

Gettysburg College

Hidden in Plain Sight:

The Remnants of a Shard of Hope Tainted by the Shadow of Evil

History 300

Historical Methods

Dr. Michael Birkner

By

Sergio J. A. Ragno III

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A symbol is unique as a form of communication in that it holds no meaning standing alone, but rather gains meaning by people. As such a symbol can sometimes lead one astray for its meaning is liquid. A symbol that once represented something beautiful can be used by a sinister group, and through that become an icon of evil. Such a symbol can be found here at Gettysburg College: the Swastika. I found this symbol decorating the floor tiles of the second floor entrance to Breidenbaugh Hall. What the symbol represents may not be as ambiguous as it may seem, as the Swastika has been around almost as long as man has, its significance ever changing. I had a hunch as to its meaning but in order to uncover what indeed was behind this symbol when it was first laid down I must examine multiple the conditions under which the building was constructed, and the times in which it was completed.

I had an idea as to the meaning of the symbol in Breidenbaugh Hall before I started my research. The swastika is a symbol that has been around for a very long time, its common use beginning as early as 1000 B.C.¹ Needless to say, the symbol's meaning changed over the years granting it volumes of uses. My guess was that the swastika on the floor of Breidenbaugh meant good luck. I had first heard about that meaning behind the swastika when I saw the nose cone of Charles Lindbergh's airplane at the Air and Space museum: the nose cone has a swastika in its center. Mind you that Lindbergh flew in 1927² which was a good seven years after Hitler made the swastika the Nazi party

¹"Symbol 15:1" Symbols.com- Online Encyclopedia of Western Signs and Ideograms. 2005. HME Publishing. 20, Feb. 2006 <<http://www.symbols.com/encyclopedia/15/151.html>>

²Ranfran, Patrick. "Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator." <http://www.charleslindbergh.com/history/timeline.asp>

insignia in 1920⁴, so I had doubts that this was the case. Even so, the claim that the symbol represented good luck had to come from somewhere, and with a little research I confirmed this. Practically in every case in which it occurred, the Swastika represented luck in some form. It was used in Greece, most likely representing the Gods³. It spread as far as Japan where the symbol represented the number 10,000, but the symbol was most prominent in Buddhism. To this effect the symbol was used in India to represent goodness.³ What's more the word Swastika in German and English comes from the word "Svastikah" which means good luck, the first part of the word "Svasti" being split up into "Su" which means good, and "Asti" which means being.⁴ Historically and linguistically it makes sense that the Swastika would be used as a symbol of luck in America prior to World War II, and the Americans did indeed apply the Swastika as a good luck charm. It was used in things like pendants and bottles, and the American 45 infantry division wore it as a shoulder patch in World War I.⁴ Thus, the theory that the swastika was a good luck charm is backed up with sufficient data. However, we know through experience that the swastika has not been used in this respect in the U.S.A. for some time due to its association with the Nazi party. I needed to examine the times in which Breidenbaugh Hall was constructed.

Patrick Ranfranz is not a historian or Lindbergh scholar, just a fan who set up a website dedicated to the historic flight. While he may not be the best source in the world, I think I can trust this source with on the date of the flight.

³ "Symbol 15:1" Symbols.com- Online Encyclopedia of Western Signs and Ideograms. 2005. HME Publishing. 20, Feb. 2006 <<http://www.symbols.com/encyclopedia/15/151.html>>

⁴ Bethancourt III, W.,J. "A History of the Swastika." Web page. 1997. 20 Feb. 2006. <<http://www.locksley.com/6696/swastick.htm>>

Looking over sources on the history of Gettysburg College, I discovered that Breidenbaugh Hall was constructed in 1927.⁵ Already my theory seemed shot in the foot, as I could not see Americans being too eager to use the symbol adopted by the Nazi party. This, however, was my assumption, and was nothing but an indication of something I needed to look into for definitive proof of American attitudes to the icon in question. I thought a bit as to where I would look for such proof, and then I remembered something, something that I had stated earlier in this very paper. I recalled that Lindbergh had a Swastika painted inside the nosecone of his airplane when I saw it in the Air and Space Museum. Lindbergh's historic flight took place on May 21, 1927⁶, the very same year in which Breidenbaugh Hall was completed, thus, I had a lead. It is amazing how a faint memory would have such a strong correlation to the query at hand! If the symbol in Limburg's nose cone is indeed a good luck charm, then it would not be too unlikely that the symbol was indeed used as a good luck charm even as late as 1927.

Background information as to why the symbol was placed inside of the nose cone of the Spirit of Saint Louis is not documented in any biographies of Lindbergh. However, the Swastika as we have seen is a symbol generally used for luck and a thing of such nature is very appropriate for a flight such as that of Charles Lindbergh. The other possibility was that it was a representation of Nazism. Thus if we examine Lindbergh's view on Nazism we can understand what this symbol represented. Lindbergh suffered accusations of being a Nazi apienty. If one needs confirmation of this statement one can just skim the message boards of Patrick Ranfranz's website [Charles Lindbergh: an](#)

⁵ Landrey, Gregory J. [A History of the Gettysburg Campus](#). May 27, 1977. P 62
A History of Gettysburg College has no publisher as it was in the Special Collections section of the library, specially made for Gettysburg College.

⁶ Ranfranz, "Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator."

American Aviator⁷. This is mainly because of Lindbergh's opposition to the U.S. entering World War II for combat.¹ However, Lindbergh was opposed to totalitarianism and in no way supportive of Nazi Germany. Lindbergh just did not think that combat was necessary for defeating Hitler; he wanted diplomatic efforts to continue, and to support England and France via bolstering their defenses². As far as Lindbergh was concerned Hitler was not the problem, it was totalitarianism in general, and thus Russia was a factor. He believed that if Hitler is destroyed, Europe would be exposed and vulnerable to the wrath of Russia. To quote Lindbergh on the matter: "I was far from being in accord with the philosophy, policy, and actions of the Nazi government...but it seemed to me essential to France and England, and even to America, that Germany be maintained as a bulwark against the Soviet Union."⁸ Thus, Lindbergh's opposition to the Nazi party is evident. What's more, Lindbergh knew he was going on a significant journey, and as such his air craft would become historic. Thus, I do not think it would be likely for him to put the insignia of the Nazi party on an item of such nature if he was indeed hiding his loyalty to the Nazi party. One can safely surmise that the symbol in question was one of luck, and thus we have proof of the swastika being an acceptable representation of fortune even as late as 1927, the year Breidenbaugh hall was built.

Through doing research on the interior design process of Breidenbaugh Hall, I discovered even more support to the good luck theory, or rather, support to the claim that the symbol was most definitely not used to represent Nazi support. Breidenbaugh hall

⁷ Ranfranz, "Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator."

⁸ Berg, Scott A. Lindbergh. (G. P. Putnam's Sons: New York, New York 1998) P 376
Lindbergh is the bibliography that inspired Patrick Ranfranz's web page Charles Lindbergh: An American Aviator

was the new science building, dedicated to Professor Edward S. Breidenbaugh, a professor of analytical chemistry at Yale. During the administration of Dr. Valentine a demand for science courses at Gettysburg College grew. Indeed, just before Valentine took office Gettysburg College issued its first bachelors of science degree. Dr. Valentine created several chairs for the college, of which one called the Conrad Professorship of Chemistry which went to Breidenbaugh in 1874.⁹ At the time we are concerned with for the purposes of this investigation, this seat was vacant President Henry. Hanson's choice to fill this position was a John B. Zinn, an alumnus of Gettysburg College in the class of 1909. Hanson offered Zinn the opportunity to design the interior of Breidenbaugh hall when he requested that Zinn return to Gettysburg. In a footnote in Charles H. Glatfelter's A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985 Zinn is reported to have said that he "had high praise for the assistance in designing the building given to him by Horace S. Uhler, professor of physics in 1925-1926."¹⁰ This footnote reveals important things. Not only does it reveal who designed the interior of Breidenbaugh hall, but it revealed the kind of work that went into designing Breidenbaugh hall. As stated earlier, Breidenbaugh Hall was an academic hall for the sciences, namely chemistry and physics.¹¹ Zinn and Uhler were professors of chemistry and physics respectively. This building was thus much more personal than it would be to some interior designer working on a building he would never see again. Zinn and Uhler would spend much of their careers in this building, it represented their profession, and in so the luck aspect of the

⁹ Hefelbower, Samuel Gring. A History of Gettysburg College 1832-1932. (Maple Press Company: York, PA 1932) P 246-249

¹⁰ Glatfelter, Charles H. A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985. (W&M Printing Inc.: Gettysburg, PA 1987) P 518.

¹¹ Hefelbower. A History of Gettysburg College 1832-1932.

swastika is backed up further. Had the swastika been tainted by Nazism as early as this, one would seriously doubt that it would be installed in a project as personal as this.

One has to ultimately wonder why the swastika was chosen for use at all. Surely there are other symbols that could be used to this extent, or other symbols representing equally good concepts such as wisdom. I searched for the answer to this as well and found a satisfactory answer to this question. In 1914 the president of Gettysburg College, Dr. Granville, proposed extending the college by building multiple new academic halls, a college park, and fraternity housing facilities north of Glatfelter Hall. These halls were to be built in the Doric, or Greek architectural style, a civilization that used the swastika as I have stated before.¹² The halls that were built under Dr. Granville's Doric preference were Huber Hall, Weidensall Hall, Eddie Plank Gymnasium, Schmucker Memorial Library, and most importantly for the purpose of this investigation, Breidenbaugh Science Hall¹.

It would seem that the background of why this specific symbol was used in Breidenbaugh hall has been unveiled however, one question threatened this conclusion: If this were simply a matter of Doric design, the swastika should be in every building. I searched the buildings of Dr. Granville's great vision of Gettysburg. I only found three buildings of said project remotely close to their original forms: Breidenbaugh Hall, Eddie Plank Gymnasium, and Weidensall Hall. I say remotely because Weidensall is not entirely original, but I shall address that in due time. Both Breidenbaugh Hall and Eddie Plank Gym were constructed in 1927¹³, so if my good luck theory was accurate swastikas

¹² Landrey. A History of Gettysburg College. P 35.

¹³ Landrey. A History of Gettysburg College. P 35.

should at least adorn the floor of the Eddie plank Gym for these buildings were built within the same year and are thus under the same conditions, more so than any other. I was indeed able to find swastikas at Eddie Plank Gym. Going further, Weidensall Hall was constructed in 1923¹, and logically should have the symbols as well. However, I could not find the symbol in question; however I did notice that the floor tiles were exactly the same as in the other two halls. This looked very suspicious, and so I did some digging regarding Weidensall Hall. Something peculiar did indeed happen to Weidensall Hall that would explain the difference to the other two academic buildings. In November of 1946 there was a fire inside Weidensall Hall. The building was gutted, and rebuilt, expanded, in 1948.¹⁴ This was after World War II, or rather after the United States entered the war, facing all the hardships and propaganda that would change the way citizens saw the symbol forever. I can easily see now why those floor tiles would adorn the floors of Weidensall sans swastika. The conclusion that the swastika was used as a part of Dr. Granville's vision of a greater Gettysburg is a sound one.

I believe I have submitted sufficient proof that the swastika that adorns the floor of Breidenbaugh Hall and Plank Gym represent good luck, and not support for the Nazi party. I have provided background on the symbol, and its use to that extent in America as late as the date it was built in 1927. However, all of this was uncovered via investigation, and I was curious as to what those who spot the symbol today understand it to be. I waited at the entrance to Breidenbaugh Hall on Thursday February 23 and briefly took a poll from seven random people who entered as to what they thought of the symbol, and if they have noticed it before. Four of these people were college students, two were faculty

¹⁴ Landrey. A History of Gettysburg College. P 61.

members and one was not affiliated with the College. Out of this group four have noticed the symbol before, three of the students and one faculty member. Only two people from this group, one faculty member and one student believed that the symbol represented the Nazi party. The other two stated with great confidence that the symbol represented hope, referencing Indian and Hindu roots for the symbol. One student who did not notice the symbol before made the same claim as did a man touring the college. The rest surmised that the symbol was that of the Nazi party. Of this group of seven four claimed that the symbol meant hope, and three thought of Nazism.

A symbol is a very fragile thing, in that its meaning is entirely reliant on the times. The swastika is perhaps the quintessential example of this as this paper has demonstrated. If only John B. Zinn and Horace S. Uhler had known the risk they would be taking by allowing a symbol to be used in their building that would in only a matter of a few years be synonymous with evil they might have removed it, as in what most likely happened in Weidensall Hall. The only defense a symbol has against the times is its history, for only an unbiased analysis of the past, of a symbol's source and the people who used it, only through that can one look upon symbol with the clarity of truth, and not merely upon its darkest shadow. It is refreshing to know that many people, especially the educated youth and the elderly, are able to accurately surmise what the significance of enigmatic pieces of their past represent, and not just jump to the most sinister of conclusions.

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