

## Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

---

Relics from the Gettysburg Campaign  
Carroll County Times article for 1 July 1990  
By Jay A. Graybeal

Exactly 127 years ago leading forces of the Federal and Confederate armies began fighting at Gettysburg. The battle would rage for two more days and result in more than 50,000 casualties making it the costliest in American history.

The movement of troops through Carroll County caused great excitement and concern among local residents. Two days before the battle began, Confederate cavalymen led by General J.E.B. Stuart fought a brief but sharp engagement, now known as Corbit's Charge, with a greatly outnumbered force of Delaware cavalymen. Following Stuart's victory and quick departure, Carroll County was again occupied by Union troops, many of whom later fought at Gettysburg. Westminster became a critical supply depot and communications center because the Western Maryland Railroad was the only undamaged rail route to Baltimore.

Immediately following the departure of troops for Gettysburg, the battlefield was visited by families seeking loved ones, volunteers helping with the dead and wounded, and the curious touring the scene of the bloodiest engagement of the war.

Miss Frances Birnie, a 54-year-old teacher from Thorndale Academy in Taneytown, was among those who journeyed to the battlefield. Like many of her counterparts, Miss Birnie brought home relics picked up on the battlefield. Her collection was donated to the Historical Society in 1956 by her grandnieces, the Misses Elizabeth and Amelia Annan.

Somewhere on the battlefield Miss Birnie found a frayed 34-star American flag. She must have been on the field very soon after the departure of troops because flags were among the first items retrieved by the soldiers. The flag has thirteen red and white stripes. The blue field has a large central white star surrounded by two concentric circles of white stars and flanked by a white star in each corner. It was probably carried as the national colors of a Union volunteer regiment.

Miss Birnie made at least two subsequent visits to the battlefield. In October she found a battered frying pan which she labeled "Army of the Potomac, Gettysburg Round Top Battlefield, July 1-3, 1863, Oct. 17, 63." The strategic Round Tops were the scene of severe fighting on the second day of the battle.

One month later she returned to the battlefield. Among the objects she found was a battered tin container which originally held bullets in a soldier's leather cartridge box. This item is labeled "Cemetery Hill Gettysburg, Nov. 19, 1863." As I studied this relic, I remembered that this was the day that the National Cemetery was dedicated. Almost certainly, Miss Birnie was among the crowd that heard President Abraham Lincoln deliver his now famous Gettysburg Address.

The Historical Society owns other relics from the Gettysburg Campaign. After the Federal army left Taneytown, a member of the Rudisell family found a small Bible left behind by a soldier on his way to the battle. The Roop family preserved a receipt from an officer of the 10th New York Cavalry for the

## Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

---

purchase of 44 bushels of oats @ 65¢ per bushel and 13 bushels of corn @ 90¢ per bushel. A retreating Confederate soldier abandoned a Virginia-made musket in a barn owned by the Foltz family in Hampstead. Miss Agnes Yingling received a piece of hard tack inscribed "Westminster, Md., July 6, 1863."

We are fortunate that Miss Birnie and others preserved these relics since these objects can tell us much about the past. On the simplest level we can see them as examples of soldier's equipment. However, in most cases there are many surviving undamaged examples available to study. A more productive way is to explore these artifacts as evidence for understanding the Victorian penchant for collecting relics associated with famous people, places or events.

Local historical societies have traditionally been the repositories of these types of relics. For the original collector or descendant, these objects possessed significant intrinsic or sentimental value which provided a tangible link with a remembered or imagined past. Many people saw their objects as a piece of history and not as a product of a distinct American culture. The Historical Society owns a number of objects which were carefully saved because of their association with nationally famous figures, such as George Washington. Also found are objects related to natives who rose to national importance such as Francis Scott Key (1780-1843) or William Henry Rinehart (1825-1874).

Objects associated with important buildings, especially churches, are well represented in our collection, as are objects related to regional events such as the Gettysburg Campaign or local ones such as the opening of the Route 140 Westminster Bypass in 1954.

The full historical value of these objects usually has been obscured by concentration on them as symbols, an approach which rarely proceeds beyond simple identification. The modest cartridge box tin becomes an important historical document when you learn that Frances Birnie was in Gettysburg on the day that Lincoln delivered his Gettysburg Address. Once researched, the relic often takes on an enhanced or entirely different meaning or, more importantly, suggests new avenues of research.

*No Photo Available*

Photo Caption:

Relics from the Gettysburg Campaign: Hardtack inscribed July 6, 1863; Frying pan from Cemetery Hill dated October 17, 1863; soldier's Bible found on the doorstep of the Rudisel House, Taneytown; Cartridge box tin found by Miss Frances Birnie, Round Top, November 19, 1863. Photograph by George Welty.