

## **National Park Service and Gettysburg Foundation decision to amend the fee structure at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania**

**Summary:** The National Park Service (NPS) and the Gettysburg Foundation have decided to charge a single admission fee for venues at the Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center, including museum exhibits, the film (“A New Birth of Freedom”), and the Cyclorama Painting. The Gettysburg Foundation will collect the fee as part of its responsibilities as operators of the museum facility. Admission to the Visitor Center portion of the facility will remain free.

The new “all-in-one” ticket allows the Foundation to lower its fees from the proposed \$12 rate for adults for the film and Cyclorama Painting, to the considerably lower rate of \$7.50 for adults for the museum exhibits, the film, and the Cyclorama Painting. The new “all-in-one” fee creates a higher value for visitors, and allows visitors multiple opportunities to enjoy the venues during their visit.

The majority of a visit to Gettysburg National Military Park will remain free for all visitors. The park does not have an entrance fee, so the entire battlefield and the Soldiers’ National Cemetery are available for visitors to explore and enjoy at their leisure, for free. In the new facility, there is no charge to enter and use the Visitor Center, the Refreshment Saloon, the Museum Store, the Theater and Museum Lobbies (which contain numerous exhibits), and the Resource Room. Dependent upon fundraising, more exhibits may be placed in the Theater and Museum Lobbies in the future. There is no charge for parking while visiting the Museum and Visitor Center, or for the numerous NPS Ranger programs provided in the height of the visitor season. Students, scholars and visitors may still conduct research in the park’s archival and museum collections for free, by appointment.

**The Public Comment Period:** Gettysburg National Military Park received 572 comments during the thirty-day comment period which ended on September 29, 2008. Officials from the Park and the Foundation read each and every letter. The letters, notes, and emails included many compelling comments from constituents who live in the local area and from throughout the United States.

Approximately 56% of the public comments received were in favor of the proposal to collect an “all-in-one” fee. In addition 5% of the responses were in favor of the proposal to collect an “all-in-one” fee but suggested lower fees than proposed; 34% of the responses opposed the proposed fee change; and 5% of the responses provided comments but were neither in favor of, or opposed to, the new fee.

**Comments and Issues of Concern:** Many people who provided comments expressed concerns about the affordability of the proposed fees for families with children, and for senior citizens. Others expressed a desire to create a discount for members of the United States military. Numerous responders also wanted the Park and the Foundation to create multi-day passes for the venues. Some comments also asked for opportunities for the local community to visit during

fee-free days or at a discounted rate. A number of people raised concerns about ensuring that visits to the museum remain affordable for students in underprivileged schools.

Others opposed the implementation of a fee to enter the museum on principle, expressing their belief that the museum collections held by the NPS should be available to all citizens at no charge. Several respondents offered alternative fee charges, in order to avoid or lower a potential fee to visit the museum. Some of these included a charge for parking, separate (and lower) individual fees to each of the three venues, or donation boxes instead of fees. A few suggested that the entire problem could be avoided if the Gettysburg Foundation cut its costs.

The Park and the Foundation have carefully considered all comments received, and have revised the proposed fee schedule where possible to reflect many of those comments. Unfortunately, the alternative fee charges suggested through public comment were not feasible; i.e., parking fees are infeasible due to the many cars and busses that go to and from the Museum and Visitor Center to the battlefield and back again on a regular basis, and would impose a charge upon visitors merely seeking Park or battlefield information.

The proposal to try separate fees for the museum, theater, and Cyclorama Painting rather than one combined fee for all three venues would, unfortunately, greatly increase the Foundation's ticketing, reservations and monitoring costs. (In other words, the one-price proposal helps keep prices lower for visitors, by keeping costs lower for the Foundation.) The Foundation currently has two donation boxes in the new complex. Based upon previous revenues generated by the donation boxes, they can be expected to bring in approximately \$40,000 per year.

The Foundation is – and has been – doing everything possible to keep its expenses as low as possible, while providing visitors to Gettysburg with the quality of visitor service that they expect and deserve. The Foundation's annual operating budget is reviewed and approved by the NPS. As with most other businesses, the largest single cost for the Foundation is salaries for its 42 full-time and 62 part-time employees who provide ticketing and reservation services, custodial services, and visitor services. The Foundation's second-highest annual expense is the cost of energy, which has substantially increased over the years of planning, design, and construction of the new facility.

After careful consideration of these issues the Park and the Foundation has made the following decisions.

**The New Fees:** The original proposal suggested for the following fees: Adult (ages 13+) \$ 7.50; Adult group (16+ visitors) \$ 6.50; Youth (ages 6-12) \$ 5.50; and Youth group (16+ visitors) \$ 5.00. In order to address concerns about affordability for families with children, the elderly, and members of the U.S. military, fees will be:

- Adult \$ 7.50
- Seniors and Military \$ 6.50
- Adult group (16+ visitors) \$ 6.50
- Youth (ages 6-18) \$ 5.50
- Youth group (16+ visitors) \$ 5.00

\* Please note the change in the Youth rate. It now includes ages 6 through 18, where the proposal had previously only included ages 6 through 12. This would make a visit more affordable for families and school groups of all ages.

**Multi-Day Passes** – In order to encourage longer stays in the Gettysburg area, and at the request of many people who commented, Multi-day passes will be available for the following fees:

**Two-Day Passes**

- Adult \$10
- Youth (ages 6-18) \$ 8

**Three Day Passes**

- Adult \$15
- Youth (ages 6-18) \$12

**Annual Passes** - In order to accommodate the large numbers of repeat visitors to Gettysburg, a new annual pass will provide unlimited admission to all three venues for a year for \$32 per person or \$63 per family. The annual pass will include a complimentary membership in the Friends of Gettysburg.

**Complimentary tickets for group chaperones** - For every ten students in a student group, one adult chaperone will receive free admission. For non-student groups, for every 40 visitors in a group, one person receives free admission.

**Community Appreciation Days** – The Park and the Foundation are committed to welcoming all residents of our local communities on four fee-free community appreciation days per year. The dates will be announced in advance in the local news media and will include: Veterans Day, Martin Luther King Day; Presidents’ Day; and a “Back to School” day each year in early September. On community appreciation days all residents of Adams County can enjoy the museum, film, and Cyclorama Painting for free.

**Affordability for Underprivileged Schools** – The Gettysburg Foundation intends to work with the philanthropic community to aid in funding school visits to Gettysburg for inner city schools in Harrisburg, York, and other areas in order to ensure that underprivileged school students are able to experience the new Gettysburg National Military Park Museum and Visitor Center.

**Partnership Model for all National Parks** – The non-profit organization National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) provided comments on the proposal but declined to support or oppose it. Because the public/private partnership at Gettysburg is a national model, NPCA asked the Park and Foundation to fully study and document operational decisions based on changes in visitor use patterns so that the new venture can be used as a teaching tool for park managers and potential partners. The Park and the Foundation agree on the concept of undertaking such a study.

**Visitor Input and Public Feedback** – The Gettysburg Foundation will study visitor reactions to these changes, conduct surveys, and will consider comments and feedback on the museum experience in operations of the facility. As stated in the General Agreement between the Gettysburg Foundation and the National Park Service, the NPS has the right to review and approve all aspects of the operations of the facility.

**Implementation** – The new “all-in-one” fee will take effect on October 2, 2008. For tickets and reservations please call 1-877-874-2478, or visit [www.gettysburgfoundation.org](http://www.gettysburgfoundation.org) or [www.nps.gov/gett](http://www.nps.gov/gett).

10/1/08