



PRESIDENTS COME TO GETTYSBURG TO HONOR AND TO LEARN

Gettysburg is the site of the largest battle of the American Civil War and the largest battle ever fought in North America. But the little town of Gettysburg is equally known for the national cemetery made famous at its dedication in the same year as the battle--1863. This year marks the 150th anniversary of both the battle and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address at the cemetery. Among the visitors to this town are 24 U.S. Presidents, who came to tour, to learn, and to share their insights. Below are highlights from a few of their visits.

1863-Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg's most famous visitor, made the trip from "Washington City" by train in November 1863 to help dedicate the new national cemetery. To this day, the anniversary of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is a day of ceremony and remembrance in Gettysburg, with a recreation of the 1863 ceremonies held at the national cemetery.

1867-General Ulysses S. Grant, (not yet President) visited Gettysburg just four years after the Battle of Gettysburg. General Grant was photographed in front of the National Soldiers' Orphans' Homestead on Baltimore Street, along with orphans from the home. The following November (1868), Grant would be elected President.

1904-Theodore Roosevelt made his first trip to Gettysburg on Memorial Day, delivering a stirring speech. He would return in 1912 to address a conference in Gettysburg.

1913-Woodrow Wilson was the keynote speaker on July 4 for the 50th reunion of veterans in Gettysburg. Over 53,400 veterans assembled for the largest Civil War reunion.

1938-Franklin D. Roosevelt, spoke at the 75th anniversary of the

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battle, dedicating the Peace Light Memorial, with its eternal flame, as a symbol of the reuniting of North and South. This was the last reunion of Civil War veterans (the youngest in their 80s). Invited were all surviving veterans (8,000-11,000) of the war, not just Gettysburg's battle. An estimated 2,000 veterans attended this reunion (only 70 of the attendees having fought at Gettysburg).

1950-Harry Truman drove to Gettysburg for what he hoped would be a quiet day trip with no publicity. To his surprise, Truman and his wife, Bess, were recognized, and the Park Service was alerted. Before the Trumans could return home to Washington, they had to face another press conference.

1963-Dwight D. Eisenhower (retired and living in Gettysburg) spoke at the 100th anniversary of the battle, stepping in for the sitting President, JFK, who had been invited for the July event but had already scheduled a European tour.

1963-John F. Kennedy toured the battlefield in the late Spring with his wife, Jackie, and Licensed Battlefield Guide, Col. Jacob Sheads (photo top). The Kennedys were impressed by the Eternal Light Peace Monument, asking how the flame worked. Col. Sheads knew that the President had been invited to speak at the battle anniversary, but would be out of the country in July, so he suggested that President Kennedy consider coming to Gettysburg later in the year--November 19--for the 100th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address. Kennedy replied, "I'd like to, but I can't. I have to go to Dallas and mend fences." After Kennedy's assassination in November, Mrs. Kennedy told staff that she wanted an eternal flame, like the one in Gettysburg, for JFK's memorial, and so it was to be.

1963-Lyndon B. Johnson (then Vice President) spoke poignantly in Gettysburg on Memorial Day on the need to move forward for civil rights, foreshadowing national changes soon to come.



1978-Jimmy Carter, whose ancestors fought in the Battle of Gettysburg, toured the battlefield with his family, Licensed Battlefield Guide Bob Prospero, and author Shelby Foote. Later Carter would return during the Camp David peace talks, bringing with him Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for a guided tour (photo above).

And more presidential visitors will come. We hope you will join them to learn and honor Gettysburg's rich history.

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-Dwight D. Eisenhower

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