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Provocation through Accessibility at Special Collections at Musselman Library

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Abstract

Gettysburg College Special Collections is a place where the worlds of archiving, preservation, and interpretation intersect. In the climate-controlled stacks, shelves lined with volume after volume attest to the centuries of history that the college has witnessed. It is the role of the current staff and interns to disseminate the seemingly infinite artifacts, manuscripts, and other primary sources that come through the door to those who travel to Special Collections to learn, discover, and enrich themselves. As Freeman Tilden wrote, “Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information”. However, interpretation is not something that should be rigidly defined and passed from person to person without question. In places such as Special Collections, we seek to provoke interactions between the sources and those using them; we hope to facilitate an environment where such interpretations can be made.

Keywords

Archives, Pohanka Internship, Special Collections

Disciplines

History | Military History | Public History | United States History

Comments

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THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

Provocation through Accessibility at Special Collections at Musselman Library

By Chloe Parrella '19

Gettysburg College Special Collections is a place where the worlds of archiving, preservation, and interpretation intersect. In the climate-controlled stacks, shelves lined with volume after volume attest to the centuries of history that the college has witnessed. It is the role of the current staff and interns to disseminate the seemingly infinite artifacts, manuscripts, and other primary sources that come through the door to those who travel to Special Collections to learn, discover, and enrich themselves. As Freeman Tilden wrote, “Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information”. However, interpretation is not something that should be rigidly defined and passed from person to person without question. In places such as Special Collections, we seek to provoke interactions between the sources and those using them; we hope to facilitate an environment where such interpretations can be made.



Over the course of my internship, the question of the role of an archive has been raised many times. The area between protecting an artifact or document from further harm

and the desire to share what the document contains, as well as the connection that is made when one is able to manipulate the artifact or document in real time with one's own hands, is often a grey one, and it is often left to the archivist and their colleagues to determine the most prudent course of action. I believe that in locations like that of Special Collections one potential way to bridge this gap and to aid the interpretation of their impressive collection is to remain in tune with the trends of not only the academic world as a whole, but also with the enthusiast who is simply interested in learning for their own sake.



The traditional message of Special Collections is to share what they have with as many as possible, as much as possible. In keeping with this motto, I believe that accessibility is paramount. In facilities across the country, where history is actively engaging with the modern world, I feel that it is most important for those acting as the guardians of the knowledge give it to as many as they can. To accomplish this end, Special Collections has made steps to digitize their collection. I have made a few small contributions to this effort and am able to see its positive effects. More and more sites like Special Collections have been moving in this direction: towards digital collections that can be viewed by a larger audience. I truly believe that Gettysburg College Special Collections is a shining example a facility that is moving into the future of scholarship, education, and interpretation, and they are bringing their patrons with them.