



1-2-2019

25 Years of Gettysburg

Olivia Ortman
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler>

 Part of the [Military History Commons](#), [Public History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Ortman, Olivia, "25 Years of Gettysburg" (2019). *The Gettysburg Compiler: On the Front Lines of History*. 322.
<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/322>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/322>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

25 Years of Gettysburg

Abstract

Amongst the Civil War community here at Gettysburg College, the movie *Gettysburg* is very much a part of our daily lives. Quotes are thrown back and forth in witty banter, the music is played for dramatic effect, and history professors are badgered to show clips in class. Since the movie fits so seamlessly into our experience here in Gettysburg, we often take it for granted. However, *Gettysburg* recently celebrated its 25th anniversary with a special showing at the Majestic Theater, with remarks from the director preceding the viewing. Although none of the Fellows attended, it got a lot of us thinking about our own experiences with the movie. Each one of us has been touched by *Gettysburg* in significant ways. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Gettysburg Movie, 25 years, Majestic Theater, Civil War Community, Fellows

Disciplines

History | Military 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

25 Years of Gettysburg

Edited by [Olivia Ortman '19](#)

Amongst the Civil War community here at Gettysburg College, the movie *Gettysburg* is very much a part of our daily lives. Quotes are thrown back and forth in witty banter, the music is played for dramatic effect, and history professors are badgered to show clips in class. Since the movie fits so seamlessly into our experience here in Gettysburg, we often take it for granted. However, *Gettysburg* recently celebrated its 25th anniversary with a special showing at the Majestic Theater, with remarks from the director preceding the viewing. Although none of the Fellows attended, it got a lot of us thinking about our own experiences with the movie. Each one of us has been touched by *Gettysburg* in significant ways.

[Ryan Bilger '19](#) –I knew the soundtrack of the movie *Gettysburg* before I knew the film itself. I remember being six years old on a trip with my parents, asking “where are we going?” again and again during the car ride until I saw a sign announcing the mileage to Gettysburg. In that moment, I knew exactly where we were going. My father is also a casual historian of the battle, and I had often looked at the colorful pictures and maps in his Civil War magazines. Gazing out over the fields of Pickett’s Charge that day, something clicked in my young brain, and thus was born a lifelong interest. Of course, at six years old my parents correctly decided that I was not quite ready to see the movie *Gettysburg* yet, so they gave me the soundtrack CD to listen to instead. They didn’t get it back any time soon.

The movie, when I finally saw it, was worth the wait and has been my constant companion since. I watch scenes like the 20th Maine’s bayonet charge or the climax of Pickett’s Charge when I need to get motivated for events. The poster for the film hangs at the foot of my bed at home. *Gettysburg*, for all its flaws, has remained one of my favorite movies over the years, and has acted as a gateway to my development as a historian. The film presents myriad examples of popular heroism, whether in the form of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain leading a bayonet charge or Winfield Scott Hancock exposing himself to enemy fire to inspire his own troops. However, many more heroes of the battle did not survive to tell their stories. Through the [Killed at Gettysburg](#) project, I’ve illuminated some of these stories of valor that do not receive nearly as much attention. Men like [Patrick O’Rorke](#), [Benjamin Crippin](#), and [Franz Benda](#) all had their own unique stories to be told, bringing greater color and nuance to the broader narratives of heroism in July 1863.

Though it may sound strange, *Gettysburg* has also given me a community. Living in the Civil War Era Studies House at Gettysburg College, I can exclaim “What’s happening to my boys?!” or grumble in a low voice about high ground and nearly everyone will instantly understand. We joke about Pickett’s ridiculous laugh when Longstreet tells him he will lead the assault on July 3 and bemoan the death of the glorious Buster Kilrain. The movie brings us together as a group in strange, yet often hilarious ways, and for that I am extremely grateful.



Seven-year-old Ryan Bilger exploring the Gettysburg battlefield.

Benjamin Roy '21 – I was born in Bethel, Maine and take great pride in bearing the identity of a Mainer. This is in no small part due to the movie *Gettysburg* and the story of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and the 20th Maine dramatized therein. From the first time I was exposed to the movie *Gettysburg* at five years old, I felt deeply connected to Chamberlain and the 20th Maine. I writhed in agony as the shrieking Alabamians charged and cheered when the Mainer valiantly resisted. My heart soared as Colonel Chamberlain charged down the hill, his Maine boys following close behind with fixed bayonets. My brother and I refought this struggle for Little Round Top on hillsides countless times. When my parents asked me, at age seven, whether I wanted to go to Disney World or Gettysburg, my choice was simple: Gettysburg.

The heroic story of the 20th Maine told in *The Killer Angels* and dramatized in *Gettysburg* is what ultimately inspired me to study the Civil War and pursue history as a career. My interest in Chamberlain and his men evolved into an interest in common

soldiers. The story has also instilled a sense of identity in me and a pride in coming from Maine myself, even though I now live in North Carolina. Even as I write this, a miniature bust of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain overlooks my desk, reminding me of where I come from, and where I hope to go. Whenever I need to be reminded of who I am and where I am from, I need only to watch *Gettysburg*.

Olivia Ortman '19 – My own journey with *Gettysburg* began much later than most of my fellow CWI writers. In my family, birthdays have always been very important. My sister and I were allowed to stay home on our birthdays and do anything we wanted. For me, that usually meant trips to Mystic Aquarium or the zoo. However, after learning about the Civil War in 8th grade, I asked my parents if my birthday day could be a birthday weekend. My parents agreed, and I headed off with my mom to spend Memorial Day weekend of 2011 in Gettysburg. It was one of the most magical weekends of my life, to say the least. (My mom still shudders when she thinks about traipsing every inch of battlefield behind me so I could investigate all, and I do mean all, the monuments.)

When I heard about the annual reenactment, I knew I had to come back to Gettysburg that July. The copy of *Gettysburg* the movie that I picked up in the giftshop of General Lee's Headquarters was how I convinced my father to make a family trip out of the reenactment. After getting home from Gettysburg, I put on the film and insisted my dad watch with me so I could show him where I'd been. By the end of the film, and to my sister's immense disappointment, I had convinced both parents that we needed to go to the July reenactment. That was the beginning of the past eight years for me. When we returned to Gettysburg, I discovered Gettysburg College and knew that I would one day attend. Throughout those years, whenever someone from home has asked me why Gettysburg or why history, *Gettysburg* was my way of explaining. The movie has given me a way to introduce others to my passion and let them see what I'm doing here at college.

Savannah Labbe '19 – Being from Maine, I appreciate how *Gettysburghighlights* Maine's contribution to the Civil War, which I feel is often underappreciated or even forgotten about. Maine contributed the largest number of soldiers proportionate to its population of any state in the Union. However, the movie *Gettysburg* has risen to such fame that it seems as if the 20th Maine was the only unit from Maine that made an important contribution to the battle. This is decidedly not the case. For example, the 16th Maine made a suicidal stand on the first day of the battle so that the Union First Corps could retreat. All of the 16th Maine soldiers were either captured or killed in order to allow the Union to fight another day. On the second day of the battle, the 17th and 19th Maine helped save the Union line after General Sickles overextended it.

The film also deifies the battle for Little Round Top and Chamberlain. The battle for Little Round Top comes across as a defining moment and a turning point in the Battle of Gettysburg. Viewers think that this was the moment that decided the outcome of the three-day fighting at Gettysburg, but that's not necessarily true. Chamberlain himself has taken on star qualities as the man who saved the day, but his conflicting reports on

the battle in real life call into question whether or not he himself actually gave his famous order to charge. While *Gettysburg* is an important film and it has its merits, it has become so dominant in popular culture that people have put Chamberlain and the 20th Maine on a pedestal, which does a disservice to the other Union units present at the battle. However, when I watched the movie *Gettysburg* for the first time in my 8th grade social studies class, I took this movie at face value. While the movie motivated me to study history and piqued my interest in the Civil War, I soon learned that it had a lot of flaws and was not necessarily an accurate depiction, making me want to explore the actual history of the battle more and the role that all Maine units played.

Cameron Sauers '21 – My introduction to the movie *Gettysburg* begins with Michael Shaara's novel *The Killer Angels*. I remember being infatuated with the novel, constantly reading it and carrying it with me when I was in 4th grade. I don't remember the first time I saw *Gettysburg*, but I do remember watching it constantly (my parents have seen it more times than they probably wished). This infatuation with the movie sky-rocketed in 5th grade when my local historic society brought in Patrick Falci (the actor who portrayed A.P. Hill) to speak at a special event and he encouraged me to pursue my passion for history and the Civil War. Almost 10 years later, I am on the front lines of history as a Fellow here at the CWI. I think it is safe to say that I would not be where I am today without the passion that *Gettysburg* awakened in me.

Not only has *Gettysburg* inspired my future, but it has also influenced the time I've spent with my family. My parents were forced to endure countless screenings of the movie, and never once complained or suggested that we watch something else. They saw my love for history growing before their eyes and supported it, buying me countless books and taking day trips to battlefields and re-enactments. When my parents recently visited during Family Weekend, they agreed when I wanted to take them to museums in town and on an impromptu battlefield tour. My parents didn't bat an eye when they heard the many *Gettysburg* quotes from me and my peers. *Gettysburg*, to me, is a reminder of my childhood and my passion for history. But more importantly, it's a reminder of the support and love my family has given me.