

Gettysburg College in the Civil War

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Gettysburg College was originally founded as PENNSYLVANIA COLLEGE in 1832. When the Civil War broke out in April 1861, the Pennsylvania College community responded like much of the country. Faculty participated in rallies and public meetings and, along with students, volunteered for military service. A militia company was formed by the students in June 1861 and became quite proficient in drill and maneuvers. They marched in the July 4 parade held to show Gettysburg's support for the Union.



After the initial excitement, the reality of war set in and the College pressed on with classes, lectures, and recitations, putting the conflict in the background as much as possible despite a drop-off in enrollment. The drop-off had much to do with Gettysburg's proximity to the Maryland border and the threat of invasion from a Confederate force. Several close calls occurred in 1862 when Confederate General Robert E. Lee invaded Maryland and threatened to sweep up into Pennsylvania. But on September 17, 1862, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia was stopped at the battle of Antietam. A raid on Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, shortly after Antietam by Confederate cavalry also had the town and college in a state of fear.

However, the true danger came in June 1863, when Lee invaded Pennsylvania. On June 15, Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin called for emergency volunteers to defend the state. First to step forward were fifty-four students from the town - about half the College's population. The faculty allowed seniors to enlist but would not allow others without parental approval. Nevertheless, upper- and underclassmen left for Harrisburg and were mustered into service as Company A, 26th Regiment, Pennsylvania Emergency Militia. A week later they returned to Gettysburg to guard the area. On June 26, the advance guard of Lee's army approached the town and the 26th marched out to meet them. Company A and the rest of the regiment were no match for the battle-hardened veterans of the Army of Northern Virginia, and the 26th Pennsylvania was quickly scattered.

On July 1, classes began as usual at 8 a.m., despite the sound of gunfire to the west of the town. Federal signalmen commandeered the cupola of Pennsylvania Hall as a signaling station, and Union troops filed past the College buildings to take up positions to the north and west. As the crash of artillery and rifle fire grew longer and louder, President Baugher finally told his students, "We will close now and see what is going on, for you know nothing about the lesson anyhow."

So began the great Battle of Gettysburg. By the end of that first day of fighting, the Confederates had pushed the Union army south of the town and had control of the College grounds. Pennsylvania Hall now

became a field hospital. The dorm rooms were purposefully cleared of all possessions and were stored in the president's room under guard. The belongings of those who had locked their doors, however, were not protected and were subsequently stolen.

The battle raged for two more days, culminating in Pickett's Charge on July 3, 1863. Lee's great invasion of Pennsylvania had failed. All during the battle, students, and faculty took shelter in town and President Baugher remained in his home on the campus. But after Lee's retreat, people began returning to the College. Senior Michael Colver (Class of '63) noted that:

On our arrival we found in and around the building, according to the estimate given us, seven hundred wounded rebels. When I came to my room I saw it afforded ample accommodation for three - one on the bed and two on the floor.

The weekly faculty meeting was cancelled and classes suspended for the remainder of the term. The senior class graduated without ceremony since there were no available buildings to use. Damage to the exterior of the buildings was not extreme, but the use of Pennsylvania Hall as a hospital left the interior in ruins.

Pennsylvania College was cleaned and repaired in time for the fall semester. Classes were cancelled for November 19 for the dedication of the new National Cemetery on the battlefield, and the students joined the crowds who came to hear Edward Everett deliver a two-and-half-hour description of the course of the war, and hear President Abraham Lincoln deliver a two-and-half-minute dedication which quickly became known as the Gettysburg Address. President Baugher gave the closing benediction at the ceremony.

In 1864 parts of Lee's army entered Maryland again, and although their aim was Washington, the students at the College petitioned for the suspension of classes. The faculty denied the request but many students left with the approval of their parents, especially after Chambersburg was burned by Confederate raiders at the end of July that year. Only two seniors appeared for commencement in August.

After Lee's surrender, students returned and the College resumed its usual routine, almost as if there had never been a war. Twenty-seven Pennsylvania College students had served in uniform (not including the fifty-four of Company A) as well as an equal number of former students. Two had been killed during the war, one at Gettysburg. He was buried in the National Cemetery.