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## Everyday Sesquicentennial: Ghoulish Capitalism Takes Root

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## Abstract

Nothing was happening in Gettysburg in the spring of 1864.

That's not quite true. There was tons happening in the first few weeks of April 15 decades ago. But that "tons" was not massive or earth shattering. A dozen men and women died. Another handful of men and women found new lives in each others' arms. Life continued in this place just as it had a year before. It continued on in spite of the new cemetery, in spite of the war, in spite of the rebel arms and heads poking out of gardens alongside the budding spring flowers. Life was normal. [*excerpt*]

## Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Sesquicentennial, Communism

## 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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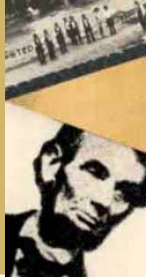
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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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**THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2014**

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That's not quite true. There was tons happening in the first few weeks of April 15 decades ago. But that "tons" was not massive or earth shattering. A dozen men and women died. Another handful of men and women found new lives in each others' arms. Life continued in this place just as it had a year before. It continued on in spite of the new cemetery, in spite of the war, in spite of the rebel arms and heads poking out of gardens alongside the budding spring flowers. Life was normal.

But it wasn't normal. War changed this place fundamentally. Gettysburg was shaken to its very core by the battle. Torment, suffering and death warped the landscape and its denizens.

Joel A. Danner was one of those poor souls warped by the hellscapes of three days in July. The teenager was named for his father, and consequently went by his middle name: Albertus.

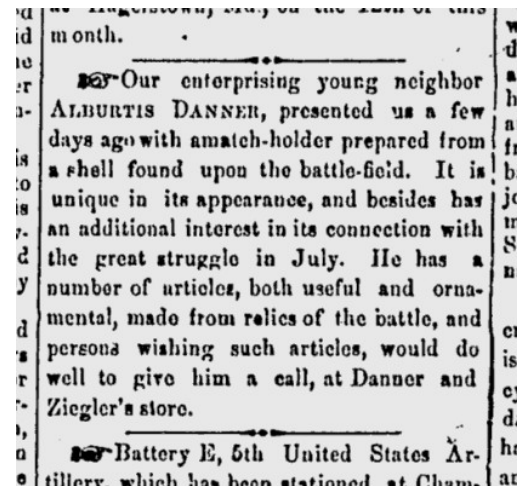
The Danners lived on the Diamond at the center of Gettysburg, a massive family wedged into a modest brick home. When Lee and his armies invaded Gettysburg, Albertus was about 16 years old.

War is adventure. War is excitement. And for Albertus, war was opportunity.

What kid hasn't, on some ungodly hot day, tried to set up a card table by the roadside and sell lemonade? Capitalism is such a natural laboratory for the precocious young kid, turning lemons into lemonade, and then quickly into pocket money.

But Gettysburg was warped and twisted by war. No part of life wasn't melted in that massive crucible.

Albertus brought his own wares into Robert Harper's newspaper office. When life hands you lemons, you make lemonade. But what about when life hands you the detritus of the greatest mass bloodletting on the American continent?



The *Sentinels*' editor Robert Harper was obviously impressed by Danner's handicrafts.

Harper's [notice is typical enough](#), praising the "enterprising young neighbor," for his commercial pursuits. But these aren't refreshing drinks Albertus is selling. Instead, the teen presented the editor with, "a match-holder prepared from a shell found upon the battlefield." And it wasn't his only handicraft. "He has a number of articles, both useful and ornamental, made from relics of the battle."



Battle forever changed Albertus. He made his living selling relics in one of the first local museums. / CC Gettysburg Daily

War warped the childhood of every young man and woman in Gettysburg.

For Joel Albertus Danner, war turned that simple impulse we all have, the impulse to experiment with our own hands and the market economy. into something slightly more sinister. When Albertus excised that childhood rite, he was selling tools of death, quaint reminders of a battle and the objects that helped end men's lives.

War changed Gettysburg. Some might say it made the men and women who lived here callous to the reality of battle. War is about death. War is fundamentally killing.

And maybe Gettysburg, even a century and a half later, hasn't quite recovered from the trauma of 1863.