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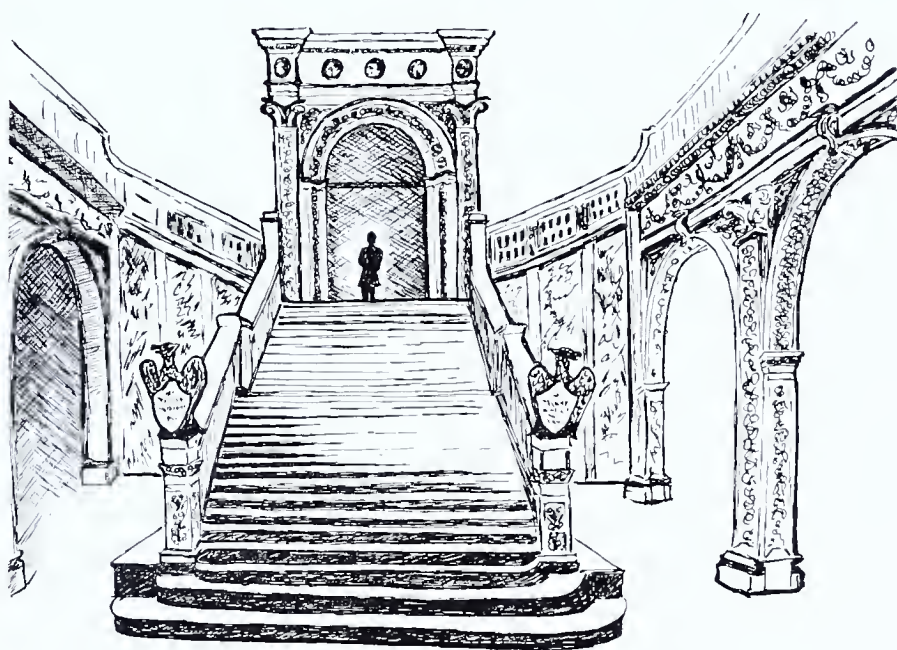
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# Rothermel's Paintings of the Battle of Gettysburg

By

EDWIN B. CODDINGTON



*Main Hall of the State Museum Building*

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THE PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION





THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG [PICKETT'S CHARGE, JULY 3]  
*By Peter F. Rothermel*



# ROTHERMEL'S PAINTINGS OF THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

BY EDWIN B. CODDINGTON\*

A VISITOR to the State Museum Building in Harrisburg upon entering the main floor will immediately meet an imposing stone stairway which leads up to the Hall of Trophies. Going up the steps he will see spread out before him at the far end of the hall the "largest 'Battle scene' [on a single piece of canvas] in North America. . . ."<sup>1</sup> Of unusual dimensions, 32 feet in length and 16¾ feet in height, this oil painting by Peter Frederick Rothermel has always been called the "Battle of Gettysburg." Actually it shows not the battle as a whole but the dramatic and symbolic moment when the Union forces stopped the Confederates in Pickett's famous charge.

The battle of Gettysburg lasted too long and covered too large an area to be confined within a single frame, and Rothermel did not attempt the impossible. To lead up to and complement the big scene of Pickett's charge, Rothermel painted five smaller pictures which show other memorable but less decisive episodes during the three days of the battle. These paintings, which are known as the "side series," he completed after the unveiling of the big one at Philadelphia on December 20, 1870. Three of them hang to the visitor's left as he walks into the Hall of Trophies. These include No. 1, "Battle of the First Day and Death of Reynolds"; No. 3, "Charge of Pennsylvania Reserves in Plum Run, July 2"; and No. 4, "Repulse of General Johnson's [Confederate] Division by General Geary's White Star Division, July 3." Not on display but in the possession of the State Historical and Museum Com-

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<sup>1</sup>*Know Your State Museum: Rothermel's famous painting, "The Battle of Gettysburg."* Leaflet by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. I wish to express my appreciation for the help generously given by several members of the professional staff of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

mission are No. 2, "Charge of Louisiana Tigers and Repulse [on East Cemetery Hill in the evening of July 2]," and another version of No. 3 which shows the charge of the Pennsylvania Reserves as seen from the Confederate instead of the Union battle lines.<sup>2</sup> These smaller pictures have always received scant mention in official correspondence and notices. Most writers have referred only to the large painting of Pickett's charge, invariably calling it "the Battle of Gettysburg" and thus creating the impression that it was Rothermel's only picture of the subject. This misleading title illustrates some of the unusual twists in the story of how these pictures came to be, what the artist accomplished in painting them, and what happened to them after he had done his work.

Within a year after the surrender of General Lee, Pennsylvania's Governor Andrew Curtin suggested to the legislature that the state should commemorate the battle of Gettysburg in a "historical painting" for display at the capitol. In justifying this recommendation he pointed out that the battle had resulted in a glorious victory and was "in fact the beginning of the end of the war, and occurred on the soil of the Commonwealth. . . ."<sup>3</sup> With agreeable alacrity, but not without some discussion, the legislature responded favorably to the governor's idea and on February 15, 1866, established a joint committee of six members, three from each house, to handle the matter. The legislature wanted the com-

<sup>2</sup> The labels on the pictures of the "side series" hanging in the Hall of Trophies give 1881 as the date for the painting of the "Charge of the Pennsylvania Reserves in Plum Run, July 2," and none for the other two works. Rothermel wrote Governor John Geary on January 1, 1872, that the picture of the "Battle of Gettysburg" and the accompanying smaller pictures would be "ready for delivery on or before February 22, 1872." See *Pennsylvania Archives, Papers of the Governors, 1871-1883*, Ser. 4, IX, 99.

Judging from this statement and evidence found in the Rothermel Collection, Division of Public Records of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (hereafter called D.P.R.), there were only four "smaller pictures" ready for delivery in 1872. They were identical in size, 5 feet 7½ inches in length and 3 feet in height. The version of the "Charge of the Pennsylvania Reserves" now on display in the Hall of Trophies has larger dimensions, 5 feet 11 inches in length by 4 feet in height. These facts suggest that Rothermel was dissatisfied with the version included in the original "side series" and decided to do another on a larger canvas showing the charge from Union lines. It is signed "P. M. Rothermel 1881." Statement of Mr. John Witthoft, Chief Curator, Pennsylvania State Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Proceedings of Governor Curtin and the Legislature of Pennsylvania relating to the picture of the battle of Gettysburg, MS, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R. See also *Pennsylvania Archives, Papers of the Governors, 1858-1871*, Ser. 4, VIII, 730. The governor made the recommendation in his annual message, January 30, 1866.

mittee to recommend a competent artist, to suggest ways of reproducing the battle artistically, and to estimate the cost of the project.<sup>4</sup> The committee was given a free hand in nominating an artist, although there had been an attempt in the senate to limit the choice to a Pennsylvanian because the battle had been fought on a "Pennsylvania field." One senator opposed this move with the remark that while as a matter of principle he favored protection of American industry, the senate was not considering an economic problem, but how to procure for the state a "work of high art, worthy of a great occasion, memorable for all time to come. . . ." For that reason he hoped that the committee would "secure the services of the best artists without reference to State lines." Another senator wanted the state to be so rash as to import foreign artistic talent should it prove necessary. Finally someone reminded the senate that the "battle was not fought by Pennsylvanians alone; it was fought by the soldiers of the whole country, and it [was] to the interest of the whole country to have this painting." These arguments impressed the senate for it disregarded the tradition of protectionism and rejected in the name of free trade in artistic skills an amendment instructing the committee to select an artist from Pennsylvania.<sup>5</sup> But as events would show, the committee finally conformed to the spirit of the amendment.

The committee got busy right away in the winter of 1866 and proceeded to act as a commission with "large discretionary powers." Less than two months after its appointment it made a report and recommendations. Together with the governor it had conferred with a large number of artists and laymen who were well informed about the fine arts in both Europe and the United States. Mr. Joseph Harrison, Jr., a prominent Philadelphian, had opened "his private art gallery, finest in the State, and introduced . . . [the members] to the works of the most eminent artists. . . ." The committee had happily discovered that many artists of "high reputation" were interested in doing the picture. Even more comforting was the assurance "by those who know" that it could find a Pennsylvanian "equal to the task of painting the work." The committee had discussed the project with General George C. Meade

<sup>4</sup> *Journal House of Representatives* (1866), 290. Members of the committee were Senators George Connell, D. McConaughy, A. H. Glatz; Representatives J. A. Kerns, A. W. Markley, H. Allen.

<sup>5</sup> *Pennsylvania Legislative Record* (1866), 263.

and other general officers, such as Winfield Scott Hancock and Samuel W. Crawford, and they had shown interest and a willingness to help. General Meade had offered to accompany any artist the committee might select and go over the battlefield with him.<sup>6</sup>

Because of the importance of the subject and their great concern to secure a work which would redound to the credit of the state and the soldiers who had "fought the enemy upon [its] soil," the committee had "proceeded cautiously." There was much "diversity of opinion as to the particular study (the place or event) which should be selected as the great theme for a picture. . . ." The committee felt there was not a single battle, but three battles of Gettysburg, involving the "conflicts of three distinct days, each of which takes rank with the first battles of the world." Therefore to do "justice" to the battle there was perhaps need for "three paintings—one for each day."<sup>7</sup> Although someone in the legislature attempted to give the committee authority to obtain possibly as many as three paintings,<sup>8</sup> the general appropriations act as finally adopted in 1866 empowered it to make a contract, in cooperation with the governor, for only one painting. The legislature did not appropriate any specific sum for this work but instead took the unusual step of authorizing the governor to "draw the moneys required, by his warrants upon the state treasurer." In addition to this measure the legislature permitted the committee "to obtain [art] studies."<sup>9</sup> Possibly the committee interpreted this phrase liberally so that it felt warranted in purchasing the "side series" as well as the one large painting. The records unfortunately are not clear on this point, nor for that matter on several others.

Sometime in 1866 the committee and the governor commissioned Peter Frederick Rothermel to paint the battle of Gettysburg, and

<sup>6</sup> Proceedings . . . relating to the picture of the battle of Gettysburg, MS, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R. See also *Journal, House of Representatives* (1866), 981.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* Although it indulged in hyperbole, so typical of Civil War writing, the committee was substantially correct in its analysis of the battle, certainly in the difference between the first and the last two days. Considering the location of the Union lines and the number of regiments involved in both armies, the contests of July 2 and 3, were parts of a larger engagement which took two days to reach a decision. On the other hand, it could be argued, that the battle of the first day was a completely separate affair. Resulting in the defeat of Federal forces, it occurred in a different location with only parts of both armies engaged.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Public Laws* (1866), 82. The governor approved the Act on April 11, 1866.



in the contract agreed to pay him \$25,000 for the work. This amount presumably reimbursed him for five pictures—the four smaller ones in the “side series” and the tremendous one now hanging on the east wall of the Hall of Trophies in the State Museum Building.<sup>10</sup> Rothermel was a *bona fide* Pennsylvanian, born in Nescopeck, Luzerne County, on July 18, 1817, and raised in the state where he received the advantages of a “common-school education.” After studying art in Philadelphia and serving there for a good many years as director of the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, he finally conformed to the custom of native-born artists by completing his education in Europe. At the time the legislative committee was casting around for someone to do a commemorative work on the battle, he had already gained a reputation as an artist whose paintings depicted dramatic events in history. Over the years he had produced a large number of pictures on a variety of subjects, including “De Soto Discovering the Mississippi,” “Embarkation of Columbus,” “Christian Martyrs in the Colosseum,” “Patrick Henry before the Virginia House of Burgesses,” and the “Trial of Sir Henry Vane.” All were in the style and taste of the closing phase of romanticism in American art. In addition he had done a series of paintings illustrating William H. Prescott’s *History of the Conquest of Mexico*.<sup>11</sup> Although the committee in choosing a Pennsylvanian opened itself to the charge

<sup>10</sup> Rothermel said that the picture had “cost some four years of study. . . .” See Gettysburg MS, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R. The unveiling of the picture took place December 20, 1870. See newspaper clipping and Proceedings . . . relating to the picture of the battle of Gettysburg. *Ibid*.

See explanation for Rothermel’s picture of the Battle of Gettysburg. *Ibid*. This document clearly indicates that \$25,000 was paid for all five paintings. The Harrisburg *Patriot*, Dec. 12, 1870, and *The Evening Telegraph*, Harrisburg, Dec. 17, 1870, asserted that Rothermel received \$25,000 from the state. There is no suggestion anywhere that this amount also included payment for the sixth painting, the second version of the “Charge of the Pennsylvania Reserves in Plum Run, July 2,” which was finished in 1881. Rothermel did not complete his work within the time set by the contract because the state authorities kept back for a while a fifth of the amount owed him. On May 27, 1871, the governor approved an act authorizing the state treasurer to pay Rothermel \$5,000, representing the balance, on February 22, 1872, “to which date the time for the delivery of the picture [was] hereby extended.” See *Public Laws* (1871), 209. This act accomplished its purpose, for on January 1, 1872, Rothermel wrote the governor that the pictures would be ready on or before February 22, 1872. He had finished the big picture in 1870, but needed more time to complete the “side series” paintings. See *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 30, 1870.

<sup>11</sup> *Appleton’s Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, V, 333; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XVI, 187. See also E. P. Richardson, *Painting in America, the Story of 450 Years* (New York, 1956), 255.

of parochialism, it could justify its selection by pointing to Rothermel's great experience.

All the skill he had acquired was to be severely tested in planning a picture which would convey the story and the meaning of one of the great and decisive battles in history. He had to approach his task in the same way as the historian—except that in transmitting the results of his research he used a different medium. Most of the records now open to the historian were not easily available then, but he did have the advantage of talking and corresponding directly with veterans of the battle who could give at first hand, and when memories were still comparatively fresh, their impressions of what had happened.<sup>12</sup> He spent countless hours in obtaining and studying the testimony of these men, and in going over the battleground, often with State Senator David McConaughy, who was a member of the committee, and more important, a resident of Gettysburg. McConaughy's services proved invaluable for, as Rothermel said, "at the time of the battle he [had] remained in the town [where he] saw much of the near fighting. And, being entirely familiar with the ground occupied by both armies, was in the condition to . . . [give] me all the information he had of himself, or, had gathered through his personal relations with many of the officers . . . who fought . . . in the Great Fight."<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately, the deeper Rothermel went into the subject, the more confused he became about the sequence of events. As conscientious historians have also discovered, he found battle accounts particularly difficult to evaluate. The person telling the story might be a most competent witness, yet the chances were that he had seen a mere fragment of the engagement, or unconsciously he would put events in the best light so as to enhance his own reputation or that of his military unit. Rothermel complained that "there was much contradiction and confusion in the various

<sup>12</sup> That tremendous accumulation of documentary material containing battle reports, official reports, and a great variety of correspondence, published in 128 volumes under the title of *The War of the Rebellion, A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* did not see the light of day until the first few volumes appeared in 1880. Hereafter cited as *O. R.*

<sup>13</sup> Gettysburg MS, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R. In this connection Rothermel graciously acknowledged the help given him by the committee and said, "All the members save one did all within their power to assist me in making a good work. And if it is a failure, the fault is not theirs but *mine* and of my deficiency alone." *Ibid.*

reports of officers, eye-witnesses and writers in the interest of their special friends. In consequence it cost a great deal of labor before an amount of reliable information was assured as sufficient to warrant the beginning of *even* the first sketches."<sup>14</sup> No wonder "the picture had cost [him] some four years of study on the ground and elsewhere."<sup>15</sup>

In the case of the big painting Rothermel was especially obligated for their assistance to such Union generals as Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac; Hancock, commander of the 2nd Corps; John Gibbon, division commander in the 2nd Corps; Alexander S. Webb, in charge of the 2nd Brigade under Gibbon; George S. Greene, commander of a brigade in the 12th Corps; and Henry J. Hunt, Chief of Artillery, Army of the Potomac. Officers of lesser grades, some of whom had served on the various staffs, also furnished Rothermel useful information. More important, he obtained from Lieutenant Frank Aretas Haskell's brother a copy of the lieutenant's long personal account of the battle of Gettysburg, which has since become a classic in Civil War literature.<sup>16</sup> Haskell as aide-de-camp to General Gibbon was right in the thick of things during Pickett's charge, and he played an important role in pushing the Confederates back.

Rothermel's attempts to balance the Union version of events with reports from Confederate officers apparently brought meager results. He got a sketchy account from General Trimble, commander of a division in General A. P. Hill's 3rd Corps, but General Longstreet, commander of the 1st Corps and General Pickett's immediate superior, refused to give his story of events at Gettysburg. He excused himself on the grounds that he could not "do so satisfactorily . . . without visiting the battlegrounds again." He went on to say that his recollections of the various points were not "clear enough" to permit him to give Rothermel information sufficiently accurate to warrant "putting them upon canvas."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Haskell wrote the story of the battle to his brother, H. M. Haskell of Portage, Wisconsin, not long after the event. It was such a complete and well-written account that friends of the family arranged for its publication. A recent edition has been produced by Bruce Catton, although an older one published in 1908 by the Wisconsin History Commission is satisfactory. The manuscript copy of this account in the Rothermel Collection includes only the description of Pickett's charge, which can be found on pp. 110 to 138 of the 1908 edition.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



One of Rothermel's big problems was to determine who was where, and when. Two questions in particular gave him difficulty: where was Meade during Pickett's attack, and who announced to him the repulse of the Confederates? Looking back now, the fuss caused by these queries seems petty, but the *amour propre* of more than one personage was involved. Rothermel's correspondents were in dead earnest in their efforts to keep the record straight for his enlightenment and incidentally for their own or their friends' reputations. Regardless of anyone's feelings, the answer to the first question was of primary concern to Rothermel for it would determine whether General Meade, the victorious commander, should be in the picture at all, unless history were to be ignored for the sake of artistic effect.

Aware that "perhaps some critic may question"<sup>18</sup> Rothermel's placing him in the picture, Meade wrote to the artist and accounted for his movements, as he recalled them, on the afternoon of July 3. He warned that "in the excitement of battle, no individual's memory unsupported by corroborative evidence is to be relied on, however honest or truthful the individual may be."<sup>19</sup> Several other accounts agreed with Meade's, that he was at the house on the Taneytown Road, which he had used as headquarters, when the enemy's batteries began the two-hour cannonade preparatory to Pickett's charge. The house was located three or four hundred yards to the rear of the battle line and down a good way from the crest of Cemetery Ridge. Confederate gunners were generally shooting over the heads of the infantry into Union batteries on the top of the ridge and also into units to the rear. Some shells ricocheted and dropped uncomfortably close to Meade and his staff. Despite suggestions that he move headquarters, Meade refused to budge because he felt it imperative for him to be where people would expect to find him. Toward the end of the bombardment he consented to move to Power's Hill, site of General Slocum's headquarters and a much safer place, when he

<sup>18</sup> George C. Meade to Rothermel, Dec. 18, 1869. Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.

<sup>19</sup> Meade to John B. Bachelder, December 4, 1869, *ibid.* When he wrote to Rothermel on December 18, 1869, Meade enclosed a copy of this letter, telling what he had done during the Confederate attack on July 3. A printed copy of the letter can be found in John B. Bachelder, *The Story of the Battle of Gettysburg and Description of the Painting of the Repulse of Longstreet's Assault* (Boston, 1904), 34. The painting mentioned in the title of this book is one done by James Walker and not by Rothermel.

learned that a signal officer stationed there could communicate with his officer in charge of signals at the house on Taneytown Road. No sooner had Meade made the change than he discovered that his man had left his post, so he started back to the old headquarters. As a result of these movements he became separated from his staff and found himself alone with only a few orderlies. On returning to the Taneytown Road house, he met several of his staff dismounted and among them his son George, an aide-de-camp. George took a horse from one of the orderlies and followed his father. About this time the sound of musketry replaced the boom of cannon, and many men for various reasons began moving to the rear. These changes and the appearance of many prisoners suggested to Meade a heavy enemy infantry attack, so upon reaching headquarters he "rode straight up to the line of battle."<sup>20</sup>

It is from this point on that accounts vary considerably, leading to claims and counter-claims by the participants. Several questions have never been answered in such a way as to remove all doubt. When Meade headed for the front, how far had the Confederate attack progressed? Who rode with him, and who gave him information about developments in the battle? Meade said he remembered starting out alone for the battle line, and upon inquiring of the first officer he met, learned that the Union forces had repulsed the attack. At this moment his son rejoined him. He recognized only one officer of those he met, Lieutenant Haskell of General Gibbon's staff. As for the time of his arrival at the front he wrote, "I have always been under the impression that the contest was virtually closed when I reached the scene, although my horse was shot while there, with a musket-ball, and my son had his horse killed under him by a shell, the enemy re-opening his batteries with great fury the moment the assaulting column was seen to give way. I did not myself see any of the assaulting columns, except . . . [prisoners]; these I met just as they passed into our lines, and rode through them as I approached the line of battle."<sup>21</sup> George refreshed his father's memory on two counts: that another member of Meade's staff, Lieutenant R. S. McKenzie, had accompanied Meade at least part of the way to Cemetery Ridge before being sent off "with some orders"; and that the "first

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

officer" Meade mentioned as having met was Lieutenant John Egan, 1st Regiment, U. S. Artillery,<sup>22</sup> who recalled the incident in a letter to George.

When Egan saw Meade and his son, he said he was standing with his section of artillery a little to the right and front of Cushing's Battery and about fifteen or twenty yards in the rear of the stone wall, behind which kneeled the men of General Alexander Hays' division of the 2nd Corps. As the two came up the ridge from the right rear, Egan recalled that George was the only staff officer with his father. They arrived when the Rebels were "close up to the stone wall" and General Hays was on his horse and jumping over the wall to lead his men in a counter-attack. Meade inquired about Hays, and Egan pointed him out, riding beyond the wall and trailing a Confederate flag behind him. When Meade asked if the Rebels had "turned," Egan said, "Yes. See Hays has one of their flags."

"Your father said (and mighty cross too Old Boy): 'I don't care for their flag. Have they turned?'

"I said, 'Yes sir. They are just turning.'"

Egan ended his letter with the remark that "the bullets flew right lively there, George."<sup>23</sup>

In giving his version of the fight on Cemetery Ridge, Frank Haskell agreed with Egan that Meade was accompanied only by his son, and that he rode up just as the tide was turning or soon afterwards. Haskell, however, created the impression that it was he who gave Meade the first report of the enemy's repulse. He told how Meade heard the good news just before he reached the crest and could see for himself "the masses of prisoners, the numerous captured flags . . . , the fugitives of the routed enemy, disappearing with the speed of terror in the woods. . . ." At what he had heard and seen Meade's "face lighted," and he said, "'Thank God.' And then his right hand moved as if it would have caught off his hat and waved it; but this gesture he suppressed, and instead he waved his hand, and said 'Hurrah!' The son, with more youth in his blood and less rank upon his shoulders, snatched off his cap, and roared out his three 'hurrahs' right

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> [Lieut.] Egan to Lieut. Col. George Meade, February 8, 1870, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.

heartily. The General then surveyed the field, some minutes, in silence."<sup>24</sup>

Four witnesses, including Meade, therefore agreed that during the two-hour bombardment, the fighting on Cemetery Ridge, and until the Confederate repulse, the commander of the army was either at his headquarters or wandering somewhere behind the lines; and that he was riding to the top of the ridge near the turning point of the battle in the company of no more than two officers of his staff and most likely only one, his son George. The question as to which officer gave him the first news of victory is unimportant, for it is possible that both Egan and Haskell told him the same thing. On such an occasion where thousands of troops in close combat filled the air with heavy smoke from their rifles and cannon, it would be hard for anyone to tell what was going on. Under the circumstances Meade quite likely asked several people the same question, if only to confirm what the first had told him. In so doing perhaps he unwittingly gave each witness the impression that he was the first and only one to give him the glad tidings of victory. Very possibly Meade saw Egan first, but since he did not recognize him he paid less heed to his report than he did to the same information from Haskell, whom he knew quite well.<sup>25</sup>

However, there are flaws in this reconstruction of Meade's movements during the afternoon of July 3. General Hancock, commander of the corps which received the brunt of Pickett's attack, asserted that he had sent Meade the first official announcement, if not the first message, of the repulse. He claimed to have had that day "general command of the whole line, from Cemetery Hill to Round Top . . . consisting of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Corps, styled the Left Centre. . . ."<sup>26</sup> When the cannonading began, he was with General Meade and other officers behind the 2nd Corps' line of battle not far from army headquarters. Hancock hastily mounted his horse and rode to the front with his staff and orderlies,

<sup>24</sup> Frank A. Haskell, *The Battle of Gettysburg* (1908), 136-137.

<sup>25</sup> Haskell recalled with relish an unusually fine luncheon, just before the Confederate attack in the afternoon, consisting of an enormous pan of stewed chickens, potatoes, toast, bread, butter, coffee, and tea which their "faithful John" had somehow got together for General Gibbon and his staff. Just as they were sitting down to enjoy the feast, Generals Meade, Hancock, Newton, and Pleasanton within moments of each other happened to come by. Apparently there was enough for all. See *ibid.*, 89-94.

<sup>26</sup> Hancock to Rothermel, December 31, 1868, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.

then along the whole line to the extreme left held by Colonel John R. Brooke, commanding the 4th Brigade, in the 1st Division of the 2nd Corps. When Hancock saw skirmishers advancing out of the woods on the Confederate battle line, he immediately sent Major W. G. Mitchell to inform Meade that the enemy was advancing to attack the 2nd Corps.<sup>27</sup>

During this crisis in the battle Hancock kept on the move, constantly checking on all parts of the line to make sure that nothing was wanting to give the enemy a warm reception. After Mitchell left he rode to the woods at the extreme right of the 2nd Corps. There he saw that a New York regiment, which he himself had posted across the Taneytown Road on Cemetery Hill, was missing. Disturbed at this weakening of the line at what he feared might become the main point of attack, and with all of his staff away on errands, Hancock went to army headquarters to seek reinforcements from some other corps. Finding it deserted, he returned to the center of the line held by General Webb's small brigade. From there Hancock directed his horse to a section of the front manned by Vermonters of General George J. Stannard's brigade of the 1st Corps, placed immediately to the left of the 2nd Corps. The fury of the Confederate assault kept increasing, and Hancock learned that his next in command, General Gibbon, had been wounded. After Hancock had talked to Stannard and had apparently helped to direct operations, he turned to go to the now famous "clump of trees" where he saw that the contest had reached its high point. At that moment a minie ball and a twisted iron nail, of all things, tore a hole in his upper thigh. Two of General Stannard's aides caught him as he sank from his horse.

Just then the tide of battle turned, and the Confederates began their retreat. Five or ten minutes later Major Mitchell arrived and discovered his general lying on the ground, but still very alert to what was going on.<sup>28</sup> "Turning partially on his side and raising himself on his hands," Hancock saw the Confederate attack wither away to small clusters of defiant men retracing their steps and

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* In this letter Hancock refers to Mitchell as Lieutenant; yet in his battle report, written sometime before October 1863, he calls him major. Mitchell as Hancock's senior aide-de-camp and acting assistant adjutant general held an important position on the staff of the 2nd Corps. See *O. R.*, Ser. 1, XXVII, Pt. I, 376.

<sup>28</sup> Hancock to Rothermel, December 31, 1868, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.



leaving behind their thousands of dead, wounded, and captured.<sup>29</sup> He then instructed Mitchell to go to army headquarters and "tell General Meade that the troops under my command have repulsed the enemy's assault and that we have gained a great victory. The enemy is now flying in all directions in my front."<sup>30</sup> A few moments later Mitchell delivered the message just as Meade in company with "others" started to ride up from the Taneytown Road to the crest of the ridge. He also told the general of Hancock's wound, and Meade responded, "Say to General Hancock that I regret exceedingly that he is wounded, and that I thank him for the Country and for myself for the service he has rendered today."<sup>31</sup>

Those who told this story cited written records to substantiate their words. On the evening of July 3, within a few hours after he had heard them, Mitchell wrote down in a memorandum the messages between Hancock and Meade. Hancock said that his aides-de-camp were "required to keep memorandum books, in which during a battle, all important facts were to be noted," and that Mitchell "recorded his interview with General Meade. . . ."<sup>32</sup> Mitchell said that a lieutenant from General John C. Robinson's staff was there and heard him repeat Hancock's message and Meade's reply. That evening the lieutenant described the incident in a letter sent to his home.<sup>33</sup> Despite this impressive array of evidence and the fact that it makes sense, Meade's testimony greatly weakens the story. In recalling his actions at this time, Meade said he did not remember "the report which Major Mitchell . . . states he made to me, of the general's being wounded."<sup>34</sup> Then he added, "There can be no question that the report was made as stated by Major Mitchell. . . ."<sup>35</sup> This peculiar remark further indicates Meade's appreciation of the unreliability of memory in times of stress and confusion. It also shows that Meade had the same great confidence in Hancock's word as in his ability to lead troops.

<sup>29</sup> General W. G. Mitchell to P. F. Rothermel, December 19, 1870, *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell to [Hancock], January 10, 1866, *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Hancock to Rothermel, December 31, 1868. See also Mitchell to [Hancock], January 10, 1866, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Mitchell to Rothermel, December 19, 1870, *ibid.* The lieutenant was James P. Meade, and General Robinson commanded the 2nd Division in the 1st Corps.

<sup>34</sup> Meade to Bachelder, December 4, 1869, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

This lapse in Meade's memory undoubtedly bothered Rothermel and had a tendency to invalidate for him the Mitchell and Hancock versions of events. Their stories made it difficult furthermore to accept the accounts of Meade, his son George, Egan, and Haskell. According to Mitchell a group of officers, not just one or two, accompanied Meade on his way to the front, where he arrived a good many minutes after the Union forces had broken up the charge and there was no longer any doubt about the decision. Should Mitchell have been right, Meade could have been in the picture only as a result of an extreme distortion of history. Since there was conflicting evidence, Rothermel took advantage of the opening and chose the version which best suited his purpose. He caught the Confederate attack at its highest point just before the retreat, but in the left-hand corner he pictured Meade and his son receiving word from Lieutenant Haskell that Federal forces had already gained the upper hand and turned the enemy back. Meade himself called attention to this violation of historical accuracy at the unveiling, when he saw the finished work probably for the first time.<sup>36</sup> In response to calls for a few remarks he told the audience that he should not have been in the painting at all, since he arrived at the front after the "repulse had been accomplished." Except for this "error" Meade felt the artist had depicted the battle with great "fidelity."<sup>37</sup> This honest and blunt criticism was perhaps justified, although most observers would probably have agreed with the artist that a painting of Meade's great victory would appear incomplete without him in it. The picture with its judicious mixture of fact and artistic license thus represents a triumph for the Haskell version of events.<sup>38</sup>

Similar difficulties occurred when Rothermel tried to obtain a reasonable reconstruction of what really had occurred for his smaller paintings of Gettysburg. A question arose as to who

<sup>36</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 30, 1870. The paper said that the picture was to be completed in about two weeks, a week or so before the unveiling.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, December 21, 1870.

<sup>38</sup> Just before the unveiling Mitchell protested against the prominence given Haskell in the picture and insisted that Hancock was the person from whom "above all others Meade was looking for a message and Hancock was the only one who could, authoritatively, at that time inform Meade that the enemy's *whole* line had been repulsed and that the battle was won." Mitchell to Rothermel, December 19, 1870, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R. But Rothermel had made up his mind and the protest failed to bring any changes.



should be in the picture of the "Charge of the Pennsylvania Reserves at Plum Run" at the head of the troops. General Samuel W. Crawford who had commanded the Reserves wrote that he had received information which caused him "not only great surprise but indignation." His father said someone had told Rothermel that Crawford had not led his division in its charge at Plum Run and the Wheatfield late in the afternoon of July 2. Crawford proceeded to set Rothermel straight on the matter by furnishing the necessary proof. In both versions of the "Charge of the Pennsylvania Reserves" the artist placed Crawford in a prominent position, boldly leading the troops into action.<sup>39</sup>

Discussion also arose concerning the composition of the painting which depicted the repulse of the Confederates in General Edward Johnson's Division of Ewell's 2nd Corps on Culp's Hill on the morning of July 3. General Thomas L. Kane, one of the prominent figures in the painting, was critical of Rothermel's treatment of the event. Kane, who had commanded the 2nd Brigade in General John W. Geary's division of the 12th Corps that day, apparently felt that Geary had given the artist misleading information at the cost of historical accuracy. After thinking things over he decided that in view of Geary's death it would be "ungenerous" of him to question Geary's word "unnecessarily."<sup>40</sup> A few days later he sent Rothermel his observations on both the picture and the battle. Reflecting the sometimes maudlin sentimentality of the Civil War period, Kane noticed with pleasure that "the artist's pencil commemorates a touching incident connected with this charge. A pet dog belonging to a company of the 1st Maryland (Confed.) charged with the Regiment; ran ahead of them when their progress was arrested, and came in among the Boys in Blue, as if he supposed they were what in better days perhaps they might have been; merely the men of another noisy hose engine company, competing for precedence with his masters in the smoke of a burning building. At first,—some of my men said, he barked in valorous glee; but I myself first saw him on three legs going between our own and the men in Gray on the ground as though looking for a dead master, or seeking on which side he might find an explanation

<sup>39</sup> S. W. Crawford to Rothermel, June 2, 1871, *ibid.* Rothermel kept sketches of both versions and identified important figures either by key or by writing the names beside each one.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas L. Kane to Rothermel, March 21, 1874, *ibid.*

of the tragedy he witnessed, intelligible to his canine apprehension. He licked some one's hand, they said, after he was perfectly riddled. Regarding him as the truly Christian minded being on either side, I ordered him to be honorably buried."<sup>41</sup> The inclusion of the dog in the painting was perhaps another reason why General Kane was willing to overlook shortcomings of the work.

These comments on his paintings by various participants, although helpful, must have been a trial to Rothermel. In contrast to some of the unfavorable criticism, General J. W. Hofmann's observations of the painting of the 1st Corps in action at Gettysburg on July 1 must have pleased him. As colonel of the 56th Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment Hofmann saw a lot of fighting that day. His regiment was in General Lysander Cutler's brigade, the first one of the 1st Corps to clash with the enemy on the ground west of Seminary Ridge and north of the Chambersburg Pike. Hofmann claimed intimate knowledge only of operations on the right of the Union line from the opening of action to the retreat of the Northerners to Cemetery Ridge. He felt that in the painting Rothermel's "reproduction . . . of events . . . [was] eminently successful" and that other "survivors . . . [would] concur in this opinion."<sup>42</sup>

Though important, Rothermel's achievements in reproducing historical events were not enough in themselves to make his paintings works of art. Particularly in the case of the large picture, it was his ambition to reconstruct a great moment of the Civil War and also to convey to posterity the larger meaning of the struggle. He conceived of it as a conflict between "certain men of the north and certain men of the south, in masses, with weapons of destruction" fighting upon "peculiar ground in point of topographical formation" and "in a manner peculiar to the people of the north and of the south." To him the north stood for the "integrity of the union, its indivisibility," the south for the "right of secession" and "disintegration." Although southern statesmen claimed secession "as a right Constitutional and sustained by the Declaration of Independence," they were really waging a war in "defense of slavery, for the right to enslave." The north had in contrast the "great advantage of [the] justice of liberty to all." Rothermel admitted that "no matter of what complexion, the moral right,"

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth D. Kane to Rothermel, March 28, 1874, including Kane's observations, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Brig. Gen. J. W. Hofmann to Rothermel, April 4, 1872, *ibid.*

the North overcame the South because it combined "greater wealth with physical force and material [strength] with courage. . . ."<sup>43</sup>

Symbolic of masses of men engaged in mortal combat, of the clash of great forces and values, the central figure and "key-note" to the whole work is a "stalwart Union soldier, stripped of a coat and accoutrements and standing one foot upon the wall and the other upon a dead Rebel, beating back the enemy with the butt of his musket." He personified the "valor of the rank and file of the Union army,"<sup>44</sup> and revealed Rothermel's appreciation of Gettysburg as "emphatically a soldier's battle." Because it made "common soldiers heroes of the picture and . . . [placed] officers in the background" Rothermel's painting received unfavorable comment,<sup>45</sup> but today students of the battle would commend his interpretation. The Union soldier fought at Gettysburg as he never had before. He had emerged from the frustrations of the Chancellorsville campaign, where under bumbling leadership he had had little chance to prove himself, to confront once more an enemy who had the habit of winning victories. This time the Army of the Potomac did not enjoy its customary numerical superiority, but most of its soldiers were veterans and many of them Pennsylvanians. With any kind of leadership they would stop the enemy and drive him back to Virginia. Fortunately, men like General John Reynolds and General John Buford were in the right place at the right hour. They came to Gettysburg to stay and they did. Often outnumbered at a given moment, they fought with a tenacity and skill which amazed the Confederates. Rothermel caught the grim spirit of determination in the common soldier and preserved it on canvas in such a way as to convey dramatically the tragedy and magnificence of the struggle.

The sense of the deeper meaning of Gettysburg and the sharp focus placed on the turning point of the battle, which Rothermel's painting achieved, can be appreciated best by comparing it with two other works of art which depict Pickett's charge. One, the Cyclorama in Gettysburg, painted by Paul Philippoteaux in 1883, recreates on an immense scale the instant when General Lee lost

<sup>43</sup> Gettysburg MS, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *The Evening Telegraph*, Harrisburg, December 17, 1870, clipping found *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

his supreme bid for victory in Pickett's charge.<sup>46</sup> This work has the effect of a great photograph and gives the viewer a feeling of being in the midst of a mighty spectacle while it is happening. He sees the battlefield in a broad sweep as it appeared at the time. The figures in the foreground, almost life-size, contribute to the illusion of reality. In like manner Rothermel for the sake of greater historical authenticity copied on his canvas portraits of veterans of the battle, many of whom he had previously painted,<sup>47</sup> but he subordinated their roles to the larger purposes of the work. The Rothermel painting achieves a unity which because of its size and photographic qualities the Cyclorama lacks. The latter is so comprehensive in scope that the eye cannot catch the broad outline of the work in a glance, and as a result the scene is broken into a series of tableaux. The difference in perspective of the two paintings also explains the obvious contrast in artistic effect. In Rothermel's picture of Pickett's charge the viewer looks south and sees a cross section of the battle lines on Cemetery Ridge. The Cyclorama on the other hand shows the battle from behind the Union line with the viewer obviously in the center. If he looks west he sees the oncoming Confederate forces; in other directions he sees the Union lines extending along the ridge and the timely arrival of reinforcements, as the battle reaches its climax.

The other painting on the same subject is the smallest in size, but the most pretentious. Although James Walker painted this picture, which is called "Repulse of Longstreet's Assault," the

<sup>46</sup> The cyclorama which is now on Baltimore Street in Gettysburg, measures 368 feet in circumference and 30 feet in height. Philippoteaux who had helped his father produce small cycloramas in Europe began his study of the Gettysburg battlefield in 1881. He became thoroughly versed in the subject of Pickett's charge through a study of post-war photographs of the field, battle reports, letters and messages, and personal interviews of such eyewitnesses as Generals Hancock, Doubleday, Webb, and others. Equipped with on-the-spot sketches and notes he returned to Paris and assisted by five other artists completed the work in two years. First exhibited in Boston in 1885, it was displayed in several other cities before its appearance in Gettysburg for the 50th anniversary of the battle in 1913. Until 1942, when the United States Government acquired it, a private concern owned the cyclorama. Information furnished by Dr. Harry W. Pfranz, Park Historian, Gettysburg National Military Park.

<sup>47</sup> Rothermel painted portraits of participants which were kept as family heirlooms after he had copied them on his big picture. Statement of Mr. John Witthoft. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 30, 1870, "Nearly all the principal figures were drawn from life and consequently are very accurate. Even the principal figures of the private soldiers have been taken in this manner."

greater share of the credit for its creation goes to John B. Bachelder who contributed to it his abilities as a promoter, cartographer, and historian. The smoke of the last shots had hardly drifted away when Bachelder arrived at Gettysburg to begin his careful study of the conflict. He spent eighty-four days there making an isometrical drawing which included twenty-five square miles of the field. Months after he had obtained the reports and testimony of contestants on both sides, he was able to trace the movements of each regiment or battery from the beginning to the end of the engagement and to locate on the drawing its "most important positions for each of the three days."<sup>48</sup> Bachelder's research for his project was far more extensive than Rothermel's, for he not only interviewed many more people, both Southerners and Northerners, but he obtained copies of Union and Confederate battle reports, undoubtedly from the Office of the Adjutant General in Washington, D. C. After he had organized the material, Bachelder turned it over to Walker to be used in composing the picture.

Actually the painting was Bachelder's brainchild. Though a "celebrated battle-scene painter" Walker did little but carry out Bachelder's ideas on what constituted a good battle picture. The result was a work, Bachelder claimed, that differed "materially from ordinary scenes of this kind," where the painter, "having a few leading incidents of a battle in his mind, clothes the picture with the mystery of color and effect, and gives an *imaginary, rather than a literal rendition of the subject*."<sup>49</sup> Bachelder would not tolerate such license and proudly asserted that "in the production of this picture, Mr. Walker has endeavored to weave into an harmonious whole the prominent incidents and episodes of this portion of the battle, and has never resorted to fiction, when truth would do as well. No stretch of the imagination has been indulged

<sup>48</sup> Bachelder, *The Story of the Battle of Gettysburg*, 30. Bachelder boasted that when he completed his drawing "*but one solitary regiment* was discovered to be out of position on it." *Ibid.* A copy of these drawings deposited in the Division of Public Records is very useful to students of the battle.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 19. Italics are mine. Rothermel and Walker apparently painted their pictures about the same time, for Bachelder got a copyright on a key to the picture in 1870. The United States Congress voted to give Bachelder \$50,000 for "his labor and research." Presumably this money paid Walker for painting the picture 7½ x 20 feet in size, and H. B. Hall, Jr., for making a steel engraving of it, measuring 24 x 43 inches. See *ibid.*, 31. For reasons not known, at the very time when General Longstreet refused Rothermel any help, he was cooperating in splendid fashion with Walker and Bachelder. See *ibid.*, 5 n.



in." Although "*effect* has been sacrificed in many instances to accuracy," Bachelder happily cited the acknowledgment of the "ablest art critics" in support of his opinion that the "execution [of the picture] is highly artistic. . . ." <sup>50</sup>

The picture is certainly "different," and it is about as moving as a blueprint, but not as accurate. There is an element of deception in Bachelder's boast of a "literal rendition of the subject" for he admitted that the artist had tampered with chronology by selecting and combining "such episodes as . . . [would] best convey the story to be told." <sup>51</sup> What Bachelder really achieved was a comprehensive battle report in pictorial form. The viewer watches the battle from an imaginary elevated position in the rear of Cemetery Ridge, looking westward toward the Confederate lines. He is supposed to see not only every Union and Confederate regiment fighting in the portion of the field held by Hancock's 2nd Corps at the time of Pickett's charge, but also, when topography would permit, every unit in position or engaged along the entire left wing of the Army of the Potomac. <sup>52</sup> Bachelder had the artist commit the error Rothermel avoided of trying to include most of the action of a three-day battle within the limits of a single picture. At first glance the painting has no meaning and seems to be nothing but a huge mass of figures going through the motions of fighting a battle which could have taken place anywhere. Only by consulting a complicated key, which identifies outstanding landmarks, important officers, and various military units, can the viewer get any notion of what happened. Although Rothermel's paintings of Gettysburg all have keys also, these devices are not vital to an understanding of what the artist has to say, particularly in the picture of Pickett's charge.

Rothermel's painting of this event, though one of six illustrating the battle, is the most important because, while representing in color the crashing crescendo of the contest on July 3, it symbolizes the entire three-day struggle and perhaps the Civil War itself. Owing to its size and importance Rothermel gave it his greatest

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 18. Italics are Bachelder's.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>52</sup> The picture purports to show 25 square miles of the battlefield, "the positions and movements of 175,000 men . . . [in] 309 regiments and 78 batteries. . . ." See *ibid.*, frontispiece. These statements have all the ballyhoo of P. T. Barnum.

effort and care. In 1870, before the smaller pictures were finished, he had it ready for delivery to the state for display in the capitol, as Governor Curtin had originally intended. Unfortunately, at that point the state had not carried out its end of the bargain; it had not provided for a building in Harrisburg suitable for the exhibition of a painting of that size. Governor John W. Geary, a veteran of the battle, was aware of the problem. When he officially announced the completion of the picture soon after New Year's Day, 1871, he recommended that the legislature appoint a committee to take it in charge and "prepare a place suitable for its accommodation." His next remarks contained the idea for the present State Museum, for he said that the building for the picture should be large enough and so designed as to "afford an opportunity for display of the flags and other relics of interest to citizens of the State and visitors."<sup>53</sup> The legislature took no steps to carry out his recommendation and, as it turned out, would not do so for some time to come.

Meanwhile Rothermel's "numerous friends," anxious to have the first exhibition of "his grand painting" on Pennsylvania soil, since the "heroic struggle was on it, and the gifted artist one of her native sons," arranged for an unveiling ceremony in Philadelphia.<sup>54</sup> Implicit in the situation was a legal question. The painting belonged to the state of Pennsylvania, yet the authorities could not accept delivery unless they took extraordinary measures to house it properly for public exhibition. Failing to do so, they took the easier way out by allowing Rothermel to keep possession of the picture and to exhibit it as he saw fit. The legislative committee which had made the contract for the painting assumed authority to sanction this arrangement, although it is questionable whether it had the power.<sup>55</sup> About eight months before Governor Geary made his recommendations to the legislature, the committee authorized the artist to exhibit the painting in "such of the cities of this state and within the United States as shall be agreeable to him and receive the proceeds of such exhibition for his per-

<sup>53</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives, Papers of the Governors, 1858-1871*, Ser. 4, VIII, 1149.

<sup>54</sup> Proceedings . . . relating to the picture of the battle of Gettysburg, MS, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.

<sup>55</sup> At the time of its appointment there was an understanding that the "authority and labors of the commission would end when the painting of the battle was finished and ready for delivery." *Ibid.*



sonal benefit.”<sup>56</sup> The committee found justification for granting him this privilege in “professional usage” (whatever that means), and in a desire to express its “high appreciation of the success of the artist . . . in the execution of this great historical painting. . . .”<sup>57</sup> Given this blanket permission, Rothermel and his friends were now free to display the picture at an opening ceremony and on permanent exhibition in any way they saw fit without interference from state authorities. As their plans unfolded some opposition developed, but without ultimate effect. For awhile there was danger that someone would apply for a court injunction to prevent exhibition of the picture at the unveiling exercises in December of 1870, but no one did.<sup>58</sup>

More serious, and reflecting perhaps the opinion of many people, were the views expressed in a sour editorial published in the December 12 issue of the Harrisburg *Patriot*, a Democratic and anti-administration newspaper.<sup>59</sup> Generously admitting that those who have seen the picture “pronounce it worthy of the great scenes it commemorates, as well as the genius of the distinguished artist,” the editorial showed a thorough dissatisfaction with the arrangements for its public exhibition. The paper claimed that the committee had no right to give anyone, not even Rothermel, permission to exhibit the work for private gain by charging fees for admission. But the committee no longer had control over the picture; once it had concluded a contract with Rothermel its work was done. Now that the artist had finished the painting, it was up to him to deliver it to the governor. The paper then made the serious charge that “like everything else that passes through the legislature, even this painting has been tainted with jobbing. In the first place, the committee of the legislature, among whom were Senators Connell and McConaughy, and Allen, of the House, now a member of the Senate, charged *one thousand dollars* for making the contract with Mr. Rothermel.” With heavy sarcasm it said “These patriotic servants could not refrain from turning a penny

<sup>56</sup> Resolution of State Legislative Committee upon the Painting of the Battle of Gettysburg, Philadelphia, June 2, 1870. Rothermel Collection D.P.R.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> F. Carroll Brewster to T. L. Claghorn, December 17, 1870, *ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Mr. Frank Evans, Senior Archivist, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, has identified the political complexions of the *Patriot* and *The Evening Telegraph* of Harrisburg.

out of this painting of a great event in the history of their State."<sup>60</sup> It concluded by saying that even if Rothermel were dissatisfied with the \$25,000 for his services, he should not be allowed to "peddle around this picture for which he has been fully paid by taxpayers of the State."<sup>61</sup> If put on exhibition in Philadelphia, the painting should be seen by the public without charge, but the proper move, the paper argued, would be to place it in the capitol where it belonged.

The *Evening Telegraph* of Harrisburg, a Republican organ, flatly disagreed with the opposition paper and heartily approved of the action taken by the committee. It noted that "some rather censorious remarks" had been made about a proposal to exhibit the picture for the "artist's profit," but it considered them unjust in view of all the work Rothermel had put into the painting. The payment of \$25,000 was not as large as it seemed when the "time, talent, and labor necessarily expended upon the work . . . [were] taken into consideration." The paper pointed out that during the time he spent in painting the picture, Rothermel had declined other commissions. Not only that, but he had paid money out of his own pocket for certain necessary expenditures and had given to the project more generously of his time, so that "much of the work . . . [was] a labor of love." As for the suggestion that the proper place for the picture was in the state capitol, the paper made the patronizing comment that there was no suitable building for it in Harrisburg, and if there were it would be a "pity to bury such a work of art in a country town, where comparatively few persons would ever have an opportunity to inspect it."<sup>62</sup>

This indication of some public disapproval in no way affected plans to make the first showing of the picture a memorable occasion. Caleb Cope, president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, made the first move when he wrote to Rothermel in

<sup>60</sup> On December 22, 1870, the paper repeated the accusation, but made it clear that the reimbursement to the committee was not at Rothermel's expense. It said that the committee "drew from the State Treasury the sum of one thousand dollars for the valuable and patriotic service."

<sup>61</sup> At the time the editorial appeared, Rothermel had not as yet been paid the full amount of \$25,000.

<sup>62</sup> Issue of December 17, 1870. See *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 30, 1870, which also felt that \$25,000 was not "more than sufficient after four years of labor." It went on to say that after spending a year in obtaining information the artist "took a sketch of the plan. After this he made a small study and then painted a picture ten feet long before he put up the canvas to commence his great picture."

November, 1870, suggesting that the unveiling be held under the auspices of his society at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. A few days later Rothermel graciously accepted the proposal as "evidence of . . . [the] favorable opinion of my work and disposition to foster American art."<sup>63</sup> After this polite exchange of views the officers of the academy got busy and appointed a Committee of Arrangements, consisting of James L. Claghorn, Joseph Harrison, Jr., and William Struthers. They set the date for the affair, December 20, 1870, which by accident or design was the tenth anniversary of the secession of South Carolina. For the general public the price of admission was to be \$1.00 per person for reserved seats in the parquet and balcony, and fifty cents and twenty-five cents respectively for the family circle and gallery.<sup>64</sup> The committee then started to compile a list of public luminaries, high-ranking members of the armed services, and officers of the Army of the Potomac who had fought at Gettysburg. These people were sent special invitations, in which the committee told how the legislature had ordered a picture of the Battle of Gettysburg of "such dimensions as would give a good idea of this great and decisive struggle." It went on to say that "friends of the artist deeming the picture so successful" wanted to present it to the public for the first time in such a way as "will mark the event as an epoch in American Art, and as an appeal to the patriotism of our people in all coming time." After this flight of eloquence the committee said more prosaically that if the guest accepted the invitation he would be given a ticket of admission to a reserved section of the hall free of charge.<sup>65</sup>

The choice of the date was unfortunate because the committee found itself short of time to make out a complete mailing list, and there was a frantic scramble to get the names of all those who should be invited.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, many of the prominent guests

<sup>63</sup> Letters from Cope to Rothermel, November 10, 1870, and Rothermel to Cope, November 14, 1870, printed in a newspaper clipping, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.

<sup>64</sup> Harrisburg *Patriot*, December 20, 1870.

<sup>65</sup> Printed invitation dated December 1, 1870, and James Starr to William Struthers, December 14, 1870, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.

<sup>66</sup> David Wills to William Struthers, December 10, 1870, *ibid.* Until Wills, Chairman of the Board of Managers of the Soldiers National Cemetery at Gettysburg, suggested it, no one apparently had thought to write the Adjutant General in Washington for the names of officers who had participated in the battle. It is doubtful whether the committee had enough time to follow his suggestion.

received insufficient notice to make their plans. Such generals as John Gibbon, S. W. Crawford, Henry H. Hunt, G. K. Warren, and A. A. Humphreys who had performed conspicuously in the battle, and had helped Rothermel in his labors, unfortunately could not attend, perhaps because of the pressure of official duties,<sup>67</sup> and General Joshua A. Chamberlain, then governor of Maine, wrote that he could not get away on such short notice.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, many distinguished people came to the affair, lending it an air of pomp and brilliance, and the Academy of Music was filled to its "utmost capacity."<sup>69</sup> General Meade accompanied by his wife and children had a place of honor in a private box.<sup>70</sup> General William T. Sherman, commander of the United States Army, and his staff arrayed in full uniform made their appearance at the right moment to receive the "hearty applause" of the audience. Other generals and lesser lights, such as state senators, judges, bishops, and colonels, came to honor the artist, his painting, and those who had fought in the battle. One civilian whose attendance undoubtedly caused a stir was "the renowned [and] aged John Burns of Gettysburg." Veterans in the audience might have recalled that as the men of the 1st Corps had swung into action on that hot July morning seven years ago, a little old man with a musket of ancient vintage in his hands had suddenly appeared and asked to join in defense of his home.

At precisely eight o'clock, Hassler's full military band opened the ceremony by playing a medley of patriotic airs. Then came the solemn and moving moment when the "curtain rose and unveiled the great work of art, which was greeted with a storm of applause seldom heard in the Academy. A full drum corps, stationed behind the scenes, simultaneously beat the *generale*, which produced great effect on the audience." After another musical selection the great

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Joshua L. Chamberlain to the Committee, December 17, 1870, *ibid.* As colonel of the 20th Maine Regiment, Chamberlain had led his men successfully through one of the more critical movements of the battle. His 300 or so infantrymen held the extreme left of the line on Little Round Top the afternoon of July 2, and repeatedly fought off superior forces trying to roll up the Union flank, until in desperation with ammunition running low they affixed bayonets, charged, and routed the enemy.

<sup>69</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 21, 1870.

<sup>70</sup> George G. Meade to Caleb Cope, December 10, 1870; George Meade [son] to the Committee, December 14, 1870; George G. Meade to Struthers, December 15, 1870, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.

art patron, Mr. Joseph Harrison, gave a short speech. At the end he called for Rothermel, who appeared and was greeted with "great applause." Another speaker, Colonel William McMichael, gave a brief history of the battle and ended by describing in flamboyant style the struggle to the death on Cemetery Ridge. Fully aroused, the audience called on Meade to stand up and say a few words. After saying that he should not have been in the picture, Meade complimented the artist for painting "one of the finest battle pieces in existence." He then closed with the "hope that events like that immortalized by the work of art before them, would never again occur in this country, and that universal peace might prevail for all future time." Before the end of the ceremony Meade and Sherman left the hall amid enthusiastic applause. Following their departure the orchestra played the Prussian Hymn by Swoff, someone read a poem about the battle, and the affair was over.<sup>71</sup>

A few days later Rothermel moved the picture to a temporary building on a lot near the corner of Tenth and Chestnut Streets. Some of his friends owned the property and permitted him to use it rent-free, with the understanding that at the close of the exhibition he would renovate the building.<sup>72</sup> Here for several months the public could see the picture for a fee until Rothermel took it on its travels. In Boston he exhibited it in Tremont Temple. Next he took it to Chicago in time for the great fire of '71, from which the picture emerged unscorched, but somewhat torn, so that it required a new lining. This was put on at Pittsburgh. At the close of an exhibition in that city Rothermel brought his work back to Philadelphia, where taking "every proper means . . . for its preservation" he rolled it up for storage in the "old" Philadelphia Saving Fund building.<sup>73</sup>

Governor Geary and Joseph Harrison, Jr., a friend of Rothermel,

<sup>71</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 21, 1870.

<sup>72</sup> The friends who were joint owners of the property were Colonel and Mrs. Mitchell and her brother, Henry Keene. See Gettysburg MS, *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph*, June 3, 1873. *The Daily Telegraph*, May 13, 1873, quoted from the *Scranton Republican* which asserted that Rothermel had taken the picture to the western states and exhibited it at so much per head in "nearly all the large towns and cities." Since then he had shown it periodically in Harrisburg and Philadelphia. The paper greatly exaggerated the extent of the picture's journeys. Few cities had buildings suitable for exhibition of so large a painting, and Rothermel in his story of the picture mentioned showing it only in Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia. See Gettysburg MS, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R.



rescued the picture from the attic. There still was no suitable place for the "reception and exhibition" of the painting in the capitol or any other public building in Harrisburg. Realizing that it could not remain rolled up for long without doing it serious damage, Geary early in 1873 obtained the consent of several members of the house and senate to place the painting in the hands of the park commissioners of Philadelphia, subject to the order of the state legislature. In turn the commissioners agreed to erect a gallery in Fairmount Park large enough "to house and to exhibit the painting properly."<sup>74</sup> Harrison persuaded the commissioners to enter into this contract with the state and then agreed to pay for the building at his own expense.<sup>75</sup> The new gallery had enough room to display works of other artists as well as all of the Rothermel paintings. They were now together for the first time, and could be seen free of charge. The large picture stayed in the gallery until its removal to Memorial Hall, Philadelphia, for the Centennial Exposition of 1876. There it remained for some time after the closing of the fair.<sup>76</sup>

In 1894, twenty-eight years after the legislature had commissioned Rothermel to commemorate the great victory at Gettysburg, the state finally had available the kind of building Governor Geary had recommended in 1871. The Library and Executive Building, now the Museum, had enough space to display the work properly.<sup>77</sup> The great painting, flanked on one side by the smaller and complementary pictures, now had an appropriate place where it could remain as a lasting tribute to the men who had fought in one of the most significant battles of history, and to the state which had expressed its gratitude in a work of art.

<sup>74</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives, Papers of the Governors, 1871-1883*, Ser. 4, IX, 162-163. Geary included this information in his annual message to the Assembly, January 8, 1873. According to the governor the building was 140 feet long and 43 feet wide and was located a few hundred feet from the Green Street entrance to the park.

<sup>75</sup> Harrison must have been a generous patron of art for it was he who had helped the legislative committee for a painting of the battle in its investigations. He also served on the Committee on Arrangements for the Unveiling of the big picture.

<sup>76</sup> Harrisburg *Daily Telegraph*, June 3, 1873; Gettysburg MS, Rothermel Collection, D.P.R. Rothermel gives smaller dimensions for the gallery than those mentioned by the governor. An engraving of the large picture by John Sartain is still in Memorial Hall, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia. See Mantle Fielding, *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors, and Engravers* (New York, 1945), 310.

<sup>77</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 4, 1894.













