

The Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry “Lancers” Monument

Visitors to the Gettysburg National Military Park who venture down Emmitsburg Road to South Cavalry Field will discover a cluster of commonly overlooked monuments. Nearly lost in the midst of the Battlefield RV Sales Lot and a nearby “Battlefield”-themed resort stands the haunting and evocative battle monument that honors the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry, known as “Rush’s Lancers.”

As a work of art, the monument is surely worthy of consideration. The Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry’s monument is a six-sided granite shaft. The rough quarry-faced texture attests to the Sixth’s flinty resolve. To each facet of the marker is attached a lance, cast in bronze and with its pennant extended in a breeze that never dies. One face tersely proclaims “Gettysburg July 3 1863, Number engaged 365, killed 3 wounded 7 missing 2.” On other faces, the number of the unit—6—and the emblem of the unit—the lance—are fused in fact and in memory.

Like so many monuments scattered across the battlefield, the Lancers’ monument has a rich history. Formed in Philadelphia in the first year of the war, the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry attracted the sons of the city’s elites, including many veterans from the historic First City Troop. The distinctive lances were the suggestion of Philadelphia native son General George McClellan. An anecdote in the regimental history describes the young Lieutenant Frank Furness comparing the effectiveness of the lances with that of the more customary saber, with a saber-wielding cavalryman impaling but one while the lancer impaled six.¹ Perhaps more importantly, the lances evoked the pageantry of *Ivanhoe* and quickly captured the public imagination. Winslow Homer captured the Lancers in a quick ink sketch in the spring of 1862, just before they first saw action, but the use of the ancient weapon in modern combat proved catastrophic. On May 25, 1862, near Hanover Courthouse, Virginia, the troop charged with set lances into an entrenched Southern line. The resulting slaughter demonstrated that romance had no value in an age of mechanized killing. Henceforth the lances were used ceremonially in parades and were

¹ Reverend S. L. Gracey, Chaplain to the Regiment, *Annals of the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry*, (Philadelphia, 1868), 353–54. Furness’s career is described in George E. Thomas, et al., *Frank Furness: The Complete Works*, rev. ed. (New York, 1996).



Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry "Lancers" monument, near South Cavalry Field, Emmitsburg Road (Business US 15) south of Ridge Road near Gettysburg. Courtesy of George E. Thomas.

stacked for identity at the camp sites of the unit.

By the summer of 1863 the Lancers had seen much hard fighting in the eastern theater, including action at Chancellorsville and Brandy Station. A portion of the troop had spent the days before Gettysburg shadowing Lee's cavalry under J. E. B. Stuart, drawing them away from the battle in the critical early hours when the Union forces established their superior position along the principal ridge of the field. On July 3 the Lancers took part in the final action of the great battle at the south end of the battlefield—near this monument—shortly after Pickett's Charge.

Among the men of the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry, the one who would achieve the most fame—both on and off the battlefield—was Captain Frank Furness (1839–1912). A native Philadelphian and the son of the noted Unitarian minister and abolitionist William Henry Furness, Furness studied architecture in the New York City atelier established by one of the first Paris-trained American architects, Richard Morris Hunt. When war broke out, Furness did not follow the route of his peers to Paris (Henry Hobson Richardson) or Canada (Henry Augustus Sims). Instead he joined the Lancers. Furness remained with his unit from its organization until the fall of 1864, when he was mustered out at the end of his three-year enlistment. In 1864, at Trevilian Station, Furness carried a box of shells on his head across an open battlefield to resupply other troops, an act that earned him the Medal of Honor.

After the war, Furness went on to become one of the leading architects of his age. Instead of relying on traditional designs, he drew on the forms of the rising engineering and mechanical culture of his native city to forge an architecture that could represent the power of industry in the age of the great machines. Following the dictum of Philadelphia industrial designer William Sellers, who claimed that "If a machine is right, it looks right," Furness created a new strategy for design that ignored historical sources and the classical orders and instead made buildings with the same direct reflection of function as the great machines for which Philadelphia was famous. In commercial buildings such as his great banking houses along Chestnut Street, each shouting their individuality, and in a remarkable array of buildings, some one thousand in total, ranging from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (1871–1876) and the University of Pennsylvania Library (1886–1891) to steamship interiors, Furness staked out and defended his position and by extension the values of Philadelphia's engineering-based culture.

As the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg approached, it naturally fell to Furness to design the monument to the Sixth Pennsylvania Cavalry. Dedicated on October 14, 1888, the monument is a brilliant summation of what Furness had learned and what he taught students who would continue to advance his positions. One hundred and twenty years after the monument was installed we can still feel its power. Circling the monument in the small clearing on the east side of the Emmitsburg Road south of Gettysburg, it is likely that we are standing where its designer stood at its dedication. The road itself is part of the story, for it was along its route south that the main Confederate force retreated after the battle and where the South Cavalry Field battle took place when Union cavalry units were ordered into defended stone walls overlaid with wood rails and posts.

Like the Tenth Massachusetts image in bronze of stacked arms, Furness's work took an elegiac stance, remembering the comradeship of the camp as much as the battle. Other monuments represent the soldiers' diverse cultural allegiances: the numerous Irish crosses and shamrocks, for example, denote the role of the Irish in the nation's military and their rising political power in the decades after the Civil War. Political power itself is the message of the splendid bronze Sachem Tammany in front of a plains tepee erected to honor the New York Tammany Brigade. Some monuments pay tribute to the professional work of their units, as in the case of the stone castle of the Fifteenth and Fiftieth New York Engineers, on which is a bronze panel that depicts a pontoon bridge of their construction. A few units were still fighting the war. Just north of the Furness monument on the Emmitsburg Road is the now sadly disfigured Eleventh Massachusetts Infantry monument, erected in 1885, that until 2006 was topped by a sword-wielding arm—there was still anger in New England. Its base carries a title from Shakespeare—"All's well that ends well"—conveying the cool irony of educated Boston and still calling on the images of classical learning at the end of the first modern war. Furness's marker is part of a remarkable array of battle monuments that make Gettysburg a splendid record of the evolving cultural and political issues of late nineteenth-century America.

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