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Ivy and the Class of 1933

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Ivy and the Class of 1933

Description

Plaques are curious items. According to MSN Encarta, a plaque is “a small flat piece of metal, stone, or other hard material that has an inscription or decoration on it and is fixed to a wall or other surface, often to commemorate somebody or something.” They can be found in a variety of places, celebrate a number of events, and vary in complexity from a single sentence to lengthy paragraphs. Many go unnoticed, but if one looks hard enough, they appear fairly frequently. This oddity is especially true at Gettysburg, where plaques on campus celebrate events and people on buildings, trees, and even sidewalks. An examination of these plaques reveals a multitude of stories that are an important part of the college’s history. [*excerpt*]

Course Information:

- Course Title: *HIST 300: Historical Method*
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- Course Instructor: Dr. Michael J. Birkner '72

Hidden in Plain Sight is a collection of student papers on objects that are "hidden in plain sight" around the Gettysburg College campus. Topics range from the Glatfelter Hall gargoyles to the statue of Eisenhower and from historical markers to athletic accomplishments. You can download the paper in pdf format and click "View Photo" to see the image in greater detail.

Keywords

Gettysburg College, Hidden in Plain Sight, Schmucker Hall, Ivy Week, ivy, Ivy League

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Hidden in Plain Sight
Ivy and the Class of 1933

History 300
Historical Methods
Dr. Michael Birkner

By
Elizabeth Ungemach

Fall 2009

Plaques are curious items. According to MSN Encarta, a plaque is “a small flat piece of metal, stone, or other hard material that has an inscription or decoration on it and is fixed to a wall or other surface, often to commemorate somebody or something.”¹ They can be found in a variety of places, celebrate a number of events, and vary in complexity from a single sentence to lengthy paragraphs. Many go unnoticed, but if one looks hard enough, they appear fairly frequently. This oddity is especially true at Gettysburg, where plaques on campus celebrate events and people on buildings, trees, and even sidewalks. An examination of these plaques reveals a multitude of stories that are an important part of the college’s history. One of these plaques, located on the campus-side of Schmucker Hall, reads:

“TO COMMEMORATE THE FIRST IVY WEEK WITH THE IVY PLANTING
GETTYSBURG COLLEGE
APRIL 25-30, 1933
BY CLASS OF 1933

‘BOWL’ R.F. SHEELY	‘SPOON’	‘SPADE’ L. MORRIS
G. D. WHITCRAFT		J. BANKERT” [See

Appendix 1]

Although this plaque contains little beyond a sentence by way of explanation, date, and four names, the story behind it is much more complex than one might originally think. An inspection of this plaque leads to several interesting discoveries.

Ivy played an important role on college campuses across the country. Several of the nation’s oldest establishments of higher education are referred to as the ‘Ivy League’ and institutions like the University of Washington had a long history of planting ivy.² Ivy was first sown by the senior class as a part of commencement exercises at Gettysburg College in 1893.³ Dr. Glatfelter, when writing his history of the college, could not find an explanation as to why ivy, specifically, was used,⁴ but it seems to have been part of a ceremonial beautification program, like a manifestation

of the old Girl Scout motto: "Always leave a place better than [it was found]." The planting did not occur every year, and when it did take place it was not always well attended.⁵ The class of 1933 decided to change that practice.

In 1933, the senior class decided to revitalize the custom by organizing an Ivy Week. The idea was first mentioned at a class meeting on October 3, 1932, when someone suggested the planning of an Ivy Day.⁶ A committee of students and faculty was formed and planned events for the week of April 25-30. Several weeks later, it was announced that the week would be moved to May 15-20 "in order to avoid conflict with the plans of the Inter-Fraternity council for the Spring Pan-Hellenic."⁷ It remains a mystery as to why the date on the plaque remained April 25-30; perhaps the plaque had already been ordered or perhaps, if it was affixed years later, the wrong date was supplied. One ponders the feasibility of replacing the plaque for a new one with the correct date, or somehow indicating that the date presented is incorrect and supplying the actual date, so as to preserve a charismatic story. Either way, the week was changed and plans continued.

The activities planned for the week were mostly a celebration of the senior class and its achievements. The yearbook announced "Ivy Week will be an innovation this year. The Class of '33 is to be congratulated for its initiative in advancing this event. The program is complete and varied, and the dance that will be held as a finale to the occasion promises to surpass the standards set by the other dances held during the school year."⁸ The committee decided that new class officers would be elected that week and that the best scholar, athlete, and general activities or literary student would be chosen from the senior class to participate in the ivy planting.⁹ It occurred on Friday, May 19. The morning began at 11 AM, when trumpeters were "heard from the cupola of 'Old Dorm.' [They played] the new Gettysburg College medley which was

composed by Jack Miles.”¹⁰ According to the Faculty Minutes, “On request from the students the Faculty agreed to appear in academic costume at the Ivy Exercises, May 19 and sanctioned the regular lecture schedule for that morning.”¹¹ The procession “[started] at 11:15 o’clock and [ended] at the north side of the library where the members of the three classes [were] assembled. Richard Gifford, vice-president of the senior class and chairman of the Ivy Week committee, [presented] some introductory remarks [. . .].”¹² The ivy was to be planted on the western wall of the library (what is now Schmucker Hall), which was then a relatively new building, as it had been completed in 1929.¹³ In a letter written in 1944 describing subsequent Ivy Day practices, Education Department head Dr. Frank H. Kramer¹⁴ stated that “the spoon man lifts the ivy out of the bowl with the spoon and sets it in the hole which had been dug by the spade man. (We have hard shale here, which is hard to work, and the actual digging is done before the ceremony, so that merely lifting out the earth is all that has to be done at the time.)”¹⁵ It is possible to assume that the practice Dr. Kramer described originated in 1933. “The wooden bowl and spoon [used in ‘33] were received from the Lutheran University in Oslo, Norway by Dr. Henry W. A. Hanson, president of Gettysburg College. The names of the honor men [were] inscribed upon them. The same spade [. . .] used [in the ceremony . . .] broke the ground for the gymnasium and the science hall [what are today Eddie Plank Gym and Breidenbaugh Hall].”¹⁶ After the planting, President Hanson made an address entitled “Ivy in College Traditions” and the senior class president, Raymond Sheely, made the mantel oration and officially granted his title to the newly elected senior president for the class of 1934, Robert Nix.¹⁷

The week was closed by the Ivy Ball held in Eddie Plank Gym on Saturday, May 20. It was a semi-formal affair attended by students from all years at the college. The Bowl, Spade, and Spoon men were honored during the evening.¹⁸ The Ball committee chose to decorate with

spring-like colors and sprigs of ivy and the student body selected Happy Felton and His C. B. S. Recording Orchestra, containing eleven pieces, to perform for the evening. The group had “been heard for the [previous] six months over a nationwide radio hook-up [and came] to Gettysburg after playing at a number of leading universities and colleges in the south.”¹⁹

The four men named on the plaque were among several nominated by a committee of faculty members and students on Monday, May 15.²⁰ The voting for all three positions occurred during Ivy Week at three class meetings: Bowl, for academics, was chosen on Tuesday, May 16; Spade, for athletics, was chosen Wednesday, May 17; and Spoon, for participation in literary or general activities, was chosen Thursday, May 18.²¹ In the same 1944 letter, Dr. Kramer noted that “to be eligible, the senior must be ‘outstanding’ in one classification and ‘very creditable’ in another.”²² One can speculate that this same process of nomination was utilized in 1933, and is the reason behind the three days of elections, to ensure that each honor was granted to a different man. The four men chosen were: Bowl-Raymond F. Sheely, Spade-Lawrence B. Morris, and Spoon-Gordon Davis Whitcraft and John W. Bankert. Their qualifications were exceptional.

The Bowl represented academic achievement. Raymond F. Sheely certainly deserved the honor. Sheely graduated with a B.S. in Biology; received Class Honors his freshman and sophomore years; received Highest Class Honors his junior year; was a Senior Honor Student; and participated in a variety of groups on campus, including the Owl and Nightingale Club, Scabbard and Blade (the Honorary Military Fraternity), and student council. He was salutatorian; a member of Beta Beta Beta (the National Biological Fraternity); and a member of Phi Beta Kappa (the National Honorary Scholastic Fraternity).²³ It is clear that while Sheely was an academic achiever, he also dabbled in enough other activities to qualify for multiple Ivy Week honors.

The Spade represented athletic ability. Lawrence B. Morris was definitely an athlete. He graduated with an A. B. in history and played both varsity baseball and football his sophomore through senior years. He also participated in student council, the Historical Society, the Athletic Council, the Student Finance Committee, and was a member of both Pen and Sword (the Honorary Upper Class Activity Society) and Kappa Phi Kappa (the National Honorary Education Society).²⁴ Morris, while interested in sports, also had other priorities which qualified him for more than one of the Ivy offices.

The Spoon represented participation in literary or other general activities. The tie indicates that these two men were so accomplished that choosing between them was impossible.

Gordon Davis Whitcraft graduated with a B. S. in English and was member of the Gettysburgian staff freshman through senior year; he was editor-in-chief his junior and senior years. Whitcraft was also a member of the Inter Collegiate Newspaper Association of Middle Atlantic States and played a role in the 1933 Spectrum. In addition to his literary activities, Gordon Whitcraft was a Senior Honor Student, an active member of the Owl and Nightingale Club and the Historical Association, and was assistant manager or manager of the basketball team all four years at Gettysburg. If those activities were not enough to qualify Whitcraft for the Ivy Week honors, he was also a member of Scabbard and Blade (the Honorary Military Fraternity), Alpha Kappa Alpha (the National Honorary Philosophy Fraternity), Blue Crocodiles (a Gettysburg group created to “recognize quality service on the staffs of the Gettysburgian and Spectrum”), and Pen and Sword (the Honorary Upper Class Activities Society).²⁵ Gordon Whitcraft obviously had a very full career at Gettysburg!

The other Spoon man was John W. Bankert. He graduated with a B. S. in Chemistry, was on the staff of the Gettysburgian freshman through senior year, and was a member of the Y.M.C.A.

Cabinet sophomore through senior year. In addition, he was assistant track manager or varsity track manager sophomore through senior year; a member of Skeptical Chymists (a Gettysburg chemistry club) and Der Deutsche Verein (a Gettysburg German club); and received Class Honors freshman and junior year and was a Senior Honor Student. Bankert was also a member of Kappa Phi Kappa (the National Honorary Education Society), Blue Crocodiles (for staff of the paper and yearbook), Pen and Sword (the Honorary Upper Class Activities Society), and Phi Beta Kappa (the National Honorary Scholastic Fraternity).²⁶ It is easy to see how there was a tie in the voting for this honor, as both of these men were deeply involved in campus life. It is baffling to imagine how both Whitcraft and Bankert managed to accomplish all that they did.

Though the seniors organized a wonderful event, their wish that their week “act as a precedent for future senior classes to follow,”²⁷ was carried out only in some respects. It was in fact the first and last Ivy Week held on campus. Some of the traditions those seniors initiated continued; as Dr. Kramer stated in his letter, the bowl, spade, and spoon men (or women, as the case may be) were nominated by a committee of faculty and students and elected by the senior class.²⁸ The Ivy Ball was also held again; it was a semi-formal event open to all students.²⁹ The college also continued the practice of requesting ivy from a variety of locations around the world to further relations.³⁰ In the following years, ivy was planted from Harvard in 1936 in commemoration of that university’s 300th anniversary; “the seven ‘daughters’ of Gettysburg (colleges founded by Gettysburg men) each made contributions”; as did Oxford, Heidelberg, and the oldest South American University; universities in Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia donated “one year when Pan American friendship was the country’s theme”; and ivy from a leading university in each of the Canadian provinces arrived.³¹ Over time, the practice dwindled.³² The

last Ivy Day was held by the class of 1957. The classes of 1958-61 continued to plant ivy, but in a less formal ceremony. 1961 was the last year ivy was planted.³³

One may ask where the ivy is now. Sometime in the 1960s, the Business Manager, F. Stanly Hoffman, in spite of his alumni status and regard for college traditions, urged that the ivy be removed because of the damage it was doing to the buildings on which it was growing. The ivy was growing between the mortar and bricks and destroying the facades of these edifices. The veracity of this statement was confirmed, the ivy was removed, and bricks were added to commemorate the ivy's former prominence.³⁴ Then, the library itself changed. In the early 1970s, the need for a new library was recognized; though Schmucker library had been built only 50 years before, it had suffered all the depredations of an economic crisis the size of the Great Depression.³⁵ In 1981, Musselman Library and Resource Center opened and Schmucker Hall became the music and art building it is on campus today.³⁶

Though planting ivy had played a role in campus life, particularly during commencement, the class of 1933 decided to revitalize the tradition in an attempt to interest a larger portion of the campus in this old practice. The week the class planned perfectly celebrated the achievements of the seniors, particularly those of Raymond F. Sheely, Lawrence B. Morris, Gordon Davis Whitcraft, and John W. Bankert. All of these men clearly earned the honors their fellow classmates granted them. The events of Friday, May 19 were impressively ceremonial and symbolic, from the trumpets playing from the cupola to the ivy planting itself. The Ivy Ball on Saturday, May 20, the social highlight of the year, was the capstone to a packed week. Though no further Ivy Weeks were planned, senior classes in the following years borrowed some of the customs started by this inventive class and perpetuated them. The honors were accepted, the Ivy Ball held, and ivy collected from universities the world over: Gettysburg became an international

institution in more ways than one. It was not until the late 1950s that the practice fell into disuse and the damage caused by the ivy ended in its replacement with bricks commemorating the classes that decided to take part in the ivy planting consuetude. This long-lasting college tradition was part of a nation-wide use of ivy on institutional campuses. The plaques celebrating the ivy, as well as many other customs on the Gettysburg College grounds, tell just one facet of this area's fascinating history.

Notes

¹ Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2009, s.v. "plaque," © 1997-2009 Microsoft Corporation, http://encarta.msn.com/dictionary_1861738745/plaque.html (accessed September 30, 2009).

² Letter from Herbert T. Condon, Dean of Students, University of Washington, to Mr. Clyde B. Stover, Registrar, Gettysburg College, March 29, 1944, Ivy Day vertical file, Special Collections, Musselman Library.

³ Dr. Charles H. Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985*, (Mechanicsburg, PA: W & M Printing 1987) vol. 1, 302.

⁴ Elizabeth Ungemach, interview with Dr. Charles H. Glatfelter, September 25, 2009.

⁵ Glatfelter Interview, September 25, 2009.

⁶ "Four College Classes Hold Monthly Meetings," *Gettysburgian*: October 6, 1932, 4.

⁷ Date For Ivy Week Has Been Changed To Week of May 15, With Ivy Ball As Closing Fete Saturday Night, "Alter Schedule For Ivy Week," *Ibid.*, March 23, 1933, 1.

⁸ *Spectrum*: 1934, 221.

⁹ Date For Ivy Week Has Been Changed To Week of May 15, With Ivy Ball As Closing Fete Saturday Night, "Alter Schedule For Ivy Week," *Gettysburgian*: March 23, 1933, 1 and Mantle Oration, Planting Of Ivy, and Ivy Ball Are Already Listed In Plans For Ivy Week, "Seniors Plan Ivy Program," March 9, 1933, 1.

¹⁰ Seniors Sheely, Morris, Whitcraft And Bankert Share Campus Honors, "Seniors Elect Men For Ivy Week Honors," *Ibid.*, May 18, 1933, 1.

¹¹ Gettysburg College Faculty Minutes, September 1929-June 1938, May 5, 1933, 56-57, Special Collections, Musselman Library.

¹² Seniors Sheely, Morris, Whitcraft And Bankert Share Campus Honors, "Seniors Elect Men For Ivy Week Honors," *Gettysburgian*: May 18, 1933, 1.

¹³ Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence*, vol. 2, 601 and Glatfelter, *Salutory Influence*, vol. 2, 522-523; Glatfelter Interview, September 25, 2009.

¹⁴ "Elect Three For Ivy Week Honors," *Gettysburgian*: May 18, 1933, 2.

¹⁵ Letter from Dr. Frank H. Kramer, Head of Ivy Day Committee and Department of Education, Gettysburg College, to Dr. Herbert T. Condon, Dean of Students, University of Washington, April 10, 1944, page 2, Ivy Day vertical file, Special Collections, Musselman Library. Note: the bottom of the letter was cut off before the signature was displayed. I surmised from what the author stated within the letter itself and from issues of the *Gettysburgian* from May 5, 1942, January 13, 1944, and April 19, 1945, when combined with mentions of his name in connection with the planning of Ivy Week in 1933, that Dr. Kramer was the author of this letter.

¹⁶ "Elect Three For Ivy Week Honors," *Gettysburgian*: May 18, 1933, 2; Glatfelter, *Salutory Influence*, vol. 2, 520-521.

¹⁷ Seniors Sheely, Morris, Whitcraft And Bankert Share Campus Honors, "Seniors Elect Men For Ivy Week Honors," *Ibid.*, May 18, 1933, 1.

¹⁸ "Elect Three For Ivy Week Honors," *Ibid.*, May 18, 1933, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Committee Secures "Happy Felton" For Ivy Ball; Completes Plans for Decorations, Programs, Awards, "Announce Ivy Week Program," *Ibid.*, May 4, 1933, 1.

²¹ Joint Committee Of Faculty and Seniors Will Nominate Students For Honorary Positions For Ivy Week, "To Elect For Ivy Positions," *Ibid.*, April 6, 1933, 2.

- ²² Dr. Frank Kramer to Dr. Condon, April 10, 1944, page 2, Ivy Day vertical file, Special Collections, Musselman Library.
- ²³ Spectrum: 1934, 51, 198, and 200; Dorothy Harris And Raymond Sheely Are Named Valedictorian And Salutatorian, Respectively, "Reveal Senior Class Honors," Gettysburgian: April 20, 1933, 1.
- ²⁴ Spectrum: 1934, 50 and 208; Glatfelter, *Salutary Influence*, vol. 2, 640.
- ²⁵ Spectrum: 1934, 53, 55, 208, and 299; Glatfelter, *Salutary Influence*, vol. 2, 641 and 653.
- ²⁶ Spectrum: 1934, 42, 55, 198, and 208; Glatfelter, *Salutary Influence*, vol. 2, 640, 641, and 653.
- ²⁷ Mantle Oration, Planting Of Ivy, and Ivy Ball Are Already Listed In Plans For Ivy Week, "Seniors Plan Ivy Program," Gettysburgian: March 9, 1933, 1.
- ²⁸ Dr. Kramer to Dr. Condon, April 10, 1944, page 2, Ivy Day vertical file, Special Collections, Musselman Library.
- ²⁹ Ivy Ball Dance Card, 1945, Ivy Day Vertical File, Special Collections, Musselman Library.
- ³⁰ "Elect Three For Ivy Week Honors," Gettysburgian: May 18, 1933, 2.
- ³¹ Dr. Kramer to Dr. Condon, April 10, 1944, page 1, Ivy Day vertical file, Special Collections, Musselman Library.
- ³² Glatfelter Interview, September 25, 2009.
- ³³ Glatfelter, *Salutary Influence*, vol. 2, 920.
- ³⁴ Ibid.; Glatfelter Interview, September 25, 2009.
- ³⁵ Glatfelter Interview, September 25, 2009.
- ³⁶ Glatfelter, *Salutary Influence*, vol. 2, 849-850.

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<http://encarta.msn.com/encnet/features/dictionary/dictionaryhome.aspx>.

Spectrum, 1934

Appendix 1



Plaque as it appears on the campus-side of Schmucker Hall