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*A Field Guide to Gettysburg: Experiencing the Battlefield
through Its History, Places, and People* by Carol Reardon and
Tom Vossler (review)

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Carol Reardon and Tom Vossler, *A Field Guide to Gettysburg: Experiencing the Battlefield through Its History, Places, and People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). 464 pp. ISBN 978-0-8078-3525-8.

A mere decade after the Battle of Gettysburg, battlefield devotee John Bachelder alluded to a recent phenomenon when he penned *Gettysburg: What to See, and How to See It*. The crossroads town had been raised from “rural obscurity, to world-wide celebrity.”¹ No tourist, Bachelder argued, “considers his study of countries complete unless the famous fields of historical battles . . . are visited and studied.” Ever since the battle concluded, individuals ranging from high schoolers to admirals have traversed the fields of Gettysburg to seek comprehension and meaning from what occurred there.

Despite the plethora of histories written about the engagement at Gettysburg, few battlefield guidebooks can accommodate both experts and novices. Carol Reardon and Tom Vossler’s book, *A Field Guide to Gettysburg*, remedies this predicament. Harnessing their combined knowledge of decades of study, the authors present a revealing analysis designed specifically for those wishing to trek the roads and trails of Gettysburg National Military Park. Categorized by thirty-five tour stops, this book allows readers to examine the battlefield with “natural thematic breaks,” while offering each visitor a sense of flexibility.

Contrary to the typical “You are here; this is what you are seeing” formula of historical guidebooks, *A Field Guide to Gettysburg* offers impeccable insight into the episodes of combat, the individual units involved, and the important commanders who made the pivotal tactical decisions that influenced the larger battle. The book moves beyond the traditional narrative of gray and blue bars moving across maps, taking into account the personal dramas and tragedies produced by the melee. The section within each tour stop entitled “Who Fell Here?” adds appropriately somber human-interest stories that reveal the all-consuming nature of combat. Readers will learn about such ordinary personalities as Cpl. Joseph Hammel, a member of the 149th Pennsylv-

nia’s color guard. Hammel languished from a groin wound for two painful months before dying in agony in September 1863. These vignettes serve as potent reminders of the grim realities of the Civil War.

Reardon and Vossler also illustrate how local civilians were pulled into the maelstrom. Park visitors who utilize this book will undoubtedly relate to the plight of families who once called the battlefield their home. Through these perspectives, readers are introduced to forgotten figures such as Ephraim Hanaway, a farmer and mason who owned much of Little Round Top and used that site for timber.

Building upon the scholarly insight achieved by Reardon’s *Pickett’s Charge in History and Memory*, each tour stop concludes with a section called “What Did They Say about It Later?” This feature not only allows readers to contemplate the power of primary sources but also delves into the heated disputes by veterans over postwar memory and politics.

More field friendly than the works of Noah Andre Trudeau or Stephen Sears and more in-depth than a customary battlefield audio tour, *A Field Guide to Gettysburg* offers an ideal compass for those desiring to immerse themselves within the vivid landscapes and richly complex sagas that constitute the history of the Battle of Gettysburg.

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¹ John Badger Bachelder, *Gettysburg: What to See, and How to See It* (Boston: privately printed, 1890) 2–3.