



8-3-2011

Manassas: Consumer Time Machine

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Rudy, John M., "Manassas: Consumer Time Machine" (2011). *Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public*. 188.

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Abstract

One of the interesting bits of interpretation I found at Manassas' Sesquicentennial event was a rarity in my book. Oftentimes, living history volunteers place the contents of a haversack or a bedroll out on a gum blanket and simply name off the items for visitors. Beyond this laundry list, the conversations rarely reach into the realm of drawing personal connections with the visitor's daily life or personal experiences. The intellectual connection is well laid out, but an emotional connection is often fleeting. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Interp Theory, Living History, Manassas, Reenactors, History Education

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public History | Social History | United States History

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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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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

www.civilwarconnect.com



WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 3, 2011

Manassas: Consumer Time Machine



Only a quick post this week, as I'm preparing for a few busy days in Dulles at a conference.

One of the interesting bits of interpretation I found at Manassas' Sesquicentennial event was a rarity in my book. Oftentimes, living history volunteers place the contents of a haversack or a bedroll out on a gum blanket and simply name off the items for visitors. Beyond this laundry list, the conversations rarely reach into the realm of drawing personal connections with the visitor's daily life or personal experiences. The intellectual connection is well laid out, but an emotional connection is often fleeting.

But one of the living historians at Manassas hit an interpretive home run. Look at the exhibit pictured above. Under the right side of a fly were some original period food containers. Then, on the left side, was the spread pictured above. They are modern brands which find their lineage in the Civil War era. Some were regular consumer goods. Others made their first fortunes from war. The gentleman who was interpreting the setup was making connections for visitors. It didn't take a leap to imagine how many of these goods sat on my shelf at home, artifacts of the Civil War in my kitchen cupboard or on my refrigerator shelves. The connection between the past and the present was palpable in those simple bags of Eight O'clock Coffee and Lea & Perrins Sauce.

Knowing the soldiers and civilians of the 19th century ate some of the same foods I appreciate, the Civil War was alive in the supermarket of my mind.