



Fall 2013

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Wagner, Robin. "North and South: Archivists Document Gettysburg's 150th." *Pennsylvania Libraries: Research & Practice* 1.2 (Fall 2013), 92-94.

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Abstract

Sometimes the best special collections are right in your own backyard. Not the ones that come to you from a retiring professor, local collector, or estate settlement, but the ones that you put together yourself. Rather than sit by and wait for memorabilia related to the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg to come to them, archivists at Gettysburg College took an active role, becoming part of the history they would normally just accept from donors. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Gettysburg, 150th anniversary, Battle of Gettysburg, Musselman Library, Civil War, memorabilia, library archive, Gettysburg College

Disciplines

Library and Information Science | United States History

North and South: Archivists Document Gettysburg's 150th

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Sometimes the best special collections are right in your own backyard. Not the ones that come to you from a retiring professor, local collector, or estate settlement, but the ones that you put together yourself. Rather than sit by and wait for memorabilia related to the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg to come to them, archivists at Gettysburg College took an active role, becoming part of the history they would normally just accept from donors.

In late June and early July 2013, they set out to gather representative items related to the historic anniversary. Over 250,000 tourists and reenactors descended on Gettysburg during the commemoration. Among them were staff of Musselman Library's Special Collections who—with cameras in hand—shopped for souvenirs, attended battle reenactments, interviewed tourists, and joined in events like the Pickett's Charge walk, which drew over 15,000 participants.





Chelsea Bucklin, archives assistant, marched with the Confederates. “It was a long walk,” she said. “I never realized how far it was. Plus, we were trudging through fields of tall grass, briars, and poison ivy. It was tough. And we were lucky; no one was shooting at us!” Intern Dori Gorczyca was with Union troops, waiting at the wall for the Confederate advance. “Sometimes you’d see them, and then they would disappear in one of the dips in the field and reappear again. All you would see was the tops of their flags. You hear so much about the importance of flags in the Civil War, and this was a visual reminder of that.”

Bucklin photographed her Confederate comrades and Gorczyca her compatriots waiting at the stone wall. Gorczyca pointed out that unlike the fateful day in 1863, northerners were camped out on lawn chairs waiting for the Confederate approach. In this present-day reenactment, both sides eventually met at the wall, and the mingling was friendly.

In addition to Bucklin and Gorczyca, Special Collections Director Carolyn Sautter and intern Stephanie Bowen each covered one day of the reenactments on July 4-7. They joined thousands of spectators at the field where the battles of the day were played out, viewed the Union and Confederate camps, talked to reenactors, and shopped along sutlers' row. They could see a demonstration on cannons or hear lectures from generals on their plans for the battle or even converse with nationally known authors like Jeff Shaara, who has penned works of historical fiction such as *Gods and Generals* and *The Last Full Measure*. Of course look-alikes were everywhere, and Musselman Library's photo archive now contains images of modern-day Lincolns, Meades, Lees, and more.





"The weather stayed true to history," Bucklin observed. "It was incredibly hot. When I walked around the encampments, there were people finding shade wherever they could." Not all was authentic, however. The roving photographers tried to capture the flavor of the 21st century as well. There were men and women in Civil War-era dress talking on their iPhones and stepping out of 21st-century cars with license plates from as far away as Oregon and Alaska. "And snow cones," said Bucklin, "a lot of snow cones!"

The staff also went on a \$250 shopping spree funded by Gettysburg College's Civil War Institute. Their mission was to purchase commemorative pieces that will remind future generations of the 150th events. Their shopping bags included spoons, patches, pins, a pocket watch, golf balls, playing cards, coins, a shot glass, tee shirts, hats, a potholder, and an apron, all with the 150th insignia. "My favorite in terms of pure tourist kitsch is this pig," said archivist Amy Lucadamo, removing some tissue paper and producing a white ceramic piggy bank stamped with the Sesquicentennial seal and bright red hearts. Two bottles of 150th sarsaparilla, a bottle of "Rebel Red" wine, and a bottle of "Tears of Gettysburg" chardonnay rounded out the purchases. Of course, all drinks had to be consumed before being archived.

"Everyone made a concerted effort to pick up any free paper materials they found around town, such as program flyers, event announcements, maps, and posters," said Sautter. The library also purchased commemorative stamps, postcards, guidebooks, the battlefield audio driving tour, and a copy of the new release film, *The Gettysburg Story*. Archivist Lucadamo is also collecting all news coverage and creating an online guide related to commemoration activities. She is also using Archive It software to document all 150th anniversary-related webpages.

In reflecting on the experience, Sautter observed that the idea of becoming the collectors was born out of necessity. When looking for pieces to display from previous anniversaries, there was very little in the collection. "We had one scrapbook, containing some wonderful photographs of the 75th anniversary," said Sautter, "but little else." That prompted the staff to collaborate on how best to capture all aspects of the 150th anniversary.

"It was such a rewarding experience," said Sautter. "So often collecting is done after the fact, and much of our material culture is lost that way," she noted. "We were able to gather artifacts in real time, photograph the moment, and talk with visitors who were living history. Now we will be able to preserve all of this so that the archivists planning the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg won't have to go far to find examples of the Sesquicentennial."



Photographs contributed by Stephanie Bowen, Chelsea Bucklin, Dori Gorczyca, and Carolyn Sautter, Gettysburg College