

**TESTIMONY OF ROBERT C. WILBURN, PRESIDENT,
GETTYSBURG NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD MUSEUM FOUNDATION
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS,
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES**

**CONCERNING THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MUSEUM AND VISITOR CENTER
PROJECT AT GETTYSBURG NATIONAL MILITARY PARK**

March 21, 2002

Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee:

My name is Robert Wilburn and I am president of the Gettysburg National Battlefield Museum Foundation, a position I accepted in October 2000. Before joining the Foundation, I spent seven years as president and CEO of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and eight years as president and CEO of the Carnegie Institute. I also served six years in the cabinet of former Pennsylvania Governor Dick Thornburgh, first as Secretary of Budget and Administration and later as Secretary of Education.

(A current resume is attached at (1).)

I wish to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the partnership of the Museum Foundation and the National Park Service. The mission of the partnership is to tell the story of the Gettysburg Campaign, to restore and properly preserve the sacred ground -- and the significance -- of America's most revered Civil War battlefield, to preserve and exhibit Gettysburg's priceless collection of artifacts and archives, including the historic Cyclorama painting, and to give visitors a deeper, more lasting appreciation of what happened there. To accomplish this mission, the Museum Foundation will raise the necessary funds to restore significant portions of the battlefield and to design, build and operate new museum and visitor center facilities to enhance the Gettysburg experience for the nearly 2 million visitors who come to the park each year.

(Attachment (2) lists members of the Foundation Board of Directors who have been appointed as of the date of this testimony, the distinguished historians who are members of the Gettysburg Museum Advisory Committee, and the members of our National Council, who have agreed to work closely with us to support our fundraising and outreach efforts.)

On a personal level, I appreciate your interest in our efforts to enhance the Gettysburg experience, and I am delighted to have the opportunity through this subcommittee to inform the Congress and the American people about our hopes and our goals. I also understand your determination that the funds are spent wisely and that the project moves forward in a manner consistent with the direction of Congress, which is the ultimate steward of our National Park System.

I am humbled by the responsibility I have been granted to share in the preservation and enhancement of our national treasure at Gettysburg. I also am very proud of the Museum Foundation's efforts to date, our partnership with the Park Service, and the conceptual design plan for the park. I hope that after our discussions today, you will begin to share my enthusiasm for this project.

Before responding to your questions, I would like to spend a few moments discussing our vision for the museum, the visitor center and the Gettysburg experience. I also would like to talk about its importance to America, especially at a time when our commitment to freedom and democracy is once again being put to the test.

The Vision and the Challenge

For me, the opportunity to help improve the Gettysburg experience is the capstone of a gratifying career spent seeking out ways to excite and inspire people about their history. I believe strongly that the preservation of our heritage is a sacred responsibility. With my biases out front, I would like to share some of the vision and the solutions identified by the park service and the Museum Foundation, following several years of public study and discussion.

In the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln talked of a “new birth of freedom.” Today, I believe the public-private partnership between the National Park Service and the Museum Foundation offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a “new birth” for Gettysburg.

The heart of our effort is the new Gettysburg museum and visitor center, which will enhance the resources of the park and enable us to protect the sacred ground of our most revered Civil War battlefield. By properly restoring and preserving the battlefield and the park’s collection of artifacts, we can give visitors a deeper, more lasting appreciation of the events and the meaning of Gettysburg and help them connect that battle with America’s continuing commitment to freedom around the world.

I believe that Gettysburg’s programs and exhibits need to invite exploration of our history. They must help us better understand the forces that shaped our national character, and move us to recommit ourselves to the principle that people can govern themselves.

(Attachment (3) are op-eds I have written in the last year -- for the Pittsburgh Post Gazette and the Civil War News -- that describe in greater detail my sense of the importance of Gettysburg and the role it can play in exciting Americans about their heritage.)

Let me tell you some of our goals:

- We want to educate and to inspire; to promote learning by creating the kind of excitement that makes people thirst to know more.
- We want people to leave Gettysburg with a deeper, more lasting appreciation of what happened there.
- We want people to have a rewarding experience, and also to stir their emotions and enable them to imagine what it was like for the soldiers who battled on Gettysburg’s fields and hills in the first days of July in 1863.
- We want to create a connection with the events of 1863 and to extend that connection to the town – its architecture, its history and its people. For the fullest understanding, visitors should know the town of Gettysburg as well as the battlefield.

To achieve those goals, we need to respond to some very significant challenges.

As you know, for years the park service has lacked the money and other resources to properly preserve the collections and artifacts in its possession at Gettysburg. Nor has it had the resources to provide visitors with the critical understanding of the battle and its impact on our nation.

The battlefield park is being overwhelmed by visitors. Nearly 2 million people visit Gettysburg every year. They come from every part of the world and, right now, they are not getting all that they might from the experience. There are simply too many people for the facilities that now exist.

The visitor center is equipped to handle about 400,000 people a year – but almost five times that many come to the battlefield each year. The park has been pushed beyond the breaking point. If you visit Gettysburg during a busy season, one thing is certain – you will wait in line. You will wait to park, you will wait for tickets, and you will wait to tour exhibits.

The issue is not just about size. The existing facilities do not meet the expectations of today's visitors: They do not take advantage of modern communications tools. They do not take account of what we've learned over the years about using our collections to educate and inspire.

Nor do they provide proper protection for the Cyclorama painting or the other artifacts, manuscripts, letters and photos housed at the park. Until recently, these precious gems of our heritage were deteriorating each day, taking bits of our history with them forever. The facilities that housed these irreplaceable objects were woefully substandard. They lacked temperature and humidity controls, dust protection, and fire protection.

Thanks to a grant from "Save America's Treasures," the park has been able to move the collections into temporary facilities, so deterioration has been halted. But that's just a temporary solution. We must provide museum-standard, environmentally controlled space to ensure permanent protection, preservation and display.

One of the most precious objects in the collection is the 26 foot by 370 foot Cyclorama painting, entitled "The Battle of Gettysburg." Created in 1884, this magnificent painting is truly an interpretive icon of the 19th century. Unfortunately, the building in which it is currently displayed was not properly designed for this task. In addition, it has structurally failed, exposing the painting to excess humidity as well as structural stress. Painting conservators have warned us that if these conditions are not corrected, we face catastrophic separation of pigment from canvas.

The visitor experience also is undermined by inappropriate siting of modern buildings and facilities. Because of these intrusions, visitors struggle to picture Gettysburg as it existed nearly 140 years ago. Facilities stand atop some of the most significant and fabled battlefields. The ground where the union repulsed Pickett's charge; the blood-soaked terrain of Cemetery Ridge; the greenery of Ziegler's Grove – are today occupied by buildings and parking lots. Buses and cars compete to park where soldiers struggled and died.

The Foundation's partnership with the park service is designed to change all of that by raising the necessary funds to restore and preserve this national treasure for future generations. The partnership will:

Provide the American people with a state-of-the art museum and visitor center.

- Ensure high quality interpretation and educational opportunities.

- Restore and fully protect the Cyclorama painting.
- Protect and provide for proper display of artifact collection.
- Return significant portions of the battlefield, now paved over and covered with buildings, as close as possible to their state in 1863.
- Acquire additional battlefield land to expand the park's buffer area and provide a "decompression zone" to give visitors a better sense of what Gettysburg was like 140 years ago.
- Create a permanent endowment to support ongoing annual building maintenance and preservation of the park's collection.

A Progress Report

That is the vision. As the subcommittee considers our plans, it also may wish to know more about the events that led us to this point, our interactions with the park service and the progress of our fundraising. In addition, I am aware of some concerns about the project budget and some apprehension that our reach may exceed our grasp. These are appropriate questions.

Let me begin with a quick summary of the Museum Foundation and the partnership.

The Museum Foundation was established in 1997 to address the needs of the Gettysburg National Military Park, as outlined in the park's General Management Plan. From the beginning, the Museum Foundation believed that a partnership with the park service would be the best way to address the challenges facing this historic treasure. Toward that end, we created an advisory board of noted Civil War scholars for assistance in developing the interpretive plan.

In addition to a new museum and visitor center, the partnership is designed to enhance roads and infrastructure, acquire land, restore the Cyclorama painting, restore historic landscapes, preserve and enhance display of the park's collection of Civil War artifacts, and equip and furnish the new facilities. The Museum Foundation also agreed to run the new visitor center and, after 20 years, to donate the land, building and facilities to the park service.

Since my appointment as Museum Foundation president in October 2000, I have devoted much of my time to developing a fundraising and financial management plan and completing a fundraising feasibility study, while at the same time recruiting a board of directors and convening a design team to complete the detailed concepts for the new building.

In July 2001, following a nationwide search, the Museum Foundation, in partnership with the park service, engaged the architectural firm of Cooper, Robertson & Partners, whose work includes Monticello, the city of Charleston, SC, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and Lincoln Center. We also selected the exhibit design firm of Gallagher & Associates, which has provided similar services for the Smithsonian, the visitor center at Yellowstone National Park, the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the Maryland Museum of African American History and Culture in Baltimore.

For six months, the team -- composed of representatives from the Museum Foundation, the park service, the architect and the exhibit designer -- met frequently to develop a conceptual design for the building that, on the one hand, blends into the rural Pennsylvania landscape while at the same time uses state-of-the-art exhibitry to tell the Gettysburg story. In January we released the conceptual design for the facilities. The design has received wide public acclaim.

(Renderings of the conceptual design for the building, as well as a ground floor rendering of the building interior, are at Attachment (4).)

We also have identified the first nine members of our board of directors and are involved in discussions with a number of prominent individuals about joining this group. Our goal is a well-rounded and diverse board with appropriate interests and expertise. The board, as well as the advisory committee of historians, participated in the review of our conceptual design plans.

With the conceptual design in hand and an initial group of directors in place, we are now moving into active fundraising and plan to raise sufficient funds to allow for groundbreaking as planned in 2004.

Gettysburg Community Embraces the Project

However worthy our goals for the park, we cannot truly fulfill our objectives without the involvement and support of the citizens of Gettysburg. With that in mind, we continue to keep interested local citizens, community and business leaders, and public officials in the greater Gettysburg area informed about our progress, and to solicit their input. Our board and advisory committees include representatives from the community; we also are an active partner in the Main Street Gettysburg coalition. We view the project for which we have responsibility as an important component of a variety of programs and activities underway to enhance the Gettysburg experience for our visitors.

One cannot fully experience the battlefields without also experiencing the town, which itself was a site of military action where soldiers camped, fought and died. We want to extend visitors' stays in Gettysburg, to encourage them to experience the town and to return for repeat visits. We support the park service's plans to develop an improved transportation system that will reduce traffic backups and move visitors more easily and efficiently from the visitor center to the town and back.

I am pleased to report a positive response from the people of Gettysburg, who I believe have grown more enthusiastic as our plans have taken shape. Just last week we had a very positive public meeting in Gettysburg with members of the park's Advisory Commission. This meeting gave us an opportunity to answer many questions posed by commission members and residents, and I was pleased that we continued to receive only favorable comments about our plans.

Project Details Shape the Budget

There has been some concern about growth in the project budget since Congressional approval of the General Management Plan (GMP) in 2000. It is important to recognize, however, the distinction between a preliminary estimate based on a very generalized plan and a budget that reflects detailed conceptual plans as well as careful study of the specific program elements required to fulfill the project mission.

The \$95 million cost includes some elements not in the GMP number -- for example, the \$10 million endowment to provide ongoing support for building maintenance and preservation of the collection. Administrative and fundraising costs, which had been netted out in the GMP, now are explicitly accounted

for.

There also were elements in the GMP that the Museum Foundation supported but for which we did not initially have responsibility. In the process of developing the project, we identified opportunities that would significantly improve the visitor experience but which would also require additional funds.

For example, the cost of restoring the historic Cyclorama painting has increased as the Museum Foundation pledged to not only restore the current painting, but also to replace parts of the original painting that had been removed and lost over the years. When the painting first was displayed -- in the 1880s -- the experience was said to be so realistic that grown men wept. To restore the Cyclorama's full integrity and to ensure maximum impact on the visitor, the missing elements need to be replaced.

Another exciting element of the visitor experience will be the inclusion in the museum and visitor center of open storage space – something not originally anticipated – that will allow visitors to see more of the park's world-class collection of artifacts.

The costs for offsite improvements, such as overflow parking and restoration of adjacent lands, will add \$4.4 million that was not originally budgeted but which will enhance the visitor experience. The Museum Foundation also has assumed responsibility to raise \$1 million for an interpretive film and \$5.5 million in building and exhibit fit-out costs that otherwise would have been passed on to visitors.

In short, the Museum Foundation agreed to view these program enhancements not as fundraising challenges but as opportunities. We were pleased to take on the responsibility of raising additional funds for these enhancements to make sure the Gettysburg experience reaches its full potential.

I should also note that our campaign goal is entirely consistent with capital campaigns underway right now at other nationally significant historic sites. Monticello, home of Thomas Jefferson, is in the midst of a campaign to raise \$100 million for a new visitor center and other program needs. In Philadelphia, the new Constitution Center and Independence Hall Visitor Center, have as their campaign goal \$225 million. And Colonial Williamsburg is in the midst of the first capital campaign in its history, with a goal of \$500 million.

Fundraising Update

To date, we have raised about 10 percent of our goal. This reflects a very deliberate and orderly approach.

We first established a fundraising plan and conducted a donor prospect assessment to measure our opportunities and refine our fundraising strategy. Next we identified the architect and exhibit design team, and completed conceptual design concepts. Experience shows that fundraising for large projects of this nature do not get very far until donors can see a design and renderings. People want to know what they are supporting.

We have identified many potential donors and had preliminary conversations with a number of them. Election of board members also has been an important step in this process. Now, we are ready to go. Based on the response to the conceptual plans, I can report that people feel very strongly about Gettysburg and the need to restore it and take advantage of the educational opportunity it presents. Our goal is to

translate that sentiment into the necessary financial support.

A Classroom of Democracy

We consider this effort the opportunity of a lifetime to build something of lasting significance. But more than that, preserving and enhancing the Gettysburg National Military Park is a responsibility that we all assume for future generations. This sense of responsibility has been heightened since September 11. In that regard, I should note that the renewed spirit of patriotism that we all have seen emerge from that tragic day is also visible at Gettysburg. Park guests seem more contemplative and more eager for understanding of the forces that have shaped America and enabled us to overcome the agony of Civil War.

If we make the most of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, the restoration of the battlefield and the new museum and visitor center will enable us to better fulfill our educational mission and ignite in our visitors a passion to learn. By bringing to life the experiences of 1863, we can help Americans better see the links between the struggles of the Civil War and the challenges we face today.

Nearly 140 years ago, President Lincoln came to Gettysburg to honor the dead. On that occasion, he urged Americans to be “dedicated here to the unfinished work” of freedom and democracy. Today, another generation has picked up that torch. Preserving the battlefield of Gettysburg and making it a classroom of democracy is one way to advance the unfinished work that Abraham Lincoln laid before us.

Thank you.