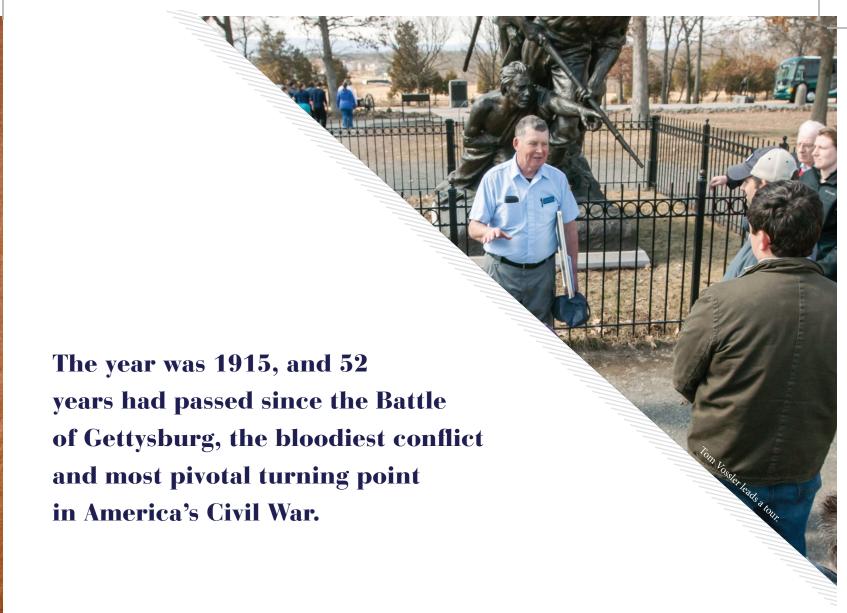


For 100 Years, Licensed Battlefield Guides Have Preserved the Stories of Gettysburg

By Karen Hendricks | Photography by Casey Martin





Gettysburg National Military Park, as we know it today, was taking shape through the careful planning of monuments and park avenues. Thousands of visitors were drawn to Gettysburg's hallowed battlefields to hear stories of the soldiers who fought here.

Prior to 1915, the caretakers of those stories were mainly Civil War veterans and Gettysburg civilians. Gradually, the stories were entrusted to their sons, but by 1912, complaints about battlefield tour guides were rampant and documented; many were local residents, considered charlatans capitalizing on the influx of tourists.

The National Park Commission took control in 1915 by requiring all battlefield guides to be licensed, by way of an exam ensuring they grasped an understanding of the battle, its soldiers, movements, and the outcomes along battle lines. It was the birth of the Licensed Battlefield Guides, today known as "the nation's oldest licensed professional guide service." A year later, the Association of Licensed Battlefield Guides

(ALBG) was founded, and the profession was on its way, rebuilding its reputation and paving the way for a century's worth of storytellers dedicated to historically-accurate, personalized, and guided tours across Gettysburg National Military Park.

"More men and women have flown in space than have been licensed battlefield guides," says Joe Mieczkowski, licensed battlefield guide and current ALBG president. "It's prestigious—a privilege to be a guide."

Today, there are approximately 150 active licensed battlefield guides—independent contractors under the umbrella of the National Park Service. Over the years, licensure exams have grown more rigorous, while the guide force has grown more diversified, welcoming members hailing from varied walks of life and hometowns across the nation. This year's centennial is a celebration of these special caretakers.

# 100 Years of Storytellers

Take a look back at the history of the Association of Licensed Battlefield Guides in Gettysburg.

Timeline Information Courtesy of Licensed Battlefield Guides Fred Hawthorne and Sue Boardman | Photos Courtesy of Sue Boardman

#### 1863-1895

Veterans oversaw the growth of the park under the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association. Many veterans served as the first guides.

#### 1891



The death of William Holtzworth (born in 1843). "He is the model all 19<sup>th</sup>-century guides emulated and deserves the title 'Father of the Battlefield Guides," writes Licensed Battlefield Guide Fred Hawthorne. He escorted many dignitaries including President Cleveland and Vice-President Hendricks; and French artist Paul Philippoteaux in preparation for his painting of the cyclorama paintings.

#### Pre-1915





According to a paragraph in an April 1936 NPS memo: "Before 1915 there was no proper guide organization. During this period the greatest part of the monuments were erected and much of the park avenues were surveyed and built...the men who assisted...and witnessed the erection of the monuments soon came to have an intimate knowledge of the field. It was during this same period that the men who had fought in the Civil War were visiting the battlefield, and a demand for guides arose."

### Oct. 17, 1915



The National Park Commission announced that only licensed guides were allowed to conduct tours; 91 guides are licensed, badged and soon uniformed. The first guide examination was given. Test results placed applicants into one of three classes. First class guides were those who scored above 70 percent on the exam, second class guides scored 50-69 percent, and third class guides received scores of 40-49 percent. Of the 91 licenses issued, 37 were first class, 38 were second class, and 16 were third class.

### Oct. 24, 1916

An association of guides was formed with 16 charter members. The AFL General George G. Meade Local Union #1 — Gettysburg Battlefield Guide Association's purposes were to improve the efficiency of the guide service, improve the attention to the tourist, and provide mutual protection.

#### 1950



Front of licensed battlefield guide brochure

#### 1976



Licensed battlefield guide badge



Licensed battlefield guide patch

#### 1980s-90s

Ken Burns' PBS series "The Civil War" renewed interest in both the American Civil War and Gettysburg. Coupled with activities centered around the commemoration of the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle, visitation increased along with the number of guide applicants.

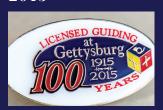
#### 1917

A set of guide rules and regulations was published including rates (for the first time). The fee for one car or bus was set at \$1.50 for the first hour plus "\$1 for each additional hour or major fraction thereof." Groups arriving in two or more cars, sharing one guide, would pay \$2 for the first hour and \$1.50 per additional hour. As the speed limit was set at a speed of 15 mph one regulation established the standard tour length of two hours in order to cover the 22 miles.

#### 1968

Barbara Schutt became the first female licensed battlefield guide. Two more women received their licenses in 1970.

#### 2015



Commemorative 1915–2015 pin celebrates the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of licensed battlefield guides

#### 1963

During the first eight months of the centennial year of the Battle of Gettysburg, a total of 50 guides provided 13,049 long auto tours; 1,432 short auto tours; 2,174 bus tours; and collected \$86,933 in guide fees. Also in 1963, Gettysburg's new visitor center was completed and gave park guides a home for the first time.

# "When I'm out on a tour, it's all about the story and trying to do it justice—I can't help but get excited about it."

Licensed Battlefield Guide Britt Isenberg

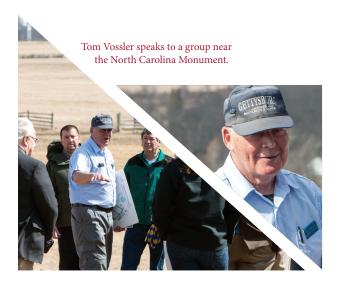
## A Calling to Guide

"My interest began with my great-grandfather—two generations removed from an ancestor who fought in the Civil War—and from the time I was three or four, I grew up hearing stories about my ancestor," explains Licensed Battlefield Guide Britt Isenberg, 29, one of the youngest and newest guides.

"When I was six or seven years old, my parents brought me to Gettysburg for the first time. I don't remember our [licensed battlefield] guide's name but I sat in the front seat with him. I remember him telling stories about the Confederates in the area of the railroad cut—it was dramatic. My appreciation for Civil War stories grew into something incredible from there."

After earning degrees in history and geography from Millersville University, the Millersburg, Pa., native moved to Gettysburg in the summer of 2011 with the sole purpose of becoming a guide. Through coincidence, Isenberg met Licensed Battlefield Guide Richard Rigney, who was like a mentor. The two met while working for FedEx York.

"It's a passion for me...everything always came back to Civil War history and telling the story," Isenberg says.



He officially became a guide in May 2014 and has about 50 tours under his belt. Very few guides are able to make a living exclusively from guiding; however, Isenberg hopes to be the exception to the rule.

One such guide, who incorporates licensed battlefield guiding into a full-time position, is Sue Boardman, leadership program director for the Gettysburg Foundation. She became a licensed battlefield guide in 2001, and assumed her current position in 2005. Former Gettysburg Foundation President Bob Wilburn asked her to develop a leadership program for corporate groups based upon her knowledge of officers' leadership roles and styles in the Battle of Gettysburg.

Her career path to this point, however, was extremely unique. Boardman was an ER nurse for 23 years in her hometown area of Danville/Sunbury, where she developed a love of estate sales, auctions, antiques, and their stories. Her career path and life changed all because of a box of old books.

"I discovered a handwritten diary, a leather Civil War diary, and felt the past calling to me...It was written by a soldier named Michael Schroyer from Selinsgrove...who served in Co. G,  $147^{\rm th}$  PA Volunteers, and covered a three-year time span...from the Battle of Chancellorsville, then Gettysburg, out to the Midwest, Tennessee, Atlanta...it put a personal face on the story of the war."

She continued researching the Civil War and took a leap of faith in 1997.

"You talk about crazy...on the bold assumption that I was going to pass the [licensed battlefield guide] test, I moved here, walked away from a nursing career...thank goodness I had a supportive husband...we picked up and moved to Gettysburg."

Many licensed battlefield guides, like Boardman, consider their profession to be a "calling" that builds on previous careers.

"Every day I'm in awe of the people I get to work with, from diverse backgrounds, enjoyable people who are former doctors, attorneys, school teachers, or military," says Denny



Joe Mieczkowski presents Gettysburg National Military Park Superintendent Ed Clark and Gettysburg Foundation President Joanne Hanley with the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary pin.

Forwood, licensed battlefield guide and chairman of the ALBG centennial committee. He conducts about 300 tours annually.

Forwood, a retired dentist who practiced in Schuylkill County, grew up in Maryland and visited Gettysburg frequently. He started guiding in 1995, riding a wave of interest in the Civil War following the release of the movie "Gettysburg." For many years he commuted 100 miles per weekend, but in 2014 he moved to Gettysburg permanently.

"Gettysburg holds a special place—a pivotal place—in American history and to convey that to people keeps me coming back every day; I hold the battlefield in reverence," Forwood says.

## **Passion for the Story**

Despite their various backgrounds, one thing all guides share is a passion for keeping history alive.

"For the early guides who lived here, guiding was an economic thing—they found a way to make money," says Licensed Battlefield Guide Steve Slaughter, vice president of the ALBG. "Today guides are drawn to Gettysburg because they have passion."

Slaughter says his Civil War passion took hold in childhood. After a career as a history teacher in nearby Maryland, he made the natural transition to licensed battlefield guiding in 2008. Most guides today do not pass the written licensure exam until their second try, but Slaughter is one of the few who passed on his first attempt. However, he says passing the written exam, then an oral exam, is only the beginning. "Being a guide is a lifelong process of continual learning."

# Schedule a Tour with a Licensed Battlefield Guide

Licensed battlefield guides are available daily at the Gettysburg National Military Park's Museum and Visitor Center, 1195 Baltimore Pike, on a first-come, first-served basis.

Tours may also be arranged for dates more than 48 hours ahead of time by calling the guides' reservation number at 717-337-1709.

Guides either ride with you in your vehicle or, if you prefer, they can drive your vehicle for you so that you can better enjoy the tour.

A standard, two-hour tour for one to six people is \$65. Longer tours, customized tours, or tours for larger groups are also available.

For additional details, visit the ALBG website at www.gettysburgtourguides.org.



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Licensed Battlefield Guide and Association of Licensed Battlefield Guides President Joe Mieczkowski

And every tour presents new challenges. Guides always begin by asking visitors where they are from, why they are here, and how they would like to spend the next two hours. The answers to those questions determine the routes and stories presented by guides so that each tour is customized.

"The amazing thing is that we all have our different styles, telling the story, but in the end it's the same story," says Licensed Battlefield Guide Tom Vossler, who became a guide after a 30-year military career.

"It's even further amazing because all of us come from such diverse backgrounds," Vossler adds. "People from all walks of life come and assimilate into this walking/talking guide that can do an excellent interpretation of events...of the people involved here. In the end it's all about people... You're working face to face with people and you're talking about people."

Vossler says his army career, as a combat arms commander of infantry and tank units, serving as a platoon leader in combat during the Vietnam War and Cambodia, shapes his stories. "I certainly do not want to draw comparisons, but having been on a battlefield as an active participant, I will point out...different aspects of the battlefield that are meaningful...I can tell them firsthand what the men are

Sue Boardman explains Spangler Farm while a tour group "re-enacts" Pickett's Charge.

feeling, what they're going through—their mindset, their reaction, or predicted reaction to different situations. That's a gift I guess or a skill that I try to include in my guiding," Vossler says.

"As we part ways and people thank me, they often say, 'You brought it to life—it's like you were there.' But in mind, body, and spirit, I have been there and done that," says Vossler.

In addition to being a licensed battlefield guide available to the general public, Vossler is one of three guides who assist Boardman with leadership-oriented corporate tours. He says whether he is guiding families, dignitaries, or corporate leaders, there are enduring lessons to be learned from Gettysburg's story.

"It helps define from a national perspective who we are," Vossler says. "One of my clients the park service assigned me was newsman Peter Jennings, who was Canadian. He and his coauthor wrote a series of books on America and the American character. We spent a whole day together on the battlefield, and his primary reason for coming here was to gain an understanding of Gettysburg, the Civil War, and why they were so important to the American people. Why do 1.6 or 1.8 million people visit every year? What are they looking for? And the answer—Gettysburg is part of our character."

## The Next Century of Caretakers

As for the future of guiding, Forwood says the past 100 years have established a tradition to be maintained. "I like to think there will always be a role for personalized guided tours," he says. "There are lots of other ways to see the park, but what we do is at the pinnacle of that list—we can take people exactly where or to what they want to see...That's part of our celebration this year."

Licensed battlefield guiding is still evolving, says Mieczkowski. "We tell the stories of the soldiers. But the composition of visitors changes, so now we have guides carrying iPads and utilizing technology... and there are African-American and Hispanic soldiers' stories to be told."

Slaughter says he's optimistic that licensed battlefield guiding will continue spreading a passion for history in millions of future visitors. "For many guides it's a passion or calling, a life-changing event-probably one of the most rewarding things we've done in our lives or careers. When you lead tours two or three times a day, you're tired at the end of the day, but you also have a feeling of accomplishment."

As for Isenberg, he hopes his own personal history repeats itself. "When I'm out on a tour, it's all about the story and trying to do it justice—I can't help but get excited about it... I look forward to meeting more wonderful people passionate about history and continuing to share stories with them. And just maybe one of these kids I have in a vehicle with me one day will also feel the calling to become a guide." @

# **Celebrate** the Centennial

Numerous events are planned throughout 2015 to commemorate the centennial of licensed battlefield guiding.



Memorial Day through Labor Day, licensed battlefield guides will offer a free, guided tour of Soldiers National Cemetery every night at 6 p.m.



A seminar planned at the Gettysburg Heritage Center is titled "Battle Between the Barns: The Fight for the Emmitsburg Road Ridge."



A keynote dinner is planned for guides and guests on the date when the first guide was issued a license in 1915.



A memorial service honoring past guides will be held in November.

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