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Wittingly Effaced for Too Long: Hidden in Plain Sight

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Wittingly Effaced for Too Long: Hidden in Plain Sight

Abstract

A few years ago, Gettysburg College changed their wordmark. The previous college logo featured the words "Gettysburg College" topped with a line art version of the flag flying from the cupola of Pennsylvania Hall. The logo explicitly acknowledged the sense of place, referencing the 34-star flag which flies above the Civil War era field hospital both night and day. The logo acknowledged the Civil War inherently. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Hidden Meanings, Inspiration, Power of Place, Willful Forgetting

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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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2011

A few years ago, Gettysburg College changed their wordmark. The previous college logo featured the words "Gettysburg College" topped with a line art version of the flag flying from the cupola of Pennsylvania Hall. The logo explicitly acknowledged the sense of place, referencing the 34-star flag which flies above the Civil War era field hospital both night and day. The logo acknowledged the Civil War inherently.



The former Gettysburg College logo, phased out in early 2001 but still available on the [Internet Archive](#).

In early 2001, everything changed. The logo shifted to a simple blue and orange wordmark of "[Gettysburg College](#)." No flag, no war, no history. As the re-branding initiative continued throughout the 2000s, a company named *Cognitive Marketing* helped the college pilot a campaign to, as the college newspaper reported on November 6th, 2003, help, "Gettysburg College [seem] new and in the moment." The article went on to make the cryptic observation that, "the culture does not embrace the rich history of Gettysburg."

This seems to have been the norm within the college's history community for quite some time as well. The most recent college history, a two-volume, 1060 page work from 1987 by Charles Glatfelter entitled *Salutary Influence* and [available here \[136mb\]](#), devotes under 9 pages or roughly 0.8% to the war years. If you weighted each year evenly, 5 years of Civil War should take up 3% of the book, or roughly 30 pages. Tumultuous years like the 1860s would seemingly demand an even closer investigation, not a lesser one.



Two of Gettysburg's Civil War programs' old logos.

The college has in the past gone out of its way to efface the Civil War from its landscape. Today, that trend is being reversed by a forward thinking administration who seem to see that the Civil War is one of the things which makes this place unique.

Why do I mention all this? I've been working on the college's Civil War history since 2006, trying to piece together something meaningful from the bits and pieces. I offer tours for groups of college alumni and parents around the campus, helping unfold the Civil War stories hidden beneath the surface. A few weeks ago, I gave a tour for some high-power alumni, parents and trustees, all of whom were outrageously interested in the hidden history of this place. They connected to this landscape (which some of them spent years crossing on their way to class) in new ways. They were floored at how rich the stories of Gettysburg's students, faculty and the soldiers who

inhabited the college's campus could be. I am stockpiling research to hopefully put together a book on the college and the Civil War in time for the 150th in 2013.

As I've been searching, I found an intriguing article in a [1937 issue of the Gettysburg College Bulletin](#). Workmen digging the foundations for the north portico of Pennsylvania Hall, the non-historic porch of the building, "came upon some bones said to be human." Barely stopping the excavation, the workers almost seem to have been expecting to find remnants of the, "amputations of soldiers wounded in the Battle of Gettysburg." Among the other artifacts were, "an old-fashioned key, a piece of shell, a penny dated 1838." The article boasts that the college's new addition was, "deep-seated in courageous history." The enthusiasm is palpable. We can take some inspiration from this profound excitement: sometimes it is a far more effective strategy to embrace the histories we might not like instead of eschewing them.