

“OUR COUNTRY’S COMMON GROUND”:
THE GETTYSBURG BATTLEFIELD AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

AMELIA J. SPOONER
PROFESSOR ERIC FONER
PROFESSOR WILLIAM LEACH
THESIS IN AMERICAN HISTORY
12 APRIL 2010

CONTENTS

*
**

I. Theatre of War	3
II. Monuments, Reunions, & the Invention of American Valor	13
III. “As Developed ‘For the use and enjoyment of the people’”: The National Park Service at Gettysburg	20
IV. Works Cited	35
V. Works Consulted	38

Gettysburg was the greatest battle of the Civil War; not for the number of casualties, nor for its strategic import, but for its enduring symbolic power. The story of Gettysburg is a narrative of national progress, but the meanings of progress and the nation changed over time. The varied efforts to preserve the Gettysburg battlefield over the course of the last 146 years reflect those shifts in meaning. Since July 1863, Gettysburg townspeople, private organizations, and government institutions have led the charge to preserve, and later interpret, the battlefield. This paper discusses the significance of three key moments in the battlefield's history as a preserved landscape: the dedication ceremony of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863; the Supreme Court decision, *United States vs. Gettysburg Railway Company*, handed down January 24, 1896; the publication of the latest *General Management Plan and Environmental Statement*, issued by the National Park Service administration at Gettysburg in June 1999.

Early preservation efforts commenced almost immediately after the fighting stopped. The physical remnants of that singular Union victory were to be the material manifestation of hope, a kind of prophecy, for ultimate victory and a united nation. In the 1880s and 90s, the battlefield landscape provided the most meaningful space for soldiers of the formerly divided nation to signify, on the ground itself, the nation's reconciliation, and the federal government soon acknowledged and financially supported those efforts. The National Park Service's arrival in 1933 marked the beginning of a new era of 'objectivity' that considered the first two moments as historical documents in their own right. The current Gettysburg administration is highly self-conscious of its role as the primary source of historical interpretation of the site, a self-consciousness that owes

much to the ideological underpinnings of the Park Service itself. In short, this is the story of how a single battle came to symbolize the necessity of a war that led to the reunion of the nation, the continuation and renewal of democracy, and the end of slavery.

*

**

CHAPTER I: THEATRE OF WAR

Confederate General Robert E. Lee launched his last offensive campaign in the late summer of 1862. His forces subsequently defeated Union forces at the Second Battle of Bull Run, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville, near the Virginia-Maryland border, the year before Gettysburg. Rumors of the Confederate advance filled northern newspapers for months leading up to the battle. By mid-June 1863, two weeks before the armies converged on Gettysburg, the *Philadelphia North American* declared the situation in Pennsylvania a “crisis.”¹ The author pleaded with bickering Unionists to declare a “political armistice,” because “so grave an emergency” had to be confronted by a “harmonious, united and zealous action of the people, rising in their strength to defend the soil of the free States against invasion by the rebel hordes from Virginia.”² An important victory on northern soil might have crushed Union morale and turned the war in Lee’s favor. The defeat at Gettysburg, however, halted his army’s large-scale advance into northern territory, and effectively drove the Confederate forces “back into ‘Old Virginia’ again,” in the words of army surgeon Spencer Welch.³ The Confederate retreat was as much symbolic as it was tactical.

From the first days after the battle, Union supporters characterized Gettysburg as the beginning of the end of the Confederacy. Some went so far as to claim Gettysburg as the Confederacy’s “mortal wound,” its “death blow,” the herald of ultimate Union

¹ “The Crisis,” *North American and United States Gazette*, June 18, 1863, Col. A.

² Thomas W. Knox, “The Battlefield at Gettysburg. Scenes after the Fight. Appearance of the Ground, July 6, 1863,” published in the *New York Herald*, July 9th, 1863.

³ Spencer Glasgow Welch, 1834-1916. “Letter from Spencer Glasgow Welch to Cordelia Strother Welch, July 17, 1863.” *A Confederate Surgeon’s Letters to his Wife*, (Washington, DC: Neale Publishing Company, 1911), p. 59.

victory.⁴ *The New York Herald's* first lengthy article on the battle compared Gettysburg to the Napoleonic battles at Waterloo, Wagram and Jena. Other reports drew comparisons to famous battles of classical antiquity such as Thermopylae and Marathon.⁵ The reference to Waterloo was especially fitting: that battle was both a physical and a symbolic defeat. Napoleon would never again rule as emperor, and Lee would never again advance so far into northern territory. Though the war dragged on for nearly two more years, the Battle of Gettysburg began to earn its place in American – at this time only Yankee – mythology. Gettysburg was a victory to which the North could lay claim, and the battlefield physically marked that place where Lee had been repulsed. As early preservations would soon claim, the act of preserving the battlefield documented, fixed in place, the record of that symbolic Union victory. The simple act of setting apart pieces of the battlefield, even as the war continued, supposed the site's continued preservation. The battlefield awaited a united nation.

On July 4th, 1863, a heavy rain fell over the Gettysburg battlefield and over the retreating army. The Pennsylvania landscape had been transformed from one marked by the signs of rural life to one indelibly marked by the event that had occurred there. The farmhouses and outbuildings were riddled with shrapnel. The wheatfields and the cornfields were destroyed: their stocks were flattened and their zigzag fences lay in shattered bits. The modest town cemetery, set on an elevated ridge, had been the site of some of the most intense fighting. A reporter for the *New York Herald* who visited the scene on July 6 noted overturned monuments and headstones, “graves once carefully

⁴ See for instance: “The Victory Undoubtedly Ours,” *The New York Herald*, July 4, 1863; “Brilliant Victory Won,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 4, 1863; “The Victory at Gettysburg,” *Albany Journal*, July 6, 1863; “Vicksburg and Victory—Peace Conquered and the Union Restored,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 8, 1863; “Victory!”, *The Independent*, July 9, 1863, p. 4.

⁵ “Consecration of the National Sepulchre,” *New York Herald*, November 20, 1863.

tended by some loving hand, [...] trampled by horses' feet until the vestiges of verdure [had] disappeared."⁶ The material landscape of devastation spread out before the *Herald* reporter included not only the fractured tombstones, pockmarked trees and scarred barns, but human and animal carnage as well. The corpses of soldiers and horses lay thick over the nearly 20,000-acre site and the ground was visibly soaked with blood even after the torrential rains of the two previous days.⁷ In the space of three days, the town's wheatfields and orchards, the patches of woodland and the town cemetery, were now simply a "battlefield."

The first newspaper reports of the battle emphasized the openness and visibility of the landscape. "Were it not for [...] the occasional sprinkling of trees over its surface," a typical article ran, "it could be compared to a patch of rolling prairie in miniature."⁸ The battle was fought primarily over control of the high ground, and both sides endured massive losses as they ventured out into the no man's land of cultivated fields and ascending slopes. Other Civil War battlefields possessed barren fields and elevated ridges,⁹ but the Gettysburg topography was "unlike every previous battle of the war" because "the movements of the two armies [...] were visible from every part of the field."¹⁰ No landscape could be more appropriate as the theatre of bloody drama, epitomized by what has become known as Pickett's Charge. On the third and last day of fighting, the combined forces of Pettigrew, Trimble, and Pickett attempted to break the center of the Union line on Cemetery Hill by marching across hay fields already

⁶ Thomas W. Knox, "The Battlefield at Gettysburg. Scenes after the Fight. Appearance of the Ground, July 6, 1863," *The New York Herald*, July 9, 1863.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Knox, "The Battlefield at Gettysburg," July 9, 1863.

⁹ Union forces encountered a long open plain at Fredericksburg; at Antietam, the two armies clashed along the uneven western slope of the Antietam River.

¹⁰ "The Campaign in Pennsylvania – Further Accounts of the Battles of Gettysburg," *The Charleston Mercury*, July 17, 1863.

devastated by the fighting. At Gettysburg, a Southern reporter noted, “The game of battle [was] played on a clear board.”¹¹ Men became actors in the drama of war, pawns moving across a board, “wave[s] of living valor” rolling up the slopes of Gettysburg “only to roll back again under the deadly fire.”¹² The topographical features of Gettysburg and their bloody consequences lent themselves to journalistic dramatization immediately after the fight. In the years following the battle, the battlefield’s visibility was serendipitous for those who would preserve and memorialize it: if men are visible, so are monuments.

Before preservation of the battlefield could begin in earnest, however, the dead had to be buried. The question was where. More than 7,000 men had been killed during the battle, and roughly 26,000, many of whom subsequently died, lay wounded after the fighting ceased.¹³ The scale of the casualties overwhelmed the town of roughly 2,400. Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin traveled to Gettysburg soon after the battle to determine the best course of action. He visited field hospitals, conferred with local leaders, and walked over the battlefield. Upon his departure for the capital, he appointed David Wills, a Gettysburg resident and lawyer, as his representative. Wills was to communicate with the governor as to how the state could best meet the needs of the devastated town, through financial or other assistance. On July 24th, 1863, Wills wrote to Governor Curtin, emphasizing the urgent need for Pennsylvania to purchase land for a cemetery.¹⁴ While the cemetery was founded in part for practical reasons, the proposed burial ground was to be explicitly “national” in character. Only Union soldiers, the true

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Knox, “The Battlefield at Gettysburg,” July 9, 1863.

¹³ Mark Adkin, *The Gettysburg Companion*, (Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2008), pp. 244, 507, and 509.

¹⁴ Wills to Curtin, July 24 1863, printed in John Russell Barlett, *The Soldier’s National Cemetery at Gettysburg* (Providence: Providence Press Company, 1874), pp. 1-2.

defenders of the “nation,” were to be buried there. The Soldiers’ National Cemetery at Gettysburg, then, accomplished a dual purpose: it did something about the dead bodies hastily buried on the Pennsylvania terrain, and it addressed the question of how best to honor the nation’s dead.

As soon as Wills received approval from the governor to go forward with the purchase of land on Cemetery Hill – so named for the old Gettysburg town cemetery that occupied a part of the slope – he discovered that another Gettysburg resident and attorney, David McConaughy, had already purchased the desired spot. Indeed, McConaughy had written to Governor Curtin soon after Wills to request that Pennsylvania citizens purchase battlefield land so that they could “participate in the tenure of the sacred grounds of the Battlefield, by contributing to its actual cost.”¹⁵ As president of the town cemetery association, David McConaughy arguably had another aim: to found a soldier’s cemetery of his own that could later be incorporated into the civilian cemetery, which would alleviate his association’s mounting debt.¹⁶ Governor Curtin and Wills, however, insisted that the soldier’s cemetery be separate and distinct from the local cemetery—a truly national cemetery whose very name, the Soldiers’ National Cemetery at Gettysburg, spoke of a reunited nation. In the late summer of 1863, McConaughy did finally agree to sell seventeen acres of land to Wills, and a design for the cemetery was quickly chosen.¹⁷ Ever-widening semi-circular rows were to be laid out, and no state, no matter the number of sons lost, was to be given preferential placement.

¹⁵ Richard West Sellars, “Pilgrim Places: Civil War Battlefields, Historic Preservation, and America’s First national Military Parks, 1863-1900,” *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 2, no. 1 (Winter 2005), http://crmjournal.cr.nps.gov/04_article_sub.cfm?issue=Volume%202%20Number%201%20Winter%202005&page=1&seq=1 (accessed fall 2008).

¹⁶ Kathleen Georg Harrison, “Gettysburg: A Happy and Patriotic Conception,” unpublished manuscript, 1979, in Folder 11-28, Vertical Files, GNMP Library, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

The tombstones were to be nearly flush with the ground, symbolizing the dead soldiers' identical commitment to the Union.¹⁸ The new cemetery's location had been carefully selected as well: it had been the center of the Union line. As David Wills successfully argued, Cemetery Hill was "the spot above all others for the honorable burial of the dead who have fallen on those fields."¹⁹ In this early period of the battlefield's preservation, those who deserved to be buried in this decidedly "national" cemetery were Union men.

In the late morning of November 19, 1863, four months after the battle, President Lincoln's party reached the modest stage set up for the day's occasion, the dedication of the Soldier's National Cemetery at Gettysburg. Sometime after noon, the Honorable Edward Everett began a lengthy oration, which ended around 3 p.m. A hymn was sung, and Lincoln rose to speak. The President suggested that if the Union were to have a "new birth of freedom" – the renewal of democracy and the end of slavery – it would be Gettysburg that had acted as midwife. Lincoln insisted, however, that the work was not yet accomplished. It required the continued sacrifice and dedication of Unionists to carry on the work begun at Gettysburg. The prescient words of 1863 assumed new potency in 1865. The nation remembered Gettysburg as the site of freedom's new birth. If Lincoln had never come to Pennsylvania, the battle would have remained an important strategic and symbolic victory for the North. However, his words, in addition to mere accidents of history – the topography of the landscape, the eagerness of certain Gettysburg citizens to preserve battlefield land – set the site apart. Lincoln confirmed Gettysburg's importance,

¹⁸ The cemetery's proprietors had even considered identifying and burying the dead not by state, but simply by their Union affiliation, a physical symbol of their unity even in death. The Union over state identity. David Wills to Edward Everett, September 23, 1863. For a lengthier description of the development of the Soldiers' National Cemetery, see John S. Patterson, "A Patriotic Landscape: Gettysburg, 1863-1913," unpublished manuscript, date not given, in Folder 11-27, Vertical Files, GNMP Library.

¹⁹ Wills to Curtin, July 24 1863, printed in John Russell Barlett, *The Soldier's National Cemetery at Gettysburg* (Providence, 1874), pp. 1-2.

militarily and symbolically, and provided a usable set of terms, a vocabulary, to which Gettysburg could always lay claim: from death, life; from division, union; from slavery, freedom.

While David Wills and Governor Curtin turned their attention to the administration of the new Soldiers' National Cemetery, David McConaughy continued to acquire tracts of battlefield land that he considered to be "the most striking and interesting portions of the Battle ground" in order to preserve them.²⁰ There could be "no more fitting and expressive memorial of the heroic valor and signal triumphs of our army," he wrote in an August 1863 letter, "than the battlefield itself, with its natural and artificial defences, preserved and perpetuated in the exact form and condition they presented during the battle."²¹ For McConaughy, preserving the battlefield was the best way for Pennsylvanians to honor the fallen Union men, but he did not have the financial resources to purchase land indefinitely. Thus in the fall of 1863, McConaughy co-founded the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA), a private association charged with soliciting funds from Pennsylvania and other states in order to acquire battlefield land.²² The GBMA achieved official sanction in the spring of 1864 when the Pennsylvania legislature issued a charter to the fledgling association, endowing it with the rights of a corporation, to:

hold and preserve, the battle-grounds of Gettysburg [...] and by such perpetuation, and such memorial structures as a generous and patriotic people may aid to erect, to commemorate the heroic deeds, the struggles, and the triumphs of their brave defenders.²³

²⁰ David McConaughy to Hon. Jos. R. Ingersoll and others, August 19th, 1863, in Folder 11-29b, "David McConaughy Correspondence," Vertical Files, Gettysburg National Military Park archives.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² John M. Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, (Dayton: Morningside House, Inc.: 2000; first publication, 1897), p. I.

²³ "An Act to Incorporate the Gettysburg Battle-Field Memorial Association," April 30, 1864, printed in Unrau, *Administrative History: GNMP and GNC*, p. 41.

The “patriotic people” meant northerners, and specifically, Pennsylvanians. It bears mentioning once again that Gettysburg ended Lee’s large-scale offensive campaign into the north. Pennsylvanians considered the Union soldiers who fought at Gettysburg to be, literally, their “brave defenders.” The Pennsylvania legislature gave the GBMA the exclusive right to build roadways, ornament the grounds, and oversee the erection of “structures and works or art [...] adapted to designate the spots of special interest, to commemorate the great deeds of valor, endurance, and noble self-sacrifice, and to perpetuate the memory of the heroes, and the signal events, which render [those] battle-grounds illustrious.”²⁴ The language of the Act links four important concepts: valorous deeds, memory, heroes, and battle-grounds. The Act states that in preserving the battle-grounds, the memory of the heroes who fought there would likewise endure. And ‘heroes’, at that time, belonged only to the Union.

Three years later, in 1867-1868, the state of Pennsylvania appropriated funds to achieve the goals outlined in the Act. The state reimbursed McConaughy for the land he had purchased and allocated six thousand additional dollars to purchase three distinctive landscape features, Culp’s Hill, East Cemetery Hill, and the slope and summit of Little Round Top.²⁵ Such state involvement in the preservation of a historic landscape was highly unusual at the time. Before the Civil War, Congress had debated whether the government’s involvement in historic preservation was even constitutional.²⁶ While ornamenting and caring for the new national cemetery took priority over purchasing and preserving other battlefield land in this early period, the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁵ Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, p. 360.

²⁶ Sellars, “Pilgrim Places,” p. 15.

Association made the first efforts to memorialize the field. By the early 1880s, an increasing number of veterans began to participate in reunions and other commemorative activities at battlefield sites including Gettysburg, and these activities led directly to the federal government's total commitment to preserving and marking battlefield land outside the cemetery.

This process was not immediate at Gettysburg, for the victory held such symbolic significance for Pennsylvanians and northerners at large. Early battlefield administrators resisted the national character the site was taking. David McConaughy, for instance, the major advocate of battlefield preservation from the beginning, found himself displaced from the Board of Directors in June 1880. His personal letters reveal a man committed to keeping the site in the hands of Pennsylvanians. Again and again, he emphasized the need to select local-born directors who could continue the work that he, a Gettysburg citizen, had begun.²⁷ Two years before his removal, in the summer of 1878, the largest and most powerful Union veteran organization, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), encamped for a week on East Cemetery Hill. One of the campers was John M. Vanderslice, adjutant-general of the Philadelphia chapter of the GAR. Upon viewing the condition of the battlefield, Vanderslice resolved that the Grand Army should assume control of the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association. He had been disappointed by what he

²⁷ In a November 1863 letter to the Honorable Jordan Jr., McConaughy praises Jordan's selection of a "Chairman of Localborn"; on May 3rd, 1864, four days after the GBMA received its charter from the state of Pennsylvania, McConaughy described the ideal composition of the Association: "a President and 2 Directors [...] from Philadelphia, 2 from Pittsburg and 3 from Gettysburg, and one each from Harrisburg, Chambersburg, York, Lancaster, Reading, Erie, and Williamsport"; in another May 1864 letter, McConaughy suggests that the president of the Association be someone of "acknowledged distinction and public reputation, whose name would in itself be an element of strength and influence, and to that end should be from a City and especially from Philadelphia." These letters are to be found in Folder 11-29b, "David McConaughy Correspondence," Vertical Files, GNMP Library.

perceived as “the apparent apathy or inactivity of those controlling it.”²⁸ Circulars were issued to GAR Posts urging members to purchase stock in the Association, which would give them leverage in selecting GBMA directors. By 1880, the Grand Army controlled the Board, but the great majority of members were still from Pennsylvania. By the following year, GAR members all over the northern states began to express interest in the Association. After 1883 the local nature of the Association was lost and the directors hailed from all over the North.²⁹ Former Confederate soldiers began to take part in the association; soon it became truly national in character.

²⁸ Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, p. 364.

²⁹ Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, p. 368, and NPS pamphlet, *History of the Gettysburg National Military Park*, “Organization of the Association,” in Folder 11-33a, GNMP Library, p. 1.

CHAPTER II: MONUMENTS, REUNIONS, & THE INVENTION OF AMERICAN VALOR

Gettysburg is but a small example of what historian David Blight had called “a fated and tragic struggle still only in its formative years,” the struggle to haphazardly reconcile the former enemies under the banner of reunion, to the grave detriment of African Americans’ newly gained civil and political liberties.³⁰ On battlefields across the country, veterans would reenact, by way of reunions and monuments, their former battles. Battlefields provided the most meaningful space for the working out of sectional reconciliation. Starting in the 1880s, Gettysburg began the slow transition from a site dedicated exclusively to northern soldiers to one both sides could claim. The marking of Union battle lines became meaningless without their mirror images: Americans, dressed in grey, lining the opposite side of a once bloody field.

The first significant overtures to include Confederate veterans in the preservation of the battlefield came in 1882, when the GBMA invited a number of officers to visit the field in order to ascertain former troop positions. The Executive Committee reported in June that the men had contributed “a great deal of valuable information” that the Committee hoped would lead to the erection of memorials and further land acquisitions.³¹ The report concluded with a plea for monetary assistance from “the States whose troops were engaged in the battle here, [...] who will doubtless desire that their achievements shall be kept in perpetual memory by monumental structures upon this field.”³² Though Union veterans still administered the battlefield, for the first time the GBMA solicited the financial support of any state desiring to erect memorials in honor of their troops. No

³⁰ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 139.

³¹ *Report of the Executive Committee of the Gettysburg Battle-Field Memorial Association*, June 26, 1882, in Folder 11-30, GNMP Library, p. 1.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 1.

longer was Gettysburg a site dedicated only to Pennsylvania's "brave defenders." Former Confederate states would not immediately jump at the chance, however. Nonetheless, the participation of Confederate veterans in marking the field, and the GBMA's explicit assertion that the battlefield served to memorialize the achievements of *all* states, marked a break with the early period of preservation characterized by local control of the Association. The growing insistence on marking Confederate battle lines at Gettysburg in the mid-1880s symbolized the greater inclusion of the former enemies in the life of the antebellum nation. Private organizations like the GBMA took the first steps to accomplish the purpose of reconciliation.

The GBMA's often strained financial resources, however, necessitated the intervention of the federal government. By late 1882, the GBMA declared their funds "exhausted." The Association had recently bought thirty-two acres of land, bringing their total acreage to 280 acres. The Executive Committee reported that the work of restoring the defenses, constructing monuments, and purchasing land would have to be put on hold until more funds could be secured. The following summer, the committee stated that members had been obliged to use their personal funds to purchase further battlefield land.³³ Fortunately for the GBMA, the state of Massachusetts soon appropriated \$5,000 for land purchases and a smaller amount for the erection of monuments. In 1884-1885, the 3d Pennsylvania Cavalry and the 2d Maryland Confederate Infantry donated funds.³⁴ The GBMA continued in like manner, soliciting appropriations from states and veterans' organizations, until 1893. In that year, as part of the Sundry Civil Appropriation Act, Congress set aside \$25,000 for preserving and marking "the positions occupied by the

³³ *Report of the GBMA*, 1882, p. 1; *Report of the Executive Committee of the Gettysburg Battle-Field Memorial Association*, July 2, 1883, in Folder 11-30, GNMP Library, pp. 1-2.

³⁴ Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now*, pp. 371-72.

various commands of the armies of the Potomac and of Northern Virginia,” and for the opening of avenues. The Secretary of War promptly appointed a three-man commission to oversee the expenditure of the congressional appropriation. Confederate veteran William Forney, Union veteran John Nicholson, and self-styled historian John Bachelder, a former landscape painter who had come to Gettysburg shortly after the battle to interview soldiers and draw topographical maps, were selected. A brief but significant phrase at the end of the appropriation bill required each tablet to bear a “historical legend compiled without praise and without censure.”³⁵ The language was neutral and inclusive. The markers would neither glorify nor rebuke; they would simply tell the story of two American armies who met each other in July 1863.

By 1893 the federal government was intimately involved in the preservation and marking of the battlefield. In the fall of that year, the three-man War Department Commission conducted an initial survey of the battlefield and found to their dismay that the Gettysburg Electric Railway sought to lay out tracks over significant portions of the battlefield, most notably, close to Devil’s Den, where intense fighting had taken place on the second day. The commissioners implored the company to divert the line away from battlefield terrain, but their efforts failed. The commission appealed to the Attorney General for assistance, and in 1894 condemnation proceedings began. The trial wound its way through various appellate courts until it reached the Supreme Court in January 1896. The case hinged on whether or not preservation of the battlefield was an appropriate “public use.” The court decided that the preservation and marking of battle lines at Gettysburg had a higher purpose than even “public use”: indeed, preserving the

³⁵ U.S. Senate, *Appropriations, new offices, etc.* Serial Set Vol. No. 3071, Session Vol. No. 8 (December 5, 1892-March 3, 1893), 52nd Congress, 2nd Session, S.Misc.Doc. 70, p. 189.

battlefield was “so closely connected with the welfare of the republic itself” that through such action the “whole country” could be “protect[ed] and preserv[ed].”³⁶ To condemn a railroad’s advance was to condemn progress, but the preservation of the Gettysburg battlefield trumped progress. The decision came only one year after the War Department assumed control of the site’s administration. Gettysburg no longer belonged to the North. It was a national sacred space that both sides could memorialize. What had once been a celebration of only Union victory and courage became a tribute to American valor. Gettysburg embodied on a smaller scale nationwide sectional reconciliation.

From the 1890s onward, veterans from the northern states would no longer dominate Gettysburg’s administration. The War Department years also saw a renewed effort to preserve and mark Confederate battle lines. With the influx of new monetary resources, the Park Commission under the War Department replaced the rutted drives of the GBMA era with Telfordized grand avenues. Post and pipe fences came to line the new roadways, whose shoulders were protected by drainage gutters and guard chains. The Commission erected four steel observation towers for the use of military students and posted regulatory signs. As the veterans of the battle passed away, such markers and monuments became increasingly important to tell the story of “American heroism” at Gettysburg.³⁷ For the veterans of the 1880s and 90s, the war had been a testing ground for American courage, and in that respect both sides had come out victorious. Both sides had monuments, tangible records of their movements, eulogized in perpetuity. Veteran reunions served a similar purpose. They too recounted the story of the battle—who

³⁶ *United States vs. Gettysburg Electric Railway Company*, Vol. 160 U.S. 668, Supreme Court of the United States, January 24, 1896.

³⁷ By way of an example, in 1887 the monument marking where Confederate General Armistead fell was named “a monument to American Heroism,” instead of the initially proposed “Armistead-fell-here marker.” From the *Gettysburg Star and Sentinel*, in Folder 17-1, Vertical Files, GNMP Library.

fought where when. Monuments stood where regiments had marched, and the men of Pickett's Division walked over the same ground they had crossed years earlier. But these reenactments, in flesh or stone, accomplished another purpose. They wrote a new story into the ground, that of reconciliation.

Though sectional animosities had not faded entirely, the end of the 19th century was characterized by an effort to define and celebrate values to which both sides could lay claim: American valor and dedication to a cause. On the former fields of death, Union and Confederate veterans reenacted significant battle moments and conducted joint reunion ceremonies. These symbolic acts had as their end result the clasping of hands, in stark contrast to the last time these men had met on fields like Gettysburg. Again, new life from death and unity from division. "A new birth of freedom," however, would have to wait. The rough cobbling together of the former enemy soldiers, overwhelmingly white, came at the expense of black Americans. Though free of slavery, they would be subjected to Jim Crow legislation beginning in the late 1870s.

Union and Confederate veterans fraternized publicly for the first time in 1875, at the centennial observance of the Battle of Bunker Hill.³⁸ The celebration of a common history brought the men together in Boston. Such gatherings increasingly took place on Civil War battlefields, and Gettysburg played host to some of the most significant. The same year as the Bunker Hill celebration, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which promised "full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of public amusement" to all citizens regardless of race and color. The Supreme Court

³⁸ Ronald Lee, "National Military Parks Line, 1781-1933," *Family Tree of the National Park System*, (Philadelphia: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1972), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/lee2/leec.htm (accessed spring 2009).

declared the Act unconstitutional less than ten years later, around the same time that joint reunions were becoming increasingly popular.

Gettysburg's 25th anniversary in 1888, for instance, drew enough veterans to reenact Pickett's Charge. The former Confederate soldiers rode across the field in carriages until they reached the "enemy" at their position behind the famed stone wall, where the men joined in a long, loud cheer, and shook hands repeatedly.³⁹ "The man who lives on sectional bitterness," a southern reporter wrote, "would have been out of place there. The Gettysburg reunion will, in my opinion, do immeasurable good in bringing about thoroughly national and unprejudiced thinking among the people of the great United States."⁴⁰ "Unprejudiced" here referred only to reconciliation between the former enemies, not to any national trend in combating racial prejudice. Indeed, eight years after the reunion, the *Plessy vs. Ferguson* case declared racial segregation constitutional. While Gettysburg had begun as a memorial to northern victory, joint reunions and their permanent counterparts, monuments, embodied sectional reconciliation on the ground.

In 1913, on the 50th anniversary of the battle, Gettysburg played host to the most widely celebrated reunion in American history. Fifty-four thousand Union and Confederate veterans traveled to Gettysburg for the festivities. The grand finale took place on the third day with another reenactment of Pickett's Charge. As President Wilson, the first southern-born president to be elected since the Civil War, looked out over the gathered crowd, he mused:

³⁹ Frederick Tilberg, "A Century of Reunions," Gettysburg National Military Park, July 1968, in Folder 11-60, GNMP Library, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰ E.W.B., "Getting Tired of It," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 5, 1888, p. 1. Accessed through ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

How wholesome and healing the peace has been! We have found one another again as brothers and comrades, in arms, enemies no longer, generous friends rather, our battles long past, the quarrel forgotten—except that we shall not forget the splendid valor, the manly devotion of the men then arrayed against one another, now grasping hand and smiling into each other's eyes.⁴¹

Gettysburg, then, belonged to the reunited nation; the battlefield was a record of American – not Union or Confederate – valor.

⁴¹ “Address at the Gettysburg Battlefield,” July 4, 1913, printed in Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 11.

CHAPTER III: “AS DEVELOPED ‘FOR THE USE AND ENJOYMENT OF THE PEOPLE’”:

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AT GETTYSBURG

In 1915, Stephen Mather and Horace Albright, two employees of the Department of the Interior, took an official trip to the Hot Springs Reservation in Arkansas. On their return trip to Washington, D.C., Albright parted from Mather and made a detour through Tennessee. He wanted to look over the battlefields of Chattanooga and Chickamauga, administered by the War Department. Albright was disheartened by the lack of clearly marked park boundaries and the absence of park employees, but he could do nothing but grumble at the time: the site was outside of his and Mather’s jurisdiction.⁴² In a traincar on the way back to the nation’s capital, Albright wrote a fervent letter to Mather: “Why should a military department be in charge of lands which are predominantly an attraction for all the people?” he asked. “It seems to me that our new bureau ought to be concerned with all areas the Federal Government wishes to preserve and protect for the education, interest and enjoyment of the population.”⁴³ With the founding of the National Park Service a year later, Albright believed a system that included both natural and historical parks was within reach. In his first annual report as acting director of the new agency (Mather had suffered a nervous breakdown and could not resume his duties until the following year), Albright discussed the future of national military parks like Gettysburg. “The question,” he wrote, “is whether these parks should not also be placed under this Department in order that they may be administered as a part of the national park system. The interesting features of each of these parks are their historic associations although

⁴² Horace Marden Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites*, (Philadelphia: Eastern National Parks & Monument Association, 1971), p. 4, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/albright/index.htm (accessed spring 2009).

⁴³ Horace Albright, *Creating the National Park Service: The Missing Years*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), p. 117.

several of them possess important scenic qualities.”⁴⁴ The National Park Service was still a very young agency and already had its hands full learning how to administer the enormous scenic parks of the West. Nonetheless, as early as 1923, an attempt was made to transfer War Department-administered historic sites to the Interior, but it failed.⁴⁵ Three years later, in 1926, Albright and Mather took another official trip that included a stop at Gettysburg. The men “were astonished at the small acreage of these lands” and “unhappy about the quality of the guide service.”⁴⁶ Another bill to transfer the War Department sites was introduced in 1928. The bill passed the Senate but died in the House Committee of Military Affairs in 1929.⁴⁷ Under the Hoover administration, 1929-1933, Albright tried again. But just as the reorganization bill was ready to be passed in March 1933, Congress adjourned. The Hoover administration had come to an end. Finally, in June 1933, Albright finally engineered the transfer under Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Though the National Park Service did not gain control over the War Department sites until 1933, by the time of the transfer the NPS had already taken steps to acquire other historic sites and commence a program of historical interpretation. In July of 1930, President Hoover approved legislation for the establishment of the Colonial National Monument (encompassing Jamestown, Williamsburg and Yorktown) and authorized the acquisition of the Yorktown Battlefield and Jamestown Island. The newly appointed Director Albright established a new branch of research and education in Washington,

⁴⁴ Horace Albright, *Annual Report of the National Park Service*, 1917, printed in Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ *Reorganization of the Executive Departments. Letter from the President of the United States to Walter F. Brown, Chairman of the Joint Committee on the Reorganization of Government Departments*. Serial Set Vol. No. 8171, Session Vol. No.12, 67th Congress, 4th Session, S.Doc. 302.

⁴⁶ Albright, *Origins of National Park Service Administration of Historic Sites*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

D.C. In 1931, he appointed Verne E. Chatelain as the bureau's first chief historian. When the young Chatelain took up his duties in the capitol, he was instantly disappointed. He felt that "the personnel of the Service, as then constituted, was not ready for what was happening and had [...] not the foggiest notions of how to handle them."⁴⁸ Verne Chatelain would clear things up.

During his first few years at the Park Service, Chatelain focused on creating a dedicated and efficient army of historians and administrative personnel that could easily adapt to a larger, truly national system when funding and manpower became available. Soon after taking up his post, Chatelain organized a history conference in Washington, where he advocated for an overarching "philosophy" to guide the new historical division. Historical activity in the parks should have a strictly "educational" aim, he said, striving always for "accurate, scientific knowledge."⁴⁹ His long-term goal, however, was to develop a system of national historic sites that would be reflect what he called "the American story." Sites should capitalize on their "uniquely graphic qualities [...] where stirring and significant events have taken place," which would "drive home to the visitor the meaning of those events showing not only their importance in themselves but their integral relationship to the whole history of American development."⁵⁰ In 1935, the moment Chatelain had been waiting for arrived. Congress passed the Historic Sites Act, hailed as the Magna Carta in the program for the preservation of historic sites by many in the historic preservation community. A "new cultural nationalism," they effused, now

⁴⁸ Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., "Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service," *The Public Historian*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Winter, 1994), p. 29.

⁴⁹ "Historical Conference," November 27, 1931, printed in Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s*, (Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, 1983), pp. 163-164.

⁵⁰ Verne Chatelain, "History and Our National Parks," 1935, printed in Unrau and Williss, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s*, p. 166.

had official approval. The act stated “that it is national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the *inspiration and benefit* of the United States” (emphasis added). History could uplift and improve Americans, and historic sites were their tangible connection to the grand meanings of a heroic past. The act passed alongside the National Park Trust Fund Board Act, which allowed private donations to be held in trust for the Service’s use in the acquisition, preservation, and restoration of historic sites.⁵¹ For the first time, the Park Service had the money and the legislative support to implement a national program of historic preservation, development, and interpretation. From the beginning of the National Park Service’s historical interpretation program in the early 1930s, preservation and interpretation were inextricably linked.

In 1933, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 6166, which transferred the national cemeteries and battlefield parks from the War Department to the National Park Service. The takeover came only five years after the death of Emmor B. Cope, Gettysburg’s chief topographical engineer since the 1890s and himself a veteran of the battle. Beginning in the 1930s, historical interpreters employed by the Park Service explained the major events of the battle using a large topographical map and a few cases of artifacts in an office above the downtown post office. A self-guided brochure was developed in the 1940s. In 1962, the Park Service opened its first freestanding visitor center, built explicitly for the purpose of welcoming tourists and interpreting the battle. Before the arrival of the National Park Service, preservation and historical interpretation were one and the same. Visions of the battle’s meaning – and what it signified to the

⁵¹ Chatelain, “History and Our National Parks,” printed in Unrau and Williss, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s*, pp. 194-196.

nation – were written into the ground by various individuals: local citizens, veterans, and War Department officials among them. The Park Service inaugurated a new era in which preservation served the needs of historical interpretation. Preservation aided in telling the landscape’s story, because the men who had lived through the Civil War era had all passed away.

In the early years of the NPS at Gettysburg, “interpretation” meant detailing military history, tactics, and strategy. As time went on, Gettysburg’s administrators began to add supplementary contextual information to their displays and interpretive programs. The NPS annual reports from the 1970s in particular boast of the expansion and “improvement” of historical interpretation at the site. For instance, 1972 saw the introduction of a program entitled “Women in the Crisis,” planned and presented by the female staff. In 1973, Superintendent Schober was glad to note that the “old fashioned interpretive program at Gettysburg changed markedly th[at] year.” He proceeds to describe five special live programs that had been developed the previous spring, which included a “Women in the War” presentation and a Civil War Soldier living history program.⁵² The current historical interpretive strategy presented at Gettysburg traces its roots back to these “new history” programs.

At a conference for NPS historical interpreters in 1999, participants discussed the changes in historical methodology that had taken place in the 1970s. The “new history,” they said, had been “adopted by American historians and historical institutions,” and the NPS had followed suit, marking a radical departure from early NPS historical

⁵² Annual Report, Superintendent, Gettysburg National Military Park, January 22, 1973, Park Administrative Files, GNMP; Annual Report, Superintendent, Gettysburg National Military Park, January 25, 1974, Park Administrative Files, GNMP, printed in Unrau, *Administrative History: GNMP and GNC*, p. 326.

interpretation that had assigned “narrow definitions of historical meaning to NPS sites.” By contrast, they wrote, the new curriculum “encouraged interpreters to re-examine the ‘meanings of the resource,’ to present multiple perspectives, and to present universal historical concepts, so that all visitors could find meanings in national parks.” These changes, they concluded, were “not necessary because it was ‘politically correct,’ but because it was ‘historically correct.’ In summary, it was the right thing to do.”⁵³

Contextualizing the battle, therefore, was nothing short of a moral obligation. By 1981, Gettysburg’s superintendent reported that participation in NPS interpretive programs was up 200%. Subjects included Women and the War, the Civil War Soldier, Noncombatants in the War, and Civil War Medicine.⁵⁴ In 1992, Gettysburg park historian Scott Hartwig distributed an audiotape tour with an accompanying survey. In answer to the question, “Is there anything that you did not hear on the tape program that you would like to hear?”, a visitor remarked, “More individualized battle accounts.” Another reviewer suggested that the experiences of women be represented on the tape.⁵⁵ The two reviews highlight the most common “new” interpretive themes during the first 30 years of “new history” at the Park Service: women in the war and the experiences of individual soldiers. But while costumed young men strolled the fields of Gettysburg as part of “living history programs,” and female rangers spoke of women in the war, the word “slavery” was nowhere to be found. In a 1974 article, historian John Patterson hotly criticized the old visitor center’s exhibits for their contextual shortcomings. The exhibits painted sectional reconciliation in glorious colors, he said, but gave no explanation for why they fought in

⁵³ Sarah Blodgett, ed., *1999 Interpretive Sourcebook*, National Interpreters Workshop, Syracuse, NY, 1999.

⁵⁴ Annual Report, Superintendent, Gettysburg National Military Park, April 6, 1983, Park Administrative Files, GNMP, printed in Unrau, *Administrative History: GNMP and GNC*, p. 327.

⁵⁵ “Battlefield Tape Tour,” Public Comments, GNMP Library, in Box B-21.

the first place.⁵⁶ Elaboration of the “causes and consequences of the Civil War” appeared for the first time at the new visitor center, opened in 2008.

Gettysburg’s current superintendent, John Latschar, came to Gettysburg in August of 1994. Almost immediately after his arrival, the administration began work on a new general management plan. The document published in 1999 contains the most explicit acknowledgment and elaboration to date of a process that began in the 1930s, the historicizing of memory. Those who directed battlefield preservation before the National Park Service era took the process of history-writing for granted. Their memories became the facts of history, written onto the land in the form of a memorial landscape. As the self-conscious purveyor of historical information, the current Park Service has an entirely new relationship to the telling of Gettysburg’s story than did the local citizens and veterans who preserved the site in earlier periods. The NPS cannot lay claim to the ‘expertise’ of experience, and the next best thing is a kind of historical objectivity. Gettysburg no longer belongs only to the North, a permanent record of Union victory. It is no longer a site of Civil War veterans’ reunions, a site that speaks of sectional reconciliation without detailing the cost of that reconciliation. The interpretive materials at today’s Gettysburg describe the earlier eras of preservation as compelling, honorable, yet incomplete versions of the Gettysburg story. According to the main brochure handed out at today’s Gettysburg, “The big picture of what happened at Gettysburg” – a recounting of the battle and Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, from whose words “a nation was inspired to heal and unite” – is no longer sufficient. “There were thousands of stories

⁵⁶ For example, during the old center’s main film, a bird symbolizing sectional reconciliation soared over the battlefield; a prominent display case depicted a Confederate general giving water to a Union commander, noting that the men became friends after the war, from John Patterson, “Zapped at the Map: The Battlefield at Gettysburg,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 7 (1974), pp. 827-828.

that emerged, countless lives that were affected, and a multitude of underlying details about the Battle of Gettysburg, its causes and consequences,” and the new Museum and Visitor Center was founded to “tell that entire, amazing story.”⁵⁷ The attempt to expand the Gettysburg story to include a discussion of the battle’s “causes and consequences” leads necessarily to a discussion of slavery, an issue that earlier NPS administrations had only barely touched upon. Today the Battle of Gettysburg is the vehicle of yet another telling of the Civil War’s meaning. The narrative goes that the war was a terrible yet necessary event in the life of the nation that reinvigorated American democracy and ended slavery.

The reconsideration of Gettysburg’s interpretive materials starting in 1995 anticipated a Park Service-wide transformation that would begin three years later. In August 1998, a group of NPS battlefield managers met in Nashville, Tennessee, to discuss the future of historical interpretation. They expressed concern that interpretive efforts at battlefields often fell short of “convey[ing] the full range and context of the stories [their] sites [could] tell.”⁵⁸ Before returning home, the managers drafted a new “guiding principle” for historical interpretation at Park Service-administered battlefields: “Battlefield interpretation,” they wrote, “must establish the site’s particular place in the continuum of war, illuminate the social, economic, and cultural issues that caused or were affected by the war, illustrate the breadth of human experience during the period, and establish the relevance of the war to people today.”⁵⁹ Relevance was the key word. The

⁵⁷ The Gettysburg Foundation, brochure entitled, “It Takes 6,000 Acres to tell a Story this Big,” (Gettysburg: The Gettysburg Foundation, 2008).

⁵⁸ *Holding the High Ground: Principles and Strategies for Managing and Interpreting Civil War Battlefield Landscapes*, Proceedings from a Conference of Battlefield Managers, Nashville, TN, August 24-27, 1998, pp. 9-10, property of the author.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

National Park lands, they insisted, had been “set aside to be here for as long as there is an America. These sites [were] supposed to be as meaningful and evocative to Americans 500 years from now as they are today.”⁶⁰ The managers’ professed goal in updating historical interpretation was to reach a “diversified audience and promote the preservation of a broader range of resources.” The new interpretive materials would bring the assumptions of the past – for instance, the idea that interpretation should accommodate only military history – into conversation with contemporary debates about the war’s legacy and its “unresolved issues.”⁶¹ The conference participants emphasized both the difficulty and the necessity of the task before them, but they expressed hope that the newly elaborated guiding principles would be taken up by partner organizations.⁶² Two years later, Congress itself championed their cause.

In the year 2000, Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. inserted a few brief sentences into the Department of the Interior Appropriations Bill that had significant repercussions for historical interpretation across the Park Service. Echoing the language of the 1998 conference, Jackson said that Civil War battle sites were often “not placed in their proper historical context”; specifically, they failed to mention slavery as a central cause of the Civil War. Congress first directed the NPS to compile a report discussing the present state of historical interpretation at battlefields throughout the system. The mandate went even further: it strongly encouraged Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt “to recognize and include in *all* of their public displays and multimedia educational presentations the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶¹ In regard to the discussion of race at battlefield sites, the managers wrote, “The potential for controversy and backlash is high.” *Ibid.*, p. 10. The prophecy would certainly come true for Gettysburg. For example, after a speech by Superintendent Latschar’s about historical interpretation was published in *Civil War News*, he received hundreds of postcards from the Southern Heritage Coalition claiming that the NPS’s new interpretive materials scandalously “rewrote history.”

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 3.

unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War” (emphasis added).⁶³ The congressional mandate was the first system-wide directive of its kind; never before had Congress specifically requested a change in the historical interpretation of Civil War sites. Gettysburg’s administration had already taken steps to expand and diversify its interpretive materials before the congressional directive came into effect. Nonetheless, it is important to note that in the year 2000, the federal government intervened to promote a new policy that discussed the causes of the war, especially slavery.

Despite Congress’ apparent interest in developing new interpretive materials at Civil War battlefields, no money was set aside to realize that goal—in keeping with a longstanding tradition of miniscule congressional appropriations to the Park Service. Superintendent Latschar explained in an interview last spring that when he arrived at the battlefield in 1995, “it was just plain as day that the Park Service wasn’t ever going to have enough money to solve the problems here at Gettysburg.”⁶⁴ The director of the National Park Service at the time, Roger Kennedy, had come to the NPS from the Smithsonian Institution, where he had been director of the Museum of American History. The Smithsonian was founded by Congress in 1835 and is in part financed by the federal government, but a large portion of its proceeds also come from private sources. Kennedy’s experience at an institution that depends on both private and public funding led him to encourage private-public partnerships at Park Service sites around the nation, specifically at Gettysburg. The Gettysburg Foundation, a private organization, was founded in 1998 to work “hand-in-hand with the National Park Service [...] to raise the

⁶³ Bruce Babbitt, “Foreword,” *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*, (Washington D.C.: Eastern National, 2001), p. v., http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/rthg/index.htm (accessed spring 2009).

⁶⁴ John Latschar, Interview by author, Gettysburg, PA, March 2, 2009.

funds needed for the Campaign to Preserve Gettysburg.”⁶⁵ The “campaign” has involved two main projects: building a new, \$125-million museum and visitor center (christened in 2008), and carrying out a program of “battlefield rehabilitation,” which seeks to return the land to its 1863 appearance.

The new museum and visitor center, designed to look like a 19th-century barn, occupies an inconspicuous place off battlefield land. The old visitor center, located squarely on the battlefield, has been torn down. The new center deals with themes that previous NPS administrations had rarely or superficially discussed: most notably, slavery as the central cause of the Civil War. During the process of developing the new visitor center, the administration made a concerted and sustained effort to solicit the advice of professional Civil War historians who reported on what they perceived as shortcomings in the NPS’s presentation of the battle and its historical context.⁶⁶ The transcripts of the museum’s films contain pages of footnotes, the *General Management Plan* is extensively researched, and the visitor center showcases a multiplicity of voices, facts, figures, and conflicting opinions.⁶⁷ Most importantly, the current administration places slavery front and center as the central cause of the Civil War, a decision that extends the scope beyond those three days in July 1863.

The battlefield, nonetheless, remains the centerpiece. “We are going to consider this museum a failure,” Latschar told a reporter on the eve of the building’s opening, “if it does not induce people to get out on the battlefield and put their feet in the place all this

⁶⁵ The Gettysburg Foundation, “The Gettysburg Foundation: Helping to Preserve the Battlefield and its Stories,” http://www.gettysburgfoundation.org/about.htm#epm1_2 (accessed spring 2009).

⁶⁶ Historians Eric Foner of Columbia University, Nina Silber of Boston University, and James McPherson of Princeton University submitted reports. From a memorandum by John R. Dichtl regarding the Organization of American Historians’ site visits to Gettysburg National Military Park, August 18-19, 1998, property of the author.

⁶⁷ The experiences of women, free black Pennsylvanians, and Gettysburg townspeople, are discussed at length at the visitor center.

actually happened.”⁶⁸ To that end, the current Gettysburg administration commenced the battlefield rehabilitation project about ten years ago. At that time, thick undergrowth crowded former woodlots, period orchards no longer existed, and Civil War era fences had been replaced with newer styles. Most noticeably, modern contour farming had supplanted the 19th-century pattern of rough, rectangular, 10-12 acre fields over much of the battlefield.⁶⁹ Today, telephone poles and utility lines that once criss-crossed the battlefield are now underground. Non-historic trees have been removed. Civil War-era orchards are in the process of being reinstated. Last March, the administration tore down the old visitor center, which had stood in Zeigler’s Grove, a key location on the second and third days of the battle. The Park Service has not yet reached its goal of complete battlefield rehabilitation, but with the new visitor center up and running, the administration can focus on shaping the landscape itself.

According to Superintendent Latschar, the germ of the battlefield rehabilitation idea was planted one day in 1994 when he toured the battlefield with a licensed guide. As the two men set out to view the field, Latschar explained, he noticed that the guide carried a stack of period photographs nearly an inch thick. He soon discovered that the photographs were necessary to “explain the course of the battle,” because the landscape had been so radically transformed since 1863. “So much of what the commanders could see in 1863,” Latschar explained, “was obscured.”⁷⁰ Battlefield rehabilitation, therefore, was intended to provide physical context, in much the same way that the visitor center

⁶⁸ John Latschar, interview with Tim Lambert, “New Visitor Center Opens at Gettysburg,” *All Things Considered*, NPR, April 13, 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89598500> (accessed spring 2009).

⁶⁹ *Statement for Management Outline of Planning Requirements for Gettysburg National Military Park*, May 1991, GNMP Library, pp. 31-32.

⁷⁰ “*The Gettysburg Magazine* Interview – John A. Latschar,” *The Gettysburg Magazine* 39 (July 2008), in Folder 16-15, Vertical Files, GNMP Library, p. 127.

provides historical context for the battle. The history presented by the Park Service – the multiplicity of voices represented in the visitor center, the “accurate” restoration of 6,000 acres of Pennsylvania terrain – seems transparent, even objective. But contextualization is not equivalent to ideological neutrality, neither at the visitor center nor on the battlefield.

For all the talk of the devastation and hardship of the Civil War, the NPS portrays the war as a necessary event in the life of the United States—a terrible yet necessary event that can now be studied as a “classroom for democracy.”⁷¹ Superintendent Latschar has echoed similar language on multiple occasions during his time as chief administrator. At the 2007 Civil War Symposium in Illinois, Latschar asserted that “understanding what they lived through does help – I think – put the issues and struggles of today into perspective.” He gave the example of the 2004 Presidential election: “Whether we were encouraged or discouraged by the results of that election, we did not have to wake up with the prospect of our nation dividing asunder. The people of the Civil War generation gave us that assurance.”⁷² On the occasion of the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new visitor center, Latschar used the same words to describe the 2008 presidential election: “The issues facing us today are rather inconsequential as compared to the Presidential election of 1860,” he said. “On November 5, we will all get up in the morning and go about our daily lives. Whether we are encouraged or discouraged by the results of November’s election, we do not have to wake up with the prospect of our nation dividing asunder. The people of the Civil War generation gave us that assurance.” Then he added:

⁷¹ “What Gettysburg Means Today: Our Country’s Common Ground,” The Gettysburg Foundation, <http://www.gettysburgfoundation.org/learn/relevance.html> (accessed spring 2009).

⁷² John Latschar, “Reinterpreting the Battlefield of Gettysburg,” speech given at the 10th Civil War Symposium in Wheaton, Illinois, October 20, 2007, unpublished manuscript, property of the author.

This nation, created at Philadelphia, saved at Gettysburg, forged by the fire of the Civil War is more powerful, and more enduring than any single Presidential election. That is, ladies and gentlemen, the strength of our democracy [...] bequeathed to us by the Civil War generation.⁷³

Thus Gettysburg is perpetually relevant. Its story can be repurposed to comment on any presidential election, no matter how contentious, because our nation lived through the trauma of war against itself. Gettysburg has become central to the narrative of national progress that sees war as both tragic and necessary for the preservation of democracy. What better way to tell that story than to preserve the very ground upon which democracy was supposedly won?

*
**

In 1998, the Gettysburg Foundation chose the motto, “Our Country’s Common Ground.” The language speaks of a collective history, an American history, but it does not identify to whom that history belongs. In contrast, during Gettysburg’s first years of preservation, the site belonged, literally and symbolically, to northerners. Beginning in the 1880s, the former enemies met on the Pennsylvania fields and erected monuments there, and Gettysburg took on an increasingly “national” character. The nation, however, still excluded African Americans from the full exercise of their civil and political liberties. The current Gettysburg administration attempts to expand the Gettysburg story to include a deep discussion of how the battle came to be, its causes and consequences. Some say the site finally belongs to the nation. But while battlefield rehabilitation and the new visitor center provide physical and historical context for the battle of Gettysburg,

⁷³ John Latschar, “Last Full Measure of Devotion,” Speech on the occasion of the new visitor center’s ribbon-cutting ceremony, September 26, 2008, printed in *Friends of Gettysburg: The Quarterly Publication of the Gettysburg Foundation*, Fall 2008, pp. 4-5.

they do not offer objective truth. These efforts too are acts of historical inscription, written onto the land of Gettysburg by an agency that has taken upon itself the telling of history.

A singular event, the Battle of Gettysburg, has taken on multiple meanings according to historical context. The movers and shakers of each moment of battlefield preservation considered their actions to be historically truthful and honorable to the memory of those who died. What is so striking, however, is that their actions so radically differed from one another's. A Gettysburg citizen living in 1864 could scarcely have imagined that twenty-four years later the town would welcome Confederate veterans for reenactment ceremonies. Likewise, we must acknowledge that the stories presented at the new visitor center are not ones the veterans would have told. History is the strangest of disciplines, for at some level it lays claim to truth. As we know, though, the truth constantly changes, as does the land.

WORKS CITED

- Adkin, Mark. *The Gettysburg Companion*. Mechanicsburg: Stackpole Books, 2008.
- Babbitt, Bruce. "Foreword." *Rally on the High Ground: The National Park Service Symposium on the Civil War*. Washington D.C.: Eastern National, 2001.
- Barlett, John Russell. *The Soldier's National Cemetery at Gettysburg*. Providence: Providence Press Company, 1874.
- Blight, David. *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Blodgett, Sarah, ed. *1999 Interpretive Sourcebook*. National Interpreters Workshop. Syracuse, NY, 1999.
- Holding the High Ground: Principles and Strategies for Managing and Interpreting Civil War Battlefield Landscapes*. Proceedings of a Conference of Battlefield Managers. Nashville, TN. August 24-27, 1998. Property of the author.
- Hosmer, Charles. "Verne E. Chatelain and the Development of the Branch of History of the National Park Service." *The Public Historian* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1994): pp. 25-38.
- Latschar, John. "Last Full Measure of Devotion." *Friends of Gettysburg: The Quarterly Publication of the Gettysburg Foundation*, Fall 2008.
- . "Reinterpreting the Battlefield of Gettysburg." Speech, 10th Civil War Symposium, Wheaton, Illinois, 20 October 2007. Unpublished manuscript. Property of the author.
- Lee, Ronald. "National Military Parks Line, 1781-1933." *Family Tree of the National Park System*. Philadelphia: Eastern National Park & Monument Association, 1972. http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/lee2/leec.htm (accessed spring 2009).
- Patterson, John. "Zapped at the Map: The Battlefield at Gettysburg." *Journal of Popular Culture* 7 (1974), 826-837.
- Sellars, Richard West. "Pilgrim Places: Civil War Battlefields, Historic Preservation, and America's First national Military Parks, 1863-1900." *CRM: The Journal of Heritage Stewardship* 2, no. 1 (Winter 2005). http://crmjournal.cr.nps.gov/04_article_sub.cfm?issue=Volume%202%20Number%201%20Winter%202005&page=1&seq=1 (accessed fall 2008).

Unrau, Harlan D. *Administrative history: Gettysburg National Military Park and Gettysburg National Cemetery, Pennsylvania*. Denver: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1991.

———, and G. Frank Williss, *Administrative history: expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s*. Denver: Denver Service Center, National Park Service, 1983.

Vanderslice, John M. *Gettysburg Then and Now*. Dayton: Morningside House, Inc., 2000.

Warren, Horatio N. *The Declaration of independence and war history. Bull Run to Appomattox*. Buffalo: The Courier Company Printers, 1894.

Welch, Spencer Glasgow. *A Confederate Surgeon's Letters to his Wife*. Washington, DC: Neale Publishing Company, 1911.

The Gettysburg Foundation, "What Gettysburg Means Today: Our Country's Common Ground," The Gettysburg Foundation, 2007. <http://www.gettysburgfoundation.org/learn/relevance.html> (accessed spring 2009).

Gettysburg National Military Park Archives

"Battlefield Tape Tour." Public Comments. Box B-21.

David McConaughy Correspondence. Folder 11-29b.

"*The Gettysburg Magazine* Interview – John A. Latschar." *The Gettysburg Magazine* 39 (July 2008). Folder 16-15.

Harrison, Kathleen Georg. "Gettysburg: A Happy and Patriotic Conception." Unpublished manuscript, 1979. Folder 11-28.

Kennedy, Roger. "Strategic Planning for the National Park Service," 1994. Box B-20.

"Monuments, General Information." Folder 17-1.

"New Museum and Visitor Center At Gettysburg National Military Park." February 20, 2008. Folder 16-15.

NPS pamphlet, *History of the Gettysburg National Military Park*, "Organization of the Association." Folder 11-33a.

Patterson, John S. "A Patriotic Landscape: Gettysburg, 1863-1913." Unpublished manuscript. Date not given. Folder 11-27.

Report of the Executive Committee of the Gettysburg Battle-Field Memorial Association.
June 26, 1882. Folder 11-30.

Report of the Executive Committee of the Gettysburg Battle-Field Memorial Association.
July 2, 1883. Folder 11-30.

*Statement for Management Outline of Planning Requirements for Gettysburg National
Military Park.* May 1991.

Tilberg, Frederick. "A Century of Reunions." July 1968. Unpublished memorandum.
Folder 11-60.

Newspapers & Magazines

Albany Journal

American Monthly Magazine

Atlanta Constitution

Charleston Mercury

Gettysburg Compiler

Gettysburg Star and Sentinel

The Independent

Nation

New York Herald

New York Times

Milwaukee Sentinel

North American and United States Gazette

Philadelphia Inquirer

WORKS CONSULTED

- Albright, Horace M. *Creating the National Park Service: the Missing Years*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.
- Alleman, Tillie Pierce. *At Gettysburg, Or, What a Girl Saw and Heard of the Battle*. New York: W. Lake Borland, 1889.
- Burrage, Henry S. *Gettysburg and Lincoln; the Battle, the Cemetery, and the National Park*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1906.
- Carr, Ethan. *Mission 66: Modernism and the National Park Dilemma*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007.
- Cole, Thomas. "Proceedings of the American Lyceum: Essay on American Scenery." *The American Monthly Magazine*. January 1, 1836.
- Cronon, William, ed. *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995.
- Cutler, Phoebe. *The Public Landscape of the New Deal*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Desjardin, Thomas A. *These Honored Dead: How the Story of Gettysburg Shaped American Memory*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003.
- Farrell, James J. *Inventing the American way of death, 1830-1920*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- Gettysburg Battlefield Commission. *Michigan at Gettysburg, July 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, 1863. Proceedings incident to the dedication of the Michigan monument upon the battlefield of Gettysburg, June 12th, 1889 together with a full report of the monument commission, and a detailed statement of the work committed to and performed by it, and the proceedings at the various regimental reunions*. Detroit: Winn & Hammond Printers, 1889.
- Gettysburg National Military Park Commission. *Annual reports of the Gettysburg National Military Park Commission to the Secretary of War, 1893-1904*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905.
- Handler, Richard and Eric Gable. *The New History in an Old Museum: Creating the Past at Colonial Williamsburg*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Harrison, Kathleen R. Georg. "'This Grand National Enterprise': The Origins of Gettysburg's Soldiers' National Cemetery & Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association." Gettysburg: Gettysburg National Military Park, 1982.

- Hosmer, Charles Bridgham. *Presence of the past: a history of the preservation movement in the United States before Williamsburg*. New York: Putnam, 1965.
- . *Preservation comes of age: from Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981.
- “Interpretation of the Civil War.” Interpretation of Civil War Sites: A Report to Congress. March 2000.
http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/icws/index.htm (accessed spring 2009).
- Ise, John. *Our national park policy: a critical history*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961.
- Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Jenkins, Thomas E. *Gettysburg in war and peace: A Brief Review of Interesting Historical Facts and Incidents Relative to the Famous Three-days' Fight so appropriately designated "The greatest battle of modern times."* 2d souvenir ed. Issued by the Passenger Department of the Western Maryland Railroad. Baltimore: Press of J. Cox, 1898.
- Latschar, John. “Status of Battlefield Rehabilitation Efforts for Gettysburg National Military Park.” March 24, 2009. Property of the author.
- Linenthal, Edward T. *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991.
- Long, James T. *The 16th Decisive Battle of the World: Gettysburg*. Gettysburg: Gettysburg Compiler Print, 1906.
- Mackintosh, Barry. “The National Park Service Moves into Historical Interpretation.” *The Public Historian* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1987): pp. 51-63.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.
- National Park Service. *Draft development concept plan, environmental assessment plan: Little Round Top/Devil's Den, Gettysburg National Military Park, Pennsylvania*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, 1985.

- New York Infantry Regiment, 150th. *Historical sketch: with exercises at dedication of monument and re-union camp fire of 150th New York Volunteer Infantry, Gettysburgh, Sept. 17, 18, 1889*. Poughkeepsie: Monument Committee of the 150th New York Volunteer Infantry, 1889.
- New York State Monuments Commission for the Battlefields of Gettysburg, Chattanooga and Antietam. *Fiftieth anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg, 1913; Report of the New York State Commission*. Albany: J.B. Lyon Company Printers, 1916.
- Nye, David E. *Narratives and spaces: Technology and the construction of American culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Olsen, Russ. *Administrative history: organizational structures of the National Park Service, 1917 to 1985*. Washington, D.C.: The National Park Service, 1985.
- Preferred Alternative and Background, General Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement*. Gettysburg: Gettysburg National Military Park, June 1999. Property of the author.
- Rothman, Hal. *Preserving different pasts: the American National Monuments*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.
- Runte, Alfred. *National Parks: the American Experience*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.
- Savage, Kirk. *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-century America*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Sears, John F. *Sacred Places. American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Sellars, Richard West. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks. A History*. London: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Smith, Timothy B. *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008.
- Stannard, David E., ed. *Death in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975.
- Sutter, Paul. *Driven Wild: How the Fight against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002.
- U.S. Army Center of Military History. *Gettysburg staff ride: Briefing Book*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1999.

Warren, Leon and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *History museums in the United States: a critical assessment*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Wirth, Conrad L. *Parks, Politics, and the People*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980.

Whitman, Walt. *Specimen Days*. New York: Dover, 1995.