

Gettysburg College

Hidden in Plain Sight

Discovering History: The History of the Ice House Complex

History 300

Historical Methods

Dr. Michael Birkner

By

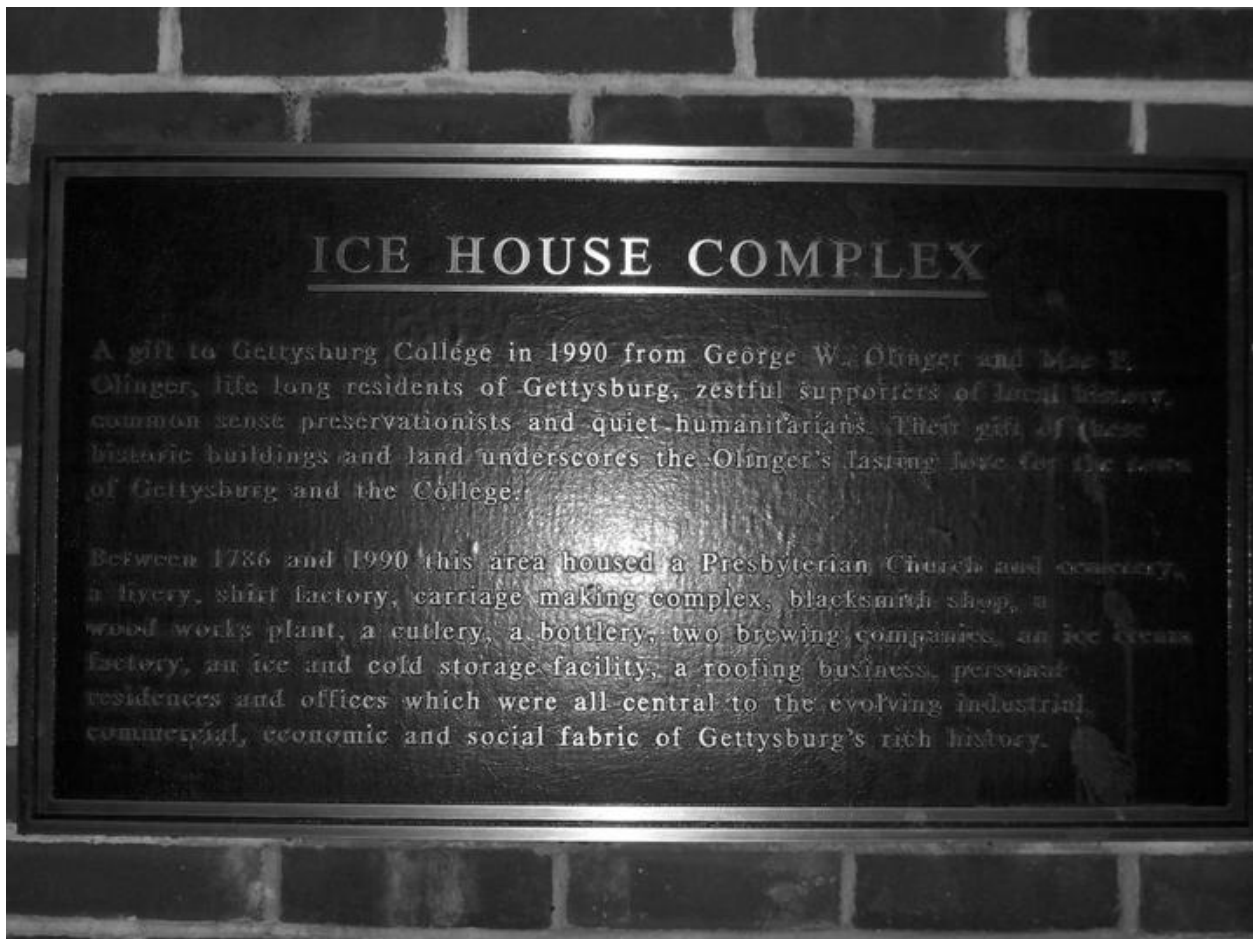
Elizabeth Amrhein

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Ice House Complex

A gift to Gettysburg College in 1990 from George W. Olinger and Mae E. Olinger, life long residents of Gettysburg, zestful supporters of local history, common sense preservationists and quiet humanitarians. Their gift of these historic buildings and land underscores the Olinger's lasting love for the town of Gettysburg and the College.

Between 1786 and 1990, this area housed a Presbyterian Church and a cemetery, a livery, shirt factory, carriage making complex, blacksmith shop, a wood-works plant, a cutlery, a bottlery, two brewing companies, an ice cream factory, an ice and cold storage facility, a roofing business, personal residences and offices which were all central to the evolving industrial, commercial, economic, and social fabric of Gettysburg's rich history.



The classic scene of a Gettysburg College sophomore moving into the Ice House Complex; the picture is full of joy and excitement to see old friends. But, of course, there is also annoyance and the deepest desire that the parents would just leave already, and the earnest hope that they would stop wondering about the history of the Gettysburg Battlefield, the campus and even the Ice House Complex itself. Who really cares about when the building was constructed? Just because it says “Ice Plant” on the north side doesn’t mean a conversation has to start and waste more time. It’s not as if something as insignificant as a dorm can have an intriguing history or a past that matters.

However, there actually is some surprisingly interesting history tucked here and there around the seemingly insignificant landmarks of Gettysburg College. The property dubbed the “Ice House Complex”, seen today by students as a home for apartments, theme housing, and sorority chapter rooms, has a history dating back to 1786; a history that is religious, grave, economical, residential, and also controversial. Who would have thought?

Rewind about two-hundred years ago, to year 1740. At this time, there was a great population of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians in need of a place to worship in their new American home in the Marsh Creek settlement of Pennsylvania. The Presbytery thus decided to form two churches, one in the eastern part of Marsh Creek, and one in the west, called Upper Marsh Creek Presbyterian at Black’s Cemetery.¹ This latter religious group eventually decided to split the church; one half of the church decided (for an unrecorded and thus forgotten reason) in 1813 to purchase land further away, in the town of Gettysburg.² The church moved to Gettysburg, and

¹ Dr. Charles Glatfelter, interview by Elizabeth Amrhein, Gettysburg College, PA, Adams County Historical Society, September 23, 2009.

² Reverend Frederick B. Crane, *History, Year Book, and Church Directory 1931-1932* (Gettysburg, PA: The Presbyterian Church, 1932), Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Church Subject File.

until its edifice was completed in 1816, worshiped in the first Church constructed in Gettysburg: the Associated Reformed Presbyterian Church.³

The newly constructed Gettysburg Presbyterian Church was located in the area by the Race Horse Alley and North Washington Street; what is now known as the “Ice House Complex.” The Gettysburg Presbyterian Church stayed in that location for twenty-three years, and expanded to include a Sunday school and a choir.⁴ During that time, the leaders of the Borough of Gettysburg were mainly Scotch-Irish Presbyterians, and thus one of their churches was the Gettysburg Presbyterian Church on North Washington Street. In fact, the founder of the Borough of Gettysburg, James Getty, was buried in the Black’s Cemetery; the primary location of Gettysburg Presbyterian.⁵ The history of the church on this lot drew to a close in 1836 when the congregation, then under the direction of the Reverend James C. Watson, resolved to move to a new location because the building was not in a prime location and was no longer as safe as preferred.⁶ From 1836 to 1842, church members again worshipped at the Associated Reformed Presbyterian until the new church building was completed in 1842 at its present location on High Street in Gettysburg.⁷

As is common today, the Gettysburg Presbyterian Church also had a cemetery, aptly named after its church. The cemetery, however, remained after the church relocated to High Street (although many bodies were exhumed and moved with the church)⁸, and played a part in the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War. The Battle of Gettysburg was fought July 1-3, 1863, and was a crucial victory for the Union forces. However, even a victorious side has its

³ Glatfelter, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, ACHS, Sept 23, 2009.

⁴ Crane, *History* (1932), ACHS, Gettysburg Pres. Church Sub. File.

⁵ Glatfelter, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, ACHS, Sept 23, 2009

⁶ Reverend J.K. Demarest, *The Presbyterian Church* (Gettysburg, PA: n.p., 1876), Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Church Subject File.

⁷ Crane, *History*, (1932), ACHS, Gettysburg Pres. Church Sub. File.

⁸ T. W. Burger, “Put to rest a second time; Officials rebury bones from vacated cemetery,” *Hanover Evening Sun*, June 10, 1995, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery Subject File.

casualties. As every student of Gettysburg College learns during orientation, the college, specifically Pennsylvania Hall, served as a lookout prior to, and hospital during and after, the battle. However, with the addition of the property by Railroad Street, Race Horse Alley and North Washington Street (the present Ice House Complex) the college added a new connection with the battle. The cemetery located on the property served as a resting place for union soldiers of all rank; a single “Color Sergeant” was even buried in the lot.⁹ A Lieutenant John D. Gordon from Indiana County, PA, of Company B in the 5th Pennsylvania, was “buried at the graveyard on the west of town of Railroad Street, near the center of the yard,” after being fatally injured two days earlier on the first of July, during the “first engagement.”¹⁰ The description of the burial grounds was confirmed to have been the Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery.¹¹

In general, the local cemeteries in town were not used as burial grounds for the battle victims; most soldiers were buried where they fell in battle. However, Gordon was taken into town, or possibly even Pennsylvania Hall of Gettysburg College, to receive treatment for his wound, and was honored and respected by having a coffin (even if crude) and marked grave.¹² This was a first, immediate effort which would – and still does – continue to honor and respect each soldier that fell during the battle; after the battle until November, a “heroic effort” was made to move each soldier to the National Cemetery with a marked grave, when possible.¹³

⁹ List of soldiers buried in Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery, n. p., n.d., Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery Subject File.

¹⁰ James M. Erea, (copy of) letter to Chris Gordon, July 4, 1863, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery Subject File.

¹¹ Glatfelter, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, ACHS, Sept 23, 2009.

Dr. Charles Glatfelter, letter to Ms. Weir, October 3, 1992, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery Subject File. Note: This letter is a response by Dr. Glatfelter upon receiving the Erea letter from Ms. Weir and responding to a question of where Gordon was buried. He confirms what he said to Ms. Weir about the location of the burial site in the interview.

¹² Erea, letter, 1863, ACHS, Gettysburg Pres. Cem. Sub. File.

¹³ Glatfelter, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, ACHS, Sept 23, 2009.

Gordon and his fellow men in the cemetery along the railroad were not in their final resting place, however. In 1899, soldier remains were unearthed in preparation for construction of the new shirt factory.¹⁴ These remains were moved to the National Cemetery, as were the remaining bodies discovered when construction for the Gettysburg College housing was underway.¹⁵ Though the Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery had played an important role in local – and national – history, the lot was not a cemetery for more than two decades after the Battle of Gettysburg. The transition from a grave lot to an industrial lot was underway.

From mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, the Ice House Complex lot was a “regional industrial center” housing a variety of businesses throughout the one-hundred years.¹⁶ Principally, the Gilbert and Company Foundry was instituted in 1848 in the northwestern corner of Railroad Street and Franklin Street.¹⁷ The foundry was essential to the industrial and economic development of Gettysburg, the town, as it permitted metal to be used in novel ways, such as for threshing machines and stoves.¹⁸ The foundry lasted until about 1912, and connected with the lot’s past as a cemetery by making the “gun carriages for the Gettysburg National Military Park.”¹⁹ Next to the foundry, further south, was the George Stallsmith Planing Mill, which, by 1896, had lumber storage sheds all along the property on the north side of Race Horse Alley. This area also included a barrel factory by 1984. Along the alley, east of the Mill were a wood-working plant and the Gettysburg Souvenir Works from about 1907 to 1924.²⁰

¹⁴ October 3, 1899, n.t., n.p., Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery Subject File.

¹⁵ Joan Bartlett, “Remains from 19 old graves on Ice House Property reburied,” *Gettysburg Times*, June 10, 1995, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Presbyterian Cemetery Subject File.

¹⁶ *Ice House Square, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania*, n.p., n.d., Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg College Ice House Complex Subject File.

¹⁷ *Ice House Square*, n.t., n.p., ACHS, Gett. College Ice House Complex Sub. File.

¹⁸ Glatfelter, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, ACHS, Sept 23, 2009.

¹⁹ *Ice House Square*, n.t., n.p., ACHS, Gett. College Ice House Complex Sub. File.

²⁰ Planing mill: *Fire Insurance Maps: Gettysburg*, November 1886, Sheet 3, Adams County Historical Society., *Fire Insurance Maps: Gettysburg*, July 1896, Sheet 2, Adams County Historical Society., *Fire Insurance Maps:*

In addition, by November 7, 1899, the Ziegler Shirt Factory had been established in the lot which was previously the old graveyard, then a wagon shop, and most recently a store for cigars and ice cream. The factory hoped to employ at least one hundred females, both women and girls.²¹ By 1902 this would become the Gettysburg Shirt Company by 1902 and then the Junerburg Shirt Factory by 1912; the factory would last until the mid-twentieth century.²² Clearly, this company not only provided a good to the Gettysburg community, but also offered jobs throughout its duration to many women at a time when women were working outside the home. The building that was the shirt factory was torn down and then built in replica of the old to hold the present Gettysburg College Women's Center and sorority chapter rooms.²³ North of the factory and still along North Washington Street, in the building which is now Gettysburg College's Smith House, was a cobblers' shop, in existence from about 1986 to soon after the close of World War II.²⁴

The collection of lots known as the Ice House Complex received its current name from the Gettysburg Ice and Storage Company, which held the central part of the property from the take-over of the Emmert Hartell Cutlery Company land and from its 1922 purchase of the land from the Gettysburg Bottlery (founded 1912) until its closing in 1954. Emmert Hartell Cutlery Company was a stone cutlery, and the Gettysburg Bottlery also included land from the previous

Gettysburg, June 1912, Sheet 9, Adams County Historical Society., *Fire Insurance Maps: Gettysburg*, July 1924, Sheet 10, Adams County Historical Society.

lumber sheds: *Fire Ins. Maps*, July 1896, Sheet 2, ACHS.

barrel factory: *Fire Ins. Maps*, July 1924, Sheet 10, ACHS.

woodworking: *Fire Insurance Maps: Gettysburg*, June 1907, Sheet 4, Adams County Historical Society., *Fire Ins. Maps*, June 1912, Sheet 9, ACHS., *Fire Ins. Maps*, July 1924, Sheet 10, ACHS.

souvenir: *Fire Ins. Maps*, June 1912, Sheet 9, ACHS., *Fire Ins. Maps*, July 1924, Sheet 10, ACHS.

²¹ October 3, 1899, n.t., n.p., ACHS, Gettysburg Pres. Cem. Sub. File.

²² *Fire Insurance Maps: Gettysburg*, September 1902, Sheet 2, Adams County Historical Society., *Fire Ins. Maps*, June 1912, Sheet 9, ACHS., *Fire Insurance Maps: Gettysburg*, June 1947, Sheet 4, Adams County Historical Society.

²³ Paula Olinger, interview by Elizabeth Amrhein, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight Hall Room 34, September 24, 2009. The factory was rebuilt because it had been deemed unsafe from officials.

²⁴ *Fire Ins. Maps*, July 1896, Sheet 2, ACHS., *Fire Ins. Maps*, June 1947, Sheet 4, ACHS.

Cumberland Valley Brewing Company.²⁵ The founders of the Gettysburg Ice and Storage Company, J.L. Butt, C. William Beales, Charles J. Spalding, William B. McIlhennan, and Merville E. Zinn also won the competition with the Adams County Cold Storage Company, which had taken over the foundry land, but eventually lost it due to the success of Gettysburg Ice and Storage. The successful business included many facilities, including the ice machines, ice tanks, cold storage, and an ice cream factory. However, eventually the company fell on difficult times, and sold off everything except the ice cream factory to Bupp's Dairy of Hanover in 1952. The rest of the property was auctioned off in 1954.²⁶ The cold storage company was a contribution to the economic growth and expansion of the town. Realizing the economic significance of the Ice House Complex property is vital because when one "hear[s] so much about the Civil War in Gettysburg [one] never think[s] of Gettysburg being a regional industrial center."²⁷ The Ice House Complex was home to over a dozen businesses and stores, all with goods, services, and employment opportunities: necessities for any town development.

The Ice House Complex then took a residential turn of events; the property was bought in 1960 by George W. Olinger, an army veteran of World War II.²⁸ The area was then, and still is, bordered by North Washington Street, Race Horse Alley, Franklin Street, and the Railroad tracks. Though much of the property was unoccupied and unused, the area served mainly as low-income and student housing. The house on the corner of Washington and the Railroad, now know as Lau House, served as Olinger's antique shop and the western area of the property also

²⁵ *Ice House Square*, n.t., n.p., ACHS, Gett. College Ice House Complex Sub. File., Elwood W. Christ, (copy of) letter to Robert L. Reifsnider, April 20, 1966, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg Ice and Cold Storage Company Subject File.

²⁶ *Fire Ins. Maps*, June 1907, Sheet 4, ACHS., *Fire Ins. Maps*, June 1947, Sheet 4, ACHS., Christ, letter, April 20, 1966, ACHS, Gettysburg Ice and Cold Storage Co. Sub. File.

²⁷ Margaret Williams, as quoted in: Janet Williams, "Unearthing the past in Gettysburg," *Hanover Evening Sun*, June 14, 1991, Adams County Historical Society, Gettysburg College Ice House Complex Subject File.

²⁸ George W. Olinger, interview by James C. Newman, February 19, 1991, Oral History, World War II Collection, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.
Olinger, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight, Sept. 24, 2009.

served as an art studio to a professor of Gettysburg College and a friend of Olinger, Professor Norman Annis of the Art Department. Olinger rented apartments to Gettysburg College students until about 1988, at which point he became rather “sick” of them as tenants.²⁹ Throughout his ownership of the property he rented to low-income residents, as a part of Section-Eight housing. Olinger was an amiable, personable, and extremely “kind-hearted” man; he never evicted or took to court any of his tenants, despite the fact that some of them fell behind in rent on occasion; he clearly was always concerned with the well-being of others.³⁰ He was in every respect, as the Ice House Complex plaque states, a “quiet humanitarian.” Olinger managed the property himself, which naturally gave the management a personal touch; tenants would even go to the family home, located on South Washington Street to pay rent.³¹

It was in this way that Paula Olinger, daughter of George, came to know many of the Hispanic families who were the main recipients of the Section-Eight housing. Paula Olinger would later become the head of the Gettysburg College Spanish Department, and she used this connection to help implement a co-curricular mentoring activity for Spanish students. Students would tutor a Hispanic youth, helping the child with English, and in turn, practice and develop their Spanish by speaking with the child and the family. The non-profit organization El Centro/The Center, founded by Paula in the Olinger home, is the present program through which Spanish students now mentor.³² The Ice House Complex Property, as a home for both students and low-income Hispanics made yet another connection with the town and Gettysburg College.³³

²⁹ Olinger, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight Hall, Sept. 24, 2009.

³⁰ Olinger, interview, Feb 19, 1991, Oral History, WWII, Sp. Coll., Muss. Lib., Gettysburg College.

³¹ Olinger, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight, September 24, 2009.

³² Jim Hale, “Professor Paula Olinger receives Lifetime of Peacemaking Award,” *Gettysburg News*, April 28, 2009, http://www.gettysburg.edu/news_events/press_releases_by_tag.dot?tag=Faculty&tagCount=34.

³³ Olinger, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight, September 24, 2009.

Gettysburg College, in fact, became the next owner of the Ice House Complex in 1990, though the transition met some controversy.³⁴ In the late 1980's, it was known that Olinger was interested in selling his property. The College, at the same time was pursuing a program of "protecting its borders." The college placed an emphasis of the physical appearance of the campus and the area surrounding the college. Therefore, the college had an eye on the Ice House property because of its rundown appearance and possibly because of its residents.³⁵ The college did not want applicants to see a dilapidated appearance or neighborhood as they viewed and toured the Gettysburg College and its atmosphere. Therefore, the College acquired various properties along North Washington heading into town to ease the transition from college to community neighborhood. In addition, the college was also interested in increasing the amount of on-campus housing, as at the time 400 of its 1,950 students were living off campus.³⁶ This situation was viewed as problematic, and was another impetus for acquiring the Ice House property. The College therefore approached Olinger and acquired the property through a "donation" of sorts from Olinger. Olinger would get a large tax deduction as a result of the donation and in return, the Pooled Income Fund, which would retain the property and thus the land's future income, would pay Olinger an annual stipend, which was agreed upon previously, until death.³⁷ It was a "win-win" situation.³⁸

³⁴ Olinger, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight, Sept. 24, 2009.

³⁵ Olinger, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight, Sept. 24, 2009. *possibly its residences*: The view that the college did not like the Section-Eight housing next to campus was – in her own words – the "blunt" opinion of Paula Olinger. I feel that her view on this matter is heavily biased in favor of the Hispanic residence because of her academic and especially personal relations with them. However, this view is an example of the community sentiment largely felt in response to the families' displacement. This sentiment is also part of the lots history, and therefore I believe it should be included.

³⁶ Minutes of the Gettysburg College Faculty, October 4, 1990, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

³⁷ Minutes of the Meetings of the Gettysburg College Board of Trustees, September 15, 1990, Section VIIIID, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

³⁸ Dean Julie Ramsey, interview by Elizabeth Amrhein, Gettysburg College, PA, College Union Building, Office of College Life, September 28, 2009.

This transition created much controversy within the college and the community. The residents were “devastated” at the news that they would have to find new housing.³⁹ The community as well was inflamed at this news, due to the fact that at the same time, another housing complex, also renting to mostly Hispanics, had closed down.⁴⁰ Therefore, the College appointed the Chaplain of the College, Karl Mattson, to arrange for assistance to the displaced families from Ice House and to act as a liaison between community sentiment and college reasoning.⁴¹ Mattson hired Stephen Olinger, son of George and brother to Paula, to help the families find new homes and promoted peace between the borough and the school.⁴² Another aid to the families was provided by the Spanish students fulfilling their co-curricular activity which was Paula Olinger’s brainchild. The students helped with translation across the language barrier and also in physical labor entailed in the families’ move.⁴³

The Ice House Complex was, per the need for more on-campus housing, always intended for on campus housing.⁴⁴ The housing would be in the three houses constructed in the mid-nineteenth century and in the buildings which used to house the Gettysburg Ice and Storage Company. And in a last minute decision, the Gettysburg College decided to use the old shirt factory to house new sorority chapter rooms.⁴⁵ Sorority members had mixed emotions about this; they were pleased to have the opportunity to have more spacious rooms than those in the Hanson Hall basement, however, they were concerned about safety in the newly added part of

³⁹ Olinger, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, McKnight, Sept. 24, 2009.

⁴⁰ Karl Mattson, phone interview by Elizabeth Amrhein, Gettysburg College, PA, Musselman Library, September 28, 2009.

⁴¹ Ramsey, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, C.U.B., Sept 28, 2009.

⁴² Mattson, interview, Gettysburg College, Pa, Muss. Lib., Sept 28, 2009.

⁴³ Julie Corridan, “Students work to help Hispanic residents,” *Gettysburgian*, April 4, 1991, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

⁴⁴ Melissa O’Donohue, “Property Acquisition to be used for student residences,” *Gettysburgian*, August 23, 1990, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

Ramsey, interview, Gettysburg College, PA, C.U.B., Sept 28, 2009.

⁴⁵ Anne Marie Schropp, “Ice House Complex will be used to house sororities,” *Gettysburgian*, October 10, 1990, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

campus.⁴⁶ The college proceeded with the plan, and in April 1991, construction began to renovate the property.⁴⁷ Beginning renovation, the college was first forced to conduct an archeological dig, as remnants from the past of the Ice House Complex had begun to be unearthed. Bodies, bottles, toys, nails, and iron were all found in the grounds; history had come to the surface.⁴⁸

History can be uncovered anywhere; even in a place as unlikely as a college dorm. In the case of the Ice House Complex, history was literally unearthed; an expansive history of religion, war and death, economic and industrial growth, immigration, and student life spanning more than two hundred years was discovered anew. And, at every layer, the property was integral and important to the Borough of Gettysburg and Gettysburg College.

So, maybe the next time an excited yet annoyed and bored college sophomore moves into the Gettysburg College dorm, he/she will learn that a little history goes a long way, that history can be found everywhere and anywhere, and that history was – and is – a cause of the present world.

⁴⁶ Linda M. Chesson, “Panhel leaders discuss “Ice House” proposal,” *Gettysburgian*, October 26, 1990, Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

⁴⁷ Ann Marie Schropp, “Last family leaves Ice House complex; work begins.” *Gettysburgian*, April 4, 1991, Special Collections, Mussleman Library, Gettysburg College.

⁴⁸ R. Christopher Goodwin & Associates, Inc., *Artifact Inventory*, March 18, 1997, Ice House Subject File, Special Collections, Mussleman Library, Gettysburg College.

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