



9-25-2015

“What About Thad Stevens?": A Call to Action to Commemorate a Great Gettysburgian and an even Greater American

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Lauck, Jeffrey L., "“What About Thad Stevens?": A Call to Action to Commemorate a Great Gettysburgian and an even Greater American" (2015). *The Gettysburg Compiler: On the Front Lines of History*. 106.
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Abstract

I love Lincoln. He adorns my iPhone case. A poster of him hangs in my room. I occasionally wear his signature stovepipe hat around the house. Earlier this week, I wrote about the newly dedicated Abraham Lincoln statue outside of Stevens Hall. I now make an effort to walk by it every day on my way to class [*excerpt*].

Keywords

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, 150th Anniversary, Gettysburg, Civil War Memory, Sesquicentennial, Abraham Lincoln, Thaddeus Stevens, The Thaddeus Stevens Society

Disciplines

History | Political History | Public History | United States History

Comments

This blog post originally appeared in [The Gettysburg Compiler](#) and was created by students at Gettysburg College.

THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

“What About Thad Stevens?”: A Call to Action to Commemorate a Great Gettysburgian and an even Greater American

September 25, 2015

By Jeff Lauck '18

I love Lincoln. He adorns my iPhone case. A poster of him hangs in my room. I occasionally wear his signature stovepipe hat around the house. Earlier this week, I wrote about the newly dedicated [Abraham Lincoln statue outside of Stevens Hall](#). I now make an effort to walk by it every day on my way to class.

Regardless of my more-than-slight obsession with our 16th President, I couldn't help but feel a bit disappointed when I heard the space in front of Stevens Hall was to be the spot for another Lincoln statue. When I walked on campus for the first time this semester, I saw the new walkway and the granite pedestal, which very clearly would soon be the base for a new statue. Not having heard who the statue would depict, my mind flurried with possibilities. I quickly settled on the perfect candidate: Thaddeus Stevens. Thaddeus Stevens had, after all, provided the land for the college when it was first founded in 1832. He was an avid abolitionist and supporter of freedmen during Reconstruction. A statue seemed like a perfect way to recognize his efforts during the sesquicentennial years of Reconstruction. Most importantly, the statue was going to be right outside Stevens Hall, a building that was named for him. But Thaddeus Stevens was not the subject of this new statue. Rather, “The Great Emancipator” has taken a permanent seat on our campus.

As I've stated before, it's not that I don't like Lincoln, nor that I don't want to see his likeness every day. Lincoln simply already has an incredibly commanding presence in Gettysburg. Visitors and residents can see Lincoln in Union Square as they wait for a table at Blue & Gray; they can see him when they visit the public library; they can see him outside the Gettysburg Visitor Center. And now, they can see him on the Gettysburg College campus, too. Yet Stevens is relatively absent. Three years ago, a ceremony outside Stevens Hall dedicated a wayside marker to Thaddeus Stevens. The ceremony coincided with a temporary exhibit on Stevens in the Musselman Library Special Collections that featured such items as his cane and his now-famous wig. Aside from these small tokens of appreciation to Stevens' great work for the people of Gettysburg and the nation, Gettysburg College and the borough of Gettysburg have done very

little to commemorate one of our nation's first great pioneers in the field of civil rights and one of Gettysburg's greatest residents.



Where is the love for Thaddeus Stevens? M. P. Price. Portrait of Thaddeus Stevens, 1792-1868. Published in 1898. Library of Congress.

I am not the first CWI Fellow to embark on a “search for Stevens.” Both [Val Merlina, '14](#), and [Kevin Lavery, '16](#), have covered his legacy for the *Gettysburg Compiler* in years past. Nor am I the only person calling for Thaddeus Stevens to be portrayed as a statue. In 2008, the Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology in Lancaster, PA unveiled the nation's first ever [statue of Thaddeus Stevens](#). More recently, plans for a Stevens statue were announced to accompany the renovation of the [Stevens School](#) on 21st Street in Washington. In a letter to the editor of PennLive.com, Hampden Township resident Ron Skubecz called for Pennsylvania to use one of its [two allotted statues in the Capitol building](#) to represent Stevens. His point is underscored by the fact that Mississippi has used one of their two statue spaces to showcase the likeness of former Confederate President Jefferson Davis. There is even a movement to get the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee to issue a [Thaddeus Stevens stamp](#). Gettysburg College should join in this pro-Stevens movement by sponsoring a statue of their first supporter and the man who fought hardest in Congress for African American emancipation and equality.

If you are interested in learning more about Thaddeus Stevens or would like to get involved in preserving his memory, I encourage you to check out [The Thaddeus Stevens Society](#).

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