What was the Effect of World War II on the College Life of Students Attending Ricks?

By Karen Dee Goodsen

October 26, 2002

Box 5 Folder 3

A research paper by Karen Dee Goodsen

Transcript copied by Victor Ukorebi and David Garmon November 2005

Brigham Young University – Idaho
How did College Life Change without Changing during World War II?

I gingerly open the weathered cover of an ancient book. The first thing I’m greeted with is handwriting. It’s not unfamiliar, but reminds me of my mother. It is actual writing, not printing. I read through the messages to Dee. I find out Dee is a swell guy, that he had swell times, and he played in a swell band. I flipped the page and I was greeted with a black and white picture. The girls were wearing knee length skirts, big smiles, and curly shoulder hair. A snowball fight was being fought with a couple of guys. Slowly I was transferred into a new world, a world I was vaguely familiar with. College life had definitely changed between 1942 and 2004, yet it was hauntingly the same. I sought to discover how World War II affected the college students of Ricks College campus. I discovered that almost every aspect of college life was changed because of the war, but that nothing really changed at all. There were many dances, school organizations, and tricks. They continued to farm, study, participate in sporting events, be targeted by ads, and worry about fashion.

Youngsters listen to elderly people talk of grand dances that lasted the whole night. The splendor of the dances were simply marvelous. At weekly dances everyone danced the night away. Unfortunately for the girls, the war had drawn away most of the young men. Having only a handful of guys on campus created a minor problem. In the *Scroll* of October 1943, one is introduced to everyone to every male on campus: one sophomore and thirteen freshmen. That was exactly 20% of the student body. But the dancing couldn’t be stopped. To solve the problem, girls danced with girls, yet it couldn’t be a dance without guys. The college came up with a solution to the problem: the faculty. The professors brought their wives and danced one, maybe two dances with
them. And then the professor danced with the students. This gave the girls the opportunity to dance with members of the opposite sex. The privileged few young men students that attended danced with a different girl for each song, they left very tired young gentlemen. Both the boys and the girls were excited if someone brought a young chap with them.³

Not only were there dances to keep the students involved, but there were several school organizations. The Purple Key Club was the oldest selective girls club on campus.⁴ It managed to maintain its activities, but the effects of the war were still felt. For Christmas 1939, the Purple Key Club held a party with the College Bachelors. They had someone assist Santa Claus by playing Cupid. “Cupid” matched up couples from the two organizations and held a dance. It was reported that everyone “had a jolly good time.”⁵ For March 1943, they held a victory tea. It “proved to be one of the outstanding social events of the year.” Unique decorations consisted of red, white, and blue, and the tea table was arranged in a striking V.⁶ On November 19, 1943 they held a meeting. They filled many offices, including a freshman vice-president that “engage[d] in first-fights and hair pulling matches to further the causes of the under-privileged class- notably the freshman…”⁷ The Purple Key Club successfully held events, despite the war, yet still observed proper remembrance of the war.

The main club for the young men on campus consisted of the College Bachelor Club. They had a theme of “Shun the fairer sex!” It is evident that they had failed in their theme by the number of their activities that involved girl participation. The College Bachelors held many formals. They advertised the formal through an assembly. Several people entered to participate in the assembly. Several performances won prizes because
of a job well done. The prize winners received an award which consisted of fifty cents in defense stamps. They took breaks throughout the assembly to make mini-advertisements for the formal.8

“At 9:30 Friday evening, the formal began with a grand march…” The activity observed “a prison motif” for the decorations. Completed with “a firearms museum, lists of unwanted criminals, a solitary confinement cell, and policemen.” The girl’s corsages complemented the decorations. The corsages were “small packet[s] of defense stamps.” This was done as a patriotic effort.9

Other clubs on campus consisted of: the Glee Club, the Alpha Theta Club, The Amagus Club, and the Agriculture Club. Each of these individual clubs responded to the war in various ways: with changing activities and emphasis’s. They made a great effort to show their support to the war, yet each club continued the activities that made them a club.10

The theme for the year 1940 was “While we are preparing to defend our lives, let us prepare to live abundantly.”11 The motto carried great significance for the young men at Ricks. Although the United States had not entered the war, the military began to prepare for the war, and so they brought the draft into effect. Even with the world at war around them the young men showed they still knew how to live life and pull pranks. A unique poem was dedicated to Dorm Three; part of it reads as follows:

They have a collection in dorm, Room 3
It starts with red and ends in blue,
Yellow, pink, or green you see,
Any design, and any hue,
A wonder of ages in Dorm, Room 3.
They swipe ’em or grab ’em
From all the girls they see,
Just any pretty hair ribbon,
To hang in Dorm, Room 3. More humor abounded with jokes and jabs at the other sex. One jab included, “All of which proves that man is just a worm. He comes along, wiggles a bit and then some chicken gets him.” Despite the war, both males and females made fun of each other and still live like normal college age kids.

It is easy to observe how people live life and their traditions during Christmas time. One tradition kept on campus was Christmas party held by the Apha Theta Club. The Christmas party they held in 1940 started out by singing Christmas songs around the Christmas tree. After a program, Santa Claus visited. He delivered gifts to the girls in attendance. Then the evening was in activities such as games and friendly visits. The war did not have the capacity to change this tradition. The club held a celebration in 1943. The individuals in charge planned it with a lot of ingenuity. It included an even balance between seriousness and not-so-serious. The program included Christmas cards, the appearance of Santa Claus, and a scene of Mary and the Christ child. They also sang to fill up the night’s time.

Another prominent tradition of Christmas includes Santa Claus letter. The students on Ricks campus didn’t forget this tradition. Some of the wishes presented in the Scroll include: a ring, a passing grade, a girl or boy friend, a ping pong ball, draft deferment, and “a male physically unfit for army service.” Traditions are strong and can’t be broken, yet they reflect the time period and events that affect the people that carry them on.

Because Ricks College sat in the middle of farm country the harvest held great importance. The war made the harvest different from those of past years. The young
men that usually participated in the harvest left to serve in the war. The harvest held such importance that the even though the war affected it, it did not manage to affect it much. It had to continue. The college released classes to help with the harvest. Children of family members went home to help, and the rest of the faculty and students helped the other farmers. The Federal Employment Service paid for the work if the farmer did not have the capability. The help had to be given.\textsuperscript{17}

After the harvest, the college held classes several Saturdays and over the Christmas Holiday to obtain the amount of time needed for them. President Manwaring stated that “the war is on, and the faculty and students of Ricks are willing to give their best in both personal and public good.”\textsuperscript{18} The spirit of Ricks is a spirit of sacrifice, and they were willing to sacrifice for the war.

“Young men had a hard time concentrating on school activities; at least until after the national lottery was held to select the first draftees.”\textsuperscript{19} The draft caused a ripple effect to move across the campus. Even before the United States entered the war they used the draft. The military geared up for war and the draft became part of the preparation. The national lottery took place October 29, 1940. Few students received I-A classification, life on campus continued like normal. Then a local unit began to build and the young men were encouraged to join. Many joined in order to escape the draft. What they failed to realize is that if they joined the guard it could actually speed up entrance into the war.

“On April 14, 1941, soldiers of Battery G paraded down Rexburg's Main Street.”\textsuperscript{20} A few of the teachers also got called up. They didn't go to fight, but to teach at military schools.\textsuperscript{21} With the country off to war, a little community college in Rexburg, Idaho did not escape its grasp.
The young ladies on campus did not get drafted, but that does not mean that they were unaffected. Since the law didn't allow them to be a soldier for their country they fought on another front. Some women signed up to be nurses. Navy recruiters came to campus to recruit young ladies to join WAVES. This stood for Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service. This is not the only way that women could help. The women and the whole community got involved in doing their part. A few organizations that they got involved in included the Civilian Defense Committee, the Home Defense Corps, and the Red Cross. The Civilian Defense Committee did volunteer work anywhere it could find it. The Home Defense committee helped “to protect the area from sabotage.” They made other efforts for the war separate from any set organization. “They cooperated with tire and gasoline rationing programs, participated in scrap metal and rubber drives, and bought defense stamps and war bonds.” They also planted “victory gardens.” The students and whole community got involved in the war effort.

Even if the young men had not joined the guard or gotten drafted, they still felt the effects of the draft. They were encouraged to attend college, although several did not. Enrollment changed at the college due to several factors, not just the draft. “Getting girls to the college was not too hard, but getting young men was a challenge.” “Many young men who would have registered stayed home to help harvest crops or prepare for military duty.”

With the likelihood that young men over age eighteen would continue to have their attention diverted for the foreseeable future either waiting for their draft number or with National Guard training, an ongoing, vigorous recruitment campaign was needed to keep the college functioning.

This campaign to recruit students targeted seventeen year olds, even high school students
between their junior and senior year. This allowed them to obtain two semesters of college work before their eighteenth birthday. This appealed to the young men because of the Navy V-I program. If an individual did well in set tests, took set classes, and maintained good grades, the Navy paid for two years of college, and it was a guarantee to escape the draft until they finished. If taking this route, they wore military clothing and followed the military rules. They became a part of the military.\textsuperscript{28} By September 21, 1943 the war had created a definite change on campus. They had an increase in the number of female students, but “even seventeen-year-olds did not show up in expected numbers.”\textsuperscript{29}

In 1942, Ricks College added the agriculture department. The addition did not directly result from the war, but the war did promote it. Educated farmers used better farming techniques. Better farming techniques created more efficient production of food. Increased efficiency on the farm caused it so less people had to work. This removed people from the farms and allowed them to become soldiers. Besides the military reason, the college had many reasons to add it. Ricks College is in the middle of a farming community. Perhaps if students became educated in agriculture techniques, they would stay and work the farms. The community showed their support by offering money. Several businesses offered scholarships to students.\textsuperscript{30} The agriculture department became a great addition to the curriculum.

The war caused greater desire in President Manwaring for students to take religious classes. He said, “The influence and teaching of these institutions will do much to offset the general tendency toward carelessness and delinquency which now exists.”\textsuperscript{31} He knew that the graduates entered a troubled world after leaving college, and if permitted, graduates “wafted about by one doctrine after another.”\textsuperscript{32} President
anticipated the annual Leadership Week. Due to the war, he added a new category: “Grave problems confronting our troubled world.” President Manwaring changed the focus from the traditional topics discussed and instead placed it on faith. The general topic of the meeting consisted of “Faith in a World of Confusion.” He hoped to leave those that attended a little bit stronger in an attempt to help the world. Unfortunately, just one week after the announcement the college was informed of a “retrenchment.” The Church cancelled the Leadership Week held. Despite the disappointment, the college still wanted to create better, stronger people.

A major influence in an individual's life is the media. The things promoted by advertisements change with the changing world events. Observed in the *Scroll* are advertisements targeting students: “Broulim's we specialize in quality foods,” “For clothing of quality shop at J.P. Croff Co.,” “For better quality of stationary and school supplies shop at King's.” These advertisements managed to be at the bottom of the page, and not on the first page. They were small. Then a change is observed. On February 9, 1942 a new add appeared to accompany the advertisements for food and services, it reads: “FOR VICTORY BUY UNITED STATES DEFENSE BONDS STAMPS.” This new ad was noticeably larger than the others and its bold letters captured the attention of readers. It did not only have words but a picture to accompany it. This advertisement somehow managed to creep from the bottom of the page, to the top of the page. Then on February 23, 1942, small and in the upper corners of the first page an advertisement appeared. In decoration form, an attractive ad emerged to encourage students to buy “United States bonds and stamps.” By April 22, the open advertisement for Defense Bonds faded into comics, with pictures to promote them rather
than just words. The Defense Bonds ads overshadowed the quality and importance of any other ad.

Sports are usually a big event, and this held true for Ricks College. Yet the football program had to be dropped in 1941 due to the lack of young men.\textsuperscript{39} Unfortunately, school spirit dropped considerably with the football program. It was hoped that “with the coming of basketball, school spirit, pep, and loyalty would come back.”\textsuperscript{40} Headlines read, “Ricks College Vikings Prove Superior to Invading Tiger Five.” The team soared. For the first time in Ricks history they made it to the AAU Tournament, where they performed well, winning their first game, but losing their second.\textsuperscript{41} Regrettably, in January 1944, the basketball team failed to have enough guys to compete.\textsuperscript{42}

Yet the war failed to do away with sports. The intramural program continued to exist with fun, intense competition. The intramural program served a dual purpose. It did not just give the guys a chance to play, but it kept the men, especially those under eighteen, in shape for when they could serve in the military.\textsuperscript{43} Even though the war stopped the competitive program, it could not stop sports.

Styles are a fun and unavoidable part of life. On February 9, 1942, the \textit{Scroll} delivered information about the styles on campus. The styles on campus began to change for spring, with the colors of beige and red taking over. The males’ style included plaid or tweed three-piece suits. The young ladies sported skirts and sweaters, “as well as knee socks and saddle oxfords.” Despite the war, the college kids looked fashionable. Yet the war still changed the fashion. The men's suits became simpler. “The double breasted suits would be without vests, trousers without cuffs, and the number of pleated backs
[would] be reduced. Even though the styles were simpler, they were still attractive.

As I flipped the last pages of the well-preserved book, I felt a distinct connection to the students on Ricks campus during World War II. As color flooded back into my view, I pondered what I had learned. I realized just how much effect the war had in their lives. Yet I was inspired by the perseverance that continued. They refused to allow the war to take over their life. I felt like we had become friends, and I am now doing what they did several years ago. I'm learning, studying, and growing. That is what college is about, what it will always be about, and nothing will ever be able to change that. Not even a war can stop the process of life, the process of learning.
End Notes


4 Ricks College Year Book, 1942.


9 Ibid.

10 Ricks College Year Book 1942.


18 Ibid.


27 Ibid.


34 Ibid.


Bibliography

Primary Sources:


Ricks College Year Book, 1942

Secondary Sources: