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## One Year On: Obliterated By Degrees

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# One Year On: Obliterated By Degrees

## Abstract

The battle anniversary loomed in the waning days of June. And Gettysburg was preparing. Aside from the feasting in the Spangler Meadow on the 4th, the holiday would undoubtedly see tourists swarming the fields and hills where just a few dozen weeks before time had stood still and Death held a grand carnival. [*excerpt*]

## Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Gettysburg Compiler, The Soldiers' National Cemetery

## Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Social History | United States History

## Comments

*Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public* is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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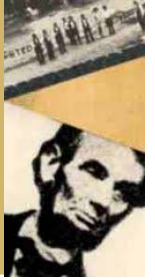
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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

[www.civilwarconnect.com](http://www.civilwarconnect.com)



## One Year On: Obliterated By Degrees

**TUESDAY, JULY 1, 2014**

The battle anniversary loomed in the waning days of June. And Gettysburg was preparing. Aside from the feasting in the Spangler Meadow on the 4th, the holiday would undoubtedly see tourists swarming the fields and hills where just a few dozen weeks before time had stood still and Death held a grand carnival.

But the battlefield they were visiting was already shifting and changing. The Soldiers' National Cemetery had hardly been filled to the brim and yet the grounds were already beginning to suffer from the elements and continual floods of curious Americans.

One visitor, as the anniversary came closer, hailed from California. Glancing at the neat rows of graves, the visitor noticed, the [Gettysburg Compiler](#) explained, that, "the names on the headboards of the soldiers from Indiana were becoming obliterated, they only having been marked in pencil."

Those men had been placed there weeks before, lovingly removed from graves scattered around the battlefield by Basil Biggs and his work crews of local Black laborers. But nature was doing her best to erase the scars of the battle from her landscape. Undoubtedly, in David Wills' law office these men from Indiana had already been catalogued, enshrined and recorded in Samuel Weaver's neat and scrupulous handwriting.

But their public memory, their stones and names, were evaporating. The Californian, out of deep pride in his Nation, "at once ordered new headboards, on which the names have been painted in a neat and durable manner." For a short row of men from Indiana, a commanding gaze of Cemetery Hill would be eternal.

But while soldiers began dominating the landscape of that low crest, other men were losing their grip on the promontory. Indeed, precisely because of those men from Indiana, because of the cemetery where they rest forever, David McConaughy saw the world tilting below his feet.

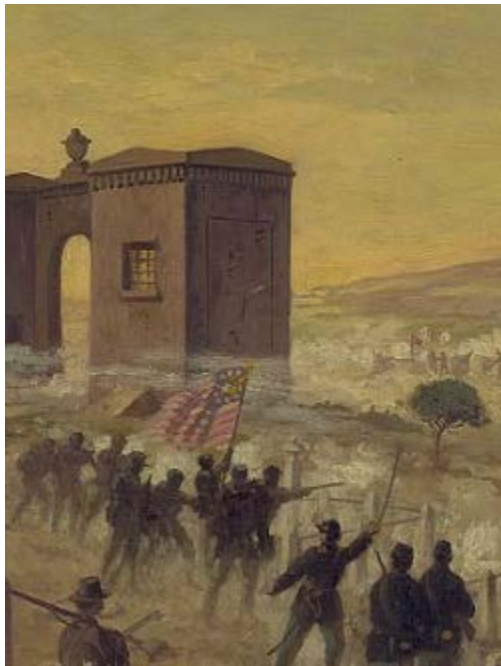


Political Battlefield in July 1863;  
Political Battlefield in June 1864. / PD LOC

The local moderate Republican had seen his name atop the roster of officers of the Evergreen Cemetery Association since the first graves sprung up atop Cemetery Hill. He had commanded that cemetery, shepherded it to become the local burying ground for the most prominent and noteworthy local citizens. Doing so meant martialling political might and building a strong roster of local political enemies along the way.

But his latest harebrained scheme had begun his slow decline. Just after the battle, McConaughy's near-single-handed endeavour to build a battlefield park, centered around Evergreen Cemetery and a new soldiers' cemetery as its chief tourist attraction, had absorbed nearly every waking moment. McConaughy had spent his own money to enlarge the cemetery boundaries, gobbling up every adjacent tract of land in the final days of July 1863.

The obsession was too much, and the local citizens took keen note. While McConaughy feuded with David Wills over who would found a cemetery for the Federal dead, the grounds of the Evergreen Cemetery went to wrack and ruin. Bills went unpaid. McConaughy, the [Democratic Gettysburg Compiler almost gleefully mused](#), "receives all the monies coming in from the sale of lots, &c., and pays out (after he has sufficiently worried creditors with delays) on his own orders." The once beautiful rural cemetery was in shambles, and not simply for want of maintenance. "Not only have those beautiful grounds suffered by neglect, but the credit of the Cemetery company has been seriously impaired by the shameless mis management of its financial affairs—in plainer terms, by McConaughy having charge of the funds."



Armies upend the natural social order, and their impacts linger all too long / PD LOC

Henry J. Stahle, the Democratic powerhouse editor of the *Compiler* wasn't the only voice crying for blood. Letters echoing the request for McConaughy's head on a platter peppered his newspaper

columns. "And I may say in this connection as an evidence of the arbitrary management of those having control, that in these ten years," [one correspondent wrote accusatorially](#), "during which the revenue must necessarily have been large, not one dollar has passed into the hands of the Treasurer? Where is the money? What use has been made of it? The lot-holders wish to know."

McConaughy's hold on his seat as the Evergreen Cemetery's board was obliterated, just as nature had obliterated the names of a few men from Indiana. He lost his post running the crown jewel of Cemetery Hill.

But just below the call from blood in Stahle's paper, another notice ran. McConaughy would be serving as secretary on the board of in his newly crafted Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association. "McConaughy," [Stahle mused](#), "is too heavy a weight for any enterprise to carry in these parts, be it ever so deserving." And Stahle had every reason for his reticence; McConaughy had hand-picked President Joseph R. Ingersoll for the top slot in the GBMA a month before the elections were

ever held. Perhaps McConaughy was growing smarter, installing puppet regimes instead of drawing targets on his own back.