



7-7-2011

Beyond the Battlefield: A Simple Matchbook and a Rabbit Hole

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Rudy, John M., "Beyond the Battlefield: A Simple Matchbook and a Rabbit Hole" (2011). *Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public*. 193.
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Beyond the Battlefield: A Simple Matchbook and a Rabbit Hole

Abstract

A couple months ago, at the annual spring Gettysburg antique show, I found a small display of Civilian Conservation Corps items. Pennants and coins, matchbook covers and pins all displayed on a piece of foam-core. One caught my eye. For \$10, I became the proud owner of a matchbook cover, never used, from a CCC Camp in Gettysburg. Company 1355 was stationed at Camp NP - 2 - Pa., now known as the Boy Scout / youth camping area at McMillan woods. I was thrilled. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Beyond the Battle, Black History, CCC, Civil Rights, Civil War to Civil Rights

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public 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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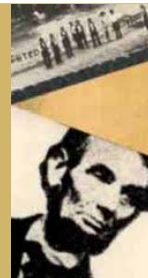
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Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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THURSDAY, JULY 7, 2011

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A couple months ago, at the annual spring Gettysburg antique show, I found a small display of Civilian Conservation Corps items. Pennants and coins, matchbook covers and pins all displayed on a piece of foam-core. One caught my eye. For \$10, I became the proud owner of a matchbook cover, never used, from a CCC Camp in Gettysburg. Company 1355 was stationed at Camp NP - 2 - Pa., now known as the Boy Scout / youth camping area at McMillan woods. I was thrilled.

The piece is an interesting artifact, but nothing too curious. There are artifacts from the CCC across America, from roads and public works projects to family photo albums and mementos ferreted away in attics as reminders of America's last great economic troubles. This matchbook is not necessarily odd.

Until you realize a key fact about Company 1355: the men were members of one of the Civilian Conservation Corp's all black units. These men were stationed at Gettysburg, Lincoln's home of a "new birth of freedom."

Site of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address Now Is CCC Camp

Boys from New York and New Jersey Have Crossed the Country.

By JOSEPH W. GOTT
GETTYSBURG, Pa.—After having been moved from camp to camp, across the entire country, Company 286 of the CCC is now stationed here, where Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg address. Composed of boys from New York and New Jersey, the company was

Adams, Trenton; Edward Booker, Glassboro, N.J.
Company clerks are: Douglas Williams, Newark; Joseph Gott, Plainfield, N.J. The steward is Henderson Lane, Atlantic City.

DOUGLASS MADE

Baltimore Afro-American - 10 February 1934

The decision seems not to have been made lightly. Its meanings were readily apparent to the region's African-American community. When a previous CCC company was stationed at Gettysburg, the *Baltimore Afro-American* was keen to point out that CCC men were now working, "where Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous Gettysburg address."

The men of camp 1355 were part of the work crew which reset, "several thousand headstones," in the National Cemetery in 1935. The *Afro-American* declared the soldiers who rested there as, "Civil War heroes." Working in the cemetery, undoubtedly, in between good-natured jests which workers trade on long days, the men of 1935 must have thought about those men of 1863 who were buried there, Lincoln's, "honored dead." They must have thought about their lives as black men in an America whose future was uncertain.

Did they gain strength to journey on from the soldiers' willingness to die for the future of a race of men?
Can we still gain that strength for our lives today?

CCC Corps Reset Markers for Graves of Gettysburg Heroes

WASHINGTON — Several thousand headstones, marking graves of Civil War heroes, who lost their lives in the battle of Gettysburg, have been re-set and straightened by the two colored companies, including 400 men, of the Civilian Conservation Corps at Gettysburg National Park, according to information from the office of the director here.

The task of the CCC has been to re-set these headstones on permanent foundations. Trenches were dug below the frost line and solid, continuous foundations of concrete laid for whole rows of markers. After the markers were set in the concrete, the ground around them was refilled, graded, and sodded. Up to August 31, a total of 6,572 feet of stone and 664 individual markers were re-set, requiring 5,519 man-days of labor.