

Thank you, President Smith, and let me say how honored I am to read my paper on this occasion.

Welcome, guests, to our humble meeting and thank you for joining us.

Welcome to Foster Hall. I was with a few members recently and we were discussing this building, wondering who was the architect and was it Eli or J. K. Lilly that had it built. This led to playing Senior Jeopardy (which allows 24 hours after you buzz in to give the correct response. And the use of electronic assistance to answer). Within the allotted time we found that this monument was designed by Robert Frost Daggett, noted middle architect of a three-generation firm, and designed for Josiah K Lilly as a place where he could come and reflect on the works of Stephen Foster, which he did often. Monuments are often a mark of attaining a certain level of success.

Monuments are also important to us as a society. Dr. Paul M. Farber, director and cofounder of the

nonprofit public art and history

organization [Monument Lab](#) expressed his thought that “History lives—not just as something that so-called history buffs reenact, or that we keep behind museum glass, but as a living force that artists help us interpret and guides the way we think about our current moment,” and continued “I’m particularly interested in the way that history lives in public spaces.” He states that “American monuments exist in part **“to create a usable past”** for this relatively young country—to tell an easier story than America’s inconvenient, often contradictory history. “Monuments elevate figures and stories without the deeper work of reckoning with the past,”

But if monuments elevate without the deeper work, how do they keep the narrative of the past as we have interpreted it alive and in our minds? What purpose do they serve? And how do monuments come into being? Certainly, one of the most recognizable monuments is one recognizing the most famous, most argued, most debated, and discussed events in our country’s history.

Even after 171 years we are unable to completely resolve the war between the states, its meaning and **outcome**. Of that conflict the battle of Gettysburg is one of the often retold, interpreted, and recognized by monuments in the story of the civil war.

The Gettysburg Battlefield has within its boundaries 1328 markers, memorials, plaques, and monuments recognizing the 165,620 troops who fought and the 51,000 + casualties of which over 7,000 were fatalities during three days of fighting. There are so many memorials the historian Eric Foner notes that "visitors sometimes ask guides whether all these monuments "got in the way of the battle"" This comment however humorous shows a contemporary lack of understanding and confirms Dr. Farber's assertion that monuments elevate figures and stories without that deeper work of reckoning with the past.

Although Gettysburg certainly is a "beautiful area," it is not because of the battlefield. Nor was it typical to create a cemetery at the place of battle. Why was

Gettysburg a special situation? First, those three days of heavy fighting changed the course of the war.

The conflict had left corpses and dead animals scattered across the fields of the battle. Both Armies were decimated by the fighting and the southern forces had retreated to shores of the Potomac. And it was July. Are you starting to get the picture?

The terrain of the battlefield was formidable. We experience monuments that are laid out in a manner that makes them accessible by automobile tours. The fighting soldiers did not have the advantage of planned roads leading to their destiny. The casualties often remained where they fell, scattered over countless acres.

July first through the third, 1863, the army of the north met with the advancing army of the south. One hundred ninety six thousand soldiers, horses, mules, armament and camp followers faced off. Those three days, the bloodiest battle of the Civil War, became a part of what we would have to reckon with. The names "Little Round Top, Cemetery Ridge and Devil's Den"

entered the language of the day. Cannons firing nonstop, hand to hand combat and crude first aid left the ground littered with wounded and dead, soldiers and army animals.

So, what turned the battlefield into a monument?

Gettysburg has become fixed in the nation's psyche and receives more visitors to the monuments than any other battlefield. There have been members of our club, who are also involved with the Civil War Roundtable, that have been known to make frequent pilgrimages to this place. They have been known to take their children along to explore and discuss the sequence of movements. These children were undoubtedly impressed by the many statues, decorated obelisks and carved stones placed about the park. How did this place become fixed in our consciousness?

We will get to that in a bit. First, we must try and picture the scene. The southern soldiers were in retreat moving away from the remaining northern troops. Wounded were being treated as the troops regrouped. Making

the work more difficult was that Gettysburg was a town of just 2,500 residents. People were rummaging through the dead, possibly looking for their friends or relatives, but corpses were left in disarray and not always identifiable. The weather in July was as you would expect, hot and humid. The entire area was becoming a burial ground, fetid and steaming. Enterprising entrepreneurs were already working to secure ground knowing the need for burials.

Garry Wills writes in his book Lincoln at Gettysburg that "Andrew Curtin, the Republican governor of Pennsylvania was facing a difficult election campaign," (We seldom think about everyday life going on during war time). He needed to placate local feelings as well as dealing with the other states diplomatically. He also had to raise funds to deal with the decomposing remains. Those remains could go on killing by means of fouled streams or contaminated exhumations. The fact that most of the corpses were hastily identified and buried in shallow graves caused added problems. Those battlefields were the farmlands of the towns people. Fields needed to be planted. Pigs

and wild animals were digging up hastily buried remains, leaving bodies exposed. Surviving soldiers needed to get back to fighting – the war did not end at this place. Could this situation become an opportunity?

As we know, the problem was solved, land speculation was stopped, a cemetery was planned. States were assessed to pay for the burials based on their representation in Congress and bids were taken to contract for burials. The high bid was eight dollars per corpse, the winning bid was \$1.59 each. Imagine being the winner of this challenge.

It is a fact that Gettysburg is well studied and known to many here. What has fascinated me is how a few seemingly simple acts make a huge impact on history. The cemetery layout was assigned to William Saunders, an employee of the Department of Agriculture and identified as a “rural architect.” The layout needed to represent equality of the soldiers, representative state of service and could not include soldiers of the southern army. You may imagine that this was an

arduous task. Identification of remains was still problematic caused by disruption such as clothing being removed, body parts separated from their identification and the general chaos of war.

As these obstacles were overcome, the interments began. David Wills was a relatively young man from the town who had been picked to head the cemetery effort. David Wills "felt the need for artful words to sweeten the poisoned air at Gettysburg." He was only obliquely hinting at the foul air. He was directing his attention to the fact that this battle was important to the northern cause, a possible turning point in the course of war. He asked prominent wordsmiths of the day to write an ode to the battle. He was turned down by Longfellow, Whittier, and Bryant. Maybe they couldn't find the muse. Wills succeeded though with Edward Everett, a master of oratory in the Greek Revival style which was quite popular at the time. Negotiations with Everett went ahead carefully even giving the great man the choice to change the date of his address to allow him to prepare his address.

In addition to oratory Everett was an adherent to the rural cemetery movement. He took part in the development of Mount Auburn, considered the first "Rural cemetery" in the United States. The primary feature being the Greek tradition of removing the burial place from a dark and brooding church plot. The Greek ideal was to a place it outside of town in a countryside setting. This was to be next to the academy or university, as a place of learning. This ideal was reflected in dedication of Mount Auburn by Justice Story of the United States Supreme Court noted.

"the Greeks exhausted the resources of their exquisite arts in adorning the habitations of the dead. They discouraged interments within the limits of their cities and consigned their reliques to shady groves, in the neighborhood of murmuring streams and merry fountains, close by the favorites resorts (of those) who were engaged in the study of philosophy and purpose, and called them, with the elegant expressiveness of their own beautiful language, cemeteries or places of repose"

The choice of Everett to deliver the dedication fit squarely into the Greek Revival style of the day. As I have noted Everett knew the style well and was known as the "*Pericles of the young democracy*". Everett was learned enough to know the parallel to what was happening and history and how "the Athenians who died in the battle of Marathon saving Hellas from the Persians were buried on the spot of the battle." Thus, Gettysburg would adhere to tradition creating a unique synchronicity to style and the battle, Everett's oratory perhaps above all creating a myth worthy of the fight.

Everett prepared a fine speech and as was his manner, gave it from memory. His oratory was a magnificent form of art. His form taken from classic Greek retelling. The almost three-hour recitation of the battle, the heroic actions, the losses, the sequence of the fight was formed in the traditional way. His final aim was to create a democratic way of memorializing the fallen warriors. Up to and including the day of the event Edward Everett was definitely the top billing.

But what of Lincoln? Why do we remember his 272 words and as school children memorize them? After all Lincoln was not even supposed to be there. At the time this was considered a state affair, and presidents did not take part in state activities. An official invitation had not even been offered to him initially. Lincoln was invited a month after Everett's engagement as part of a general call to federal Cabinet members and other celebrities in what was otherwise a state event. No offense was meant, and none was taken by Lincoln, but he decided he wanted to be a part of the event. He was asked and agreed to offer "a few words." In other words, he was not the headliner, he was third or fourth on the bill.

When spoken, Lincoln's words were missed by many of the gathered crowd. He was up and down before most had realized he was speaking. There was a photographer at the event but as far we know, no picture of Lincoln giving his address exists. But we know those words, Four Score and Seven, they have become legend. Despite the brevity of the words delivered, Lincoln managed to keep the basics of the Greek

Revival structure, successfully delivering a Cliff Notes version of Everett's presentation. Lincoln honored the noble cause they fought for, honored the dead as warriors, did not glorify individuals, rank, or denigrate the enemy. His only missed point: he said in the address that we would not remember his words: we do remember the words spoken on that day to consecrate the ground. His words reflected that the "ground was consecrated by the soldiers defending a great experiment, the United States of America".

Why do we memorize Lincoln's Gettysburg Address?

Possibly because it is only 272 words and Everett's speech almost 3 hours long. I will leave that to discussion. The dominos were carefully lined up and when they fell a memorial was created.

The odd thing is that in the 1920's as the "Lost Cause" myth arose the southern states were allowed to erect statues, plaques, and monuments in the battlefield. In the dramatic diorama at the park depicting the battle, General Robert E Lee, the losing general of the battle is

presented in heroic proportions. Another form of Memorial.

Enough of Gettysburg for the moment, as the war between the states affected Indianapolis in similar ways. Alexander Ralston had laid out the city with a cemetery located on the banks of the White River on the southwest edge of town. The growth of the city during the war years and the influx of things like an exceptionally large prisoner of war camp had increased the need for burial space. By 1863 the cemetery, then known as Greenlawn had been enlarged three times and had no more room for interments. Plans began to take shape for a new cemetery. As noted, the rural cemetery movement was quite popular, Mount Auburn in Boston could be considered a model. Mount Auburn could not truly be called original as it was following in the footsteps of Pere-Lachaise, Montmartre and Montparnasse all preceding it with a dedication to the concept of a “beautiful death.” Small point.

In 1863 the city fathers doing their research and investigation engaged John Chislett Sr. architect and Adolph Strauch, horticulturist, to design the cemetery now known as Crown Hill. Chislett began work on the designs in December 1863. As a designer of rural cemeteries Chislett was at the top of his game. The rural cemetery movement arrived in Indianapolis in fine form.

The cemetery was dedicated June 1, 1864, and soon became a popular recreational destination for the city's monied residents. At the dedication ceremony the Honorable Albert S. White, judge of the U.S. Court of the District of Indiana, gave a lengthy speech that concluded.

“Let it be the glory of Crown Hill that the rich and poor, the proud and the humble, alike may enter here... where the marble monument not only, shall be preserved inviolate, but where the written records of its silent inmates shall be transmitted from generation to generation and carefully kept from moth and worm”

Lots sold well. Prime lots in Section 1 went for \$1500 each. Calvin Fletcher, always a frugal man chose lots farther out for about 1/3 that amount. The resulting cemetery is one of the largest in the country and well recognized for the layout, horticulture, and maintenance. And memorials.

Much like Gettysburg, the cemetery and its monuments tell a story. This one is about the history of the city.

Walking through Crown Hill, it would be hard to fight a battle among the many monuments, but I muse upon the thought that monuments “elevate figures and stories....” So many familiar names. Like our city the cemetery appears to be a very big place but reading the familiar names makes it seem much smaller somehow. Spread across the fields there is a president, vice presidents, politicians of various other offices, captains of industry, daughters of the American Revolution, veterans, including soldiers from the south that had died in the prisoner of war camp in our city. Among the graves are also various criminals including the one most everyone knows, John Dillinger. The

Fletcher family has numerous burials including a cenotaph (where a marker is placed but not necessarily the remains of the person, much like the monuments at Gettysburg).

The cemetery includes the burials of brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, grandfathers, great grandfathers and great great grandfathers, great uncles and great aunts, relatives known and unknown and, not to be minimized, several Kings of the Gypsies and their families.

Other plots include deceased members of the club including perhaps the most famous buried in the crown, James Whitcomb Riley. Up on top of the hill, there may be enough room to have a small battle despite the monuments. But I am not going to try it.

I realize that I have hop / skipped through history offering brief glimpses at what are very important parts of our history. Facts are alluded to, ignored or mangled but as I noted in the beginning monuments exist to **“create a usable past.”**

And walking through the monuments looking at the names I begin to see my past in a different way. I begin to place myself in some type of context. Due to circumstance, I am not fully informed of all my past, do not know my future. But looking around I realize that many monuments are decorated with a familiar forms. Throughout history we have erected monuments to memorialize our loved ones. We use symbols of faith, family, and beliefs to provide comfort, remembrances, and safety to those who have escaped this mortal coil and for those who remain.

In what must be now described as prescient thought Lincoln in his first inaugural address (directed at the southern states) said:

"I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again

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***touched, as surely, they will be, by the better angels
of our nature."***

One familiar form on these monuments is clear as it does its job reminding us of the past and of the present. The myths and stories of their power bring into focus our need for comfort in the unknown. We use that memorial as our eternal solace. As we walk, We walk with the Angels to find our reassurance among family, friends, and the telling of history.

Thank You.