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Old, Worn Bibles: What Did She Feel?

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Old, Worn Bibles: What Did She Feel?

Abstract

A simple photo for today, taken back in September standing in the Dunker Church. A visitor, giddy and laughing, gets so close to the Dunker Bible standing inside of the footprint of the Dunker Church on the eve of the anniversary of battle. Why? What is it that made her so happy? [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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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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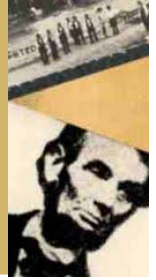
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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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Old, Worn Bibles: What Did She Feel?

THURSDAY, JANUARY 24, 2013



A simple photo for today, taken back in September standing in the Dunker Church. A visitor, giddy and laughing, gets so close to the Dunker Bible standing inside of the footprint of the Dunker Church on the eve of the anniversary of battle.

Why? What is it that made her so happy?

Was it knowledge? That surely came into play. She needed to have some background and understanding of that place, she needed a feel for the forces at play. But it's not knowledge she's getting from those pages. It's just a book like any other.

On Monday, Obama laid his hand on a plain 1853 pocket Bible, published by Oxford University Press. To open it, it is a King James Bible. Likewise, the Dunker Bible is a plain English Bible, easily read. The 23rd psalm is the same in both books as any other hunk of dead trees and cow's skin you find on shelves and in churches across America.

So what's the power?

What is the emotion here?

It's the talisman. It's the meaning. The book doesn't really matter all that much. It adds weight, but not substance. If Lincoln had set his hand upon *Punch Magazine* to swear out the oath of office, if the Dunkers had read from a sacred copy of *Frankenstein*; or, *The Modern Prometheus* right before the battle at Sharpsburg, we would drool over *those* pages of wood-pulp and ink.

It's the fact that these object were there, but it's something more than that *fact* too.

It's the romance and wonder of that proximity. It's the understanding that we cannot shake Lincoln's hand any longer. We cannot hear the Dunker's songs that Sunday before the battle any longer.

But we can meet the library's silent witnesses. So we stand slack-jawed with our camera, not gaining knowledge. There is none to be gained from these books.

We instead gain something to feed our soul.