Tour it Up!

Gettysburg College and the Battle of Gettysburg

The history of Gettysburg College is forever connected with the Civil War battle that took place nearby from July 1 to July 3, 1863. And one student’s interest has sparked a new tour on the subject.
GETTYSBURG COLLEGE AND THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

Let the Tour Begin

"History is what brought me to Gettysburg," said John Rudy '07, a history major and Civil War Era studies minor who has been interested in the Battle of Gettysburg since fifth grade. That interest in history inspired him to research and create a walking tour of the campus that reveals the College's Civil War history.

Over the past year Rudy has led numerous groups on a 90-minute tour that extends from combat sites north of campus to Lincoln Square downtown, where Rudy tells listeners how students marched with townspeople to hear Abraham Lincoln deliver his Gettysburg Address at the National Cemetery.

The tour was developed as an independent study project under the guidance of history Prof. Allen Guelzo and Instructor Christina Ericson Hansen.

You are invited here to take Rudy's tour in the comfort of your living room.

Stop 1: Abolitionist Roots of Pennsylvania College

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, located fewer than ten miles from the Mason-Dixon line, experienced directly the unrest between slave owners and abolitionists, as escaped slaves regularly made their way through the area.

Samuel Simon Schmucker, founder of both Pennsylvania College and the Gettysburg Lutheran Theological Seminary, was a proponent of gradual, legal emancipation. He himself had owned slaves that 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. A strong opponent of slavery, Stevens was heard to toast early in his legal career, "The next President — May he be a Freeman, who never riveted fetters on a human slave."

Gettysburg College’s foundation and Lutheran roots all but guaranteed a stance for social reform on the slavery issue.

Stop 2: The Student Abolition Movement

By the late 1850s America was stumbling toward civil war, with emotions over the issue of slavery intensifying daily. Gettysburg was not spared from the heat. Being so close to the Maryland border where slavery was legal, the Gettysburg area was often a first stop for slaves escaping from the South.

Around this time Pennsylvania College students reported that some of their number had 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. With a headquarters on East Middle Street, a good distance from the campus, the B.D.’s were known for late-night parties and generally "godless" behavior.

The group might have passed into obscurity had it not been for widespread rumors that B.D. also harbored fugitives. The students quickly agreed, harboring a fugitive — "Black as the ace of spades — master after him."

The students then agreed to help a fugitive — "Black as..."

Step 3: The 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment

On the heels of his victory at the Battle of Chancellorsville in Northern 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 repeated false alarms about a rebel invasion throughout the previous two years, the state of Pennsylvania was slow in calling up emergency troops. Finally, in mid-June 50,000 volunteers were summoned to protect the commonwealth.

June 16 the 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 [paper]. 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 to 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. They lost 166 men captured, who were later paroled in the Gettysburg town square.

Stop 4: Battles Around Campus

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. The Pennsylvania College campus lay near the center of the arc formed by the Union forces. To the west, on Oak Ridge, lay the 1st corps, and to the north ran the line of the 11th corps. Troops northward rushed across the grounds of the campus to stem the oncoming Confederate tide.

Lt. Louis Fischer of a company of 11th corps engineers recalled that “after passing Pennsylvania College my pioneers were put to work clearing the post fences between the college and Hagy’s house [north of campus]. The rebel infantry was coming down the Mammusla 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 every man fall as he was hit until of the opening of the battle, the Union Signal Corps mounted the cupola in the College Edifice to survey the land and observe of the 11th corps was routed after firing a volley and then you can rest.” Needing water, he grasped the officer’s hand as a would be captor when he grasped the officer’s hand, sliced off the hand of a would be soldier. Like most of the students, he waited the battle out pinned behind enemy lines.

For a month after the battle, the College served as a Confederate hospital and prison camp, with surgeries taking place on the porticos of Penn Hall and in the grounds of the college. The battle was the greatest man-made disaster in American history, with 50,000 casualties and perhaps 3,000 to 5,000 dead horses and mules. The battle killed or wounded more than 50,000 men; 5500 were wounded and 4510 died in hospitals and prisons in the next 20 days. The battle was fought perhaps on a 13,000 acre area.

Stop 6: “Our Jack — Jack the Janitor”

In 1867 Pennsylvania College hired a local black man, John “Jack” Hopkins, to work as the College’s janitor. He died in a Union field hospital ten days later. As the fighting neared the College campus, Baugher retreated to his home, where he boarded 18 wounded soldiers during the three-day Confederate occupation of the town. A month after the battle, “Mr. Lincoln Comes to Gettysburg”

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 killed or wounded more than 50,000 men; 5500 were wounded and 4510 died in hospitals and prisons in the next 20 days. The battle was fought perhaps on a 13,000 acre area.

Stop 7: College Edifice: Field Hospital and Prison

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 near where the Sentinel statue stands today — served as the residential and re- dential center of Pennsylvania College. It housed students’ quarters, recreation rooms, and offices, and was by all accounts the largest building in town. On the evening of the opening of the battle, the Union Signal Corps mounted the cupola in the College Edifice to survey the land and observe Confederate movements. Rev. H.J. Watkins, Class of 1864, later recalled that “the U.S. Signal Corps created con siderable noise and aroused suspicions. Amid repeated failures on part of the class, our professor [President Henry L. Baugher] remarked, ‘we will close and see what is going on, for you know nothing about the lesson anymore.’”

Released from class, students rushed to the aid of the wounded. Watkins ran to the train station to help with medical care, but soon found himself face to face with Confederate soldiers. Like most of the students, he waited the battle out pinned behind enemy lines.

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Stop 8: President Baugher

The “White House” — today, the Norris–Wells house — was built in 1866 to house College President Henry L. Baugher and his family. Even before the armies of the Union and Confederacy set foot on campus, Baugher had experienced the destruction of the Civil War. His son, Nesbit, an 1853 graduate of Pennsylvania College, had enlisted near the beginning of the war in the 4th Illinois Volunteers. Baugher, Lieutenant of Company B, died shortly after the Battle of Shiloh in 1862. He had been wounded seven times, and during the battle the enemy lines passed beyond him. Fortunately, Union forces were able to remove him from the field so that he was not taken prisoner and returned to the Union field hospital ten days later.

The presidential party arrived the evening before November 19 and “immediately proceeded to the resi dence of Hon. David Wills.” The next morning a procession gathered in the town square. Philip Bixle, a College sophomore at the time, recalled later that “the students of the college were... assigned the inopportune position of tailenders... we thought we should find ourselves on the outskirts of the crowd when we reached the cemetery... We assembled on York Street in front of the present-day Gettysburg National Bank... It gave us a most excellent opportunity to see the President... This was compensation for being tail-enders.”

Many a regret was expressed, as we... saw the thousands ahead of us, that we... surely would miss the speeches.”