

Memories of War

Memories of War

Visiting Battlefields and Bonefields
in the Early American Republic

THOMAS A. CHAMBERS

Cornell University Press
Ithaca and London

Copyright © 2012 by Cornell University

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Cornell University Press, Sage House, 512 East State Street, Ithaca, New York 14850.

First published 2012 by Cornell University Press
Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chambers, Thomas A.

Memories of war : visiting battlegrounds and bonefields in the early American republic / Thomas A. Chambers.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8014-4867-6 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. United States—History, Military—18th century. 2. United States—History, Military—19th century. 3. Battlefields—United States—History—18th century. 4. Battlefields—United States—History—19th century. 5. Cemeteries—United States—History—19th century. 6. Heritage tourism—United States—History—19th century. 7. Memorialization—United States—History—19th century. 8. Collective memory—United States—History—19th century. I. Title.

E181.C49 2012

355.00973—dc23 2012013902

Cornell University Press strives to use environmentally responsible suppliers and materials to the fullest extent possible in the publishing of its books. Such materials include vegetable-based, low-VOC inks and acid-free papers that are recycled, totally chlorine-free, or partly composed of nonwood fibers. For further information, visit our website at www.cornellpress.cornell.edu.

Cloth printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Preface	ix
Introduction: The Changing Nature of Battlefield Tourism and Commemoration	1
1. Accidental Tourists: The Bonefields of Braddock's Defeat and Ticonderoga	17
2. Forsaken Graves: The Emergence of Memory on the Northern Tour	36
3. Retrieved Relics and New Monuments: Lafayette in Yorktown	65
4. Memory without Tourism: Traces of the Southern Campaigns	99
5. American Antiquities Are So Rare: Remembering the War of 1812 on the Niagara Frontier	127
6. The Value of Union: Antebellum Commemoration and the Coming of the Civil War	159
Notes	185
Index	221

Illustrations

1. John Rogers, <i>Burial of General Braddock</i> (1858)	23
2. Thomas Cole, <i>A View of Fort Putnam</i> (1824–25)	44
3. R. W. Sherman, <i>Ruins of Fort Ticonderoga</i> (1852)	51
4. Thomas Cole, <i>Gelyna: A View Near Ticonderoga</i> (1826, 1829)	55
5. Benson Lossing, Isaac Rice (1850)	62
6. John Trumbull, <i>Surrender of Lord Cornwallis</i> (1820)	86
7. Moore's House (1835)	98
8. Benson Lossing, <i>View of the Battle-Ground</i> (Guilford Courthouse) (1850)	102
9. David Steele skull fragment photograph (1781)	104
10. John Blake White, <i>Battle of Fort Moultrie</i> (1826)	110
11. Ninety-Six map (1822)	115
12. Benjamin Henry Latrobe, <i>The Nelson House</i> (1789)	120
13. Benjamin Henry Latrobe, <i>View at Little York in Virginia</i> (1789)	122
14. Philip John Bainbrigge, <i>Ruins of Fort Erie and the City of Buffalo</i> (1838)	132
15. <i>Two Observatories on Lundy's Lane</i> (ca. 1860)	143

16. H. Park, <i>View of Brock's Monument, Queenston Heights</i> (1839)	148
17. <i>S.E. view of Brock's Monument on Queenston Heights</i> (1841)	150
18. 1856 monument, Cowpens National Battlefield	171
19. <i>The Dreamer at [Fort] Moultrie—1776 and 1861</i> (1861)	173
20. George N. Barnard, Union troops at Moore House, Yorktown (1862)	181

Maps

1. The Northern Tour	8
2. Braddock's Field and Forbes's Road	20
3. Northern battlefields	46
4. Lafayette's tour, 1824–25	71
5. Southern battlefields	106
6. War of 1812 sites along the Niagara River, ca. 1840	130

Tables

1. Pre-1860 monuments	94
2. Time required for battlefield monument completion	95
3. Visitors to Lundy's Lane by place of origin, 1853	144

Preface

Americans love their battlefields. In 2010 alone, over 8.5 million people visited the twenty-two battlefields administered by the National Park Service, and millions more likely visited the many other sites run by state, local, or private organizations. At these battlefields Americans do more than learn about their past—they enact their patriotism by commemorating, preserving, and remembering the places where patriot blood won our nation’s independence. Gettysburg attracts over one million yearly visitors because American history was forged there, and people seek out a personal connection with an evocative place to understand their nation’s past.¹ Many tourists claim to feel something special at Gettysburg, a “sense” that transformative events occurred there, and frequently comment on the chill that runs down their spine while on the battlefield. Twenty-first-century Americans assume that all battlefields have always elicited this kind of emotional response, that the National Park Service has been offering guided tours for hundreds of years, that monuments have dotted the terrain since Washington chopped down the cherry tree, and that we have always been able to engage our nation’s past by visiting battlefields.

We expect to discover history at historic sites, and that the conveniently placed markers and interpretive signs will allow us to better

understand our nation's past. Yet this kind of reverence for place did not begin immediately after 1776, and was not a standard part of American life until fairly recently. It took more than fifty years, as veterans of the Revolutionary War dwindled in number and few founding fathers remained alive, for Americans to even begin commemorating battlefields, much less make touring them a required part of an American family's summer vacation. In writing this book I wanted to investigate why it took so long for Americans to remember their battlefields, and what kind of memories they constructed once they began viewing such sites as "sacred places" worth visiting.² The cultural work required to construct memory at battlefields, and to deem them worthy of preservation and commemoration, took decades to accomplish, and during the period addressed in this book some of the crucial foundation was laid for the type of battlefield tourism that is so pervasive today.

My interest in battlefield commemoration comes in large part from one of the earliest and most vivid memories of my childhood. During the nation's bicentennial, my family observed what so many other Americans witnessed during that celebration—a battle reenactment. It took place in the familiar setting of Ballston Center, New York, a few miles west of my grandparents' house and barn, and just a short distance east of "dee farm" where my Scots-Irish ancestors faltered as agriculturists and where my paternal great-uncle and great-aunt still resided. The family's ties to the area were real but also attenuated. No one from my parents' generation lived in the area, and my family had driven twenty miles from our suburban subdivision to attend the event.

Ballston Center is the principal crossroads of a farming community settled in the late eighteenth century. Where the east-west Charlton Road meets the north-south Middle Line Road, amid rolling hills and mediocre soil, stand a few houses, a cemetery, a Grange hall, and a white clapboard Presbyterian church. This is all that marks what was once the hub of an agricultural community. My family and hundreds of others descended on the intersection one late-summer day as the town held its bicentennial event. I can still see the heat rising from the asphalt as the shrill sound of fifes and drums drifted across the fields, heralding the approach of British soldiers from the direction of my great-uncle's farm. Defending the crossroads was a motley crew of "minutemen" dressed in fringed hunter's garb of James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking*.

After what seemed to a child to be hours of waiting, the redcoats crested a rise in the road a hundred yards from the church. Rough battle lines were formed—the minutemen being a bit more unpolished than the supposed British regulars—and each side opened fire. The clatter of musket fire rose and fell in waves, and the acrid smoke of gunpowder wafted over soldier and civilian alike. The minutemen gave way after a few rounds of musketry, and the British made a show of “burning” the church before turning left up Middle Line Road and marching off toward what as a ten-year-old I assumed was the famous battle of Saratoga.

I interpreted the Revolution as a contest between well-dressed British regulars dead set on disturbing a pleasant community of humble farmers. It didn’t matter that the Saratoga battlefield was almost twenty miles to the east, or that this reenactment converted what the historical record demonstrates was a Loyalist guerrilla raid into a fictionalized, organized march along paved roads. This was how I remembered the Revolution. Shortly after the staged battle, and once the smoke cleared, the townsfolk, militiamen, and British soldiers joined together under the trees of the churchyard for a barbecue. This community celebration featured familiar people, food, smells, and buildings. The pretense of historical reenactment was over.

The events of the day and the landscape on which they took place remain etched in my memory.³ On the infrequent occasions when I visit my grandfather’s grave near Ballston Center, I am reminded of the bicentennial reenactment; the churchyard and “battlefield” are just down the road from the cemetery, and my mind goes back to that childhood visit. During one recent stop the historian in me contemplated how place, whether it be a specific site with a personal connection or a battlefield with broader historical significance, serves as a prompt for constructing memory. In my visits to Ballston’s historic sites during the bicentennial era and afterward, I engaged in activities that many Americans have done millions of times, and continue to do today. Perhaps my responses to this particular historic site belonged to the larger American impulse to remember our past.

In writing this book I sought evidence of the kind of highly personal, vivid responses to battlefields that I possessed—memory influenced by specific places with historical and social context—in the primary sources. This book’s research depends upon some sources that historians have already employed, such as newspaper articles, formal

commemorative ceremonies, broadsides, and published histories from the post-Revolutionary period. More important, it also exploits the many travel guidebooks and travelogues printed during the early republic and antebellum periods, as well as the personal letters and diaries of people who visited the Revolutionary War's decaying battlefields.

I attempted to understand the interaction between place and memory by visiting archives at many of the battlefields under study, where manuscript and printed sources told the stories of the people who fought and later visited each battlefield. During the 1970s, the National Park Service began writing administrative histories and historical resource surveys of its sites, and these rich documents helped me to understand each battlefield's neglect and eventual commemoration; they also revealed additional primary sources. Far from the battlefields themselves, I conducted research at nineteen different libraries and archives up and down the eastern United States and into Ontario. The most important locations, in terms of the amount and quality of material I discovered, are listed in the acknowledgements below. Important archives that did not require travel include the Niagara Falls (NY) Public Library, the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, the Old Fort Niagara archives, and the Niagara Falls (Ont.) History Museum at Lundy's Lane.

To supplement the manuscript and print sources located in these wonderful libraries, I also drew on electronic databases of historical documents that were not available just a few years ago. In collaboration with the American Antiquarian Society, EbscoHost has produced several invaluable collections of historical newspapers and printed material, including the Historical Periodicals Collection and American Broadsides and Ephemera. Combined with Readex's America's Historical Newspapers, HarpWeek (a compilation of Civil War-era *Harper's Weekly Magazine* issues), and ProQuest's Historical Newspapers: *New York Times*, researching and reading nineteenth-century periodicals has become far easier than when I started graduate school in the early 1990s. Being able to keyword search full-text editions of thousands of newspapers and periodicals, and then view the actual pages and articles in a scalable PDF document, makes the researcher's task far easier than it was in the days of microfilm rolls that arrived via InterLibrary Loan. Of course this also means that there is more material to read and an ever-expanding realm of possible sources. But compared to dusting off my university's one remaining microfilm reader and hoping that

it worked, as I did for research in several smaller local newspapers, I'll take the electronic databases any day. The main challenge to accessing these source collections is cost, which is prohibitive for smaller institutions that lack research libraries or generous endowments. In my case, I accessed many of these databases while visiting other university libraries on fellowships. The Library of Congress's American Memory Project helps to address the privatization of historical material by making important collections like the "Journals of the Continental Congress" and the "American Notes: Travel in America, 1750–1920" series electronically available to researchers free of charge. Google Books, archive.org, Project Gutenberg, American Journeys, and the Making of America websites provided additional electronic resources vital to the research for this book.

The incredibly rich sources that I found revealed many aspects of personal interactions with battlefields that formal speeches and ceremonies omit, and filled the gap between the response to place and history prescribed by published guidebooks and how people actually felt when they retraced soldiers' steps. I have walked almost every battlefield, climbed every monument, and viewed practically each marker that I discuss in this book. If anyone has an appreciation of the interaction between place and history, I now do. The resulting book reveals the importance of people interacting with specific battlefields, not just listening to or reading speeches and ceremonies, in constructing American memories of war. Preserving battlefields and remembering soldiers' sacrifices requires reverence for place, something that during the early republic took Americans many decades to learn. Until they visited battlefields, little sacred ground existed.

Memories of War ranges across three conflicts and dozens of battlefields over a century of American history. My chronological focus is the years between the conclusion of the Seven Years' War and the onset of the Civil War, with individual chapters emphasizing specific, if sometimes overlapping, time periods. Throughout this era the formalized ceremonies and monument dedications common during the nation's centennial rarely occurred. The limited Revolutionary War-era commemoration of the 1750s battles at Braddock's Field and Ticonderoga contrasts with the early nineteenth-century cultivation of battlefield tourism and place-centered memory along the Hudson River Valley and nearby lakes (the locus of America's first tourist route). The rise of tourism and battlefield memory occurred simultaneously during the

early republic, although Southern battlefields lagged far behind in this cultural development, even after the Marquis de Lafayette visited sites such as Yorktown, Virginia, and Camden, South Carolina, in 1824–25. The lack of sufficient tourist infrastructure left many Southern battlefields unremembered and often in ruins. A much different story emerged along the Niagara River, where visitors to America's first great tourist destination, Niagara Falls, used the area's well-developed transportation networks and hotels to visit the battlefields where the War of 1812 had raged. There they constructed memories that emphasized sentiment and scenery, unlike the sectional memories that Americans advanced at Revolutionary War battlefields during the antebellum period. By the 1850s Cowpens or Saratoga served the purposes of Southern or Northern nationalists intent on dividing or preserving the Union, according to their occasionally complementary sectional and partisan interests.

I deliberately avoided extensive discussion of well-studied locations such as Bunker Hill or Lexington and Concord in favor of lesser known and, in some cases, more militarily significant battlefields in rural areas and especially in the South. At such locales the romance of picturesque landscapes merged with veneration of the past in ways that troubled very few Americans.

Generous support from Niagara University's Research Council and the Albion College Small Grant program enabled me to travel to archives at Fort Ticonderoga, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the American Antiquarian Society, the Saratoga Springs Public Library, the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan, the Southern Historical Collection, the Duke University Special Collections, the Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, the Kings Mountain National Military Park, the Cowpens National Battlefield, the South Caroliniana Library, and the South Carolina Historical Society. Two separate fellowships from the Gilder-Lehrman Institute funded research at the New-York Historical Society and an invaluable monthlong residential fellowship at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. The latter allowed me time to visit the College of William and Mary Special Collections Research Center, the University of Virginia's Small Special Collections Library, the Yorktown Victory Center, and the Colonial National Historical Park archives at Yorktown. A Mellon Fellowship provided valuable research time at the Virginia Historical Society. The ability to access manuscript sources at these wonderful

libraries and historic sites proved an invaluable part of my research and composes the foundation of this book.

I have accumulated more debts in writing this book than mere words can acknowledge. The History Department at Niagara University has as fine a collection of scholars as can be found at any liberal arts college, and I am grateful for the supportive, intellectually curious atmosphere that my colleagues there have created. The College of Arts and Sciences punches well above its weight in terms of scholarship, and I appreciate the supportive environment fostered by my fellow faculty and our Dean, Nancy E. McGlen. I never lacked for funds to travel for research or conference presentations, and for this I thank Niagara University. Colleagues and friends who read parts of the manuscript include Jerry Carpenter, Suzanne Cooper-Guasco, Doug DeCroix, Doug Kohler, Bob Kane, Scott Krugman, and Nick Westbrook. I appreciate their insights, and especially the always trenchant and thorough comments of Bob Gross, whose graceful writing and precise analysis continue to be my model. Commentators and audience members offered suggestions on my conference papers at meetings of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Conference on New York State History, and British Group of Early American History—suggestions that greatly improved this book. The anonymous reviewers of a very early version of chapter 2 reshaped that argument, as did the expert critiques provided by the referees for Cornell University Press. Cornell asked me to submit a book proposal as early as 2004, and only the persistence and good humor of Michael J. McGandy convinced me to do so. Because of his sharp eye for detail and keen ability to distill abstract arguments into concise interpretations, this book is far better than it would have been with my efforts alone. I deeply appreciate his interest and commitment to the project. Every author should be so lucky as to have him as an editor! The expert and friendly help of the superb people at Sage House, including Susan Specter, Sarah Grossman, and Susan Barnett, and the copy editor, Glenn Novak, helped to make the final product clean and attractive. In a world where too many books are slapped together with little editorial oversight, it is a relief to know that some presses still do things the right way. Of course, these colleagues deserve all of the credit and none of the blame for what follows. Any errors, misinterpretations, or infelicitous phrases are mine alone.

Countless archivists answered my arcane queries and requests for many more documents than appear in this book. In particular, Frances Pollard and Katherine Wilkins at the Virginia Historical Society; David F. Riggs at the Colonial National Historical Park; Neal Polhemus at the South Carolina Historical Society; Ginny Fowler and Layton Carr at Cowpens National Battlefield; Chris Revels and Leah Boshell at Kings Mountain National Military Park; Rachel Ingram and Hannah Craddock at the Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library; Graham Duncan at the South Caroliniana Library; Del Moore and George Yetter of the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library at Colonial Williamsburg; Brian Leigh Dunnigan at the William L. Clements Library; Chris Fox at Fort Ticonderoga; Jere Brubaker at Old Fort Niagara; Kevin Windsor at the Lundy's Lane Historical Museum; and Cynthia Van Ness at the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society provided friendly and expert assistance. Tracy Snyder was a helpful graduate assistant who tracked down the book's illustrations and secured permissions. Bill Nelson drew wonderful maps and graciously accepted my suggested revisions. Samantha Gust is quite simply the greatest Interlibrary Loan librarian I have ever known and found every single obscure microfilm I requested. And for the second time in my career, the inimitable Margaret Cook located several important sources in the Earl Gregg Swem Library Special Collections Research Center that I never would have found without her help.

There are three people, however, who deserve special thanks for helping make this book possible. Teddy and Henry Chambers were always willing to trudge along to an old battlefield and listen to their father "make a big speech about blah, blah, blah." Their enthusiasm for all things historical, especially those involving guns or cannons, inspired me. And they provided a welcome respite from research and writing to read books, play soccer, have a catch, construct elaborate Lego scenes, battle at Wii, or ride bikes. Anne Ward has been my partner-in-crime since our graduate school days and has both tolerated and supported my obsession with battlefields and frequent trips to distant archives and conferences. This book would not have been as enjoyable, nor as worth writing, if not for her companionship, support, and love. Together, we make a pretty good team. Writing this on our wedding anniversary makes my dedicating this book to her especially important.

Introduction

The Changing Nature of Battlefield Tourism and Commemoration

The Yorktown monument cornerstone-laying ceremony on October 18, 1881, the battle's centennial, had been a long time coming. Two years before the commemoration of that final battle, the *New York Times* asked, "What permanent memorial can be founded at Yorktown to record for future ages the historic glories of the spot?"¹ For nearly a century, Americans had not been able to provide an answer to this question, at least in the form of a significant monument on the Yorktown battlefield. Throughout the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Yorktown remained a sleepy, undistinguished port on the York River. Its Revolutionary War history was inscribed in textbooks but was not legible on the landscape.

During the Revolutionary War's centennial, the *New York Times* noted, "trivial engagements and even melancholy Indian massacres have furnished forth agreeable and successful celebrations," but the American victory at Yorktown, a far more significant event that heralded the war's conclusion, "has thus far been left without any fit memorial." Congress's century-old promise to erect a suitable marker remained unfulfilled. But with France, the thirteen colonies' ally during the Revolution, ready to celebrate that old alliance by donating a "colossal figure" in New York Harbor, "surely national gratitude

should be eager to put on record afresh” American appreciation of French assistance at Yorktown, “the brightest example of the effects of this alliance.”² Congress answered the call of newspaper editors and the American public, capping a half dozen years of centennial monument building across the nation with a bill to erect a fitting tribute to the Franco-American alliance at Yorktown. With the 1881 cornerstone laying and official completion in 1884, the United States had at long last commemorated one of its most significant battlefields.³

The Yorktown Centennial Association, formed by local citizens in 1879, made every effort to ensure a grand celebration of the monument’s erection and the battle’s anniversary. The association held preliminary events in 1879 and 1880, and the governor of Virginia led his fellow governors of the thirteen founding states in persuading Congress to sanction and fund a centennial event and monument. Congress passed a bill, which President James A. Garfield signed on June 7, 1880, appropriating \$100,000 for a monument and \$20,000 “for the purpose of defraying the expenses incurred in said Centennial celebration.”⁴ This was no small feat, as Congress had been reluctant to fund monuments in the past. During the nation’s centennial, though, Congress suddenly expressed interest in funding “monuments on all sorts of battle-fields where a hundred years have elapsed” without any formal commemoration. Congress preferred to “go no further than State or local patriotism would go”; Yorktown’s successful local organization provided “an exception” where Congress supported a monument.⁵

The president and Senate soon appointed a committee of thirteen men to plan the event and select a monument design. With just over a year remaining before the centennial, they scrambled to make ready for the commemoration. The committee quickly selected a four-sided column honoring the victory and the Franco-American alliance. A much larger group representing Congress and “each of the Colonial States” planned the actual centennial event. They invited representatives from every state in the Union, militia groups and U.S. military units, naval vessels, descendants of the European officers who had fought with the Americans at Yorktown (including the Marquis de Lafayette, the Comte de Rochambeau and Baron von Steuben), Masons and Knights Templar, state and national politicians, and the general public to a nine-day festival honoring the great victory. It seemed that everyone would be there.⁶

The festivities began on October 13, 1881, with gala balls, speeches, fireworks, a regatta, and religious services for members of civic associations and militia units in attendance. The national ceremonies commenced on October 18, with President Chester A. Arthur—just in office a few weeks, after Garfield’s death—attending the cornerstone-laying ceremony. Arthur’s steamboat approached the wharf below Yorktown village and received a military salute. A marching band escorted his party to the reviewing stand, where the crowd greeted him with cheers. The Reverend Robert Nelson, “grandson of Governor Nelson, who commanded the Virginia militia at Yorktown,” delivered the opening prayer. Virginia governor Frederick W. M. Holliday followed Nelson and lauded “the fulfillment of the Republic’s promise” to build a monument on “the spot where we are now gathered.” He concluded his discourse on Yorktown’s history by declaring, “So may the principles this Monument is intended to represent not fall from the memory of men!” The Masons in attendance performed the cornerstone ceremony, and a host of dignitaries expounded on the event’s significance. “The scene,” wrote a Richmond newspaper, “was an inspiring one.”⁷

The United States, one hundred years after the British surrender at Yorktown, had properly commemorated that momentous event. Hitherto, Yorktown had not been completely without attention; parades and speeches had occurred before, including Lafayette’s 1824 visit to the battlefield. Yet it took more than a half century after Lafayette’s visit until a major monument stood at Yorktown. Even in 1881, accomplishing the feat required significant effort and revealed many shortcomings in battlefield tourism and commemoration and the changing nature of that endeavor over the course of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In confronting history at battlefields like Yorktown where the Revolution was fought, Americans performed memory in a manner that was less about the distinctly nationalistic concerns emphasized by politicians such as those gathered at Yorktown in 1881 than it was about the transatlantic trend of picturesque scenery and sentiment that pervaded early nineteenth-century Anglo-American culture. Battlefield tourism did not fully develop until fifty years after the Declaration of Independence. In its formative years attention to battlefields grew alongside the “Northern Tour” and an American fascination with landscape. Early tourists to battlefields formed their *own* emotional, patriotic memories based on Romantic ideals of the picturesque, melancholy,

and nostalgia, as well as a generic Revolutionary War history. Their battlefield visits and responses to those sites occurred within a larger context of shared cultural assumptions. Americans maintained an ambivalent relationship with the past; most possessed only partial knowledge of their nation's history, and sought to keep it that way. They had been performing nationalism at July Fourth parades and political rallies throughout the early republic and antebellum periods, but tourism to distant battlefields was far different from listening to Daniel Webster speak at Bunker Hill or hearing Edward Everett drone on for several hours recounting the militia movements of April 19, 1775, on Lexington Green.⁸ These and other speeches made near urban centers to dedicate what few monuments existed struck on political and military themes and lacked the melancholy responses tourists experienced at barren battlefield sites often situated in magnificent landscapes. By the time the larger American public focused on battlefield commemoration, in the 1850s, this Romantic impulse had faded and memories of war were subsumed by sectional politics. Before that moment, however, people did visit battlefields, and in growing numbers. Their visits slowly made these battlefields into "sacred places," but this early sacralization was barely interested in politics and was ill-fitted with the patriotic purposes to which these sites would eventually be put.⁹

Getting to Battlefields

The nation's inefficient transportation system and insufficient accommodations hindered visits to battlefields. Even as late as the Yorktown centennial, for instance, just reaching the battlefield proved difficult. The Yorktown Centennial Association promised "hourly ferry service" between nearby cities and Yorktown aboard "some of the handsomest excursion steamers" imported from New York.¹⁰ The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad planned to extend its line from Richmond all the way to Yorktown, with four trains running each day. But the railroad "failed to make its connection" by the commemoration's first day, and as a result the crowds proved much smaller than promoters had expected.¹¹

Those who did attend the centennial balked at the "absence of suitable accommodations."¹² Since Yorktown lacked lodging for more than a few dozen people, the committee laid out tent cantonments on the

plain adjacent to town. Military academy cadets and regular army units managed to establish their camps, but the militia, “working men, clerks and merchants,” lacked the skills and discipline to pitch tents and situate latrines.¹³ More prestigious visitors, like the French delegation and American politicians, were to be housed in a hastily constructed hotel or in two historic buildings dating to the Revolution that required renovation “from cellar to garret.”¹⁴ Organizers failed to make these accommodations ready, and instead “barns and old buildings” had been “arranged with bunks.” Barges moored in Yorktown’s harbor served as floating hotels, “with the upper deck crowded with cots.”¹⁵

The Yorktown Centennial Committee blamed Congress for the crude accommodations, since its \$20,000 appropriation was “wholly inadequate to meet the requirements of a celebration which will be commensurate with the historical significance of the event and the present grandeur of our country.”¹⁶ Yet even the nation’s parsimony could not dampen the celebration’s patriotic enthusiasm. America’s “patriotic ancestors . . . only asked or secured the earth for a couch and the heavens for a covering.” If Washington had spent much of the war sleeping not in a house but in a tent, at the centennial patriotic and appreciative Americans could sleep for a few uncomfortable nights under canvas.¹⁷ This temporary fervor made events such as Yorktown’s centennial and monument dedication a success, but could not and did not sustain battlefield tourism and commemoration over the long run. Americans had to be able to get to battlefields before they could memorialize them.

Little had changed in Yorktown and on the Virginia Peninsula more generally between 1781 and 1881. During the decades after the Revolutionary War, the slow rise of tourism in the United States hindered attempts to commemorate Revolutionary War battlefields. Across the nation, travel proved hard, and lodging was difficult to find. Few Americans caught the traveling bug during the eighteenth century, in large part because of the colonies’ and young nation’s limited transportation infrastructure. The era’s best-known traveler, Dr. Alexander Hamilton (no relation to the Federalist politician), encountered a mere seven bridges but crossed fifty-five ferries on his four-month journey in 1744 from Virginia to Maine.¹⁸ Without advanced roadways, bridges, guidebooks, or maps, eighteenth-century travelers generally stuck to major cities along the eastern seaboard. At their most adventurous, they might venture roughly 150 miles up the Hudson River, a tidal estuary

navigable by oceangoing ships as far north as Albany. The hills and mountains of the Appalachian west remained inaccessible to all but the most intrepid, and the lands there were largely unvisited except by yeoman farmers pushing west and claiming the land.

No matter the state of the roads, most travel served business purposes or sought to connect friends and family separated by distance. The idea of traveling merely to see something new or be somewhere different was not current in early America. The letter of introduction, not today's Fodor's or Lonely Planet guidebooks, helped travelers find their way, and those letters tended to lead them to familiar cities and towns, where they could lodge with people they, or a friend, knew. During the early republic era only an elite few, mostly those wealthy enough to enjoy leisure time and morally flexible enough to view touring as something other than sinful sloth, ventured more than a few dozen miles from their homes. These nascent tourists concerned themselves with scenery, health, or commingling with their social equals at seaside resorts such as Newport, regional mineral springs such as Ballston Spa, or cosmopolitan cities including Charleston, Philadelphia, and New York. The political and military history of the republic was not their concern. No matter their interests, the number of tourists remained small, and tourism constituted a minor part of American life and culture during the late eighteenth century.¹⁹ Before battlefield tourism could become a significant part of American tourism or culture, an impetus to visit such places needed to develop. That pull factor came from the landscapes around battlefields.

The Grand Tour and the Romantic Landscape

During the 1790s relative peace and prosperity established conditions that made travel more possible than it had been previously. Gradually, infrastructure such as roads, bridges, regular ferry and steamboat service, better-built carriages that softened the often bone-jarring ride—all these developments led to faster, more convenient travel, although getting around was by no means easy or luxurious. The commercial impetus to transmit information and goods as quickly and cheaply as possible moved such internal improvements along.²⁰

Hotels and resorts began to appear along these routes, and almost every crossroads town that boasted a bubbling rock hoped to become a mineral springs resort attracting regional tourists. By the 1820s prominent resorts such as Saratoga Springs, New York, and White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, emerged as destinations of choice for the national tourist class. Visiting a mineral spring resort offered Americans a justification to travel—they did so for health, not amusement. Southern planters claimed they needed to escape to the Blue Ridge Mountains in order to avoid the summer fevers that ravaged the tidewater region, and Northern urbanites insisted that the heat was unbearable inside their town houses but was much less taxing on the Hudson River. Even if health was merely an excuse to dine, flirt, and dance, the search for physical well-being provided a necessary foundation for travel in a nation anxious about leisure.²¹ During the early nineteenth century, tourism developed to the point where the purpose of traveling was “to see and be seen, to chat, laugh and dance, and to throw each his pebble on the giant heap of the general enjoyment.”²² As Washington Irving declared, people traveled “to exhibit their equipages and wardrobes, and to excite the admiration, or what is much more satisfactory, the *envy* of their fashionable competitors.”²³

The further development of canals, turnpikes, and railroads as reliable transportation during the 1820s and 1830s, at least in the Northern states, connected American farms, towns, factories, and ports in increasingly regional networks of trade and travel. Tourists took full advantage of these new networks, and the “travel system” grew so quickly that guidebooks appeared, catering specifically to the tourist trade. Any traveler could now identify the quickest routes, best lodgings, and most fashionable destinations for the price of a pocket-size volume. Travel expanded to the point that by 1828 “all ages and sexes are to be found on the wing, in perpetual motion from place to place.”²⁴

By the 1820s the standard tour route allowed tourists to sail up the Hudson River from New York City, gaze at the Catskill Mountains just at a remove from the river’s west shore, visit Saratoga Springs and Lake George, and then head west along the newly opened Erie Canal, to gawk in wonder at Niagara Falls. After reaching this westernmost point, travelers followed Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River to historic Montreal and Quebec. They returned home either via the St. Lawrence to Lake Champlain (reached by a brief overland trip



Map 1. The Northern Tour.

from Montreal to the Richelieu River) and then descended the Hudson River to New York City, or traveled overland to the Connecticut River Valley, New Hampshire's White Mountains, and finally to Boston. They frequently commented on bad hotels and atrocious food, cramped canal boats or lake sloops, boomtowns and rustic locals, and the general challenges of travel in an age of poor roads and improvised accommodations. But travelers had defined routes to follow and reliable (if not always pleasant) accommodations and food along the way.

In and through their travels, Americans sought to imitate the European Grand Tour, a rite of passage for young British aristocrats who

visited ancient ruins, painters' studios, and homes of their fellow nobles before returning home to assume responsible roles in society. As part of their gaining worldly experience, these travelers sought emotional responses to landscape and history. A model for this activity was Edward Gibbon, who, while in Rome in 1764, felt that he could "neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the *eternal City*."²⁵ Such reactions to landscapes and historic places evolved into the tradition of English landscape painting and picturesque tourism during the late eighteenth century, as articulated by William Gilpin's influential 1792 "Essay on Picturesque Travel." Gilpin moved beyond the dichotomy between the sublime and the beautiful that Edmund Burke had articulated earlier in the century, wherein raw nature produced terror in those who viewed it, and reverence for God's power. In contrast, beauty, Burke stated, was characterized by smoothness and less threatening landscapes, such as a sloping garden, which produced joy and pleasure. Gilpin amended Burke and described an intermediate landscape that possessed both the roughness of nature and the calmness of man-made scenery. Viewing and sketching such scenery became commonplace in late-Georgian Britain, as people pursued "the love of novelty" in finding new landscapes. They also looked to landscapes for evidence of the unchanging essence of Great Britain in a time of profound technological and social upheaval. Scenes untouched by the modern—be it roads and bridges or smokestacks and factories—prompted emotional responses to what the country had lost, mixed with pride in what it had gained. In defining landscape in this way, Great Britain's cultural elite redeemed nature from social change, imagining a past of untrammelled and unchanged scenery. The reality that very few such landscapes existed made the yearning for them all the stronger. A key motivation in viewing the picturesque, then, was to expand one's capacity to express longings for the vanished past and to signify one's membership in a broader, exclusive cultural group. Gilpin asked his readers, "Is there a greater ornamental landscape, than the ruins of a castle?" and they responded enthusiastically by searching for such scenes.²⁶

Experiencing picturesque scenery became an American cultural trend a bit later, by the 1820s. The few Americans who had crossed the Atlantic before that decade to complete the Grand Tour returned with an appreciation for European cultural standards, and they considered