

For Immediate Release
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NATION’S HISTORIANS SPEAK OUT AGAINST PROPOSED GETTYSBURG CASINO

In letter to Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board, more than 270 American historians unite to urge rejection of proposed gaming resort one-half mile from Gettysburg National Military Park

(Gettysburg, Pa.) – To mark the 147th anniversary of the bloodiest battle in American history, 272 American historians, including some of the country’s most respected academics, today sent a letter to Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board chairman Gregory Fajt, urging the rejection of the application for the Mason-Dixon Gaming Resort. If approved, the proposed gambling hall will be located just one-half mile from America’s most hallowed battleground.

Although many individual historians have previously voiced opposition to the casino proposal, such a large and diverse group uniting in this cause demonstrates Gettysburg’s unique place in our nation’s heritage. Among the signers are some of the most prominent historians in America, including James McPherson, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Battle Cry of Freedom*; Garry Wills, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America*; Carol Reardon, director of graduate studies in history at Pennsylvania State University; Jeffery C. Wert, author of the acclaimed *Gettysburg, Day Three*; and Edwin C. Bearss, Chief Historian *Emeritus* of the National Park Service.

In part, their message states that as professional historians, they “feel strongly that Gettysburg is a unique historic and cultural treasure deserving of our protection. Gettysburg belongs to all Americans equally—future generations no less than those of us alive today,” before concluding that “there are many places in Pennsylvania to build a casino, but there’s only one Gettysburg.”

Beyond the individual signatories, the message and its sentiment has received the endorsement and support of the American Historical Association, National Coalition for History, National Council on Public History, Organization of American Historians, Society for Military History and Southern Historical Association.

The Battle of Gettysburg, fought July 1–3, 1863, was the largest and bloodiest battle of the American Civil War. Commonly called the “high water mark of the Confederacy,” the battle saw nearly 160,000 Americans locked in mortal combat; more than 50,000 became casualties. Historians concur that the engagement was the greatest of Civil War battles, but its place in history was further cemented four months later, when President Abraham Lincoln travelled to the small Pennsylvania farm town to help dedicate a national cemetery for those who died. Lincoln’s “few appropriate remarks” for the occasion, popularly known as the Gettysburg Address, have become one of the world’s most recognized speeches.

Although the proposed casino site along the Emmitsburg Road lies outside the current administrative boundaries of Gettysburg National Military Park, it would be on land identified as historically sensitive

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by the American Battlefield Protection Program, an arm of the National Park Service. The application before the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board would retrofit an existing family-friendly hotel complex into a gambling resort with an initial 600 slot machines in addition to table games.

According to Princeton University professor *emeritus* and author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Battle Cry of Freedom*, James McPherson, “The proposed site of the casino lies athwart the advance of Union cavalry toward what became known as South Cavalry Field, which saw substantial fighting on the afternoon of July 3, 1863. This ground is as hallowed as any other part of the Gettysburg battlefield, and the idea of a casino near the fields and woods where men of both North and South gave the last full measure of devotion is simply outrageous.”

This assessment of the importance of this part of the battlefield is shared by Eric Wittenberg, the author of numerous books on cavalry during the Gettysburg Campaign, including the only volume specifically dedicated to the actions that took place on South Cavalry Field. In response to casino proponents who have tried to minimize the significance of actions fought nearby, Wittenberg said, “This was a protracted and ferocious fight. American soldiers died on that ground, and to suggest otherwise only underscores the disregard these misguided investors have for our national treasure.”

In addition to the inappropriate juxtaposition, historians also fear negative indirect impacts on their efforts to interpret the battlefield and share their knowledge with students and heritage tourists. Gettysburg resident and director of the George Tyler Moore Center for the Study of the Civil War at West Virginia’s Shepherd University, Dr. Mark Snell is extremely concerned about the increased traffic and certain commercialization with which visitors and guides will have to contend should the casino be approved..

“As someone who has tried to give a tour to my students at South Cavalry Field — within easy walking distance of the proposed casino,” said Snell, “I personally can attest that the last thing that is needed on the Emmitsburg Road, where that fight took place, is any increased traffic. It wouldn’t just be noisy, it would be dangerous.”

In 2006, when a previous proposal to bring gambling to the fringes of the Gettysburg Battlefield was under consideration, a group of prominent historians similarly spoke out against the ill-advised project. Such thorough and widespread public opposition was among the reasons explicitly cited by the Gaming Control Board in its rejection of the application.

One of those at the forefront of that effort was Ed Bearss, chief historian *emeritus* of the National Park Service and America’s foremost battlefield guide. A former historian at Vicksburg National Battlefield, who feels that site was irreparably damaged by the emergence of gaming nearby, his opposition to this newer proposal has not diminished in the least. Over the course of his storied career, Bearss has spent many thousands of hours leading tours of the Gettysburg Battlefield.

“Gettysburg, if it embraces the casino, is forfeiting that which has undeniable national and international significance,” said Bearss. “Do you want the most iconic battlefield in America and the site of Abraham Lincoln’s immortal Gettysburg Address, or do you want just another slots parlor?”

The letter was circulated among the historian community by a coalition of preservation groups which have opposed both efforts to bring gambling to Gettysburg. The Civil War Preservation Trust,

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National Parks Conservation Association, National Trust for Historic Preservation and Preservation Pennsylvania have consistently emphasized that their opposition stems from the direct threat posed to the battlefield by the site's proximity and potential for increasing traffic and development pressures on the park, as opposed to any objection to gaming. Spurred by the passionate involvement of so many individual members, member groups of the National Coalition for History also lent their institutional weight to the effort.

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(The full text of the letter and list of signatories is available at:

www.civilwar.org/aboutus/news/news-releases/2010-news/assets/gettysburg-historian-letter.pdf)

About the Civil War Preservation Trust (CWPT)

With 55,000 members, the Civil War Preservation Trust is the largest nonprofit battlefield preservation organization in the United States. Its mission is to preserve our nation's remaining Civil War battlefields and encourage their appreciation through education and heritage tourism. Since 1987, the organization has saved more than 29,000 acres of hallowed ground, including 700 acres at Gettysburg. CWPT's website is located at www.civilwar.org.

About the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA)

Since 1919, the nonpartisan, nonprofit National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come. NPCA is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization with more than 325,000 members, including more than 15,000 members in Pennsylvania. NPCA's website is located at www.npca.org.

About the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP)

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a non-profit membership organization bringing people together to protect, enhance and enjoy the places that matter to them. By saving the places where great moments from history took place, NTHP helps revitalize neighborhoods and communities, spark economic development and promote environmental sustainability. With headquarters in Washington, DC, 9 regional and field offices, 29 historic sites, and partner organizations in all 50 states, NTHP provides leadership, education, advocacy and resources to a national network of people, organizations and local communities committed to saving places, connecting us to our history and collectively shaping the future of America's stories. NTHP's website is located at www.preservationnation.org.

About Preservation Pennsylvania

Preservation Pennsylvania is a private statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving Pennsylvania's historic places through creative partnerships, targeted educational programs and grassroots advocacy programs. Since 1982 and with the support of 2600 members and member agencies, the organization has been the statewide voice for historic preservation and has provided support and technical assistance to individuals, groups and municipalities. Preservation Pennsylvania's website is www.preservationpa.org.