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Manassas: Why They Fought Here

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Manassas: Why They Fought Here

Abstract

Another quick observational post on the Sesquicentennial event at Manassas last month. This time, it all revolves around the Confederate living history camp adjacent to the Henry House, and more directly to the exhibit there which the reenactors entitled, "Flags of Manassas." Curiously, the flags of Manassas were only rebel banners, with nary an American flag in sight. But that's [another discussion completely](#). [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Alabama, Anniversary, Manassas, Reenactors

Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Military 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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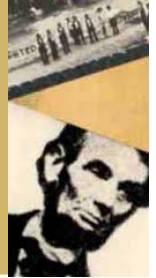
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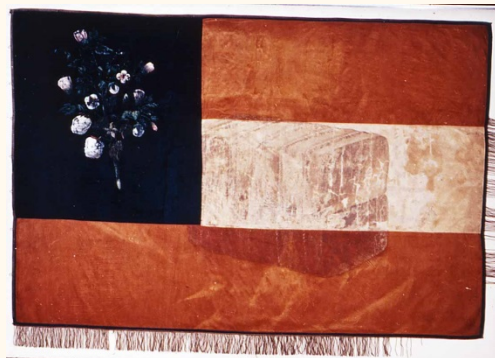
THURSDAY, AUGUST 11, 2011

Manassas: Why They Fought Here



Replica of the flag of Company G, 4th Alabama Infantry at Manassas' 150th Celebration

Another quick observational post on the Sesquicentennial event at Manassas last month. This time, it all revolves around the Confederate living history camp adjacent to the Henry House, and more directly to the exhibit there which the reenactors entitled, "Flags of Manassas." Curiously, the flags of Manassas were only rebel banners, with nary an American flag in sight. But that's [another discussion completely](#).



Near the end of the row of flags was the one pictured above, a first national flag with a large image of a cotton bale emblazoned across its stripes. One of the reenactors informed me it was a replica of the banner carried by the 4th Alabama, company G. The flag later became the regiment's colors. The flag was presented to the men of the 4th Alabama by the ladies of Marion, Alabama. The original is in the [Alabama Department of Archives and History](#).

But what did the flag mean? What was that cotton bale and the large cotton plant on the canton intended to represent?

The ladies of Marion presented the proud banner to their brave men recruited from across Perry County, Alabama. Thanks to [some keen numbers crunching by rootsweb user Tom Blake](#), we can start to get an image of what Perry County looked like on the eve of the war as men joined the army which would fight on the fields of northern Virginia. Perry County had a total of 1,045 slave owners, who held 18,206 humans in bondage. Over half of those slaves were owned by masters with 34 or more humans beings listed as their property. Perry county was a land of plantations and production farming. Commodities flowed from the fields of Perry County, picked by black hands. The flag was simply a, "beautiful device which illustrat[ed] so aptly the product of our lovely country."

So, when the regiment decided to adopt this flag as their regimental banner, what type of statement was that choice making?

To add another plot thickening and tantalizingly juicy detail to the tale, the flag purportedly flapped in the breeze near Thomas Jackson as he received the appellation, "Stonewall." There he stood, like a stonewall, fighting under a banner touting the primacy of the quintessential slave crop. What was this war all about again?