

Editor's note: Elizabeth and Bill Hallett are familiar friends of the Joshua Chamberlain Civil War Round Table. Elizabeth recently presented "Sacred to the Memory: Mourning Customs of the Civil War." They are active members of the Civil War Roundtable of New Hampshire and the Civil War Roundtable of the Merrimack. Bill generously agreed to share their experience at Gettysburg's 2019 Remembrance Day observance with us. (P.J.S.)

REMEMBRANCE DAY 2019 GETTYSBURG

William Hallett, Civil War Roundtable of New Hampshire

On November 19, 1863, President Lincoln said a few appropriate words for the dedication of the Soldiers' Cemetery in Gettysburg. His remarks have stood the test of time.

To honor both the men and the speech that redefined the war, each November in Gettysburg a day called "Remembrance Day" is held, usually the Saturday nearest November 19th, with many commemorations and events for reenactors, living historians, and the general public. In the mid-1990s, Ellsworth and Cynthia Brown began a tradition that has been handed to my wife Elizabeth, with my help, for the last ten years.

We flag the New England graves in the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg. Over the years, some other groups have started to handle the small number of graves for Rhode Island and Connecticut. So, we flag nearly 400 graves for New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont.



Flagged graves at Soldiers' National Cemetery. (Photo provided by Bill Hallett.)



New England honors her sons at Gettysburg. (Photo provided by Bill Hallett.)

On Saturday morning at 8:30 a.m., Liz hosts a small, yet touching ceremony open to anyone who wishes to participate. This year we were accompanied by Liz's daughter Aileen who came up from South Carolina, and several members of the Sons of Union Veterans from the New England area. Members of the Civil War Roundtable of New Hampshire were also on hand. A special appearance at the ceremony was Christopher Gwinn, Supervisory Park Ranger for the Division of Interpretation and Education at Gettysburg. (Chris is also a native of Amesbury, MA, and an old acquaintance.)

After words are spoken, everyone is invited to take some rosemary from the basket Liz provides and walk among the graves. A sprig of the herb is placed on each New

Englander's stone and his name is spoken aloud. Rosemary is the herb of remembrance, going back to Roman times, and is mentioned in Shakespeare. On this day with this action, these men far from home are not forgotten. Other events in the cemetery occur and it's not uncommon to hear Taps or various dirges played as groups place wreaths or flowers at different states.

One highlight for many is the annual parade. We lined up behind Twin Sycamores and Wainwright Ave. by the Gettysburg Middle School. In 2017, amid the hysteria of Confederate symbols, a threat was made against the parade. Nothing happened, fortunately, but the precedent was set for the need of special security for the safety of those participating and the spectators of the parade.



Elizabeth Hallett with daughter Aileen Kelly.
(Photo provided by Bill Hallett.)

The route of the parade was also altered. The old route followed much of Lincoln's route coming out of Middle Street near the Courthouse, but now we enter Baltimore St. and follow the route onto Steinwehr Ave. We ended across from the McDonald's near the entrance to the Old Cyclorama parking.

Along the route was Ed Bearss with Dean Schultz, the man whose property abuts Neill Avenue and much of the area known as the "Lost Avenue." Ed was greeting people and shaking hands and was still sharp as a tack at 96. After the parade, we paid our respects to both gentlemen, chatted about Civil War topics, and moved along.

More events continue, but some are weather contingent, like the free brass band performance on Little Roundtop which happens around 4 p.m. Several musicians from different states perform patriotic melodies, hymns popular during the time of the Civil War, and usually finish up with Taps as a lone bugler stands upon one of the boulders facing west. All of this is against the backdrop of Plum Run, Devil's Den and the monuments. This year they had to shorten the program as light rain plagued the performance; the rain became heavy and it was cold!

As evening draws near, many people look to an assortment of entertainment, such as Civil War balls, where dancing in the style of the era is fun. Or, like the program at Christ Lutheran Church, where Civil War music is interspersed with stories of the church in the battle—from the chaplain being killed on the steps to the building becoming a hospital. Shops and sutler stores are open and, of course, meals can be had at places like the Dobbin House.

But the ever-popular Gettysburg Illumination was canceled this year due to the rain. That was unfortunate, as many people look forward to it, including Robert and Kristy Hodgman and their son Zach, who were experiencing their first Remembrance Day weekend. Liz, her daughter Aileen, and I attended the ball, which featured the music of the 2nd South Carolina String Band. We enjoy their music and know most of the band members. The period dances, in period attire, made for a pleasant wrap up on the day.

If anyone is interested in attending future Remembrance Day events or has questions, please contact Liz Hallett at: bonacker76@yahoo.com.