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Remembrance Day

If You Want to Go

SONNY FULKS

It's perhaps the most poignant time of all to visit the battlefield, and if you hesitate to go for lack of fact and knowledge, don't worry. There'll be some just like you who go every year!

This past November in a popular eatery named O'Rourke's, located on Steinwehr Avenue, I was enjoying a beverage during a respite from a day on the battlefield, weary from toting a bag full of Nikons.

As I sat at the end of the bar, hydrating myself, a charming couple from Indiana introduced themselves and asked of my business.

I shared, of course, that I was in Gettysburg for the weekend, to photograph sites and scenes of Remembrance Weekend, the annual celebration of Lincoln's address in 1863 and the consecration of the national cemetery, the final resting place for the 3,500 dead, casualties of the three-day battle.

One visitor described what you see in Gettysburg during the weekend as “eye candy” for the amateur historian.

The color and accoutrements are breathtaking, the commitment moving, of those who come back yearly to march in the parade.

"We come every year," gushed Jenny, her enthusiasm evident. "This makes eight years in a row."

"So you know a lot about the battle, about Gettysburg?" I asked.

Sheepishly, she smiled and answered, "I really don't. Tell you the truth, it was so terrible I still can't believe it happened."

And sobering for a moment, she added, "I can't believe that anyone let it happen, even back then."

I suppose if you asked a cross section of the annual visitors to Gettysburg on the second weekend in November, you'd get more than a few who'd confess that they come for the spectacle, rather than the sobering fact of commemoration and the truth about why Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, even matters.

In fact, I always ask, because I've learned to appreciate the fact that most people come just to have a good time. They've heard about Remembrance

Weekend from someone else who told them, "Go. You'll have a good time."

To their credit, many do visit the visitor center on Baltimore Pike, seeking information and understanding about the events of July 1, 2, and 3, 1863.

"The fact is," said Jenny's companion at O'Rourke's, "they don't teach much about the Civil War, or Gettysburg, in school anymore. If you want to know, you have to go look for it yourself."

Many of the officials of the annual event will tell you that Remembrance Day weekend has existed since Lincoln's visit, 153 years ago. And while there's merit to that statement, perhaps, in truth the event dates back to an official act of Congress in 1949, when the "consecration" anniversary of the national cemetery was resolved to be "Dedication Day." Since that time, the event has evolved from local significance to broader recognition among the ever-

A focal point of Remembrance Day weekend, living historians frequent Evergreen Cemetery to pay tribute to family veterans who fought at Gettysburg.

expanding community of historians and curious onlookers.

"It's eye candy for the amateur historian," said Thomas Hardy, a Hagerstown resident and spectator who stood along the parade route of living historians last November. "Where else would one get such a grand sense of appreciation for a Civil War soldier and his daily routine?"

And that's true, as thousands of reenactors from units Union and Confederate make the two-mile-

long parade along Baltimore Street, through the heart of Old Gettysburg, before veering south, down Steinwehr Avenue. The color, the music, and the commitment is every bit as authentic as what you might have witnessed in a grand review a century and a half ago. It is not—I repeat *not*—unusual to see moist eyes or a streaming tear from those tromping to the beat of the fifes and drums.

Thousands line the streets, waiting for hours sometimes, to take in the pageantry and emotion.

"I do this on behalf of my great grandfather," said Darwin, a living historian from Virginia, marching in a Union outfit. "He's buried with the New York boys up in the cemetery. It's very emotional for me, even though I never knew him personally. But I know him through his service, and I know him through my relationship with this event. I try to come every year. I hate to miss it."

He's not alone. Many come days before the Saturday parade to absorb the history and their own relationship with a family member resting in Evergreen Cemetery, those who,

as Lincoln detailed, gave the last full measure of their devotion to duty and country. If you go, take the time to walk the cemetery yourself, and observe as they find their ancestors among the rows and linger to show their appreciation.

Some have ancestral enlistment papers and letters sent home to anxious family members prior to the actual battle itself.

Others carry actual personal effects handed down from generation to generation—a Bible; a

Just south of Pumping Station Road sits the Sachs bridge, a beautiful out-of-the-way spot and favorite of ghost hunters.

If you're a fan of the movie *Gettysburg*, you might recognize this copse of tree on Pumping Station Road used for the filming of Pickett's charge.

pair of gloves; or, in one case, the letter that an Ohio visitor's family received following the battle revealing the bad news of how their soldier had given his life at Gettysburg.

The weekend is a boon for local merchants; and to their credit, the businesses do everything in their power to make visitors feel welcome and appreciated.

Here is a list of things you must see and do.

Lincoln Diner

The diner is located downtown across from the old station where Lincoln stepped off the train. The coffee is plentiful, the food is dependable and fortifying, and frequent visitors get to know restaurant personnel who have worked there for decades.

David Wills House

Downtown on the southeast corner of the roundabout, it is the site of Lincoln's lodging the night before his address at the cemetery. The artful pre-

sentation and the many original furnishings make it hard to curb your imagination.

A Drive West on Chambersburg Pike to the Cashtown Inn

A drive west on Chambersburg Pike, the site of Lee's bivouac on June 30, 1863, is now a working restaurant and sleeping place for the weary battlefield stalker who covets authenticity with his lodging.

Visitor Center

Located south on Baltimore Pike, it's a marvelous update of the old one that stood across from the cemetery. An excellent and informative resource that is very well put together, the center has good people working there.

Evergreen Cemetery

Always busy, it's even more so on the night when they present the luminaries at the headstones of the fallen. It's chilling, emotional.

O'Rorke's Tavern

There are a number of favorite watering spots in Gettysburg, but few are as well regarded and well known as O'Rorke's, named in honor of the New York soldier killed on the summit of Little Round Top on July 2. You're liable to meet anyone there, and the food always gets a nod.

Dobbin House

For those who want an even more colloquial dining experience, the Dobbin House is one of the oldest in town and one of the best regarded. And the food never disappoints. Mid-nineteenth-century decor and the landmark's symbolism only add to your visit. It offers fine dining for two or for the entire family. And then there's the battlefield itself, with what seems to be an increasing number of newcomers each year making their first visit.

While I certainly suggest seeing all the better-known landmarks—Little Round Top, Devil's Den, the Pennsylvania Monument, the Angle—I have my own list of interesting yet less visited spots that lend themselves not only to a good story but to good photography as well.

Sach's Bridge

Out on Pumping Station Road, the bridge is a frequent hangout for videographers trying to film a ghost sighting. Scenic, historic, and beautiful.

Scenes from the Movie *Gettysburg*

A bit farther west on Pumping Station Road from the bridge, you'll find the barn where they filmed the scene where Longstreet (played by Tom Berenger) visited a wounded John Bell Hood (Patrick Gorman). He should have gone to the right!

The Copse of Trees from the Movie

Just across the road from the barn is a long, grassy slope that leads up to an unofficial Copse of Trees used for the filming of Pickett's charge in the movie. It makes for an interesting walk in good weather, but always . . . always . . . always check yourself for ticks when you get back to the car.

The 5th New Hampshire Monument

Tucked away in the trees just north of Devil's Den and adjacent to the Wheatfield, the monument

marks the spot where Col. Edward Cross was killed by a Confederate sniper. Historians have well detailed this spot, and you can visualize the point from where the fatal shot was fired and where the sniper was subsequently killed himself by an equally alert Union marksman. A good guide can really make this spot come to life.

Benner's Hill

East of town and on the way out to the scene of the big cavalry fight on July 3 at East Cavalry Field, this hill marks the spot where Confederate Joseph Latimer tried to give artillery support to the Confederate infantry assault on Cemetery Hill on the evening of July 2. It was not a good position, and Latimer's guns were destroyed by return Union fire. Latimer himself became a casualty, dying from his wounds several days after the battle. Not one of the most visited spots on the field, it's not on any of the automobile tours, but it does give you a great perspective of Culp's Hill, the cemetery, and Union positions on the high ground.

The Other Spangler Farm

Toward the west, just off the Taneytown Road, you can find the George Spangler farm, where Gen. Lewis Armistead was brought to die in a Union hospital. The barn is currently under renovation, but the summer kitchen where Armistead is said to have died is a very chilling destination. Tucked away out of site from the rest of the battlefield, this is a great photography spot.

If you're going to Remembrance Weekend for the first time, veteran visitors will advise you to come early so that you can spend more reflective time. The fall season is gorgeous. Side trips to the many local fruit farms are fun (Adams County is apple country).

And you'll find that when you sit down in some of the places I've recommended, you tend to stay there for a while.

If you're a photographer, there's no such thing as bad weather. Even when it rains, it lends mood and a somber appeal to your work, accentuating the facts of what happened in Gettysburg 152 years ago. It only adds to the remembrance.

If you want to go!