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College Kids with Guns: Hidden in Plain Sight

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College Kids with Guns: Hidden in Plain Sight

Abstract

Sunday morning found me out in the field with a stalwart group of Gettysburg devotees: the Gettysburg Discussion Group's annual spring Muster. When the coordinator of this year's Muster put out the call for something a bit different, perhaps something in town for Sunday, my ears perked up. I've been looking for groups to test out the nuggets of the College's Civil War story on and the GDG seemed like the perfect group of guinea pigs. [excerpt]

Keywords

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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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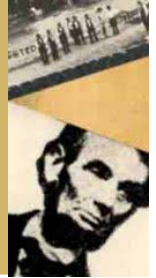
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Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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College Kids with Guns: Hidden in Plain Sight

THURSDAY, JUNE 7, 2012



The College Church, across the street from these scene of today's tale

Sunday morning found me out in the field with a stalwart group of Gettysburg devotees: the Gettysburg Discussion Group's annual spring Muster. When the coordinator of this year's Muster put out the call for something a bit different, perhaps something in town for Sunday, my ears perked up. I've been looking for groups to test out the nuggets of the College's Civil War story on and the GDG seemed like the perfect group of guinea pigs.

The GDG has been around for a healthy stint, trading barbs about the Gettysburg Campaign and various other topics for years. I was first turned onto the group in 2004 and have alternated between an active member and a detached lurker. One thing that's never changed: these are battle-centric people. The conversations revolve chiefly around the obscure idiosyncrasies of the battle. In short, they focus on the type of thing that tends to cure insomnia for the bulk of folks out there.

If I could interpret for these folks, and help them see value in the civilian story alongside the military story they so deeply care about, I could begin to prove a major point on interpretive theory.

Shifting our stories, telling different stories on these landscapes than those we've traditionally presented, will not alienate our traditional audiences. Instead, it only serves to give them even more reason to care about these places than the same tired reasons they've already found.

Of course, like all these types of revelations, I stumbled upon the answer accidentally. The most powerful moment on the tour came at a stop I hadn't quite planned.

As we moved from the former President's House on the south end of campus into the borough toward our final stop on the Diamond, the group began straggling. Stopping to let them catch up, I realized just how close we were to the home of Professor of German Charles Schaeffer. The professor's home became a shelter for one of the most awkward and unique participants in the battle at Gettysburg during the dark days of July. Inside those walls, Frederick Lehmann sought solace and safety.

Frederick Lehmann was a student in the Preparatory division at Pennsylvania College in 1863. A native Pennsylvanian from outside Pittsburgh, Lehmann got an itch on the morning of July 1st as the



Charles Schaeffer in 1862, from a brilliant Tyson Brothers album in the [Gettysburg College Special Collections](#)

sound of battle echoed over the hills west of Gettysburg. Like much of the town, he went rubbernecking.

But the teenager Lehmann did more than go look. He picked up a rifle from a wounded Federal soldier. He scrounged for a cartridge box and cap pouch. He joined the fight. Somewhere in the melee of the day, the young student was captured by Confederate forces. With help of the persuasion of a Federal officer, the rebels let him go and placed him in the care of Professor Schaeffer.

But curiosity got the better of Frederick on July 3rd. He wandered into Chambersburg Street in front of the Professor's house and quickly found himself the target of a bullet through the lower leg. He recovered, but forever bore a limp, the painful reminder of a curious young kid.

The GDG folks had never heard the story of Frederick Lehmann before. They stood transfixed. The first question out of their mouths was simply, "how did you find that?"

So I walked them through the research process. They had the vicarious thrill of discovery as I explained the tiny steps I made toward understanding who Lehmann was. For this crew, the joy of discovery was just as powerful as the tale of Lehmann itself.

Sometimes history is like a grand police procedural. The thrill is in the chase, not in the story completed. Piecing the story together bit by bit, from piece of evidence to piece of evidence, can help give a visitor the joy of discovery that the historian feels in the archive. When they finally have the clues and their minds line up all the pieces, when *they become their own historians*, that spot will forever be remembered as a meaningful place of discovery for them.

For the group I had the honor of leading on Sunday, that spot is the south end of the 7-11 parking lot. Maybe not that illustrious of a place, but it's the humble spot of pavement where Frederick Lehmann came back to life for them for just a few moment, resurrected from the cold paper records of history.