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Eyewitness at Gettysburg

The battle and the times are vivid in a restored painting and new museum, officially opening this weekend.

By Amy Worden

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GETTYSBURG, Pa. - Imagine you have a front-row seat for one of the most dramatic battles ever fought on U.S. soil. You're surrounded by the bloody battle scene known as Pickett's Charge - fallen soldiers, galloping horses, smoke from cannon fire, a blur of blue and gray.

> It's the climax of the three-day Battle of Gettysburg, with Confederate Gen. George Pickett's soldiers unleashing a full-frontal attack on Maj. Gen. George Meade's Union forces entrenched on Cemetery Ridge.

> The charge will spring to life again starting Friday, with the unveiling of the newly restored, 377-foot-long, 42-foot canvas in the round, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, just as it did when French artist Paul Philippoteaux introduced it in Boston in 1884.

> "The artist tried to make it as accurate as he possibly could, taking photographs of the battlefield and interviewing veterans," says Robert C. Wilburn, president of the Gettysburg Foundation. "Veterans wept when they saw it - we have letters from them saying it was as close to the actual battle as they had seen."

> The painting, displayed in a new cyclorama, is the showpiece of the \$103 million Gettysburg Museum and Visitor Center that opened in April but is celebrating its grand opening next weekend.

> Those attractions, coupled with the restoration of historic battlefields, are the most dramatic changes by the National Park Service and private Gettysburg Foundation aimed at teaching visitors about a defining moment in American history.

> In the 139,000-square-foot visitor center, designed to accommodate two million visitors a year, you can see Robert E. Lee's camp desk; Confederate Gen. Jubal Early's note to the Gettysburg Borough Council days before the battle, demanding money, food and clothing; and the 150th Pennsylvania Infantry flag that was carried into the first day of battle. There's also an

embroidered table runner fashioned from a tent canvas, along with weaponry and soldiers' personal items.

> Interactive exhibits let you track troop movements and hear the diaries and letters of soldiers and citizens read aloud.

> One gallery is dedicated solely to the Gettysburg Address - a kind of meditation room for one of the great works of American oratory. You can hear actor Sam Waterston read the famous words President Abraham Lincoln delivered here, five months after the epic battle, to dedicate the Soldiers Cemetery.

> Only about 7 percent of the museum's 300,000 artifacts and 700,000 documents will be exhibited at one time. But the items are displayed in context, in 12 themed galleries running from pre-Civil War tensions through the battle and its aftermath to modern-day preservation efforts. The center, an oversize replica of a Pennsylvania farmstead, stands about a mile from the old visitor center and, most important, well off the field of battle.

> Rounding out the museum experience is a 22-minute film, *A New Birth of Freedom*, narrated by actor Morgan Freeman. With stunning cinematography and a wonderful collage of images, the movie gives a superb overview of the Civil War era - the politics, the major battles, Lincoln's role, and the turmoil of Reconstruction.

> It also whets the appetite for seeing the battlefield firsthand. You can explore the 6,000-acre park on foot, bus, bicycle, horseback - even by Segway. For a personal tour with the most knowledgeable historians, hire a licensed battlefield guide.

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> On a recent Sunday morning, guide Ralph Siegel took me to Barlow Knoll, where Early's Confederate troops crashed through a weak Union line on the battle's first day.

> The guide, a former journalist from Mercerville, N.J., also pointed out the spot where Union First Lt. Bayard Wilkeson was mortally wounded that day. Wilkeson's father, Samuel Wilkeson Jr., a newly appointed correspondent for the New York Times, arrived the next day and filed these heart-wrenching words:

> "Who can write the history of a battle whose eyes are immovably fastened upon . . . the dead body of an oldest born, crushed by a shell in a position where a battery should never have been sent, and abandoned to death in a building where surgeons dared not to stay?"

> Siegel is a member of the Association of Licensed Battlefield Guides, which says it is the oldest such group in the country. It was formed in 1915, when historians noticed scam artists feeding tourists bogus stories about the battle.

> The guides, who undergo a rigorous testing process and possess encyclopedic knowledge of the battle, hop into your car and direct you to various high points, giving a broad overview of the three-day conflict. They can also customize a tour, tailoring it, for example, to a particular state's role in the battle.

> Siegel said guides are prepared to answer profound questions - "Was the war about

slavery?" - and the mundane - "Where are the redcoats?"

> We rolled past one of his favorite sites, known as the Brickyard - "the lost part of the battlefield" - where 200 Union soldiers were captured and sent to the dreaded Confederate prison at Andersonville, Ga.

> We continued past the newly replanted Peach Orchard, site of the bloodiest three hours of the battle, with 18,000 casualties. Siegel pointed out the North Carolina monument by American sculptor Gutzon Borglum, better known for his work at Mount Rushmore.

> Then it was on to Little Round Top, where Col. Joshua Chamberlain and the 20th Maine Infantry beat back a Confederate assault. It "could not have been designed better for carnage," the guide said.

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> Restoration of the battlefield to its Civil War appearance matches the dramatic upgrades in the Visitor Center and Cyclorama Building.

> The Park Service has razed a car dealership and motel that blighted the battlefield. And it is planning to remove the old visitor center and asphalt parking lot that for decades have defaced Ziegler's Grove - the position on the northern end of Cemetery Ridge held by Gen. Alexander Hays' division of the Union Second Corps.

> The Park Service also wants to remove the old Cyclorama Building, calling it an eyesore and an obstruction of the view from Cemetery Ridge to the field of Pickett's Charge. But the Recent Past Preservation Network has filed a federal lawsuit to save the building designed by renowned architect Richard Neutra in 1961.

> That building's leaky roof and poor climate control, plus years of neglect, damaged Philippoteaux's magnificent oil artwork, which hung in a Newark, N.J., department store before its unveiling here in 1913. This cyclorama actually is the second version of the painting - the original went on display in Chicago in 1883 - and it included a three-dimensional diorama and a sky that disappeared into an overhead canopy.

> Those features, lost for more than a century, have been re-created in the five-year, \$15 million conservation project, the costliest effort of its kind.

> Last year, the four-story canvas was relocated in 13 sections to a Virginia studio, where artists painstakingly stitched together pieces of canvas, cleaned faded sections of paint with tiny swabs, and re-created missing sections of canvas.

> "The difficulty was in the size and scale of the work," says David Olin of Olin Conservation Inc. "Whether cleaning or mending canvas, it was tedious, time-consuming work; multiply that one-thousandfold."

> It has been rehung in its new home with the proper canvas tension and curvature to produce the full ground-to-sky effect that Philippoteaux and his team of 20 artists envisioned - their version of Imax.

> Starting Friday, you can see it not from the bottom, as visitors have done for 40 years, but at a level closer to the horizon. And you'll see a 15-minute narrated show with smoke and strobe lights to simulate artillery fire.

> While you're marveling at the detail of the work, see whether you can find the spot where Philpoteaux took a few strokes of artistic license, painting himself into the battle as a Union officer leaning casually against a tree.

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Gettysburg: From the Battlefield to the Borough

> The Museum and Visitor Center at Gettysburg National Military Park is open daily except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Day.

> Hours

> 8 a.m.-6 p.m., September and October and April and May; 8-5, November-March; 8-7, June-August.

> Admission

> Tickets to see the 22-minute film *New Birth of Freedom*, narrated by Morgan Freeman, and the Cyclorama cost \$12 for adults, \$10 for children 6-12, and are free for younger children.

> The Visitor Center and Museum are free, but the nonprofit Gettysburg Foundation has proposed a combined admission for the center and museum, the film and the Cyclorama: \$7.50 for adults, \$6.50 for children, and \$5 for school groups.

> Touring the battlefield would continue to be free.

> Battlefield tours

> Personal tour with a licensed battlefield guide

> \$55 for a car with up to six people, 21

2 hours. Guides are available at the Visitor Center on a first-come, first-served basis, or by reservation - phone: 1-877-874-2478; e-mail: reservations@gettysburgfoundation.org.

> Bus tour with guide

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\$25.95, adults; \$15.50, children. Available at park Visitor Center.

> CD car tour

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Available at museum bookstore for \$19.99.

> Outside the park

> **Tours** of the borough of **Gettysburg** focus on civilian life during the three-day battle. They depart daily, April through November, from the **Gettysburg Hotel** on Lincoln Square.

> **Hours:** 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

> **Prices:** \$10 for adults; \$8, children 5-12 and seniors 62 or older.

> **Phone:** 717-339-6161

> **Eisenhower National Historic Site**

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The 690-acre farm where Dwight and Mamie Eisenhower spent much of their later life, keeping a show herd of black Angus cattle and hosting world leaders such as Nikita Khrushchev, Winston Churchill and Charles DeGaulle. The home has most of its original furnishings

> **Hours:** 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

> **Admission:** Adults, \$6.50; children, \$4. Buy tickets and get a shuttle at the park Visitor Center.

> **Info:** 717-338-9114; www.nps.gov/eise

> **Historic Gettysburg**

> **Railroad Station**

> 35 Carlisle St.; 717-337-8233

> Take a free tour of the station where Abraham Lincoln arrived on

> Nov. 18, 1863, to make

> his famous address the next day. Open daily, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

> Places to eat

> **The Pub & Restaurant**

> 20-22 Lincoln Square

> 717-334-7100

> www.the-pub.com

> Menu has something for

> everyone in the family, from salads, wraps, burgers and

> pizza to pasta, steaks and seafood. Full bar offers draft microbrews.

> **Dobbin House Tavern**

> 89 Steinwehr Ave.

> 717-334-2100

> www.dobbinhouse.com

> In a restored stone house built in 1776 by the Rev. Alexander Dobbin. Pub fare in the Springhouse Tavern and full entrees upstairs

> in the more formal Alexander Dobbin Dining Rooms.

> Places to stay

> **Best Western**

> **Gettysburg Hotel**

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One Lincoln Square

> 1-866-378-1797

> www.hotelgettysburg.com

> Located in the heart of town, it opened in 1922. At the height of the Cold War, the hotel served as President Eisenhower's national operations center while he recuperated from a heart attack at his nearby farm.

> Features 119 guestrooms, a full-service restaurant, and pub. Room rates from \$94 to \$400.

> **Doubleday Inn**

> 104 Doubleday Ave.

> 717-334-9119

> www.doubledayinn.com

> You can't get any closer to the battlefield than this. Union and Confederate soldiers clashed here.

> Built in 1939 as a private residence, it has nine guestrooms, some with panoramic views of the battlefield. Rates: \$109-\$159 per night; includes breakfast

> More information

> **Gettysburg National Military Park**

> 717-334-1124; www.nps.gov/gett

> **Gettysburg Foundation**

>

1-866-889-1243

> www.gettysburgfoundation.org

> **Main Street Gettysburg**

>

717-337-3491

> www.mainstreetgettysburg.com

> **Convention & Visitors Bureau**

> 717-334-6274; <http://gettysburg.travel>

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'Address' manuscript to pay visit

> One of only five known manuscripts of the Gettysburg Address will be on display Friday through Sunday for the debut of the cyclorama painting and grand opening of the Museum and Visitor Center.

> The manuscript is known as the "Everett copy" because President Lincoln gave it to Edward Everett, whose two-hour speech preceded Lincoln's famously brief address on Nov. 19, 1863.

> It is on loan from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Ill.

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Find this article at:

http://www.philly.com/philly/travel/20080921_Eyewitness_at_Gettysburg.html?adString=ph.travel/travel;!category=travel;&randomOrd=101608120101&viewAll=y&c=y

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