

Reliving the Civil War Battle of Gettysburg, and discovering an Illinois connection

BY KATHERINE RODEGHIER
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The first shot of the bloodiest battle of the Civil War was fired by a man from DuPage County. Lt. Marcellus E. Jones of the 8th Illinois Cavalry was on patrol outside Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, looking for the enemy. At 7:30 a.m. July 1, 1863, he spied a cloud of dust a half mile away and rightly concluded the Confederates were coming. He sent word to Union forces massed a mile behind him, rested a carbine on a fence and fired.

The Battle of Gettysburg had begun.

Years later, Jones returned to the spot to place a simple stone pillar hewn from a quarry in Naperville. The First Shot marker stands today a few feet from U.S. Route 30, the Lincoln Highway.

Touring the battlefield

The marker was the first stop on a tour of Gettysburg National Military Park led by licensed battlefield guide Therese Orr. Before firing the shot, she told us Jones quipped, "Give me the pleasure of opening this ball." It was the sort of anecdote that adds juice to the dry text of his story. There would be more as she drove my husband and me around the 6,000-acre national park. Battlefield guides undergo rigorous tests before they're licensed to lead tours, usually driving the visitors' own cars. Their knowledge of the battle is encyclopedic. Civil War buffs salivate over their depiction of the who, what, when, where, why and how of every movement during the battle. Those, like me, whose interests don't run as deep, revel in bits of trivia likely to score points on "Jeopardy."

Like this one: A Union officer key in the battle at Little Round Top survived the war to take over and complete his father's work on New York City's Brooklyn Bridge. And this: Sculptor



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

A statue of Gen. G.K. Warren overlooks the battlefield from the Union position at Little Round Top in Gettysburg National Military Park.

Gutzon Borglum interrupted his work on Mount Rushmore to design and sculpt the battlefield's North Carolina monument depicting infantrymen poised to join the fight.

These state monuments stand scattered like chess pieces across the ridges and fields where the battle took place July 1-3, 1863. The Virginia Monument places Robert E. Lee astride his horse overlooking the battle from his position on Seminary Ridge. Cannons were melted down to form a winged victory figure atop the Pennsylvania Monument, the battlefield's largest. It stands on Cemetery Ridge, where Union forces held sway.

Orr led us from one monument to another, re-creating battle scenes and

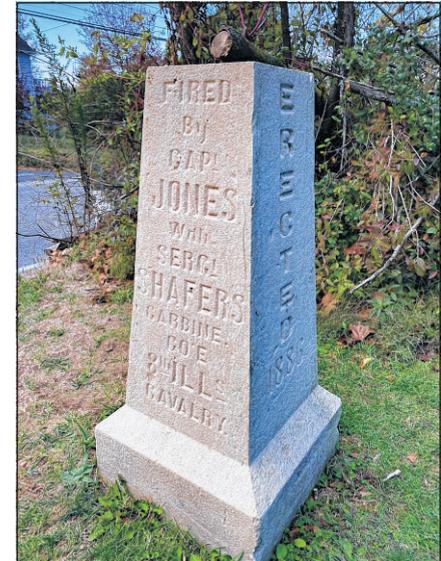


COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Cannons at Gettysburg National Military Park line the ridges occupied by Union and Confederate forces during the Battle of Gettysburg.

spicing our tour with tales of heartbreak and valor. Men crouching in wheat fields died from shots to the head and shoulders when they rose to make their way forward, she said. While describing Pickett's Charge, Orr had us imagine the mile-wide line of

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COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

A DuPage County soldier fired the first shot in the Battle of Gettysburg and returned years later to place a limestone pillar quarried in Naperville to mark the spot.

If you go

Destination Gettysburg:
destinationgettysburg.com/

Where to stay:

The Gaslight Inn, built in 1872, is a nine-room bed-and-breakfast located a block from Lincoln Square in downtown Gettysburg. thegaslightinn.com/

Where to eat:

Dobbin House Tavern, built in 1776, is the oldest building in Gettysburg and was the first station on the Underground Railroad north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Costumed waitstaff serve colonial and continental cuisine. dobbinhouse.com/

Sign of the Buck sources ingredients from local farms for its New American menu inspired by French cuisine. signofthebuck.com/

O'Rorke's Family Eatery is an Irish pub. ororkes.com/

Mason Dixon Distillery is a small-batch distillery serving comfort food. masondixondistillery.com/

Confederates walking out of the trees, advancing shoulder-to-shoulder toward an open field. Thousands were picked off by Union artillery and rifle fire as they climbed rail fences below where we stood.

Bloodiest battle

The Battle of Gettysburg had the highest number of casualties in the Civil War: 51,116 killed, wounded and missing after three days of fighting. Two-thirds died from illness and disease. Half the soldiers were farmers who volunteered to join their state regiments. They often fought without enough food and water after marching for hours in temperatures reaching 87 degrees, with a heat index of 107.

While a private tour with a licensed guide gives the most in-depth and personalized way to experience the battlefield, you can also tour by bus, horseback or carriage, as well as on foot with a walking tour.

If you choose to go on your own, the National Park Service has a map and a smartphone app with an audio tour covering 16 stops.

The park's visitor center is a good place to start. If you're thinking of a room with a few dusty display cases and a rack of brochures, you would be mistaken. The nonprofit Gettysburg Foundation operates the center in partnership with the National Park Service, and its support shows in several excellent ticketed experiences.

After the 20-minute film "The New Birth of Freedom," narrated by Morgan Freeman, visitors are led to the Cyclorama, a 360-degree oil painting made in 1884 and restored to the tune of \$13 million. Longer than a football field and as tall as a four-story building, it depicts Pickett's Charge, enhanced by sound and light effects.

The center's Gettysburg Museum of the American Civil War displays one of the largest collections of Civil War relics in the world in exhibits, interactive displays and multimedia presentations. In the new Ticket to the Past virtual reality experience, you'll don



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

A monument honoring the 8th Illinois Cavalry stands on the battlefield in Gettysburg National Military Park. Both Union and Confederate states placed monuments on the battlefield where their soldiers fought.

headgear to immerse yourself in the lives of people who lived during the battle and its aftermath.

Fighting in town

When you arrive in downtown Gettysburg, you might ask, "Where's the battlefield?" The answer: You're standing on it. Fighting swept through the town, terrorizing residents, but remarkably, only one civilian was killed. A stray bullet struck 20-year-old Jennie Wade while she kneaded dough in her sister's kitchen. The building still stands as the Jennie Wade House Museum.

For a deeper understanding of the battle's impact on residents, visit the Gettysburg Beyond the Battle Museum. In its immersive "Caught in the Crossfire" experience, you'll share in the terror of a family trapped in their home as two armies fought outside. The blast and flash of artillery fire fill the room. It actually shakes.

In 1863, the population of Gettysburg numbered about 2,400 inhabitants. It took years for it to recover from the battle involving an estimated



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

Jennie Wade, the only civilian killed in the Battle of Gettysburg, was shot while kneading bread in the kitchen of what is now the Jennie Wade House Museum.

165,000 soldiers. Wheat fields were trampled, barns stood empty, livestock was lost, water contaminated. Every church and public building became a hospital.

"We had a humanitarian crisis here. There was no FEMA, no Jake from State Farm," said Rosanne Zajko, a Gettysburg Licensed Town Guide who led us on a walking tour past buildings still pockmarked

by bullets. She pointed to an artillery round embedded in the brick façade of an ice cream shop.

Dealing with the dead became an overwhelming task. Soldiers were hastily buried in graves so shallow body parts protruded after a heavy rain. And then there were the rooting hogs.

Prominent attorney David Wills spearheaded the creation of a cemetery to rebury the remains. He invited President Abraham Lincoln to its dedication ceremony at the last minute and asked that he make "a few appropriate remarks," Zajko said.

They loved Lincoln

When word spread Lincoln would attend, 15,000 people greeted his train. They partied from tavern to tavern while the president revised his speech in an upstairs bedroom in the Wills' home. The next morning, Nov. 19, 1863, a parade accompanied Lincoln to Soldiers' National Cemetery. The keynote speaker, famous orator Edward Everett, was "the Taylor Swift" of his day, Zajko said. He spoke for

two hours. Then Lincoln rose, pulled a paper from his pocket, and spoke for two minutes. His words were followed by solemn silence. Lincoln said he thought his speech went poorly, but today, few remember what Everett said, while every school child has heard "The Gettysburg Address."

More than 3,500 U.S. soldiers are buried in Soldiers' National Cemetery, now part of Gettysburg National Cemetery. You'll find graves laid out in a semicircle around a central monument, including those of the 8th Illinois Cavalry.

Mustered in St. Charles under the command of Col. John Farnsworth, the regiment sent 491 men into the Battle of Gettysburg, including Jones, who fired the first shot. During the three days of fighting, the 8th suffered only one confirmed death. Pvt. David Dffenbaugh from Freeport, an orderly for the regiment's commander, was wounded in battle on July 1 and died in a regimental hospital the same day. His name is inscribed on the Illinois Monument standing on the battlefield on Reynolds Avenue. He was 27.

Rosanne Zajko, a Gettysburg Licensed Town Guide, on how fighting swept through the town of Gettysburg

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• Information for this article was gathered on a research trip sponsored by Destination Gettysburg.