

# THOUGHTS ON THE RETURN OF A ROSE FARM RELIC

*By John D. Weaver, Co-Founder, Spirit Society of PA*

One of my favorite parts of the Gettysburg Battlefield, from an historical and paranormal perspective, is the Rose Farm. What was once a nondescript Pennsylvania farm will be forever remembered for the epic struggle in and around a simple wheatfield on July 2, 1863. It is said that more bodies were buried on this farm than any which witnessed the horrors of the Civil War. For nearly a decade, my wife Kelly and I (along with members of the Spirit Society of PA, formerly the Capital Ghost Forum) have visited the relatively isolated area where the dense woods and the open pasture adjacent to the Rose farm house meet along Brooke Ave. All manner of evidence suggestive of paranormal activity has been obtained here: Anomalous photos and video; unheard voices and gunfire manifesting on recording devices (EVP); unexplained temperature and electro-magnetic field variations. Though less tangible as evidence, the observations of mediums such as my wife and even the reactions of an American Bulldog named Brutus, further suggest this is a very active area.

Investigating the paranormal, however, is secondary to me in regards to the history. Since my first visit as a child over 40 years ago, I have been fascinated with Gettysburg. On a recent Saturday while Kelly was doing a lecture and readings for a group in town, I headed out for an afternoon of exploring. Beginning in the Wheatfield, I headed through the woods, following the route of Brooke's advance as he drove Semme's Georgians westward toward the pasture adjacent to the Rose house. Crossing the fence toward the north end of the field, I would soon encounter a new twist to one of the many little mysteries of the battlefield.

I am very familiar with the terrain here through Bill Frassanito's superb analysis of the death studies photographed by Gardner, O'Sullivan and Gibson in *Journey In Time* and *Early Photography at Gettysburg*. Walking southward, I sat on a rock to take some photos and also record, but something looked a little different in front of me. I then saw another person walking north along the fence line; I waved hello, as did he, and then surmising we shared a particular interest in this spot, he approached saying "Did you notice the missing rock is back?" He pointed to a boulder approx. 2 ft by 2 ft with a unique ridge in it (not to be confused with the large split rock further south) — this rock, like several others, helped Bill Frassanito identify the precise locations of some of the lines of bodies, but it had been STOLEN on July 3, 1987!

The man I was speaking with confirmed a shared interest in this area of the field and is also a Park Watch volunteer; he discovered it had returned sometime in January of this year! He went on to explain that he could find no tracks or evidence that someone had brought it in a vehicle. I suspect his rock must weigh a couple hundred pounds, and would require at least 2 strong men to bring it in from the road! We agreed its return had many mysterious aspects, although he did say that after informing the rangers, they commented how many times people sent smaller stones back to the park, saying their kids picked them up while there. I wished we could have talked more, but after a few moments he got a call from his wife to go pick up someone, so he had to leave.

I continued taking photos, and later when comparing them with the analysis in *Early Photography*, it appears the rock not only was replaced facing in the correct direction (west) but also is in the same approximate location, relative to other landmarks. This suggests a couple scenarios about who returned the rock: If it was the same person (or persons) who took it almost 18 years ago, they either have an incredible photographic memory of the location or they have closely studied Frassanito's analysis. Even if this relic had been acquired by another party, the bottom line is whoever returned it was quite aware of its original location/orientation.

At our monthly SSP meeting a few days later, I shared this story and one member suggested the original theft may have been a fraternity prank. This does seem plausible: There are several frats at Gettysburg College and 1987 was several years before interest in ghosthunting dramatically increased night time traffic. Dense summer foliage, a series of lookouts and youthful strength could have made this an easy heist. The return, though, evidently sometime in January 05, would be quite different, I think, with minimal foliage and increased night ranger patrols. Once it were carried through the fence, finding the approximate original location would be a major challenge (I'm sure no one had any GPS coordinates to work with).

Along with WHO took, we must ask, WHY was it returned? Could it be simple guilt -- either an individual or group (as in the fraternity theory) wishing to atone for a simple juvenile act. Or is it possible that, like the pieces of lava returned to the main island of Hawaii after supposed misfortune follows them, this rock had a similar effect? After all, it had served for 124 years as a unique marker for the young men from Georgia aligned in a final, gruesome portrait.

Am I suggesting its return involves something from the paranormal realm? No, I see no evidence to support such a claim. However, whether it was guilt, or perhaps even something of the energy forever embedded in it, the fact is a missing piece of the battlefield has now returned! Given the recent rash of desecration, including the theft of swords from statues and other monument damage, seeing this rock transformed an already beautiful spring day into one I'll never forget.

*Note: Founded in 1996, the Spirit Society of PA ([www.spiritsocietyofpa.com](http://www.spiritsocietyofpa.com)) insists that its members observe all posted regulations when conducting group or individual investigations. We particularly stress respectful attitudes be maintained on the hallowed grounds of Gettysburg and are committed to battlefield preservation.*



**Confederate dead, view at the edge of the Rose woods, July 5, 1863 by James F Gibson**  
(Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division reproduction number, LC-DIG-cwpb-00868)



**View of at the edge of the Rose woods, showing return of rock which was stolen on July 3, 1987**  
(Photo taken April 9, 2005 by John Weaver)