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The Cult of Campus: An Analysis of Gettysburg College Students’ Fixation on the Physical Aspects of Their Campus

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The Cult of Campus: An Analysis of Gettysburg College Students’ Fixation on the Physical Aspects of Their Campus

Abstract
This research paper takes a critical look at how Gettysburg College students interacted with a select few areas on and off the campus grounds both in the 1920s and the 2010s. This work focuses specifically on how these interactions have changed or remained the same. The majority of research was collected through Gettysburg College publications like The Blister and Cannon Bawl, which can be found in the Special Collections at Gettysburg College's Musselman Library.

Keywords
Gettysburg College, college history, tradition, college campus, ritual, student life, liberal arts

Disciplines
Anthropology | Community-based Research | Educational Sociology | Politics and Social Change | Social and Cultural Anthropology | Social Psychology and Interaction | Sociology | Sociology of Culture

Comments
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THE CULT OF CAMPUS:
An Analysis of Gettysburg College Students’ Fixation on the Physical Aspects of Their Campus

Jeffrey Lauck
FYS 103-3: Bringing the Past into the Present
11 December 2014
Tradition and the “Cult of Campus”

Colleges are rooted in tradition. Nearly every campus has something that connects students new and old, whether it be a ceremony, a chant, or popular meeting place that is passed down through the graduating classes. Even more interesting are the traditions not found on the college website or orientation page – the unofficial strings that bind the history of student life together. Gettysburg College is no different from other colleges in having these off-the-record traditions. Studying these more unorthodox traditions helps us to have a deeper connection to the students that came before. In a sense, this is history at its absolute finest. Studying the everyday norms of students who lived nearly a century ago and comparing them to current students makes history both more applicable and more attractive. Through the use of contemporary accounts of student life on campus, I have examined the Cult of Campus as it existed in the mid-1920s in reference to a select few aspects of the Gettysburg College campus, including Brua Hall, the campus grounds, Penn Hall, and the surrounding town and battlefield. I have also compared the Cult of Campus to the extent in which it still exists today and how it has changed in the past ninety years.

Gettysburg College is a small liberal arts college founded in 1832 and located in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The campus lies amid the hallowed grounds of the Battle of Gettysburg, which took place on July 1-3, 1863 as part of the American Civil War. One tradition that is especially poignant at Gettysburg College and colleges around the United States both in the past and present is what I am coining “The Cult of Campus.” This idea centers on the importance, physically and sentimentally, of the location of the campus and the campus itself, including buildings, hang-outs, and landmarks. The essence of this idea is how the student body interacts with the physical campus and its surroundings. Gettysburg is abounding with material for this cult to develop among the student body. The campus itself sits on the fields of the largest battle in the history of the Western Hemisphere. Some buildings on campus date back to the time of the battle, while others are noteworthy due to their own history or striking design.

I have also made use of certain elements of an archaeological perspective to guide my research through the historical documents. Archaeologist Clive Gamble elaborated on four basic characteristics in modern archaeology in his 2008 article “What is Archaeology?” (Gamble, 7), which can also be applied to historical research. First, archaeology is multiscalar, meaning it connects macro and micro level ideas by linking smaller details to larger themes and trends (Gamble, 7). This paper uses this multiscalar principle by taking a critical look at how students’ interactions with their physical campus at Gettysburg College compare to how university students everywhere interact with their campuses. Second, archaeology is mutualistic, or involving networks between people living in the same time (Gamble, 7). In the documents I have examined, different contemporaries comment on the same events, but through different perspectives. Studying why these different people have contrasting perspectives is paramount to understanding the time period. Third, archaeology must be globally focused, or putting the research found in the greater context of the world (Gamble, 7). In this case, the “world” is not the Earth but rather the greater Gettysburg College community. Finally, archaeology must be reflexive, meaning that it must have some importance to people today that study it (Gamble, 7).
The inseparable link that binds college students to their campus as well as to those who have traversed the grounds before them serves this purpose. In every college, there is a bond between alumni, even if they never met each other or shared a class. According to historian and folklorist Simon Bronner, “Students coming to a campus feel a need to adjust to this environment by connecting themselves to those who have come before” (Bronner, 277). Students at Gettysburg College are no different.

**Primary Sources Used**

In order to accurately portray how Gettysburg College students in the mid-1920s would have looked at the campus around them, I have focused on a number of primary sources. The first document is *Cannon Bawl*, a student magazine that ran through the mid to late 1920s, was published quarterly by students on the campus. *Cannon Bawl* collected a number of humor pieces and jokes that were not always specific to Gettysburg College. The standard sized magazine is adorned in a color cover and includes advertisements from local businesses and college facilities. Time has greatly affected the magazines, as yellowing pages can be found falling out of binding despite the college’s best efforts to preserve them. All issues of *Cannon Bawl* are bound together and housed in Special Collections at the Musselman Library. Musselman Library also contains a collection of Sanborn Maps of the campus and the surrounding town. I have used the July, 1924 map collection (Figure 1) to see which buildings existed on campus at this time. Originally made for insurance purposes, the maps show brick buildings in pink and wooden buildings in yellow. These massive, table-sized maps reveal a campus that looked very different from today’s campus. Some modern buildings, such as Glatfelter Hall and Pennsylvania Hall existed in 1924, but with slightly different functions. Other buildings have been converted entirely in name and function. Still others did not exist in 1924, and many that existed in 1924 do not stand today (Sanborn Map Company). An analysis of the Sanborn maps will help give a geospatial look at the campus itself, putting everything in place in a larger context. The maps are also available as part of Special Collections’ “GettDigital” collection, which can be found accessing their website.

Unlike *Cannon Bawl*, which was undoubtedly subject to at least a little bit of official college oversight, one final document, *The Blister* provides the raw, uncut, and uncensored words of the students. *The Blister* was a semi-daily publication ran entirely by a select few members of the student body. Each page contains text typed in blue ink by a manual typewriter on a standard sized sheet of paper, with hand-drawn illustrations. Each year’s issues were collected and bound by the Gettysburg College library and eventually found their way to Special Collections in the campus library’s current residence in Musselman Library. Issues initially began appearing on the Glatfelter Hall bulletin board on November 4th, 1921. The staff for the publication was chosen selectively by the previous year’s staff, and all staff would remain anonymous to the faculty and student body at large for the entirety of their term (“Explanatory Notes”). This ensured that the words of each issue were unwavering. *The Blister* editorials offer sharp, biting criticisms of contemporary college life, but also served as a news bulletin to report the “goings on” of students. The first editor of *The Blister* was Hubert “Happy” Linn (“Explanatory Notes”) whose “smile and genial disposition won him friends everywhere”
according to his obituary following his tragic drowning just a mere weeks before he would have
graduated from Gettysburg College in 1922 (“Gettysburg Mourns Death of ‘Happy’ Linn”).

In a sense, *The Blister* lives on as a testament to “Happy” and its continued use in research and enjoyment is his legacy on the Gettysburg College campus. It is important to note that because *The Blister* was written by a team of associated authors, the words written in these documents may not represent the views of all Gettysburg College students at the time. However, given its contemporary popularity and subsequent legacy on campus, it is fairly safe to assume that *The Blister* expresses views that were at the very least common or popular. As a result, *The Blister* provides integral insight into the history of student life at Gettysburg College in the mid-1920s.

**The Gettysburg College Campus in the mid-1920s**

Before looking at how students interacted with the Gettysburg College campus in the age of jazz, we should first take a glance at what exactly the campus looked like back then. Gettysburg College was a campus in flux in the 1920s. Preparations were being made for the centenary of the college in 1932 (Moyer: 2006, 101). This ushered in a new program, called “Campus Beautiful” (Moyer: 2006, 102). There were calls to construct new buildings like Weidensall Hall to serve as the campus YMCA center (Moyer: 2006, 97). Other buildings, such as the library (Moyer: 2006, 108) and the gymnasium (*The Blister*, 1 Jan. 1922) proved to be inadequate to serve the needs of the college and needed to be replaced.

Looking at the Sanborn Maps (Figure 1) is perhaps the best way to see what buildings were on campus in 1924. Four structures lined North Washington Street. From north to south they are: The YMCA Building (today known as Weidensall Hall), the Chemical Laboratory (no longer standing today), South Hall Dormitory (today known as McKnight Hall), and the Professors’ Dwellings (located where today’s Schmucker Hall stands) (Sanborn Map Company). Directly west of the space between the Chemical Laboratory and the South Hall Dorms lie Pennsylvania Hall Dormitory (still remains today) and the Gymnasium (no longer standing), with the Janitor’s Dwelling (not standing today) just north of these buildings (Sanborn Map Company). To the Southwest of the Gymnasium lies Glatfelter Hall (still standing today) and to the west and southwest of the Professors’ Dwellings lie the President’s Dwelling (today the Norris-Wachob Alumni House) and Brua Memorial Chapel (today known as Brua Hall and Kline Theater) (Sanborn Map Company). The campus is also dotted with various fraternity houses, but due to the extensive work by other researchers on the history of these fraternities, I have opted to exclude these buildings from my analysis of campus culture. 1927 saw the construction of the Eddie Plank Gymnasium to the northwest of the 1924 college gymnasium (Moyer: 2006, 96) and Schmucker Memorial Library opened in late 1929 just south of the South Hall Dorms on the site of the Professors’ Dwellings (Moyer: 2006, 108).
Figure 1. The July, 1924 Sanborn Map of Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA, as taken from Musselman Library / Special Collections’ GettDigital Collection with labels added by the author. (Sanborn Map Company).
**Brua Chapel**

“The spirit of Old Gettysburg College, rejuvenated by the ardent faces of her little community, will hover over Brua Chapel as the semester begins” (*The Blister*, 16 Sep. 1925). So begins the fifth volume of *The Blister*, communicating the excitement for the new school year via the hallowed Brua Chapel. As the only building on campus explicitly mentioned in the Gettysburg College Alma Mater, Brua Memorial Chapel seems to be an appropriate place to start the examination of the “Cult of Campus” at Gettysburg College. Christ Chapel had not yet been constructed in the 1920s, so Brua Chapel was the only place for religious services to be held on campus. Brua was the center for worship as well as community meetings on campus (Moyer: 2006, 94). Indeed, it was here where original *Blister* editor and founder “Happy” Linn lay in state after his tragic drowning in 1922 just weeks before his graduation (“Gettysburg Mourns Death of ‘Happy’ Linn”). During the 1920s, morning services at the chapel were compulsory for all male students. During this era, Gettysburg’s affiliations with the Lutheran Church were much stronger, and Gettysburg students saw themselves as members of a definitively Christian community. Wednesday morning services had the added bonus of inspirational talks from college president Henry W. A. Hanson defining what it meant to be a “Gettysburg gentleman” (Moyer: 2006, 94).

However, not all that happened within Brua’s walls was stolid and serious. Inevitably came pranks from students to mix up the monotony of daily services. Brua saw the removal of hymn books, seats painted with molasses, the entire chapel laced with sneezing powder, cheese covering the radiators, and even pigeons released inside the chapel walls. In addition to rampant pranks, pet dogs, the mascots of the college’s fraternities, would attend services with their masters, roaming from the entrance to the altar much to the enjoyment of all in attendance, minus the clergy and college administrators of course (Moyer: 2006, 94). Brua also saw the campus tradition of freshmen inspections play out after morning services during the 1920s. Inspections entailed the entire freshman class parading out of the chapel one-by-one in order to be inspected by the sophomore class. Freshmen were expected to be wearing their dinks, black ties, and socks. Sophomores would oftentimes nail the doors of Brua hall shut so that the freshmen would be forced to exit through only one door. The animosity that followed often erupted in fights between the two classes (Moyer: 2006, 95). An editorial in a 1925 issue of *The Blister* lambasted juniors for not dressing appropriately at Brua, which supposedly had an adverse effect on these inspections. “Freshmen cannot be expected to obey customs when they see that their superiors are absolutely disregarding them.” (*The Blister*, 27 Aug. 1925).

Animosity at Brua did not solely belong to class tensions. One interesting aspect of Brua Chapel lies in the gender relations between students at Gettysburg College during the 1920s. Prior to 1926, women, or “coeds,” were not allowed to attend services. In December of 1926, however, women petitioned to be included in morning services (Moyer: 2006, 94). Male students were initially stunned by this petition, which was ultimately successful. They could not fathom why female students would want to participate in the boring obligations that male students had gone to such drastic measures to sabotage as listed above. “Coeds” were allowed to attend and were given the balcony of the chapel (Moyer: 2006, 94). Male students soon came to resent their
female counterparts attending services. In the February, 1927 edition of *Cannon Bawl*, published a few months after the coeds’ landmark petition, a section titled “People We Hate” listed “Co-eds who go to chapel” as perpetrators (*Cannon Bawl*, Feb. 1927, 15). Later in the same publication, the following one-liner is included: “Did you ever stop to think that co-eds have been attending chapel and the building is still as cold as ever?” (*Cannon Bawl*, Feb. 1927, 16). This seems to suggest that male students viewed female students as “cold-hearted” and indifferent towards them, and that Brua Chapel was one example of a showdown between the two genders.

Today Brua is no longer a contested battleground between males and “coeds.” In fact, Brua is not even a chapel holding religious services. The construction of Christ Chapel and Plank Gymnasium removed Brua’s claim to the religious and community center of the college. Indeed our first example of the “Cult of Campus” must be an example of a radical change from past to present. Or is it? Despite its transformation, one thing has bound 1920s Brua and 2010s Brua together: the performing arts. Indeed for virtually the entirety of its history, Brua has been the home of many theatrical productions with Gettysburg College students bringing its stage alive. The November, 1926 issue of *Cannon Bawl* includes a review of the Owl and Nightingale play *A Pair of Sixes* that featured a cast of Gettysburg students (*Cannon Bawl*, Nov. 1926, 13). Owl and Nightingale productions frequented the stage at Brua since the first decade of the 20th century (Moyer: 2006, 96). Indeed *The Blister* noted in 1925 that: “One of the most noteworthy strides in any campus society in the past few years is that of the Owl and Nitingale [sic] Dramatic Club.” (*The Blister*, 25 Sep. 1925). Brua’s repertoire expanded beyond O&N plays, putting on a production of the 1879 Henrik Ibsen drama *A Doll’s House* in 1927 which also featured Gettysburg students in lead and supporting roles (*Cannon Bawl*, Apr. 1927, 9). Today, the legacy of the stage lives on in Brua Hall as Kline Theater continues to see theatrical productions of all kinds.

**Penn Hall / Old Dorm**

According to the Sanborn Maps, Pennsylvania Hall, one of the oldest buildings on campus, was used as a dormitory during the 1920s (Sanborn Map Company). Despite its legacy and picturesque portico and cupola, Penn Hall (also referred to as Old Dorm during this time) was not seen as the symbol of the college. In fact, the Gettysburg College Alma Mater, written in 1922, does not even mention Old Dorm (Glatfelter: 2007, 81). The most likely cause for the overall ignoring of Penn Hall as a symbol of the college would be the overall mentality of the college and administration at the time. The 1920s, as we have seen, saw a number of improvements to the college campus itself. New buildings were popping up all over campus and the college, on the eve of its centenary, was taking a decisive “look to the future approach.” Nobody seemed to care about the tried and true “dinosaur” of Penn Fall. Nine decades later, however, this mentality has reversed entirely. With a college mentality that emphasizes the history and tradition of Gettysburg College, as well as the aesthetic quality of its campus, Penn Hall has seen a renaissance. Today, a collection of photographs of the campus would not be complete without the famous cupola-adorned buildings. The official seal of the college also displays Penn Hall in an act of homage.
Penn Hall was also the site of a particular bone of contention during the 1920s. According to Gettysburg College historian Charles Henry Glatfelter, beginning in the 1920s, the college began flying the Star Spangled Banner atop the Penn Hall cupola twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Dean Emeritus Wilbur E. Tilberg reported that the practice of flying the colors all day every day had already been established before his arrival in 1927 (Glatfelter: 2007, 76). Apparently, not everyone was elated with the continuous flag flying. A 1926 editorial in *The Blister* likens the battered Old Glory to a “rag,” calling for the flag to be replaced and also taken down every night in order to properly honor it (*The Blister*, 16 Apr. 1926). The staff of *The Blister* did not stop here with their criticisms, however. The editorial goes on to say that even though Gettysburg College is a Christian, not military, school, the Reserve’s Officer Training Corps (ROTC) should be responsible for flag maintenance. Moreover, having neglected this obligation to the nation’s banner, the ROTC program on a “Christian College” is further attacked by the editing staff. “The nice nicety of twisting a bayonet in an enemy gut is hardly an efficient builder of Christian character.” (*The Blister*, 16 Apr. 1926). According to an appendix to this April 16th issue, *The Blister* staff acknowledged a number of criticisms they had received, including the theft of the original issue of the editorial. The staff wavered not, issuing a new copy of the editorial and adding in the appendix that it would not back down from its attacks on the “unchristian” group (*The Blister*, 16 Apr. 1926a). Apparently, the relentless crusade against ROTC worked, as the following issue of *The Blister* reported that ROTC had replaced the flag atop Old Dorm with a new one. The editorial goes on to defend its harsh words as necessary for change, as the problem they had brought up had been addressed and fixed (*The Blister*, 19 Apr. 1926). The 24/7 flag flying continued, however. Prior to 1961, the flag that flew atop the cupola was a current version of the flag, updated as states (and stars) were added to the Union. In 1961, the college began flying a 34-star Civil War flag atop the cupola, as it would have flown when the Battle of Gettysburg raged around Penn Hall in July of 1863 (Glatfelter: 2007, 76). Interestingly enough, because the battle occurred on July 1-3 of 1863, the 34-star flag would have technically been in its very last days as the official national banner. Earlier in 1863, West Virginia was added as the 35th state, but because new flags are issued on July 4th, the flag would not have been turned over to the 35-star model. Penn Hall therefore displays the 34-star flag, honoring a battle that took place during the last three days that the 34-star model was the official banner. Visitors, students, and faculty today will observe this very same 34-star model flag flying atop the cupola, day and night.

*The Campus Grounds*

In preparation for the 1932 centenary of the college, Gettysburg College saw a number of projects to beautify the campus during the 1920s. In 1926, college president Henry W. A. Hanson initiated the “Campus Beautiful” project by contracting a landscape architect from Berryhill Nursery. One portion of this project involved a series of architectural improvements, including the construction of a portico on the north side of Pennsylvania Hall (prior to this time, only the south side had the elaborate pillars and stairs, while the north side lay bare), the removal of the chemistry laboratory and janitor’s dwellings, and the construction of Breidenbaugh Hall and Plank Gym (Moyer: 2006, 102).
The second part of the “Campus Beautiful” project involved planting an abundance of flora around the campus. In April 1927, the Campus Beautiful club was founded (Moyer: 2006, 101). The college obtained hundreds of trees, thousands of shrubs, and over ten thousand flowers to plant on campus. Many of these plants were donated by the Daughters of the American Revolution and the friends of the college. Students in the Campus Beautiful club took an active part in the project by planting many of the trees, shrubs, and flowers themselves. Trees were planted on the outskirts of campus to screen the railroad (Moyer: 2006, 102). Contemporary accounts also speak highly of orange and blue flowers being planted all around campus (Moyer: 2006, 103), showing the school colors with pride.

The college’s focus on campus beautification can be seen even earlier, according to one editorial in a 1921 issue of *The Blister*. The issue includes an illustration (Figure 2) of a man tripping over a “Keep off the Grass” sign, with the accompanying caption “What should happen to the habitual grass-walker” (*The Blister*, 9 Nov. 1921). The editorial goes on to say that “Gettysburg does not have a student who does not praise the beauty of her campus.” The editor lists several examples of the campus’s beauty, including: an “amphtheatre [sic] effect of buildings,” the “graceful driveways and walks that mark off the inner court,” and the “even sod that carpets the whole.” The editorial explains that even though everyone except freshmen have the privilege of walking on the grass instead of sidewalks, habitually walking on the grass can “force the beauty of them into extinction, all for the sake of saving a step or two” (*The Blister*, 9 Nov. 1921). The rule that freshmen cannot traverse the grass on campus can also be found in the 1927-28 guide book for Gettysburg College freshmen, which explicitly states “Freshmen shall at no time walk on the grass of the campus, except members of the varsity team when in uniform” (*Freshmen G-Book of Gettysburg College: 1927-1928*, 15). While this is most likely an example of upperclassman privilege over first year students, it could also be an effort to keep the grounds maintained. Indeed the idea that only upperclassmen have the privilege of walking on the grass exists even today, but only in a symbolic rule that carries no actual authority or weight. Students of all grades can be seen walking on the grass today.
In accordance with the theme of students keeping the campus beautiful, a later issue of *The Blister* includes an editorial criticizing students who litter in hallways after Joe, the janitor, has finished cleaning. The editorial is also accompanied by a cartoon (Figure 3) poking fun at litterers (*The Blister*, 19 Nov. 1921). This theme became somewhat of a saga for future volumes of *The Blister*. The next spring, an editorial blamed students playing pickup games of baseball on the green for wrecking the sod (*The Blister*, 3 May 1922). *The Blister* staff did not always stop at warning students of their destructive actions. An April, 1922 editorial explains how the invasive garlic plant has been ruining the green grass. In a sort of feudalistic allegory, the editorial goes as far to say that freshmen should be drafted to weed the plant out, with sophomores serving as the foremen to make sure the freshmen stayed on task (*The Blister*, 3 Apr. 1922). This idea of “freshmen grounds keeping conscription” reemerges in 1926, when a *Blister* editorial calls for freshmen to show up to maintain the tennis courts and athletic fields when the Sophomore Work Committee drafts them to do so (*The Blister*, 7 May 1926). In a sense, the staff of *The Blister* took it upon themselves to promote the activities among the student body that protected, not desecrated, the campus that they so loved. This love of a beautiful campus is crucial to the theory of the cult of campus. From the Campus Beautiful club to the students who took it upon themselves to persuade their peers to stay off the grass and refrain from littering, it is clear that students of the early 1920s saw Gettysburg as a beautiful place to live, and were especially keen on keeping it that way.
The Battlefield

Gettysburg College’s proximity to the hallowed grounds of the largest battle in American history has certainly played a part in students’ lives both past and present. The November, 1924 issue of *Cannon Bawl* includes a poem entitled “Nights on the Battlefield.”

“Half a mile, half a mile,
Half a mile onward,
Out to the Battlefield,
Trudged the two hundred.
On, up to Round Top,
Footsore and weary,
Out in the Battlefield,
Marched the two hundred.

On out to Devil’s Den,
Would they come back again?
E’en though each freshie knew,
His days were numbered.
Theirs not to say a word,
Freshmen are seen, not heard,
Lauck 11

Many an eye was blurred,
Blubbering two hundred.

Woozies to right of them,
Woozies to left of them,
Woozies in back of them,
Used their persuaders;
Urged on by frequent pokes,
Victims of many jokes,
Out on the Battlefield,
Quaked the two hundred.

Flashed all their dinks so red,
Thoughts turned to rooms and bed,
Oh! But to be at home,
Wished the two hundred.
When will their verdure fade?
Oh! What a howl they made,
Back from the Battlefield,
The weary two hundred.”

(Cannon Bawl, Nov. 1924, 9)

The poem describes a trip that the entire freshman class takes around the battlefield in the middle of the night. No elaboration is given, but the patronizing tone of the poem seems to view this trip as an initiation or even hazing activity for the first year students. This interpretation would certainly be backed up by an illustration (Figure 4) found a few pages later in the same issue of Cannon Bawl. In a clear instance of hazing, the illustration, titled “Pickett’s Charge,” shows upperclassmen using boards from a picket fence to beat dink-clad freshmen (Cannon Bawl, Nov. 1924, 11). It is not likely that these hazing and initiation acts actually took place, as there is no other evidence of them taking place. Most likely, these examples merely serve to suggest what would be a novel idea for freshman initiation, while using the presence of the battlefield as a location.
Interestingly enough, the battlefield, more accurately the National Soldiers Cemetery, does serve as the backdrop for a tradition of freshmen orientation today. The First-Year Walk began as a Gettysburg College tradition in 2003. The entire freshman class walks down Carlisle Street, through Union Square, and up Baltimore Street to the National Soldiers Cemetery, where a guest speaker recites the Gettysburg Address and gives the first years some words of advice. This path reenacts the steps that Gettysburg College students in 1863 took to watch President Lincoln give the original Gettysburg Address to dedicate the National Cemetery (Rhoads). Later in their first year at Gettysburg, freshmen participate in the Twilight Walk that inaugurates them as alumni. The freshman class this time walks to an illuminated Penn Hall and rehearses the Gettysburg College Alma Mater (‘Twilight Walk’). These two events, the First Year Walk and the Twilight Walk, both seem to embody the historical and surreal aspects that the freshmen students experience in the poem. More importantly, this connection, past and present, between students and the battlefield is more evidence of the presence of a Cult of Campus.

The battlefield was also a rather controversial issue for students of the 1920s. Gettysburg College in the 1920s was strongly affiliated with the Lutheran faith, as evident in students attending compulsory services each morning in Brua Chapel (Moyer: 2006, 94). 1920s Gettysburg College was also emerging from the post-World War I era, where American sentiments were determinably opposed to war (‘World War I’). As we have previously seen with the flag controversy at Penn Hall, The Blister’s editorial staff was relentless in its criticism of the ROTC program at Gettysburg. The Blister’s staff also showed its feelings on war in an editorial.
over the summer of 1922 school session. The July 5th, 1922 issue (just days after the annual reenactments that take place on the anniversary of the battle from July 1-3) shows an illustration (Figure 5) of a reenactment, then goes on to deplore reenactments and warfare in general. “To the thoughtful, the demonstration [reenactments] brought another conviction – barbarity of warfare. Military deeds appeal to man’s brutal nature.” The editorial goes on to say “Let us honor and care for the heroes, but say of their business: Never Again.” (The Blister, 5 Jul. 1922). Six days later, another Blister editorial attacks the American Legion for holding a carnival in Gettysburg that promotes militarism (The Blister, 11 Jul. 1922).

Figure 5. The illustration in the July 5th, 1922 edition of The Blister, as taken from Musselman Library / Special Collections’ GettDigital Collection. (The Blister, 5 Jul. 1922).

Not all students felt such strong convictions against the battlefield and its celebration. Indeed, this may be an occasion where The Blister staff did not represent the majority opinion of students. This can be seen first in the aforementioned backlash to the ROTC comments about the flag (The Blister, 16 Apr. 1926a), but also in comedy. One joke in the “Humor Section” of a 1925 issue goes as follows:

“John: They will soon be calling the Battle Field ‘Pear Orchard,’
Girl: Why do you make such an expression?
John: Because, there’s a pair under every tree.” (The Blister, 6 Aug. 1925).
The punchline of this joke seems to imply that the Peach Orchard, one of the areas of the battlefield that saw intense fighting on July 2nd, 1863, was a popular spot for students to picnic and go on dates, hence the “pair under every tree.” This suggests that the battlefield was used as green space for college students. Today, that legacy lives on. Gettysburg College students can often be seen jogging or walking around the battlefield. It is clear that in both the past and the present, Gettysburgians have taken advantage of the battlefield for recreational purposes.

Touring the battlefield is a popular activity for visitors to Gettysburg. An August, 1925 edition of The Blister recounts a particularly interesting story regarding visitors. In 1925, the Oxford University debate team toured the United States, competing with American university and college debate teams from across the country. Gettysburg College was fortunate enough to be chosen for the honor of going up against the British heavyweights, and, much to the surprise of many, defeated the Oxford team at the event at York High School. After the match, the victorious Gettysburg squad was responsible for showing their Oxford companions some Pennsylvania hospitality. One part of their visit was a battlefield tour led by a “Colonel Scott,” who appears to have been a local personality on campus. The Oxford boys called the tour “one of their most interesting experiences since they came to America.” (The Blister, 30 Aug. 1925). The tradition of students offering battlefield tours as a facet of hospitality also continues to this day. As an independent project, Class of 2007 Gettysburg College graduate John Rudy researched the role the campus played in the battle as well as how students and staff reacted to the events in the summer of 1863. Rudy then used his research to prepare a tour of campus for Family Weekend to educate students and their families about the Civil War history of the campus (“Family Weekend Schedule”).

Today, Gettysburg College and its students regard the battlefield in a definitively celebratory manner. Students, administrators, and faculty alike have embraced the campus’s history and its proximity to one of the greatest turning points in history. In fact, Gettysburg College has a Civil War Era Studies (CWES) Department that offers a minor in CWES for interested students. The CWES Department started in 1998 with funding from the Henry R. Luce foundation. In addition to a minor in CWES, the department also offers a program called the “Gettysburg Semester,” which allows students from other colleges to study abroad at Gettysburg and get the full Civil War experience (“Civil War Era Studies”). The Civil War Institute (CWI) at Gettysburg College is another example of the college’s efforts to utilize the battlefield as an educational resource. The CWI’s mission statement states that the CWI:

“The Civil War Institute engages with Gettysburg College students, general audiences, graduate students, and scholars in a dialogue about Civil War history through an interdisciplinary approach dedicated to public interpretation, historic preservation, public policy, teaching, and academic research.” (“Our Mission Statement”)

In addition to the CWES Department and the CWI, students also actively engage themselves in Civil War activities by joining the Civil War Club or the 26th Pennsylvania College Guard (PCG). The Civil War Club meets weekly to discuss topics about the war, plan events and trips, and paly educational games about the war (“Civil War Club”). I am a member
of the Civil War Club and can personally testify to its educational and enjoyment benefits, especially games of “Civil War Pictionary” which are known by members as the most fun part of the club. Students can also join PCG, a living history club that reenacts soldier and civilian life during the war (“26th Pennsylvania College Guard”). It is not uncommon to find members of PCG in full marching order out on the battlefield on weekends taking advantage of photo opportunities with tourists.

It is clear that the Cult of Campus as defined through the battlefield shows a distinct evolution over time. Despite having similar recreational similarities in the usage of the battlefield, Gettysburg College students in the 1920s and today likely had very different opinions on the battlefield. While it may not have been indicative of the convictions of the entire student body population, The Blister’s staff clearly showed a disdain for warfare and any celebrations of it. Today, Gettysburg College students partake in a number of organizations and programs that study the American Civil War and the Battle of Gettysburg with enthusiasm. This shift is likely the result of Americans’ changing attitudes towards war on a much larger macro scale, but nonetheless affect the micro level college student interaction with hallowed grounds.

Conclusion

Gettysburg College has undergone immense changes since the 1920s. However, one idea has remained the same: students now and then fixate on certain elements of the physical campus. As we have seen, this Cult of Campus has manifested itself in a number of areas on and off campus. In many cases, many traditions remain from the 1920s until today in regards to this Cult of Campus. Brua Hall still features drama performances in 2014 as it did in the 1920s. Penn Hall’s cupola still flies an American flag, day and night, 365 days a year. Finally, the battlefield still exists as green space for Gettysburg College students much as it did in the 1920s and is the setting for first year initiation ceremonies. Despite these similarities, the Cult of Campus has also changed and evolved with the ages. Brua Hall is no longer the site of daily, mandatory church services, nor a battleground between males and coeds or freshmen and sophomores. Penn Hall has risen as the symbol of the college campus, defying the 1920s idea that it is too old and instead embracing its tenure. Students no longer militantly advocate for the preservation of the campus grounds as they did in the 1920s. Finally, the students’ feelings towards the battlefield have changed, from opposing anything that had any connection to war in the aftermath of World War I, to embracing the history that exists all around the campus. In this way, the Cult of Campus, while present then and now, is as much affected by history as the changing daily lives of students through the ages.

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I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation of the Honor Code.