPS, therefore, proved to be a one-time experiment in how to manage conscientious objectors in time of war.

For those who looked back on their service in CPS in Vermont, the years and service were important and in some cases turning points in their lives. In the spring of 1993 members of CPS 87 and their spouses held a reunion at the Brattleboro Retreat to mark fifty years since their unit was organized. They toured the grounds and buildings where they had spent some of the war years and some, or almost all, of their time doing alternative service. They renewed acquaintances, recalled events, activities, and their time together at the Retreat, then went their separate ways again. For almost all, this was an important time and one they remember with a mix of bitterness and satisfaction and pride in what they did and how they lived out their moral or religious commitments. Thomas Shipley later characterized the time they spent together: “It was a kind of unusual community, I think. . . . The morale was always reasonably good. But everybody knew it was temporary, it wasn’t as if this was going to be your life work.”⁷⁸ Robert Fleisher wrote in his biographical sketch of his years after CPS, “We need conscientious objectors more than ever before.”⁷⁹

NOTES

¹“War Objectors Due Next Week,” *Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 13 February 1943, 1.

²“Use Conscientious Objectors As Brattleboro Retreat Attendants,” *Burlington Free Press*, 25 January, 1943, 2.

³*Brattleboro Daily Reformer*, 13 February, 1943, 1.

⁴Most of the individuals who granted oral history interviews, responded to questionnaires, loaned or gave me documents, and corresponded with me are mentioned by name in this article. I am also grateful to the staff at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, and to the John Anson Kittredge Educational Fund for a grant that allowed me to complete my research. The research notes and documents collected for this study are now deposited with the Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vt.

⁵The reputation of World War II as “the good war” has come under scrutiny in recent years, primarily but not exclusively from the political far right and far left. These new interpretations focus on three issues: 1) U.S. political and geopolitical policies, i.e., the wartime alliance with Joseph Stalin’s USSR, and the protection of the British Empire; 2) domestic racism and prejudice aimed at both the enemy and domestic populations (e.g., anti-Semitism, racial segregation, internment of Japanese American citizens); and 3) wartime atrocities committed against civilian populations (e.g., carpet bombing raids in Germany and Japan, the use of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki) as a consequence of a strategy of “total war.” For a summary of the arguments and a review of the recent literature on this revisionist view of the war, see Adam Kirsch, “Is World War II Still ‘the Good War?’” (published under the headline “The Battle for History”), *New York Times Sunday Book Review* (May 29, 2011), BR 10. See also John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Praeger, 1986). Dower argues that “[i]n countless ways, war words [and images] and race words [and images] came together in a manner which did not just reflect the savagery of the war, but contributed to it by reinforcing the impression of a truly Manichean struggle between completely incompatible antagonists. The natural response to such a vision was an obsession with extermination on both sides—a war without mercy” (11). Although some COs did discuss and comment on these issues during their alternative service, among themselves, and in

interviews and writings after the war, their applications and arguments for CO status were based on their religious principles and training. The origin of the phrase “the good war,” as applied to World War II is difficult to pinpoint. It appears to be a postwar phrase.

⁶ Also known as the *Burke-Wadsworth Act*, Public Law 76-783, U.S. Statutes at Large 54 (1940): 885, enacted September 16, 1940.

⁷ See the poem by e. e. cummings, “i sing of Olaf, glad and big” (1931), in e. e. cummings, *100 Selected Poems* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 37–38.

⁸ Reported in the *New York Times*, 8 February, 1941; cited in Roland H. Bainton, “The Churches and War: Historic Attitudes Toward Christian Participation—A Survey from Biblical Times to the Present Day.” Pamphlet reprint from *Social Action Magazine* (January 15, 1945): 43.

⁹ Roland H. Bainton, “The Churches and War”: 43.

¹⁰ U.S. Statutes at Large 54. (1940): 885 at 889.

¹¹ Report of Charles N. Barber, Director of Selective Service for the State of Vermont, 16 September 1940–30 June 1947”: 327–330 (PRA 413), F-26158. Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, Middlesex, Vt.

¹² Memorandum to State Directors in the Selective Service System, December 1940. Quoted in “The Conscientious Objector under the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940” (Washington, D.C.: National Service Board for Religious Objectors, rev. 1 April 1942), 2–3.

¹³ For a detailed study of one of these CPS base camps, see Jeffrey Kovac, *Refusing War, Affirming Peace: A History of Civilian Public Service Camp #21 at Cascade Locks* [Oregon] (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2009). Kovacs also provides an excellent review of the literature on CPS (pp. 15–18), and a thorough bibliography on conscientious objection, pacifism, and the CPS (pp. 192–196).

¹⁴ “Communiqué from Brattleboro,” February 1944, back cover. The publication appears to have been planned as a periodical or occasional publication of the unit, but the members of CPS 87 never brought out a second issue.

¹⁵ See for example, Waldo H. Heinrichs Jr., “Waldo H. Heinrichs, George D. Aiken, and the Lend Lease Debate of 1941,” *Vermont History* 69 (Summer–Fall 2001): 267–83.

¹⁶ See Richard Polenberg, *War and Society: The United States, 1941–1945* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1972): 54–55.

¹⁷ Henry Ormsby to Michael Sherman, 2 November 1993.

¹⁸ Robert Wehmeyer to Michael Sherman, 9 October 1993.

¹⁹ Interview with Luther Kirsch, 22 October 1993, Dalen’s Motel, West Brattleboro, Vt. Interviewer, Michael Sherman. See transcript, p. 2. In the interview Kirsch mentioned Gandhi and Albert Schweitzer. In a handwritten response to an earlier request for his recollections, Kirsch also listed John Woolman’s *Journal*, and *The New Testament Basis of Pacifism*, by G. H. C. Macgregor (1936).

²⁰ Luther Kirsch to Michael Sherman, 17 December 1993. In the letter, the word “suppose” is crossed out and the word “know” follows it as a replacement.

²¹ Interview with Robert and Helen Dick, 8 December 1993, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier. Interviewer, Michael Sherman. See transcript, pp. 6–7. John Haynes Holmes (1879–1964) was an activist and social reformer. Ordained as a Unitarian minister, he split from the Unitarians to create the Community Church of New York, “a self-conscious repudiation of particularistic Christianity in favor of the religion of democracy.” He was an early supporter of the founding in 1909 of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and served as its national vice president for fifty years. He was chairman of the board of the American Civil Liberties Union in 1939, and supported Progressive party candidate Robert La Follette for president in 1924 and Socialist party candidate Norman Thomas for president in 1928 and thereafter. Holmes was a steadfast pacifist, active in defending conscientious objectors and a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation during World War I. He remained a pacifist through World War II. See *Dictionary of American Biography*, Supplement 7 (1961–1965): 355–57.

²² Interview with Robert and Helen Dick, see transcript, pp. 1–2. Section 6(g) of the Selective Service Act provided that “students preparing for the ministry” in qualified schools “shall be exempt from training and service” under the Act. By registering as a CO, Dick set aside his exemption in order to make a positive statement of his commitment to pacifism.

²³ Interview with Robert and Helen Dick, transcript, p. 3. This is confirmed in the 1947 report of Charles N. Barber, director of Selective Service for the State of Vermont, who noted that “if . . . [an applicant’s for exemption] occupation was such as to justify deferment, the Local Board did not have to consider the question of Conscientious Objection.” See “Report of Charles N. Barber,” 330.

²⁴ Interview with Thomas E. Shipley, Jr., 6 April 2004, Barrington, N.H. Interviewer, Michael Sherman. See transcript, pp. 1–2.

²⁵ Interview with William D. Foye, 24 March 2004, Middletown, Connecticut. Interviewer, Michael Sherman. See transcript, p. 1. The course was offered by the Ethics and Religion Department at Wesleyan University in the fall semester 1939 under the title “The Problem of War.” My

thanks to Valerie Gillespie, Wesleyan University Archives, for her assistance in locating information about this course.

²⁶Ibid., transcript pp. 2–3.

²⁷The Oxford Pledge originated at the Oxford Union, Oxford University, England. A declaration that the signer would refuse to participate in war, it became a feature of many pacifist and anti-war rallies at British and American universities in the early 1930s. The pledge was later characterized as a statement of disillusionment over the causes and results of World War I and a statement of hope that international conflict could be resolved in ways other than warfare. For many signers, it was meant to be a way to support the League of Nations, although in the United States, joining the League was a dead issue after its defeat in the United States Senate.

²⁸Interview with William D. Foye, transcript, p. 5.

²⁹Ibid, pp. 5–6. The *Literary Digest* was a popular news, analysis, and opinion magazine, published by Funk & Wagnall's from 1890 to 1940, when it was bought by *Time Magazine*. It is best known for predicting, on the basis of unscientific polling in Maine—considered a bellwether state—that Alf Landon would win the 1936 presidential election against Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

³⁰Theodore S. Horvath to Michael Sherman, 6 January 1994.

³¹Robert Dick, photocopy (no date) of quotations used for a paper, “A C.O. and his family,” 16 October 1942. Robert Dick file.

³²Interview with Robert and Helen Dick. Many COs shared this opinion. See Heather T. Frazer and John O’Sullivan, “*We Have Just Begun to Not Fight*”: *An Oral History of Conscientious Objectors in Civilian Public Service during World War II*. Twayne’s Oral History Series, No. 18 (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

³³The Brattleboro Retreat qualified for this CPS project because it accepted patients for the state of Vermont. See Esther Munroe Swift and Mona Beach, *Brattleboro Retreat, 1834–1984: 150 Years of Caring* (Brattleboro: Brattleboro Retreat, 1984).

³⁴Roger Harnish to Michael Sherman, 12 October 1993.

³⁵Henry Ormsby to Michael Sherman, 2 November 1993.

³⁶CO’s at the work camps were paid \$2.50/month, but were paid at different rates when they moved to the special projects, at the discretion of the host institution. The agreement signed by Dr. Elliott stipulated payment of \$2.50/month plus Workmen’s Compensation. See Swift and Beach, *Brattleboro Retreat*, 127. Robert Dick, however, recalled that the CPS men were paid \$15/month. If this is correct, the terms of employment may have been altered between the time the first agreement was signed and the time Dick arrived at the Retreat. See below, page 95.

³⁷Barbara Beam to Michael Sherman, email: 25 March 2004. See also Barbara Beam’s account of her horseback trip from Truro, Massachusetts, to Brattleboro in 1944, based on entries in her diary: Barbara Beam, “A Wartime Journey,” *Equus*, 262 (August 1999): 24–28, 30–31.

³⁸Interview with Robert Fleisher, 1 May 1993, Brattleboro Retreat, Brattleboro, Vt., Michael Sherman, interviewer.

³⁹Avis Fleisher, “Wives Speak Up,” in “Communiqué from Brattleboro” (February 1944): 10. For other accounts of women’s experiences as wives of COs, see Rachel Waltner Goossen, *Women against the Good War: Conscientious Objection and Gender on the American Home Front, 1941–1947* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁴⁰Helen Dick, “Wives Speak Up,” 10.

⁴¹Barbara Beam, “A Reminiscence,” *Fellowship* [published by Fellowship of Reconciliation] 67 (September/October 2001): 9–10, 26.

⁴²Theodore S. Horvath to Michael Sherman, 6 January 1994.

⁴³“Communiqué from Brattleboro,” 2–3.

⁴⁴Memo by R. Douglas Manning: Report on conference with Dr. Elliott, Mr. Imirie of Selective Service, and James Mullin at Montpelier 1/23/43. DG2, file 37d “Service—detached—Medical—Hospitals—Mental—Brattleboro,” Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁴⁵Thomas Shipley to Michael Sherman, 16 December 1993. The author has been unable to gain access to any archival material at the Brattleboro Retreat. It has therefore been difficult to represent Dr. Elliott’s position on controversies in which he was involved or mentioned, except where third-party documents exist in the CPS 87 papers at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁴⁶J. Huston Westover, “Report of Visit to Brattleboro Retreat, Brattleboro, Vermont, November 1–4, 1943.” DG2 file 37d, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁴⁷Theodore S. Horvath to Michael Sherman, 6 January 1994.

⁴⁸Luther Kirsch to George Mohlenhoff [AFSC], 11 July 1945, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁹J. Huston Westover to Joseph Albrecht, 3 October 1944. Swarthmore Peace Collection DG2, file 37c.

⁵⁰J. Huston Westover [unsigned], “Report of Visit to Brattleboro Retreat, Brattleboro, Vermont, June 30–July 2, 1943.” DG2 file 37d, Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

⁵¹J. Huston Westover, “Report of Visit to Brattleboro Retreat, November 1–4, 1943.”

⁵²Ibid.

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⁵³ Mental Hygiene Program of Civilian Public Service. Memorandum, 15 January 1943: "Educational Phase: Attendant Orientation and Training."

⁵⁴ Swift and Beach, *Brattleboro Retreat*, 127.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁵⁶ Memo, Luther Kirsch to Sam Marble, "Goings on here," 12 January 1945. Carbon copy in Kirsch file.

⁵⁷ Luther Kirsch, "Brattleboro Days," no date. Handwritten manuscript, 4 pages, 7 sides. In Kirsch file.

⁵⁸ Interview with Robert and Helen Dick, transcript, p. 18.

⁵⁹ For a sample of first-hand accounts by members of CPS see Frazier and O'Sullivan, eds. "*We Have Just Begun to Not Fight*." For accounts of and comments by women war resisters—including wives of COs—see Goossen, *Women against the Good War*. Many first person accounts have been published by the Mennonite, Brethren, and Friends service committees through their church or organizational journals (e.g., *Quaker History*; *Mennonite Life*). See also, *The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It*, documentary film directed by Judith Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores (2002; pbs.org/itvs/thegoodwar/).

⁶⁰ Interview with Wesley Herwig, 19 January 1999, Randolph, Vermont. Interviewer, Michael Sherman. See transcript, p. 35.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² The author had the privilege of reading Wes Herwig's diaries and letters for the years 1943 through 1946, thanks to the generosity of his widow, Miriam Herwig. Wes Herwig died December 10, 2003.

⁶³ See Robert T. Dick, ed., "Guinea Pigs for Peace. The Story of C.P.S. 115-R (1943–1946)," foreword by Dr. Arthur B. Otis (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Medical School at Strong Memorial Hospital, n.d. [1991?]), in Robert Dick, Materials Related to Conscientious Objectors during World War II, Vermont Historical Society, MS 355.224 D55. There were two CPS units at the University of Rochester Medical School: CPS 115.14 (cold weather) and CPS 115.21 (physiology). Dick does not specify which unit he belonged to—identifying it only and incorrectly as CPS 115-R; but his account suggests that he was probably assigned to CPS 115.21 See also, Sharman Apt Russell, "The Hunger Experiment," *Wilson Quarterly* 29:3 (Summer 2005), 66–82.

⁶⁴ Interview with William D. Foye, transcript, p. 20.

⁶⁵ See Goossen, *Women against the Good War*, 116–118; Frazer and O'Sullivan, "*We Have Just Begun to Not Fight*," 20, 46–47, 84, 107–108, 165, 219; Mitchell Lee Robinson, "Civilian Public Service during World War II: The Dilemmas of Conscience and Conscription in a Free Society," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1990), 427–491.

⁶⁶ Luther Kirsch to George Mohlenhoff, Brattleboro, Vt., 28 September 1945.

⁶⁷ Bob Currier, autobiographical entry for CPS 87 fiftieth anniversary reunion, Brattleboro, April 30– May 2, 1993. CPS 87 reunion file. For accounts by COs who refused or left alternative service and were imprisoned, see Larry Gara and Lenna Mae Gara, eds., *A Few Small Candles: War Resisters of World War II Tell Their Stories* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1999); John H. Abbott, "Reflections on Machismo," in Studs Terkel, ed. "*The Good War*": *An Oral History of World War Two* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984): 166–174.

⁶⁸ William D. Foye, autobiographical statement for CPS 87 fiftieth anniversary reunion, CPS 87 reunion file; interview with William Foye, transcript, pp. 20–26. Kala-azar is a severe infectious disease, found chiefly in Asia, marked by fever, progressive anemia, leukopenia, and an enlargement of the spleen and liver. It is caused by a flagellate organism (*Leishmania donovani*) transmitted by the bite of sand flies.

⁶⁹ Interview with Thomas Shipley, transcript, p. 19.

⁷⁰ William D. Foye, autobiographical statement for CPS 87 fiftieth anniversary reunion.

⁷¹ Lee Hebel to Michael Sherman, 19 October, 1993; Henry Ormsby to Michael Sherman, 2 November 1993. In "Questionnaires and responses" file.

⁷² For an excellent summary of the post-World War II legal history of conscientious objector definitions, see Robinson, "Civilian Public Service during World War II," chapter 10, "Legacies and Lessons," 492–521.

⁷³ Interview with Robert and Helen Dick, transcript, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Interview with Wesley Herwig, transcript, pp. 67–68.

⁷⁵ Interview with Thomas Shipley, transcript, p. 13.

⁷⁶ Interview with William D. Foye, transcript, p. 30.

⁷⁷ Military Selective Service Act, as amended through July 9, 2003 (50 U.S.C. App 451 et seq.), Section 456 (j).

⁷⁸ Interview with Thomas Shipley, transcript, p. 17.

⁷⁹ Robert Fleisher, "Robert Fleisher—50-year summary." Autobiographical statement for CPS 87 fiftieth anniversary reunion. CPS 87 reunion file.