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# Women and World War II at Gettysburg College

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# Women and World War II at Gettysburg College

## **Abstract**

An examination of the women attending Gettysburg College during World War II. This project examined what the women did and experienced during the World War II, along with analyzing campus culture and life.

## **Keywords**

Women, World War II, WWII, Gettysburg College

## **Disciplines**

History | History of Gender | Military History | Oral History | Social History | United States History | Women's History

## **Comments**

This paper was written for Professor Julia Hendon's First Year Seminar, *FYS-103-3: Bringing the Past into the Present*, Fall 2015.

# Women and World War II at Gettysburg College

Keira Koch

FYS: Bringing the Past to Present 103-3



## Purpose

The main objective of this research project was to discover what Gettysburg College campus life was like during World War II, and to learn about the women who attend the college during this time.

I chose to do this research project because my great cousin, Elmo Koch '1946, attended Gettysburg College during the years the war was going on. I wanted to see what college life was like during her time at the college and understand the challenges she went through.

To gather information, I used multiple primary and secondary sources. The primary sources I used were the college newspaper, *the Gettysburgian*, from the years 1941-1946 and the oral histories of Doris Haas, Dorothy Craver, and Esther Fortenbaugh. Secondary sources I used were *To Waken Fond Memory: Moments in the History of Gettysburg College* by Anna Jane Moyer and *A Salutary Influence Gettysburg College 1832-1985 Vol. 2* by Charles H Glatfelter.



Fig. 1 Women's Student Council 1943. Spectrum (Gettysburg PA, Gettysburg College 1943. Print.)

## The Question Process

I formulated a set of questions to help me conduct my research.

My primary question was: What was the college life like at Gettysburg College during World War II, primarily between the years 1941 and 1945?

I then asked questions about my primary sources, analyzing their physical appearance and subject matter.

- Why did *the Gettysburgian* decrease in physical size from the years 1941 to 1945?
- Why was there a change in paper?
- When did *the Gettysburgian* start putting in propaganda ads?
- Where was *the Gettysburgian* printed?
- What year did these people (Dorothy, Esther, and Doris) attend Gettysburg College?
- How old were they when they were interviewed?

## Larger Questions

I also asked larger and general questions about my sources and research

- How greatly was the college affected when Pearl Harbor occurred?
- Did rationing affect college life?
- How involved was the college with the war effort?
- How many students served in the war?
- What years did most of the men leave? When did they come back?
- Did any professors serve in the war?
- How many men died in the war from Gettysburg College?
- Did the role of women change on campus?
- Were there any women who served as nurses?
- What events did the college sponsor to support the war effort?
- Were there USO Dances and scrap drives?
- Was there a change in academics?
- Was there a change in social life?
- How many students were enrolled in the college during the war?
- Did the college suffer financially?

## The Gettysburgian

- Throughout the years of the war, *The Gettysburgian* continued to act as a college newspaper.
- Articles on social events, sports statistics, dance ticket sales, and fraternity fundraiser events were all among the non-war related topics.
- You can see the effects of the war in *The Gettysburgian*, by both the content and physical appearance of the newspaper.
- From the 1942-1943 academic year, to the 1943-1944 academic year, the physical size of the paper decreased.
  - The measurements went from 20 in x 13 in to 17 in x 11
  - The type of paper also changed.
  - The paper used in 1941 was a thinner and light gray color, while the paper used in the 1943 *Gettysburgian* was much thicker and a yellowish brown color.
  - The October 12, 1943 issue of *the Gettysburgian*, gives the readers an explanation for this change stating that *The Gettysburgian* is in its war time form. News was to be condensed and printed on smaller paper.
  - The newspaper stayed this size until after the war, when it went back to its former 20 in x 13 in size and light gray paper in 1946.

- Another point to note about the college newspaper was the war propaganda ads.
  - Around the year 1943, the slogan "Buy War Bonds" was placed at the top right hand corner of every front page of *the Gettysburgian*.
  - Political cartoons depicting US soldiers' involvement in battle, titled "American Heroes" by an artist named Leif, started to show up in the newspaper around the year 1943.
  - Movies that were getting advertised all relate to the war

- In addition to physical signs of war, the articles and content within the *Gettysburgian* give ample information on changes happening on the campus due to the war.

## World War II and Gettysburg

- There were only 16 men on campus who were not of draft age
- Most of the male population at Gettysburg College enlisted in December of 1942 and left Spring of 1943.
- To fill the financial gap the college was one of eleven colleges in Pennsylvania selected to participate in a military training program

- The 1943-1944 school year welcomed the arrival of the 55th College Training Detachment Army Air Crew.
  - The training detachment enrolled around 1659 men through the years 1943-1944
  - The college moved all the women on campus to the fraternity houses and the military was housed in Pennsylvania Hall, McKnight, and Huber Hall
  - The program ended in 1944

- The 333D Service Command Unit Army Specialized Training Unit of the Army Airforce was activated on campus June 1944 then terminated when the war was over.

## The War Effort on Campus

- USO dances and scrap metal drives were held on campus
- Campaigns urged women to write to those who attended Gettysburg College who were now serving.
- There was a war fund drive in which the students raised over seven hundred dollars more than the estimated one thousand goal
- No cars were allowed on campus because of gas rationing
- Many dances were held on campus to keep morale up
- The 1943 Junior Prom was to be a defense theme
- "Victory" became the slogan for the last Pan-Hellenic Dance that was sponsored by the Fraternities

## Gettysburg Women and War

- The women on campus played a huge role in contributing to the war effort.
- There were around eight to ten women who became nurse aids at the Gettysburg
- Some checked clothes to be mended by the Red Cross
- Other ways that women contributed to the war effort was by rolling bandages, collecting books for the USO, and knitting sweaters, socks, and scarves

## The Voices of the Women

- The stark drop in male enrollment led to a large increase in female population
- The academic years 1944-1945 marked the first time in college history that female enrollment exceeded male enrollment
- The lack of male presence on campus allowed the women to become more integrated into college social life.
- The year 1942 was the first year that a woman was mentioned in *Gettysburgian* editorial staff.
- The first female editor in chief was selected in 1944
- The first female Student Christian Association president was elected
- More women participated in intermural sports
- The rise in women involvement at Gettysburg College serves as evidence to the rise of women in the nation during the years of the war.

## Conclusion

- In May 1946 a memorial service was held for the 62 graduates who fought and died for their country.
- 1500 Gettysburg students served in World War II
- After the war an overwhelming number of war veterans applied for admission
- New housing was under reconstruction and the college started to go back to its former state before the war
- Both *the Gettysburgian* and oral histories provided a detailed firsthand experience of college life during the World War II
- The effects of World War II seen at Gettysburg College compare to those seen throughout the country.
- Propaganda, rationing, USO dances, rolling bandages, letter writing, and fundraisers, were all happening across the nation.
- The rising role of women at Gettysburg College directly aligns with the rising role of women across the nation.

World War II was and remains one of the most influential events during the twentieth century. The college and the world continued to change and grow. But the artifacts, old newspapers, and photographs that remain create an urge to look back into the past and enable us to bring the past into present

### Further Questions

- This research project brought up a number of new and unanswered questions that could lead to further research.
- What happened to all the men who participated in the two Airforce training programs?
- Did the female population at Gettysburg College continue to increase?
- Did the female voice continue to rise after the war?
- Did the return of war veterans greatly affect the college?

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