Gettysburg College & The Battle of Gettysburg: A Civil War Walking Tour

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Abstract
Originally compiled by John Rudy as a student project in 2007 at Gettysburg College, this new, revised edition of the Civil War Walking Tour booklet guides a visitor on a truly unique campus tour. Visitors can walk among buildings from the war era and learn how they were pressed into service during and after the Battle of Gettysburg. Likewise, many college figures such as President Henry Baugher, John "Jack" Hopkins (janitor), and many students are part of this complex and heroic story of Pennsylvania College's story in July 1863.

This other is available at The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College: http://cupola.gettysburg.edu/cwfac/5
The Civil War Era Studies program is Gettysburg College’s showcase program for studies in the American Civil War and the Civil War era in American History (1848–1877). Created in 1998 with funding from the Henry R. Luce Foundation, CWES oversees an undergraduate minor in Civil War Era Studies and a “Gettysburg Semester,” which affords undergraduates from outside Gettysburg College an opportunity to spend an entire “immersion” semester in Civil War studies at Gettysburg.

Founded in 1832, Gettysburg College is a highly selective four-year residential college of liberal arts and sciences with a strong academic tradition. Alumni include Rhodes Scholars, a Nobel laureate, and other distinguished scholars. The college enrolls 2,600 undergraduate students and is located on a 200-acre campus adjacent to the Gettysburg National Military Park in Pennsylvania.
When Gettysburg College — originally named Pennsylvania College — was founded in 1832, the issue of slavery was a contentious and widely debated subject throughout the 24 states of the United States. Less than a year earlier Nat Turner had been executed after his failed slave rebellion in Virginia. The borough of Gettysburg, fewer than ten miles from the Mason-Dixon line, experienced this unrest between slave owners and abolitionists, as escaped slaves regularly made their way through the area.

The College’s founder, Samuel Simon Schmucker, was a proponent of gradual, legal emancipation. He himself had owned slaves who came to him through marriage, but had eventually emancipated them and allowed them to continue living in his home until he could find them suitable training or employment.

Gettysburg’s most famous abolitionist was undoubtedly Thaddeus Stevens, a member of the original board of trustees of Pennsylvania College. He also provided the College with its original six acres of land. Stevens was strongly opposed to slavery. Early in his legal career he was heard to toast, “The next President. — May he be a freeman, who never riveted fetters on a human slave.”

Some of Stevens’ most outspoken criticism of slavery came in the 1840s, when Gettysburg passed a resolution quashing speech over the slave issue — a local gag-rule. This brought Stevens back to the town where he had first practiced law, where he said in a strong speech against slavery: “If a man comes to speak of universal liberty, you answer him with violence and rotten eggs. Shame! . . . What true freemen would not blush at such behavior.”

Completed in 1868, 5 years after the battle, Stevens Hall was named for the congressman and radical abolitionist, a physical reminder of one of Gettysburg College’s abolitionist founders.

STOP ONE
Abolitionist Roots of Pennsylvania College

STOP TWO
Students and the Abolition Movement

In the late 1850s, the view for miles to the north of what is today Lincoln Avenue was farm fields and orchards, many worked by pacifist and abolitionist Quakers. To slaves stumbling northward from the slaveholding south, the steps taken through the farm fields of Pennsylvania were some of the first on free soil they had ever trod. In Adams County and across southern and eastern Pennsylvania, loose networks of black and white allies helped these fugitives draw their first free breaths.

According to local legend, around this time students at Pennsylvania College formed an unofficial and unsanctioned fraternity called Beta Delta. The members had a poor reputation in town and were often a thorn in the side of the local constabulary.

The group might have passed into obscurity had it not been for widespread rumors that B.D. also stood for the Black Ducks, a secret society that on occasion hid slaves as part of the Underground Railroad. The Black Ducks participation was purportedly inspired by a local dance instructor, Manuel, who on a cold December night asked the students to help a fugitive — “Black as the ace of spades — master after him.” The young men quickly agreed, harboring the man and eventually spiriting him away to one of their hideaways on Culp’s Hill, the “glim’s Cave,” a jumble of rocks that had recently been fashioned into a hiding spot.

By word of mouth in the Gettysburg African-American community, Manuel became a point of contact for escaping slaves. In turn, Manuel leaned on the Black Ducks to help him spirit away the fugitives to the Quaker communities north of town and on to freedom further north.

“Am I not a man and a brother?” Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.
n the heels of his 1863 victory at the Battle of Chancellorsville in Virginia, Gen. Robert E. Lee made a bold push northward with his Army of Northern Virginia, up the Shenandoah Valley into Maryland and Pennsylvania.

Because of many false alarms about a rebel invasion, Pennsylvania was slow in calling up troops to defend the commonwealth. Finally, in mid-June Governor Curtin sounded the call for 50,000 volunteers to repel the Confederates. The June 16 Adams Sentinel announced the Governor’s call, stressing “the importance of immediately raising a sufficient force.”

Hearing the news, students were stirred to action and a group went into “Dr. Horner’s Drug Store, got a sheet of foolscap. Before night we had the names of the majority of the students” — so many names, in fact, that the Star and Banner erroneously reported that Pennsylvania College had been “obliged to suspend the session a few weeks in consequence.” The men were mustered into service at Harrisburg as Company A of the 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Militia Regiment.

Within ten days the soldiers from Pennsylvania College were back in Gettysburg, and on June 26 were deployed in the fields north and west of town (beyond the modern observation tower on the ridge in the distance) as pickets to scout for rebel advance. That same afternoon the unit was routed after firing a volley and attempting to make a stand against veteran Confederate troops who were marching in advance of Lee’s army. The unit was forced to retreat to Harrisburg. One-hundred sixty men were captured, later paroled in the Gettysburg town square.

Although their service was brief and lackluster, the men of Pennsylvania College had done their part to help protect state and college. In the post-battle newspapers, the community had praise for the College students where once there was contempt.

On July 1, 1863, the advance forces of the Union 1st and 11th corps clashed unexpectedly with the advance units of the Army of Northern Virginia. To the west, on Oak Ridge, lay the 1st corps, and to the north ran the line of the 11th corps. Troops rushed across the grounds of the campus to stem the oncoming Confederate tide.

Captain Frederick Von Fritsch of the 11th corps recalled that, “one unfortunate officer was nailed by a six-pounder [cannon ball] against a big tree. I got hold of his bushy hair and pulled him down, as he presented a ghastly appearance.”

First Lieutenant Louis Fischer of a company of 11th corps engineers recalled that “after passing Pennsylvania College my pioneers were put to work to cut down the post fences between the college and Hagy’s house [north of campus]. The rebel infantry was coming down the Mummarsburg road at a run, about 600 yards from me.” Fischer witnessed some of the most intense fighting north of the campus, watching “the 13th Mass and 104th N.Y., who stood in an open meadow. [He] could see every man fall as he was hit until of the original line of blue was left only a thin line, with great gaps at that.”

By late afternoon the Confederates had gained the upper hand. One Confederate company commander recalled his order to his men, “Boys, do you see that stone wall yonder? I want you to drive the Yankees from behind it, and then you can rest.” Needing water, he recalled that he “saw a Yankee jump up [and] a cannon-ball struck him in the breast and cut him in two. I saw him fall apart. I picked up his canteen and says, ‘I reckon you are dead!’”
In 1847 Pennsylvania College hired a local black man, John “Jack” Hopkins, to work as the College’s janitor. His starting wages were a healthy $15.00 a month. Over time Hopkins duties increased, and so did his status on campus. In 1860, after having been charged with care of the College grounds as well as the buildings, Hopkins moved into a home that stood near where the steps to Musselman Library are today. Well known on campus, students jokingly referred to him as the “Vice-President” of the College. Hopkins’ duties included ringing the College bell, which tolled in the morning and evening, as well as to announce classes. His home appears to have been well outfitted, as the wife of the College president, Clara Baugher, recalled that the family “had a considerable quantity of bed clothing, carpeting, and household + kitchen furniture.” According to a claim form that Mrs. Hopkins filed for goods lost during the Confederate invasion, the furnishings also included “20 yds. Imported Carpet” and a clock with an estimated worth of $5.00 — a third of Hopkins’ weekly salary by the 1860s.

Like most of the black community in Gettysburg, the Hopkins family fled the area for fear of being captured and enslaved by the rebel army. At a faculty meeting on June 30, the day before the battle began, the duty of ringing the College bell was assigned to a tutor in Hopkins’ absence. During the battle, his home was used as one of the satellites to the main Confederate field hospital in Pennsylvania Hall, providing a respite from the battle and an aid station for Hopkins’ foes.
Completed in 1838, the College Edifice (now known as Pennsylvania Hall) was the primary building on campus at the time of the battle. The building — along with Linnaean Hall, which stood to the west where the “Sentinel” stands today — formed the academic and residential center of Pennsylvania College. It housed students’ dorms, recitation rooms and offices, and was by all accounts the largest building in town.

At the opening of the battle on the morning of July 1, the Union Signal Corps mounted the cupola in the College Edifice to survey the land and observe Confederate movements. Michael Colver, Class of 1863, returned to campus after the battle to find, “in and around the building, according to the estimate given us, seven hundred wounded rebels. When I came to my room, I saw it afforded ample accommodation for three — one on the bed and two on the floor. All rooms, halls, and hallways were occupied with the poor deluded sons of the South. The moans, prayers, and shrieks of the wounded and dying were heard everywhere.”

For a month after the battle, the College served as a Confederate hospital and prison camp. Surgeries took place on the portico of Penn Hall and in the surrounding fields, and the dead and dying lay scattered outside.

Released from class, students rushed to the aid of the wounded. Watkins wound up at the train station where he helped with medical care, but soon found the place overrun with Confederate soldiers. Like most of the students, he waited the battle out pinned behind enemy lines.


Henry Baugher, 1862. Photo courtesy of Special Collections, Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

After the two armies left town and the hospitals once again became residences and schools and churches, the citizens of Gettysburg were left with the task of burying the dead. The battle was among the greatest man-made disasters in American history, with 50,000 casualties and perhaps 3,000 to 5,000 dead horses and mules. The stench from the decomposing bodies was overwhelming, and most were initially buried in shallow graves where they lay. Not surprisingly, the proposal of a National Cemetery for the Union dead was heartily endorsed by the town and state government.

The dedication of the cemetery was held November 19, 1863. The featured orator of the day was the great Edward Everett, a Whig politician from Massachusetts who was considered the greatest orator of his day. David Wills, graduate of the class of 1851 and head of the committee planning the ceremony, invited President Lincoln on the late date of November 2 to “formally set apart these grounds to their Sacred use by a few appropriate remarks.” The President, to the surprise of the committee, accepted.

The presidential party arrived the evening before November 19 and “immediately proceeded to the residence of Hon. David Wills. In the meantime a great crowd had gathered, and vigorously called for a speech. Nothing would do, the President must come forth.” And he did.

Lincoln’s response to the crowd was short. “I do not appear before you for the purpose of [making a speech], and for several substantial reasons,” he said. “The most substantial of these is that I have no speech to make. In my position it is somewhat important that I should not say any foolish things.” A heckler replied, “If you can help it.” Lincoln displayed his quick wit, retorting “it very often happens that the only way to help it is to say nothing at all.”

Upon reaching the cemetery, the students found that the column had parted and they were dead center in front of the rostrum at the feet of the speakers. Everett’s speech lasted nearly two hours and included a detailed recounting of the battle, funeral customs and the state of affairs in the nation. Then came Lincoln.

“When Mr. Lincoln rose to speak the stillness was very noticeable... With a hand on each side of his manuscript (typewriter size), he spoke in a most deliberate manner, and with such forceful and articulate expression that he could be heard by all of that immense throng... There was no gesture except with both hands up and down, grasping the manuscript which he did not seem to need, as he looked at it seldom... On coming away I said to a classmate, ‘Well, Mr. Lincoln's speech was...appropriate...but I don’t think there was anything remarkable about it.’”

It was, of course, Lincoln’s speech that the students and the world would ultimately remember.