

A GAVEL AT GETTYSBURG: FREEMASONS HONORS THE BATTLE'S 150TH ANNIVERSARY



When we talk about Masonic History, it is clear that the Lodges of the Grand Lodge of Virginia clearly have plenty of it. Let's face it, many of her Lodges (and the Grand Lodge of Virginia itself) were already established well before the unification of the Ancients and the Moderns where they formed under the United Grand Lodge of England. Some of Virginia's oldest Lodges could say that they were present before the schism which would rend asunder these brethren of the Ancients and Moderns as well. From their struggles to maintain themselves through the years and across the many conflicts of their nations; from the French and Indian War, to the American Revolution, to the War of 1812, the various Indian Wars, to the Mexican War and even beyond the great American Civil War, Virginia Masons have stood with their Masonic brethren throughout this nation, and the world to at times shine as the last beacon of hope, when all other lights seemed to have failed the people of this Earth.

In late June, I called up my dear brother, Worshipful Chris Chrzanowski, and while talking to him, he informs me that Henry Lodge No. 57 will be hosting a bus ride from Fairfax, Virginia to Gettysburg, Pennsylvania in recognition of the 150th Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg. As one who loves history and is a part of the Grand Lodge's Committee on History, I asked him to send me more information and he sent out an email with the following information:

Henry Lodge No 57 invites you to join us for a day back in history. On July 5, we will be taking a bus trip to Gettysburg to commemorate the 150th anniversary of that pivotal battle. We will tour the Museum, view the Cyclorama and take a guided tour of the Battlefield. The evening will close with a Called Communication of the Civil War Lodge of Research No 1865. An alternate program for non-Master Masons and Ladies is provided. Cost is \$60 per person. Please bring chairs and Aprons.

So naturally, I want to join my brethren in this event, but it is on the Fourth of July weekend and my family recognizes this as a family time. Fortunately for me, my wife Holly overheard part of the phone conversation and as I am reading the email invitation, she informs me that I should go to this event as it would be a once in a lifetime experience and that she can make plans with the kids and her mom, so I reserved a seat and joined in on the event.

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Friday morning, I get to Henry Lodge No. 57, where the brethren welcomed everyone as we loaded up our bags and lawn chairs onto a chartered bus. From there, Worshipful Chrzanowski ensured our entertainment during the trip with the movie "Gettysburg" and the ride was most enjoyable and a great time to relax and share in the fellowship with my brethren. During the trip, we had to divert because of the traffic and despite the delays; we arrived in time for the private tour with our Guide from the Visitor's Center at the Gettysburg National Military Park. Our tour guide welcomed us to the battlefield and reported that the number of tourist present for this anniversary was five times the numbers that they usually had in a day. He then took us out to the battlefield where we walked the real estate where many Union and Confederate soldiers contested for victory. While listening to the details given to us by our guide, many of us discuss the Masonic factors of this battlefield and discussed names such as Louis Armistead, Henry Bingham, Winfield Hancock, Joshua Chamberlain and Solomon Meredith.



Virginia Masons at the Gettysburg Monument dedicated to Virginian soldiers who fought and died on this battlefield.

Although the day was hot, there was a slight breeze and our guide first led us to the Union side of the battlefield called High Water Mark, where Armistead fell during Pickett's Charge and we looked over the landscape to see the vast distance and fencing that the southern armies had to cross. Directly in front of this area of the battlefield, you could see at a good distance, the monument to the Virginians who participated in this battle crowned with the statue of General Robert E Lee upon his horse, Traveler. We spent a good deal of time here in discussion with our guide as this was the main area of the conflict for day three of the battlefield.

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We also met up with a few of our Masonic brethren who were present as re-enactors for this battle and we enjoyed time with them as well. We then moved on to the Lutheran Seminary where the battle begun and following this we went to the Confederate side of the battlefield to the Virginia monument. There was a great deal of traffic and during this time we were able to find the local Masonic temple, but with the number of tourist present, it limited our maneuverability and time with our guide and we were unable to maintain the complete tour.



Virginia Masons at the Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial at Soldiers National Cemetery at Gettysburg

Despite this, we had a great time and after we dropped off our guide, we went to the Visitor's Center to observe the Gettysburg Cyclorama to which the theater was narrated by Morgan Freeman as he discusses the continuing impact that the Battle of Gettysburg has had upon us to this day. Following this, the bus dropped us off at Soldiers National Cemetery where we converged upon the Friend to Friend Masonic Monument. It is here where Freemasonry is recognized for his participation and contributions to this battlefield and it was here where we paused for a photo of all the Masons who were present. Following this, we broke up to get something to eat and most of us migrated into town to a restaurant called "Gettysburg Eddie's", named for Baseball's Hall of Famer, Eddie Plank of Gettysburg. The food was good and we ate and drank and talked about Masonry and history and celebrated together as brothers and when we got back together, we headed on over to the bus to meet Civil War Lodge of Research.

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Masons from all over the United States and Europe attend Virginia's Civil War Lodge of Research No. 1865 in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

We came to the encampment of the Civil War re-enactors and there were tents and horse stalls for as far as you could see. People from all over the United States, groomed and attired in the fashion of the period, came together to participate in this mock battle if as to obtain a fraction of an understanding as to what these brave soldiers went through. Near the center of the encampment, we found Freemasons from all over the United States, as well as two of our European brothers; one from Scotland, the other from Italy, all converging for the night's ceremony. The coordinators of the encampment could not understand why we Masons required privacy for the night's event but with the leadership of Worshipful Master Gary Laing, with the support of Right Worshipful Jon Shelton, District Deputy Grand Master for Masonic District No. 4 in Virginia, the Civil War Lodge of Research was able to obtain a secluded hill just outside the encampment for its meeting and we made our way to our new location.

Although a Virginia Research Lodge, the Civil War Lodge of Research consists of Masons from all over with their officers from multiple grand jurisdictions as Delaware and South Carolina. As a Virginia Lodge, these officers must still learn Virginia ritual and they happily do such because of their devotion to its purpose. As to how a Virginia Lodge is able to conduct a communication within the grand jurisdiction of Pennsylvania, I learned that the Lodge must first obtain a dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Virginia permitting them the opportunity to work, so long as they also receive a dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania authorizing them to function within their jurisdiction. Once both are obtained, the Lodge Secretary must read both dispensations following the opening of a Lodge but previous to any other business. Previous to this, we began to organize the positioning of Lodge stations along with the altar and seating for all present.

While present, I was permitted to announce that I had the "Prayer at Valley Forge" lapel pins, which were designed and created by Right Worshipful Barrye Absher, and that these pins were to raise money for the Grand Master's Youth Groups fund raising and within a matter of a minute or two I was wiped clean of all lapel pins and the members of this Research Lodge raised the sum of \$310.00 on these pins. To their credit, most did not know what the pin looked like

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when they purchased it; only that it was for the Grand Master's promotion of our Masonic Youth groups, although they in fact appreciated the pin once they did look upon it. The atmosphere about us all was both jovial and reverent as Masons, both uniformed and out of period, enjoyed the fellowship. The sun was now at a decline and the heat was traded for cool breeze as we were able to survey a great distance of terrain from our overlook and the skyline was majestic to behold as our meeting commenced.

Brethren from twenty-one jurisdictions came together that night and under the twilight sky, enjoyed this historic moment of honoring those Union and Confederate heroes, who sacrificed their lives, both Mason and non-Mason. They had sanctified these grounds and it is our lot to perpetuate the knowledge of their actions that their legacy shall not be forgotten. It did not go unnoticed that these brethren held a solemn respect for the meaning and purpose of this battlefield that has rang out across the ages for the past 150 years. I then realized the privilege that was rendered to me by both Henry Lodge No. 57 and the Civil War Lodge of Research No. 1865 and I was both humbled and honored by this opportunity. As we closed off the Lodge meeting and said our farewells to all of our brethren, I took with me the epiphany that this now passing moment along with the flight of this day, would soon become a memory that each of us would not only cherish, but would be forever grateful that we few were permitted the opportunity to be participant in this great moment in Masonic and American history.

Slideshow and photos of this event can be found at:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/112857744009527509206/Gettysburg150thAnniversaryCWLOR1865July52013?feat=email#slideshow/5897479301633340338>

Brother Shelby Chandler is a Past Master of Fredericksburg Lodge #4, the current Worshipful Master of the George Washington Research Lodge #1732, District Education Officer for Masonic District #8 and serves as a member of the Grand Lodge of Virginia's Committee on History.



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