

Traveling with Jewish Taste

Gettysburg: Battlefield Visit Evokes Historical Thoughts

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



I don't know why, but my high school didn't teach American history beyond the earliest pre-Revolutionary days. So, when it came to learning about the Civil War, I was a blank slate. *Gone With the Wind* was about all the background I had, so in honor of the 150th anniversary of the end of what has been called The War Between the States (by the South), and the War of the Rebellion (by the North), I have been reading books and seeing films about that period in our nation's history. And, when a friend who happens to be a Civil War buff invited us to visit Gettysburg with him and his wife, we jumped at the chance.

The Civil War divided Jews just as it did all Americans, with Southerners supporting the Confederacy and Northerners the Union. As to the issue of slavery, our co-religionists took surprisingly mixed views for a people that had itself endured slavery. Partly due to anti-Semitic attitudes within the Christian-oriented abolitionist movement, the established Jewish community didn't take a particularly public stand on the subject prior to the war. However, some prominent rabbis of the time were vocally divided on the issue.

Rabbi David Einhorn of Baltimore's Congregation Har Sinai used his pulpit and his journal, *Sinai*, to preach: "It is the duty of Jews to fight bigotry since, for thousands of years, Jews have consciously or unconsciously fought for freedom of conscience." On the other side, Rabbi Morris Raphall of New York's Congregation B'nai Jeshurun delivered a sermon titled, "A Bible View of Slavery," in which he stated: "Slavery has existed since the earliest time. Slave holding is no sin," since "slave property is expressly placed under the protection of the Ten Commandments." Rabbi Einhorn immediately wrote a rebuttal in *Sinai*, posing the question, "Is slavery a moral evil or not?" He argued that the spirit of Jewish law demanded the abolition of slavery. "The Bible" he wrote, "merely tolerates this institution as an evil not to be disregarded and therefore infuses in its legislation a mild spirit gradually to lead to its dissolution."

At the time of the war, the Jewish population in the United States and the Confederacy numbered around 150,000. Estimates of Jews fighting in the war vary widely, but about 7,000 fought for the Union, and 3,000 fought for the Confederacy. One specifically Jewish company served for the Union at Gettysburg: Company C of the 82d Regiment of the Illinois Volunteers, led by Lieutenant Colonel Edward S. Saloman.

Since the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1863, millions of people have made the pilgrimage to this tiny town in southeastern Pennsylvania to bear witness to the horror that took place here, in a war of brother against brother that nearly tore this nation apart. They reenact campaigns. They climb Little Round Top and gaze out at the positions held by Confederate troops. They look out from Cemetery Ridge and the Copse of Trees, trying to conjure the image of a mile-long phalanx of men in gray marching toward them during Pickett's Charge. And, the town has experienced an immigration of sorts, of Civil War re-enactors who have made Gettysburg their home.

The countryside around Gettysburg is spectacular, but it is haunting. That so much carnage took place in such an idyllic spot seems impossible. But, it did. During the three-day battle, 165,000 soldiers fought in and around the small town, whose population at the time was only 2,400. When it was over on July 3, 51,000 soldiers had been killed, wounded, or captured in what was then largest battle ever fought in North America.

The battlefield itself is studded with square white stones that mark the left and right flanks of every platoon – from both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. And, if it weren't for the knowledge of what had taken place here, you might think that you had wandered into a major sculpture garden. Dozens of monuments – beautiful statues and even a tower from which to view that bucolic farmland – honor the regiments from every state that participated in the battle.

The first national military cemetery in this country was established in Gettysburg. Magnolias in full bloom and trees leafing out made it a beautiful place on the day of our visit, silent but for the birdsong and distant hum of traffic. The headstones are arrayed in concentric circles by state, a mute testimony to sacrifice. It is a most fitting resting place for the more than 3,500 Union troops, 131 of them Jewish, who gave their lives to ensure that slavery be abolished.

The David Wills House, where Abraham Lincoln spent the night before delivering his Gettysburg Address, is another must-see in the center of town. The brief yet powerful speech of only two hundred seventy-two words has stayed with us for a century and a half, and the town celebrates it in this beautifully restored home. Docents in period dress will guide you through the house and answer any questions you may have.

Gettysburg even features in modern Jewish history. After several fruitless days of discussions at the Camp David peace talks in 1978, President Jimmy Carter decided that a break was in order for the frustrated negotiators. He corralled a recalcitrant Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat, and brought them to Gettysburg. Once there, Begin surprised everybody when he began to recite from memory the Gettysburg Address, bringing tears to several eyes. Lawrence Wright, in his book *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin and Sadat at Camp David*, writes that while the hours spent confined together in the limousine to and from Gettysburg may have had some effect, he believes that viewing the battlefield and learning of the bloodshed there had a profound effect on the two men. The visit to Gettysburg brought the parties to a turning point in the negotiations.



Monument at Gettysburg

Letters to the Editor

Today's Boat People and Jewish History

To the Berkshire Jewish Voice:

The daily stories we hear, see, and read about the boat people are heart-rending. On four continents, they leave homes where they are threatened, deprived, and in danger of annihilation to find refuge somewhere in the world where they may be safe and able to resume productive lives. These stories are similar to the lives of our family and the Jewish community as a whole.

Both my wife and I, and so many other Jews fleeing from the Holocaust, sought and found refuge. The problem for refugees is always the same: finding a safe haven permitting entry. Unfortunately, during the Holocaust six million of our brothers and sisters were denied safe haven and doomed to annihilation by most of the supposedly civilized countries of the world. In this respect, the story of the boat people is similar to those of Jewish refugees throughout history.

The situation of the boat people is even more precarious than the stories of survival told by fleeing refugees throughout Jewish history. Once we and other refugees finally managed to embark on voyages away from danger, our journeys were usually safe. Unfortunately, the boat people are in great danger once they board decrepit vessels that may not survive the journey; often they also become prey to the traffickers they have paid to shepherd them to safety.

Our community must do more to help the boat people. Jewish history and human decency require it.

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Civil War Idiot's Delight

This dessert recipe was popular during and after the Civil War, when provisions were hard to come by. It calls for only a few inexpensive and easily obtainable ingredients, and is considered so easy, so fool-proof that "even an idiot can make it." Having said that, I have reduced the amount of water called for, as the sauce is very runny when it comes out of the oven. It will thicken slightly as it cools.

It may be easy enough for an idiot to make, but it's delicious enough for a genius to adore. Or, even just us average folks.



Sauce ingredients:

1 c. brown sugar
1 c. raisins
1 tbsp. butter
1 tsp. vanilla
3½ c. water

Cake ingredients:

7 tbsp. butter, melted
½ c. white sugar
2 tsp. baking powder
½ c. milk
1 c. flour

Directions:

Boil together the first five ingredients.

Make a batter of the next five ingredients.

Drop the batter by spoonful into a greased Pyrex or Corningware baking dish. Pour the sauce over the top. It will be very liquid.

Bake at 350 degrees 25-30 minutes, until golden brown.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She is currently at work on a food history/cookbook, tracing the paths that some of our favorite foods have taken from their origins to appear on dinner plates and in cultural rites and artifacts around the world. She invites readers to read her blog at carolgoodmankaufman.com and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.