William Saunders, a landscape gardener, was engaged by the national cemetery board of commissioners in August, 1863, to prepare a plan for the national cemetery, embodying grave plots for the 18 Union states and suitable landscaping of the grounds. The grave plots consist of two semi-circular belts, the larger one on the exterior for the soldier dead of the larger states, the inner circle for the states having a smaller number. In the center of the entire plot Saunders indicated a place for "the monument." The Evergreen Cemetery Gate House site is at the left of the drawing, adjacent to the Baltimore Pike. The Selleck platform site is marked at an estimated distance of 40 feet outside of the grave plot periphery and 350 feet north of the national monument site.
THE LOCATION OF THE PLATFORM FROM WHICH LINCOLN DELIVERED THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

BY FREDERICK TILBERG

DR. LOUIS A. WARREN, former director of the Lincoln National Life Foundation, in his book Lincoln’s Gettysburg Declaration; A New Birth of Freedom,\(^1\) raises a question concerning the location of the speaker’s platform on the occasion of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery dedication November 19, 1863. Challenging the long accepted premise that the speaker’s stand was located in the center of the concentric plan of graves prepared by William J. Saunders where the national monument was subsequently erected,\(^2\) Warren asserts that the stand from which President Lincoln spoke was erected north of and 40 feet beyond the outer circle of graves. Warren thus indicated that site 350 feet north of the monument location determined by the cemetery board of managers.\(^3\) A holograph, purported to have been written by W. Y. Selleck, State of Wisconsin Commissioner on the board and pasted in a copy of the Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers’ National Cemetery ..., 1865 edition, bore the following text:

The stand on which President Lincoln stood in the National Cemetery at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863 when he delivered his ever to be remembered address, was 12 ft. wide and 20 ft. long, and facing to the North

\(^{*}\)The author is Park Historian (retired) of Gettysburg National Military Park.

\(^{1}\) Louis A. Warren, Lincoln’s Gettysburg Declaration; A New Birth of Freedom (Fort Wayne, Indiana, 1964), 180-183.

\(^{2}\) Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers’ National Cemetery (Harrisburg, Penna., 1865), 148. The design is shown opposite 153; Saunders, a landscape gardener of the United States Department of Agriculture, had been engaged in August to prepare a cemetery plan. Journal of William J. Saunders (U. S. Department of Agriculture Library, 1898), 7, 9.


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West. It was located 40 ft. North East of the outer circle of soldiers graves as shown by pencil mark on the Cemetery Map in the book to which this memorandum is attached.⁴

Doctor Warren cites this holograph and marked copy of the Saunders cemetery plan as conclusive evidence that the speaker's platform was not located in the center of the semi-circular plat of graves where the national monument was later erected at the place designated in the cemetery plan.

THE QUESTION OF DAMAGE TO GRAVES

Immediately after the battle the bodies of both Union and Confederate dead were buried on the field of battle, largely concentrated in areas where the hardest fighting occurred and losses were heavy. The bodies were buried in shallow graves, apparently a temporary measure to serve until arrangements could be made for permanent burial. A headboard bearing all available identifying information marked each grave.

Governor Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania, after a careful examination of the field graves, determined to recommend the establishment of a permanent burial ground. An offer by the Evergreen (public) Cemetery board of directors to provide grave lots within the existing, or an expansion of, that cemetery, was referred by Attorney David Wills of Gettysburg, serving as Governor Curtin's agent, to the governors of the 18 states whose soldiers had fallen on this field. The decision resulted entirely in favor of a separate soldiers' cemetery. Governor Curtin on July 24 authorized Attorney Wills to purchase suitable and ample ground for reinterment of the bodies. Wills then purchased 12 acres, mainly on the northern slope of Cemetery Hill, and the reburial plan was soon approved by Pennsylvania and

⁴The marked copy of the Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, containing the holograph text is in the Lincoln National Life Foundation Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The chairman of the commissioners, David Wills of Gettysburg, presented an autographed copy of the Report to W. Y. Selleck, then Secretary of the Board, who, it was stated, prepared the holograph and pasted it in the book opposite the plot of the cemetery. On the cemetery plan, Selleck designated by a small rectangle his understanding of the platform location. Warren, Lincoln's Gettysburg Declaration, opposite 165, 182. The Milwaukee Sentinel notes that Selleck attended the dedication as the official representative of Wisconsin.
Having thus become separated from "local controlling influences" and the governors of the states involved having committed their states to the project, the cemetery assumed a national character. Possibly the first official use of the designation Soldiers' National Cemetery is the inclusion of that title in the statement of specifications listed in the contracts of October 15, 1863, for exhumation in the field and reinterment in the cemetery. The Saunders design was officially adopted by the board of commissioners at their first meeting on December 17, 1863.

In view of the obvious risks to the health of the community, however, the local military headquarters of the Department of the Susquehanna at Harrisburg issued a general order prohibiting disinterment of bodies during the months of August and September. When the restriction was raised early in October, William Saunders, upon request by Wills, had already prepared a design for the northwest slope of Cemetery Hill, embodying a large semi-circular plat with its center at the crest of the hill. The state burial plots, it was intended, would fan outward and down the slope from the west to the northeast. The axis of the design pointed northwesterly. The grave plots were laid out in two belts, the smaller belt on the interior being reserved for the 17 other states. When Saunders first examined the ground "about six weeks after the battle," he recommended to Attorney Wills expansion of the cemetery grounds by lengthening the Baltimore Street boundary, then only 150 feet, and "straightening out other lines." This was soon accomplished, Saunders noted, and five acres was thereby added to the original tract of 12 acres. Journal of William J. Saunders, 4, 7: Relative to Attorney Wills's efforts to obtain from the governors of the states concerned approval of reinterment in a central burial ground, Saunders intimated that the means of communicating with the Governors was facilitated by their presence in conference at Altoona, Pennsylvania. Wills's circular to the governors dated August 13, 1863, does not refer to a conference at that place. It is probable that Saunders, writing his journal in 1898, confused the Governors Conference at Altoona in mid-September, 1862, with events in Pennsylvania during August and September, 1863. Journal of William J. Saunders, 7; Pennsylvania State Archives, Record Group 26, Executive Correspondence, 1, 243-246, RG 26, Division of Archives, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; New York Times, September 23, 1863.

"Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, 7, 8. When Saunders first examined the ground "about six weeks after the battle," he recommended to Attorney Wills expansion of the cemetery grounds by lengthening the Baltimore Street boundary, then only 150 feet, and "straightening out other lines." This was soon accomplished, Saunders noted, and five acres was thereby added to the original tract of 12 acres. Journal of William J. Saunders, 4, 7: Relative to Attorney Wills's efforts to obtain from the governors of the states concerned approval of reinterment in a central burial ground, Saunders intimated that the means of communicating with the Governors was facilitated by their presence in conference at Altoona, Pennsylvania. Wills's circular to the governors dated August 13, 1863, does not refer to a conference at that place. It is probable that Saunders, writing his journal in 1898, confused the Governors Conference at Altoona in mid-September, 1862, with events in Pennsylvania during August and September, 1863. Journal of William J. Saunders, 7; Pennsylvania State Archives, Record Group 26, Executive Correspondence, 1, 243-246, RG 26, Division of Archives, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; New York Times, September 23, 1863.

"Ibid., 8, 9, 18; Saunders recorded in his journal that when he submitted his design, in mid-August, 1863, he wrote on the plan the title "Soldiers' National Cemetery." Saunders noted that the Commissioners considered the title "quite applicable" and accepted it at the December meeting; Journal of William J. Saunders, 9-10.

"National Intelligencer, August 1, 1863, reporting from the Department of the Susquehanna Headquarters, Gettysburg, July 30.
states needing only a small number of graves, the larger belt on the exterior for states requiring a large number of graves. On either end of the semi-circle, adjacent to the central area, plots were set aside for unidentified dead and U. S. regulars. The cemetery design provided a space of 150 feet between the centrally located monument site and the first line of graves.⁸

Assuming that the speaker's platform was located at the central point of the cemetery plan, Doctor Warren questioned the propriety of permitting the public to occupy the burial ground in front of the platform. There would not have been ample space for a large crowd estimated at 20,000, he believed, to stand without trampling upon the recently closed graves. Warren also considered the Selleck site as more readily approached by way of the stated route of the procession as it moved from Gettysburg to the dedication site.⁹ Analysis of the completed reinterment undertaking in March, 1864, indicated the average number of graves in the smaller, interior state plots was six. In the outer belt of large plots the average was seventy. Of the 3,555 reinterments upon the completion of the reburial undertaking in March, 1864, only 1,258 had been accomplished at the time of the dedication service on November 19, 1863. In the instance of the plots reserved for the unidentified dead, the record indicates that of the 582 reinterments at the time of the dedication, 554 were placed in the plot east of the monument site, and only 27 in the plot west of it. It will be observed, therefore, that the number of burials on November 19 in relation to the total in March, 1864, indicates that hardly more than one-third of the total graves had been closed by the dedication date.¹⁰

The stated line of march, originating in the town square and proceeding over Baltimore Street to the cemetery by way of Emmitsburg Road and Taneytown Road,¹¹ would have brought

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⁸ Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, opposite 153; on October 27 Samuel Weaver, Superintendent of Exhumation on the battleground, and James S. Townsend, who supervised the reinterment of remains in the national cemetery, began their work of identification and reburial. The task was completed March 18, 1864. Ibid., 8, 149-152; Journal of William J. Saunders, 5, 6.

⁹ Warren, Lincoln's Gettysburg Declaration, 161-182. The estimated number of people attending was also placed at 15,000.

¹⁰ Adams Sentinel and General Advertiser, November 24, 1863; Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, 133.

¹¹ Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, 177.
the procession to the western bounds of the cemetery. As the defined route ends abruptly at that point, it may well be inferred that the procession left the Taneytown Road approximately five hundred feet southward on that road, then moved over a pre-determined and well-guarded walk through the area of limited state burials, or over the largely unused plot reserved for unidentified dead, to the central point of the cemetery. The considerable number of marshals, aides, and the military cordon stationed among and around the standing multitude, it would appear, fulfilled the dual purpose of preserving order in the crowd concentrated in front of the platform and of protecting graves in the nearby burial plots.

Referring to the Selleck platform site as the possible objective of the procession, it should be pointed out that if the column left the Taneytown Road as it reached the cemetery bounds, the entourage would have marched due eastward five hundred feet to reach that place. If this site were the objective, it appears that the line of march would have been defined to march by way of Baltimore Street directly to the cemetery boundary, then bearing to the right within the cemetery 426 feet to the platform. From the junction of the Baltimore and Emmitsburg roads at the base of Cemetery Hill, this route would have reduced the marching distance to the Selleck site by 730 feet, with no advantage of avoiding injury to grave plots. The instructions given to members of the "civic procession," moreover, who were "to occupy the area in front of the stand, the military leaving sufficient space between them and the line of graves for the procession to pass," refers specifically to graves in front of the speaker's platform. Selleck states in his holograph that the platform faced northwest and was located forty feet northeast of the outer circle of soldiers' graves. There are no Civil War graves northwest of, or at any place in front of, the Selleck site.

The Battlefleld "Lay Like a Panorama . . ."

The dedication of the national cemetery, arranged for November 19 in the planning stage, had been sponsored entirely by the states concerned. Informal invitations had been sent to President

12 Ibid., opposite 153.
13 Ibid., 177.
14 Warren, Lincoln's Gettysburg Declaration, opposite 165.
Lincoln, members of the cabinet and Congress. The president early indicated interest in attending the service. Attorney Wills, representing the committee on arrangements, accordingly sent him a formal invitation requesting that he speak a few appropriate remarks in dedication of the cemetery. When it became known that the president and certain members of the cabinet would be present, the event assumed exceptional national significance.

On the dedication day the press of the nation was broadly represented. It was expected that the central point of interest would be the speaker's platform and the distinguished guests. A review of correspondents' accounts of the events indicated a far broader interest which extended not only to the battleground but also the distant scenes beyond. Metropolitan and local reporters alike wrote of the dedication ceremony in relation to Cemetery Hill as a notable battle landmark. Accounts consistently refer especially to the high ground on which the platform stood and to the exceptional view of the surrounding countryside. Wrote the Harrisburg *Patriot-Union* correspondent, as he stood on Cemetery Hill near abandoned artillery emplacements, the scene was "indescribably . . . magnificent." The Philadelphia *Daily Evening Bulletin* reporter, diverting his attention momentarily from the platform where the distinguished guests were taking their assigned places, was enthralled by the distant view of the hills, "Round Top with its forest covering and Little Round Top half-veiled in Indian summer haze." The *National Intelligencer* correspondent said the scene was "... a grand and imposing one. The battlefield lay like a panorama in full view." The Cincinnati *Daily Commercial* writer observed that the military had led the procession to the cemetery and now took position on the crest of the hill, north of the old Evergreen Cemetery.

The Associated Press, whose story was carried by the New York *Times*, the Albany *Evening Journal* and the Harrisburg *Patriot-Union*, reported the assemblage as "... one of great magnitude ... gathered within a circle of great extent around

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15 November 21, 1863.
16 November 20, 1863.
17 November 20, 21, 1863.
18 November 21, 1863.
the stand which was located at the highest point of ground on which the battle was fought." Referring to the crowd of people who stood apart from the procession groups at the platform, the Philadelphia *Daily Evening Bulletin* reporter observed that farther down the slope of the hill "... stood about 12,000 citizens, while mingling with the imposing mass were regalia-adorned marshalls on their steeds." The correspondent of the Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, apparently following the course of the procession southward from the town, wrote that he reached eventually the summit of Cemetery Hill where he came upon the "quickly-formed entrenchments of Union batteries."

The Philadelphia *Press* correspondent, viewing from the hill crest the course of the marching units, described "... the procession filing around the roads and the bands playing down in the valley" as "glorious in sight and sound." An immense crowd gathered upon the hill, he noted, as the procession assembled in front of the platform and "around the graves of the gathered dead." The New York *Herald* described the scene on the cemetery grounds as "highly impressive, being as it was in view of the whole battlefield, of which it formed the center...." The *Adams Sentinel* reporter, observing the opening moments of the program, vividly portrayed the magnificence of the dedication event. It was a grand and imposing scene, he wrote of the view from the platform, as the whole battlefield "lay spread out like a panorama." On either hand and beneath us, he noted, were "the very heights so heroically defended, ... the graves of the fallen, the thronging multitudes surrounding the stand."

The location of the Selleck site for the speaker's platform, as defined in his holograph, was forty feet outside of the exterior line of graves. The General G. K. Warren map of the battlefield indicates by contours that the Selleck site is 25 feet lower than that of the hill's crest at which point Saunders indicated the monument site at the center of the plot of graves. From the

18 November 20, 1863.
19 November 20, 1863.
20 November 23, 1863. The guns of Battery H, First U. S. Artillery and Battery G, Fourth U. S. Artillery were posted during the Second and Third day's battle at the crest of the hill.
21 November 21, 1863.
22 November 20, 1863.
23 November 24, 1863.
Selleck site on the north slope of the hill, therefore, it is quite impossible to obtain a view southward toward the Round Tops, an observation specifically reported by the Philadelphia Daily Evening Bulletin. From the Selleck site northward the distant view of Seminary Ridge and Oak Ridge, and the South Mountains beyond, was not then restricted by intervening structures. The low-level view, however, could not in the least inspire the descriptive words employed by observers of the dedication event.

THE PROXIMITY OF GRAVES TO THE PLATFORM

The monument site, indicated by Saunders at the center of the semi-circular cemetery plan where the national monument now stands, was located at the highest point within the bounds of the national cemetery. It has been noted that the two semi-circular belts, planned to provide grave space for the large and small states, spread down the slope from the central point of the concentric design, "the configuration of the ground surface [being] singularly appropriate at the point selected, falling away in a gradual and regular slope in every direction from the center to the circumference. . . ."28

From positions of advantage, either on the speaker's stand or nearby, certain correspondents commented specifically on the location of the platform in relation to the burial ground and the assembled people. Evidence that the procession of marching units followed the route outlined in the printed program, and therefore approached the speaker's stand from the Taneytown Road, is attested by the Gettysburg Compiler report which stated that the procession "moved over the route previously arranged."29 The Washington Evening Star and the Baltimore American, employing the same account, observed that the head of the marching column reached the platform "erected in the center of the

Plate XCV. In his first examination of the cemetery plot purchased by Attorney Wills, Saunders concluded that "... a central point on the highest reach of the ground should be designated for a monument" and that the grave plots should be arranged accordingly in semi-circular manner down the slope of the ground. Journal of William J. Saunders, 4, 5.

28 Saunders's Report in Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, 147.
29 Ibid., 177.
30 November 23, 1863.
cemetery” a quarter of an hour before noon. The Baltimore Sun correspondent noted that “a spacious stand” was erected upon the cemetery grounds but failed to designate a specific location.

The Gettysburg Compiler reporter, observing the approach of the procession, noted that as President Lincoln and members of the cabinet entered the cemetery grounds, “the stand erected in the center of the same” was surrounded by at least twenty thousand people, several thousand of whom “were congregated immediately in front of the stand.” The report also observed chief marshals interspersed among the immense crowd. Possibly the slope of the ground determined in a degree the arrangement of the great crowd for the best sound reception. The Philadelphia North American reported that the vast assemblage, “gathered within a circle of great extent around the stand,” were so attentive that the words uttered by the orator, Edward Everett, “must have been heard by them all.” The Indianapolis Daily Journal correspondent, on the other hand, wrote that “the great, surging crowd around the stand, . . . spreading down the slope almost to the line of the graves,” rendered it possible for only those close to the stand to hear the speakers. The Daily Journal account noted significantly, however, that the platform upon which the president, cabinet, governors and “other magnates” sat was erected “nearly on the line of the diameter across the semi-circle of the cemetery, and the crowd filled the interior.” Further emphasizing the convergence of the lines dividing the state grave plots, the Cincinnati Daily Commercial correspondent noted the lines are “the radii of a common center, where a flag pole is now raised, but where it is proposed to erect a national monument.”

It remained for the noted correspondent of the Cincinnati Daily Gazette, J. Whitelaw Reid, to relate closely the Saunders cemetery design providing for a monument at the center of the semi-circle and the location of the platform at the dedication

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31 November 20, 1863.  
32 November 21, 1863.  
33 November 23, 1863; the identical statement appeared in the Adams Sentinel the next day.  
34 November 20, 1863.  
35 November 23, 1863.  
36 November 23, 1863.
service. "As the tall figure of the President was observed on the stand," Reid wrote of the event, "the people shouted and Mr. Lincoln stepped forward to acknowledge the salute . . . soon all was hushed, and for about fifteen minutes the multitude stood in perfect silence in close observation of the Chief Magistrate of the Nation." As the crowd formed in front of the stand, he observed, the military drew up in a cordon at the rear. The speaker's stand, he wrote, "was erected on the spot where the monument is to be built, in front of which are two semi-circular sections with portions set apart for each state. . . ."37 Honorable Edward Everett spoke significantly of the scene in his opening phrases as he intoned the words, "... overlooking these broad fields, . . . the mighty Alleghenies dimly towering before us, the graves of our brethren beneath our feet, . . ." Later in his discourse, as he reached a climactic note, he spoke, "And now, . . . fellow citizens, as we stand among these honored graves. . . ."38

Less than two years after the national cemetery dedication, a second notable event occurred at the central point of the cemetery. On the occasion of the cornerstone laying for the national monument, July 4, 1865,39 the Adams Sentinel reported that the speaker's platform "... was erected in the center of the cemetery, where the monument is to be located." The reporter estimated the crowd at 20,000 and added, "There were certainly more lookers-on than on the 19th of November [1863]."40

In operating the national cemetery, it was believed that the people of the eighteen states whose soldier dead were interred in the cemetery would desire a voice in the management. For proper representation, therefore, Attorney Wills of Gettysburg was authorized by Governor Curtin to request of each governor that he appoint a state commissioner. Twelve states were represented at the first meeting held in Harrisburg on December 17, 1863. Executives of the other states had given their assent in

37 November 23, 1863.
38 Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, 182, 198. The words in each of these passages points to the presence of graves in front and on either side of the speaker. An early printing of Everett's entire address appears in this volume.
39 John Russell Bartlett, The Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg, with the Proceedings at Its Consecration; At the Laying of the Corner-stone of the Monument and at Its Dedication (Providence, 1874), 61, 63.
40 July 11, 1865.
advance to "... any reasonable action of the convention."\(^{41}\) W. Y. Selleck, the Wisconsin commissioner, attended and served as secretary.\(^{42}\) Matters of organization, incorporation and financial responsibility of the several states were discussed.

All of the commissioners were present at the second meeting held in April, 1864. Organizing in accordance with provisions of the act of incorporation of March 25, 1864,\(^{43}\) Wills was elected president and John R. Bartlett of Rhode Island was chosen secretary. The board of commissioners at this session dealt mainly with adopting protective measures for the cemetery grounds and authorized construction of a substantial enclosure. They left the details to an executive committee appointed for this purpose.\(^{44}\) The board met again in June, 1864, to consider designs for a monument intended to occupy the center of the grave plots. A design submitted by J. B. Batterson was accepted.

A progress report of March 6, 1865, indicated that the stone wall enclosure was nearly completed, an iron fence erected between the Evergreen (public) and the national cemeteries, the grounds graded for tree planting and contracts let for placing grave headstones.\(^{45}\) There appears to be no record of further commissioner meetings, even in the 1867 edition of the revised report of the select committee to the legislature, to which edition was added a report of the cornerstone laying ceremonies for the national monument on July 4, 1865. This report does not refer to the relation of the speaker's platform on November 19, 1863, to the national monument. The monument was dedicated July 1, 1869.\(^{46}\) The Soldiers' National Cemetery was incorporated March 25, 1864, and transferred to the United States government on May 1, 1872.\(^{47}\)

\(^{41}\) Revised Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Soldiers' National Cemetery, 9.
\(^{42}\) Ibid., 16, 18.
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 154-157.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) Bartlett, The Soldiers' National Cemetery, 84-109.
A contemporary view of the dedication service was provided by the artist, Joseph Becker. [Frank Leslie's Illustrations, The Soldier in Our Civil War (New York, 1893), II, 118-119.] From a position on East Cemetery Hill, directly east of the dedication scene, Becker placed in the foreground of his sketch (1) the Gate House entrance to Evergreen Cemetery. The speaker's platform, (3) the central point of interest on which are shown officials and guests standing, appears at the right of the Gate House. The tent rest room (2) provided for Mr. Everett is at the left of the platform, the "Civic" group assembling at the platform edge, and the great mass of people closing in on the "hollow square" around the front and sides of the platform. The graves at the right, (4) with identifying head boards, are in the New York State plot at the outer border of the Saunders Cemetery plan. The location of the platform designated by Selleck (5) would be to the right of the New York plot and off the right edge of the sketch.

Mr. Everett, in a communication to Attorney Wills, suggested that the platform for the event be large enough to hold "a very considerable portion of the invited guests and other persons of prominence." This arrangement, he said, would be much more satisfactory to him while speaking than to be "isolated on a very small stage."
Gathering for Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Note Gateway entrance to the Evergreen Cemetery on left, high point in center where speakers are seated, a tent to the right of center which served as a rest room, and the crest of Powers Hill on the right. The Selleck platform site would be at the left of this view, off the edge of the print. Photo by Matthew Brady Studio courtesy Library of Congress.