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MUSEUM AND VISITOR CENTER SEPTEMBER 26-28, 2008

# GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION



The Grand Opening celebration for the Museum and Visitor Center featured a ceremonial ribbon cutting. From left to right in the back row are: A Civil War re-enactor, Gettysburg Foundation President Robert C. Wilburn, U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne, Gettysburg National Military Park Superintendent Dr. John A. Latschar, Gettysburg Foundation Chair of the Board Robert A. Kinsley, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Edward G. Rendell and a Civil War re-enactor. (Photo: Bill Dowling)

by Michael Vyskocil

A ceremonial ribbon cutting, the opening of the Cyclorama painting, Friends' First Corps programs and a "Party Like It's 1863" gala capped off a weekend-long celebration of the grand opening of the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center.

Hundreds of distinguished guests, dignitaries, members of the public and

Civil War re-enactors attended a ceremonial ribbon cutting on Fri., Sept. 26 in the Visitor Center lobby.

"The museum is beautiful. The film is a masterpiece. The restored Cyclorama is, in fact, stunning," said U.S. Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne in remarks made during the one-hour ceremony.

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**GETTYSBURG**  
 GETTYSBURG FOUNDATION

The quarterly publication of the Gettysburg Foundation

Photo: Bill Dowling

# CELEBRATION

*Grand Opening, continued from page 1*

“For the first time, we have a museum that does justice to the events that occurred here,” said Gettysburg Foundation President Robert C. Wilburn. During his speech, Wilburn read a letter of thanks written by First Lady Laura Bush during a special visit that she and her husband President George W. Bush made to Gettysburg on Sept. 5.

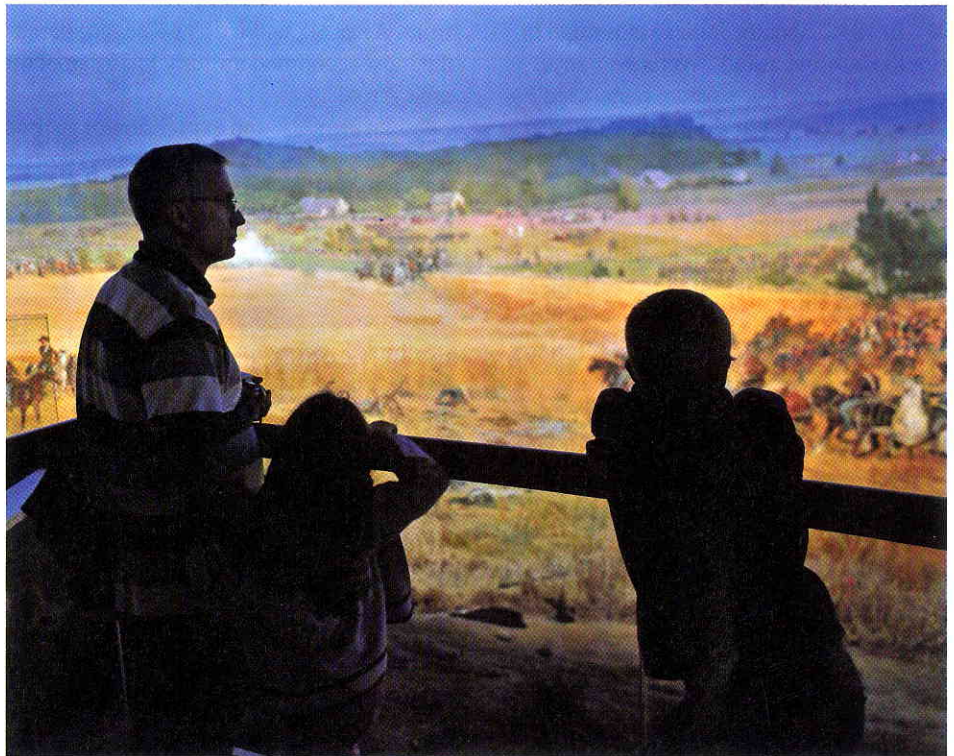
“My thanks go to all those whose efforts made this project possible,” Mrs. Bush wrote in the letter. “You have helped make an important part of American history available for future generations.”

Pennsylvania Gov. Edward G. Rendell commented on the large crowd that had gathered for the ceremony and underscored the importance of the facility to Gettysburg.

Gettysburg Foundation Board of Directors Chairman Robert Kinsley reflected on the accomplishments made by the opening of the Museum and Visitor Center in remarks during the ceremony. “But we’re not going to stop. The Gettysburg Foundation’s mission is ongoing, and we look forward to continuing this groundbreaking partnership with the National Park Service, to always make sure that Gettysburg has an important place in people’s hearts,” he said.

“We can now say for the first time in the 113 year history of Gettysburg National Military Park that our priceless collection of Civil War artifacts are preserved, unimpaired, for the enjoyment of future generations,” said Dr. John Latschar in his speech during the ceremony. (See page 4 to read the complete text of the speech.)

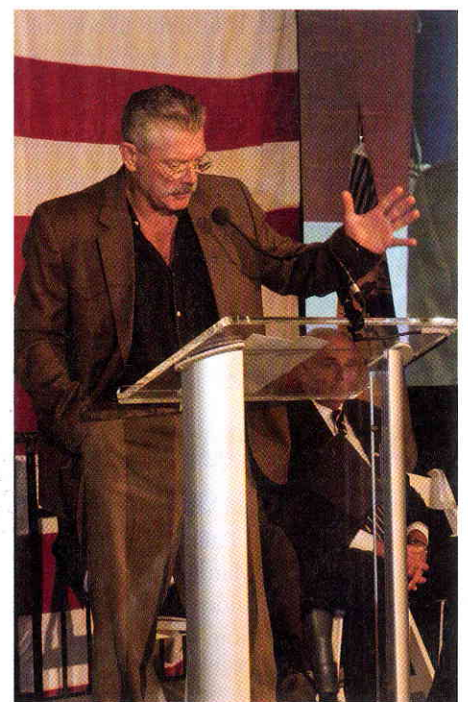
Following the speeches, actor Stephen Lang, best known for his portrayal of George Pickett in the movie *Gettysburg*, performed a vignette honoring James J. Purman, one of four soldiers awarded the Medal of Honor for service at the Battle of Gettysburg.



*A family views the Cyclorama at the Museum and Visitor Center Friday, Sept. 26, the day the restored painting was officially unveiled to the public after a multi-year conservation. (Photo: Bill Dowling)*



*A fiddle player of the 97th Regimental String Band performs Civil War period music outside the Museum and Visitor Center. (Photo: Bill Dowling)*



*Stephen Lang performs a tribute vignette honoring soldier James J. Purman during the grand opening ceremony. (Photo: Bill Dowling)*

*Please see **Grand Opening**, page 7*

# GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION, MUSEUM AND VISITOR CENTER

*Grand Opening, continued from page 6*

## Cyclorama Opens to Visitors

Under the illusion of pre-dawn light, the first visitors to the Cyclorama painting made their way up to the viewing platform after watching *A New Birth of Freedom*. Hushed tones and whispers flowed throughout the crowd as the visitors lined up along the railing and peered out at the Cyclorama painting. As the program progressed, with the sound of firing cannon exploding overhead and flashes of light seeming to radiate outward from the canvas itself, children and adults alike turned their heads and repositioned themselves to take in the sights and sounds of the program.

"Absolutely amazing," "incredible," and "wow" were words uttered by those descending the stairs from the viewing platform.

The unveiling of the Cyclorama painting officially brought the \$15 million conservation project to its conclusion. More than 5,000 tickets for the film and Cyclorama program were sold during Grand Opening weekend.

## Friends First Corps Members Enjoy Battlefield Tour and Visit to Spangler Farm

First Corps members participated in a special event held during the weekend. Members boarded buses and traveled to the battlefield where Dr. Carol Reardon focused on Pickett's Charge and the wounding of Confederate Gen. Lewis Armistead on July 3, 1863. Following the battlefield presentation, members were treated to a visit at the George Spangler Farm where Wayne Motts, executive director of the Adams County Historical Society, presented the history of the Spangler Farm, where Armistead was treated and later died on July 5.

Sue Boardman, Licensed Battlefield Guide and Leadership Program Coordinator for the Gettysburg Foundation, presented an overview of the genre of Cyclorama paintings, the history of the *Battle of Gettysburg* Cyclorama painting and the



*Clockwise from top right: The first visitors make their way to the Cyclorama platform. (Photo: Bill Dowling) First Corps members listen to Wayne Motts' presentation on the history of the Spangler Farm. Rich and Ann Marie Simmons pause for a photo at the gala. (Bottom photos: Michael Vyskocil)*



battle action depicted in the painting. (Read more about Sue Boardman's new Cyclorama book on page 26.)

## Guests Celebrate at "Party Like It's 1863" Gala

Period costumes, sumptuous food and period music performed by Tom Jolin, the 97th Regimental String Band, the Susquehanna Travellers, the 2nd South Carolina String Band, the Wildcat Regiment Brass Band and the Victorian Dance Ensemble transformed the Museum and Visitor Center into a grand entertainment venue.

Attendees, including visitors, local residents, Friends members, Gettysburg Foundation donors and other guests, were treated to the film *A New Birth of Freedom*

and the restored Cyclorama painting. They were also able to view one of five existing copies of the Gettysburg Address, written in Abraham Lincoln's own hand, on loan from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Ill.

From 10 p.m. to midnight, guests enjoyed music, dancing and desserts in the Refreshment Saloon and Dining Terrace where even a pouring rain outside could not dampen the celebration happening inside.

The "Party Like It's 1863" Gala capped off the weekend festivities celebrating the grand opening of the Museum and Visitor Center. Since it opened on April 14, about one million visitors have walked through the doors of the facility.