



The Jennie Wade House Museum

# CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

## ★ Preserving the Stories of Civilians in the Civil War ★

By Karen Hendricks | Photography by Noel Kline

Three days in July 1863 changed the course of American history. They also altered the lives of Gettysburg’s civilians forever. The Battle of Gettysburg resulted in 51,000 horrific casualties, including those who died in battle, were wounded or were captured. However, that figure does not include the only civilian fatality, civilians who died of disease caused by unhealthy post-battle conditions, or those hurt by the profusion of leftover shells and guns littering the town and fields.

Many of their stories have remained untold until now. More than 150 years after the battle, today’s tourism industry is rediscovering and focusing on the civilian side of the story, researching and sharing stories of Gettysburg’s residents in 1863. In the process, residents and visitors alike finally have the opportunity to learn about the historic, and often heroic, “other side of the story.”

### Wrong Place at the Wrong Time

“I think the civilians’ stories were overlooked for a long time,” says Janice Miller, manager of the Jennie Wade House Museum. “Thousands of wounded and dying soldiers were left behind—plus laundry and meals—and (Gettysburg’s fate) was up to the young women of the town.

Disease, from the horses and bodies, would have gone rampant if it weren’t for their efforts. It’s truly time for people to learn about the important role that civilians played in the war.”

Located south of the square on Baltimore Street, the Jennie Wade House Museum has been open continuously since 1904, dedicated to retelling the story and honoring the memory of 20-year-old Mary Virginia “Jennie” Wade, the only resident killed during the battle.

“Jennie’s story is fascinating because there are so many facets to her story,” Miller explains. Although known

Breckenridge Street, fled to Georgia’s house during the battle, not only for their own safety, but to help Georgia who was due to give birth.

“The women also felt it was their patriotic duty to provide bread to the Union soldiers,” says Miller. On the morning of July 3, as Jennie was kneading dough, a stray bullet ripped through two doors in the home, striking her in the left shoulder blade and heart. The dough tray where she was working, as well as the home’s original bullet-marked doors, remain today for visitors to see.

### ‘The Other Side of the Story’

“We have a great working relationship with the Jennie Wade House Museum,” says Nancie Gudmestad, museum director of Shriver House Museum. “We constantly refer visitors to each other’s museums because the two houses depict the two extremes of Gettysburg’s residences in the 1860s—one poor and the other very rich.”

Gudmestad, in her 18<sup>th</sup> season at Shriver House Museum, purchased the home with her husband Del in the 1990s, and completely by chance, stumbled upon and pieced together the history of its former owners. Already interested in opening a museum dedicated to civilian stories,



Janice Miller explains the daily life of Jennie Wade in the first floor bedroom of her home.

as the Jennie Wade House Museum, the restored home was actually the residence of Jennie’s sister Georgia McClellan. Jennie and her mother, who lived on







Nancie Gudmestad, museum director of Shriver House Museum, discusses the history of the Shriver house to a group of Road Scholars.

Gudmestad decided to focus exclusively on those of the Shriver family.

"I consider myself extremely lucky to be the caretaker of the Shriver's stories," Gudmestad explains. "To walk through the house and put my hand on the same doorknob as them—it's thrilling. I feel compassion for all of the civilians and what they endured."

Gudmestad learned that George and Hettie Shriver had married at 18. Due to the inheritance of a large family farm that produced vast quantities of liquor, George had the large brick home constructed, with an adjoining saloon and bowling alley in the works when he went off to war, leaving his wife and two daughters in Gettysburg.

Gudmestad's spellbinding tours take visitors through the house as she recounts the Shriver family's personal narrative. During the Battle of Gettysburg, Hettie and the girls sought refuge with her parents about three miles south of town—ironically located between Big and Little Round Tops. When the Shriver women returned to the

home, it was totally devastated and taken over by Confederates.

Nearly 143 years later in 2006, a CSI police detective, using a luminol-like chemical, confirmed the presence of mass quantities of blood in the area where it is known at least two soldiers died during the siege. This gave the Gudmestads scientific evidence that Confederate sharpshooters were indeed poised in the Shriver's attic.

"Sometimes visitors comment that they want to see 'the real battlefield,' and I tell them this is it," says Gudmestad. "People thought we were crazy when we first opened, but if you only hear the story of the battle, you are only hearing half of the story. The civilian story is the 'other' side of the story."



Located in the southwestern corner of the town's square, this plaque honors the brave citizens who endured the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863.

## Caring for the Wounded

"Just as you can't understand the battle without the context of the Civil War, you can't understand the story of Gettysburg civilians without the context of the town," says Gettysburg Licensed Town Historian Jane Malone. "What the civilians did between July 1, 1863 and January of 1864 was so important to the men who fought here. They took care of the wounded and

saved many lives... There are many stories of compassion and life-long friendships."

Malone, one of 10 historians who offer guided, themed tours of Gettysburg and its history, operates out of a downtown location shared with the Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Association a block from Lincoln Square at 33 York Street.

"Gettysburg is a town of monuments to heroism and patriotism, but there are also monuments of compassion—such as the churches and many houses that served as Civil War hospitals," says Malone. "During and following the battle, the town was a vast sea of misery, and a massive tent hospital was built east of town."

The town's civilians were like first responders, she adds. "The women get so little credit, but with few men left in the town at the time of the battle, the brunt of the battle (cleanup) fell on the women."

Malone and other historians often stop by a small, often unnoticed marker on Lincoln Square, which honors Civil War era civilians' remarkable efforts. "After the battle, there was a second invasion of gawkers, nurses and reporters, followed by the crowds who came for President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in November, and the town put them up too," Malone says. "They were a resilient population."

## 'Ordinary People Did Extraordinary Things'

A fixture in Gettysburg's tourism community, the National Civil War Wax Museum opened its doors in 1962 to tell the story of the battle through wax figures and recorded narrations. The museum underwent a major transformation this

## A Message Delivered

Charles W. Griest of York Springs volunteered to carry a dispatch from Gov. Andrew Curtin to the Union army at Gettysburg on June 30, 1863. He delivered the message to Gen. John Buford and remained with his division. On July 1, while carrying a message to the 17<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Cavalry, his horse was shot and fell upon him, severely injuring his leg. Both Griest and his horse survived.

Read more civilian encounters online at [www.celebrategettysburg.com](http://www.celebrategettysburg.com).

## Explore Gettysburg's Civilian Stories

**Gettysburg Heritage Center**  
297 Steinwehr Ave., Gettysburg  
717-334-6245  
[www.gettysburgmuseum.com](http://www.gettysburgmuseum.com)

**Licensed Town Historians**  
33 York St., Gettysburg  
717-253-5737  
[www.gblth.com](http://www.gblth.com)

**Jennie Wade House Museum**  
548 Baltimore St., Gettysburg  
717-334-4100  
[www.gettysburgbattlefieldtours.com/jennie-wade-house/](http://www.gettysburgbattlefieldtours.com/jennie-wade-house/)

**Shriver House Museum**  
309 Baltimore St., Gettysburg  
717-334-2800  
[www.shriverhouse.org](http://www.shriverhouse.org)

year and recently reopened its doors as the Gettysburg Heritage Center, a museum dedicated to "the story of Gettysburg—before, during, and after the battle," says Tammy Myers, president of the Gettysburg Heritage Center.

"We want to present human interest stories that provide a deeper understanding of the battle," Myers explains. "We want to help visitors answer the question, 'How can I personally connect to the Civil War period?'"

Demolition inside the Steinwehr Avenue building began on January 23. "We were extremely ambitious with our goals in terms of renovating and redesign—everything was gutted with the exception of the theater and bathrooms," says Myers.

When guests step inside the museum now, they find themselves within a Civil War-era street scene lined with building facades, including a replica of the Gettysburg Railroad Station. Technology and partnerships are playing starring roles in the museum's refocused future. Myers points to a new, high-definition movie


produced in collaboration with the Civil War Trust. The 16-minute movie summarizes major events within the three days of battle.

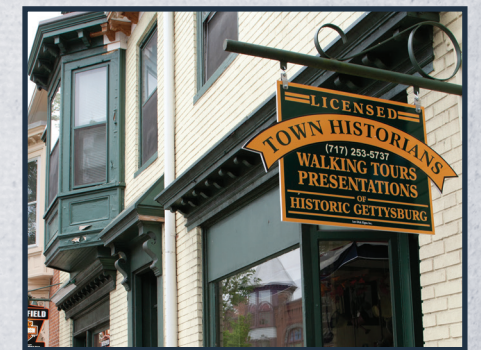
The gallery portion of the museum, developed based on research by the Adams County Historical Society, presents civilian stories via gallery exhibits. There, visitors can catch two brief, 3-D films. One of the films tackles the subject of death and mourning, while the other focuses on Gettysburg's industry and commerce—and how it changed dramatically following the battle.

Carriage making, for example, was the town's No. 1 industry prior to the Civil War, with the majority of carriages sent southward. Following the devastation of the Confederacy, Gettysburg's main industries were forced to adapt.

"Deadly Souvenirs," the title of a hexagon-shaped gallery exhibit, features rifles that visitors can pick up, as if they were residents finding the weapons strewn on fields, left behind by soldiers. Every so often the exhibit's screen "explodes" to simulate the loss

of life due to live ammunition. Another exhibit will recreate a cellar experience, so that visitors learn what civilians endured when they fled to their basements during the battle.

"Keeping the civilian stories alive better connects us to our past," Myers says. "Ordinary people did extraordinary things during the Battle of Gettysburg—that's a theme woven into our exhibits. We want to inspire visitors and show them that anyone can be a hero if put in the right situation." And that's a theme that brings the past full-circle, into the present. 



Located at 33 York St., the Licensed Town Historians bring Gettysburg civilians' experiences before, during, and after the battle to life for today's residents.