GOVERNOR EDWARD SALOMON, W. YATES SELLECK, AND THE SOLDIERS’ CEMETERY AT GETTYSBURG

Frank L. Klement
Marquette University
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Two Wisconsin residents played an important role in the establishment of the Gettysburg-based soldiers’ cemetery, a cooperative project of eighteen states. Governor Edward Salomon endorsed the project, promised that Wisconsin would pay its fair share of the costs, and named a state agent to cooperate with Pennsylvania authorities. W. Yates Selleck, as state agent and Salomon’s representative, spent considerable time in Gettysburg, lent energy and ideas to the project, played a role in the dedication ceremonies of November 19, 1863, and served as secretary of the cemetery association.

Governor Salomon, who promised that Wisconsin would be a paying partner in the enterprise, was an effective administrator, if not a popular one. In a way, chance and expediency had made Salomon their prisoner. Born in Prussia, he accompanied an older brother to Wisconsin, living first in Manitowoc, then moving to Milwaukee in 1852 to enter the fields of law and politics. He started out as a Democrat, but, influenced by Carl Schurz, he deserted that party for Republicanism and the slogan “Free soil and free men.” At their state convention in 1861 Republicans gave Salomon the second spot on the state ticket in a bid for votes of the German-Americans. The strategy helped put Louis P. Harvey in the executive mansion and made Salomon the lieutenant governor. Chance again intervened. When Governor Harvey was in the Shiloh area distributing supplies and hospital stores, he fell into the Tennessee River while stepping from one steamboat to another during the night and was drowned—elevating Salomon to the governorship. ¹

While Governor Salomon worked in the glare of the public spotlight, W. [illiam] Yates Selleck lived in the shadows, on the fringe

¹ Edward Salomon was born at Stroebeck, near Halberstadt, Prussia, on August 11, 1828. He was a student, first at the college at Halberstadt, and then at the University of Berlin. Political repression, part of the story of the revolutions of 1848, prompted him to leave for the United States. He settled in Manitowoc, serving successively as school teacher, county surveyor, and deputy clerk of the circuit court. After moving to Milwaukee, he read law in the offices of Edward G. Ryan, being admitted to the bar in 1855. He set up a law practice with Winfield Smith and engaged in politics, supporting Democratic candidates. He bolted the Democracy to support Lincoln in 1860.
of obscurity. A young man who had come to Milwaukee during the 1850’s, he found employment with an insurance firm and turned to politics as an outlet for his energy. He was one of the founders of the Young Men’s Republican Club in March of 1860, and became the organization’s corresponding secretary. He supported Lincoln for the presidency and became acquainted with the Salomon brothers. Republican victory in the 1860 elections netted Selleck an appointment in Washington.

The young, energetic and imaginative fellow was one of the organizers of the Wisconsin Soldiers’ Aid Society, formed by the state’s residents-in-Washington to furnish aid to sick and needy soldiers—“and more especially to visit the hospitals and see that our soldiers are well cared for.” Appointment as state agent (more correctly “State Military Agent”) to oversee Wisconsin’s sick and wounded soldiers became a full-time job after the Union defeat at First Bull Run and as more of the state’s volunteers were assigned to the Army of the Potomac. Selleck felt compelled to defend the reputation of the Third Wisconsin Regiment which a correspondent of the New York Times had mistakenly accused of cowardice. In a letter to the Milwaukee Sentinel, Selleck wrote “... it is a base slander and falsehood, and there is not a word of truth in it.” Union defeats in such battles as Second Bull Run, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville placed a heavy load upon the shoulders of Selleck, who performed his duties with a dedication and ability unmatched by any other state agent in the Washington area.

When word of heavy fighting in the Gettysburg area went out over the telegraphic wires, both Governor Salomon and state agent Selleck expressed apprehension. Approximately 6,000 Wisconsin soldiers served in the Army of the Potomac, and each major battle brought concern to state authorities and sorrow to many homes. Selleck left Washington for Gettysburg as soon as reports reached the capital that the battle was over. Taking his assistant, William P. Taylor, with him, Selleck took the train to Baltimore in the hopes of securing passage to Hanover Junction and Gettysburg. But they could not get a train out of Baltimore until July 6, and then the train ran only as far as Westminster, Maryland. Unable to secure a conveyance of any kind in Westminster, Selleck and Taylor set out on foot, carrying bundles on their backs. They reached Littlestown, seventeen miles away, at sundown. Next morning they “procured a conveyance” which took them the final

---

2 Milwaukee Sentinel, March 22, 1860.
3 Ibid., April 27, 1861.
4 Ibid., June 8, 1861. James R. Doolittle, one of the state’s U.S. Senators, served as president of the organization while Selleck held the office of vice-president.
sixteen miles to Gettysburg. The two state agents found that Wis-
consin troops had suffered heavy casualties, the famous “Iron
Brigade” (composed of three Wisconsin regiments and one each
from Indiana and Michigan) being decimated in the first day’s
fighting during the three-day battle. He visited Col. Lucius Fair-
child, whose left arm had been amputated above the elbow after
the first day’s fearful and fateful battle. He visited hospitals
and noticed a pathetic shortage of supplies. Leaving his assistant to
“make out lists of all the killed, wounded and missing” (Wiscon-
sin soldiers), Selleck rushed back to Washington and Baltimore to
“procure supplies.” To get back to Washington, the spirited and
solicitous agent rode “17 miles on a locomotive and 69 miles on
the back end of a freight car.”

Selleck arrived back in Gettysburg late during the afternoon of
July 10, bringing with him “5 boxes of under clothing and other
hospital stores” as well as “three bundles of crutches.” After
distributing most of the “stores,” Selleck took time to write about
his activities to Governor Salomon. He promised to send a list of
“the killed, wounded and missing” as soon as possible.

Selleck and Taylor did noble work, angels of mercy to those in
need. “The Wisconsin wounded at Gettysburg,” Selleck’s aide wrote
to a friend, “were better attended to and cared for than those of
any other State—not even excepting Massachusetts.”

Taylor could have added that the wounded and sick soldiers re-
ceived far more consideration than the dead. Many of the dead
soldiers had been buried hurriedly and carelessly. In some cases
no graves had been dug, and the bodies had merely been covered
with spadefuls of dirt; mounds of soil dotted portions of the battle-
field, especially that section where the first day’s fighting had been
heaviest. Heavy rains which followed washed off some of the soil
shoveled over the maggot-infested bodies, exposing arms, legs, and
heads. “I saw one entire skull above the ground,” wrote an ob-
server, “and in many instances hands & feet are sticking through.”
A blazing sun and the summer heat hastened the bloat-
ing and decomposition of the corpses, filling the air with a sicken-
ing stench. Worse than that, hogs rooting in various portions of

---

8 The “Iron Brigade,” the only all-Western brigade in the Army of the Potomac,
consisted of the 2nd, 6th, and 7th Wisconsin, the 19th Indiana, and the 24th Michigan.
The story of this “famous fighting unit” is well told in Alan T. Nolan, The Iron
Brigade (New York, 1961). No participant in the Battle of Gettysburg wrote a better
account than a first lieutenant serving on the staff of John Gibbon, commanding the
Iron Brigade at Gettysburg; see Frank A. Haskell, The Battle of Gettysburg (Madison,
1908).

9 Selleck to Salomon, July 9, 1863, published in Wisconsin State Journal, July 15,
1863.

10 Ibid.

11 Taylor to Leonard J. Farwell, July 18, 1863, published in part in Wisconsin State
Journal, July 24, 1863.

12 Ellen Mead to “My dear Mrs. Dean,” Aug. 12, 1863, Lucius Fairchild Papers, State
Historical Society of Wisconsin (Madison).
the onetime battlefield, desecrated the graves and devoured portions of the rotting human bodies.\textsuperscript{13}

In his work as state agent, Selleck became well acquainted with David Wills, a kindred soul and a Gettysburger whom the governor of Pennsylvania, after a visit to the battlefield, had named his representative to supervise “the removal of all Pennsylvanians killed in the late battles, furnishing transportation for the body and one attendant at the expense of the State.”\textsuperscript{14} In pursuing their assignments, Wills and Selleck noticed that many of the markers over the graves were temporary and inadequate and that some of the names were faded and quite unreadable. “... three thousand men lie in and around Gettysburg,” noted one who had tramped over the battlefield, “in cornfields, in meadows, in gardens, by the way side, and in the public road, buried hastily where they fell, and others in long rows, with a piece of box lid or board of any kind, with the name of the person and the day he died written with lead pencil, ink, or whatever they had to make a mark with.”\textsuperscript{15} Time, aided by sun and rain, made some of the inscriptions quite illegible, while occasional so-called graves had no headboards at all.

Wills, encouraged by state agents like W. Yates Selleck of Wisconsin and Henry Edwards of Massachusetts, envisioned a cooperative state cemetery as both a possibility and a necessity. Massachusetts agents had already asked their state authorities to consider buying a portion of the battlefield—preferably atop Cemetery Hill—as a burial ground for Massachusetts soldiers whose bodies had not been returned to the state and whose ill-kempt graves were scattered here and there, wherever troops had been engaged. Selleck, like Wills, believed that most of the eighteen states which had lost sons at Gettysburg would partake in a project to rebury the dead in a common cemetery created out of a portion of the battlefield. Encouraged by Selleck and other state agents, Wills conveyed the idea to his governor, suggesting that Pennsylvania purchase a plot for the proposed cemetery. He added an impassioned plea: “Our dead are lying in the fields unburied (that is no graves being dug) with small portions of earth dug up alongside of the body and thrown over it. In many instances arms and legs protrude and my attention has been directed to several places where hogs were actually rooting out the bodies and devouring them—and this on Pennsylvania soil. ... Humanity calls on us to take measures to remedy this. ...”\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} David Wills to Governor Andrew Curtin, July 24, 1863, Curtin Letterbooks, Executive Correspondence, 1861–1865, Pennsylvania State Archives (Harrisburg).

\textsuperscript{14} (Gettysburg) Adams County Sentinel, July 28, 1863.


\textsuperscript{16} Wills to Curtin, July 24, 1863, Curtin Letterbooks, Executive Correspondence, 1861–1865.
Governor Curtin, busy with affairs of state, authorized Wills to purchase the necessary acreage for the proposed cemetery, contact authorities of the other seventeen states, make arrangements for the reburials, and superintend the entire project. After each of eight agents (including Selleck) whom he had “consulted,” endorsed the cemetery proposal “semi-officially.” Wills took steps to purchase seventeen acres atop Cemetery Hill, adjacent to the local cemetery already established there. He composed a telegram to each of the governors who should have had an interest in the cooperative venture. Wills’ telegram of August 1, 1863, to Governor Salomon read: “By authority of Gov. Curtin I am buying ground on or near Cemetery [sic] Hill in trust for a cemetery for the burial of the soldiers who fell here in the defense [sic] of the Union. Will Wisconsin cooperate in the project for the removal of her dead from the field? Signify your assent to Gov. Curtin or myself and details [will] be arranged afterwards.”

Governor Salomon replied promptly: Yes, Wisconsin would cooperate in the project. The governor, however, was concerned with the “details,” for he wanted no loose ends which might be used to hog-tie him politically. Having committed his state, Salomon instructed W. Yates Selleck, who had returned to Washington, to go back to Gettysburg and “confer with Mr. D. Wills” in reference to “the detail of arrangements for removal of the Wisconsin dead to the Cemetery grounds.”

Salomon took some influential Republicans, including editor Horace Rublee of the (Madison) Wisconsin State Journal, into his confidence. Rublee, in turn, endorsed the cemetery project in the public press. “Governor Salomon of this State,” wrote Rublee, “has signified, in response to Governor Curtin’s proposition, the readiness of Wisconsin to contribute her proportion towards this laudable and patriotic enterprise.”

Selleck, meanwhile, returned to Gettysburg to seek out Wills and ask questions about progress on the cemetery project and about the so-called “details.” Wills was then negotiating for the purchase of five plots totalling seventeen acres—he eventually purchased two plots at $225 per acre, one at $200, another at $150, and the fifth at $135. Wills also talked to Selleck and other state agents.

---

17 Wills to Curtin, July 30, 1863, ibid.
19 William H. Watson (Salomon’s military secretary) to Selleck, Aug. 3, 1863, Letter Books General, Executive Department (Administration), 1861–1865, Archives Section, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
20 Wisconsin State Journal, Aug. 24, 1863.
about the specifications for the proposed reburials, seeking their aid and advice in drafting a circular letter to each of the governors involved in the project.\textsuperscript{22} Wills and the agents also discussed the advisability of getting William Saunders, an employee of the Department of Agriculture and a well-known landscape gardener, to come to Gettysburg and “lay out” the proposed soldiers’ cemetery.

After Wills composed his circular letter to the governors, he had copies printed and put into the mails. Instead of sending Salomon’s copy he gave it to Selleck to forward to his governor. Selleck promptly forwarded the circular letter and included a letter of his own.

In his letter Selleck stated that Wills had purchased “a very suitable piece of ground, on one of the most prominent parts of the battlefield,” and urged Salomon to act promptly upon the cemetery proposal. “It is desirable to have as little delay as possible in getting your reply,” he wrote to his governor, “as the bodies of our soldiers are in many cases so much exposed as to require prompt attention, and the grounds should be speedily arranged for their reception.” Selleck added, “Governor Curtin authorized me to say to you that if your State desires a conveyance in fee simple, of your burial ground in this cemetery, Pennsylvania will make a deed to you for it. Otherwise she will hold the title in trust for the purposes designated in the circular.”\textsuperscript{23}

Wills’ carefully composed circular letter, dated August 12, stated that Pennsylvania had purchased a portion of the battlefield “to be devoted in perpetuity” for a soldiers’ cemetery, that the dead would be reburied in the new cemetery, that the grounds would be “tastefully laid out, and adorned with trees and shrubbery,” and that the “whole expense,” not to exceed $35,000, would be apportioned among the cooperating states—each “to be assessed according to its population, as indicated by its number of representatives in Congress.” Wills closed his lengthy letter with the request that each governor appoint “an agent” to help carry out the reburial project and serve on the cemetery commission.\textsuperscript{24}

Salomon acted promptly. “You will please state to Mr. Wills,” he instructed his efficient and capable representative, “that the

\textsuperscript{22} Wills to Curtin, Aug. 11, 1863, Curtin Letter Books, Executive Correspondence, 1861–1865.

\textsuperscript{23} Selleck to Salomon, Aug. 12, 1863, Executive Department (Administration), Civil War Memorials Correspondence, 1861–1913, Archives Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin. The author is indebted to Miss Patricia Hosey, a research assistant in the History Department and a graduate student [she received her M.A. in May of 1972] at Marquette for locating the above correspondence—about 20 of these missiled letters were pertinent to this article.

\textsuperscript{24} Wills to Salomon, Aug. 12, 1863, \textit{ibid}. The letter, in Wills’ own hand, was evidently the basis for the printed circular letter which the author found in the David Tod Papers (Ohio Historical Society) and the Austin Blair Papers (Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library).
State of Wisconsin will bear its portion of the contemplated expenditure within the limit, and on the basis proposed, and you are hereby designated as the Agent of this State to act in connection with Mr. Wills and the agents of other States, in making the necessary arrangements for completing the work.” The governor added a timely warning, saying that he would expect a “full report” which would be laid before the legislature and suggesting “the preserving of all necessary memoranda for the purpose.”

Selleck, back in Washington when he received Salomon’s letter which officially designated him as state’s agent for the Gettysburg cemetery project, confirmed receipt of his new assignment by return mail. “I will follow out your instruction,” he assured his governor, “and preserve all necessary vouchers and memoranda and report in full in due time.” Selleck also promptly informed Wills of his official appointment as Wisconsin’s agent to work with him in the transformation of a portion of the battlefield into a national cemetery, and after putting his Washington house in order he hurried off to Gettysburg.

When William Saunders, charged with “laying out the grounds,” arrived in Gettysburg, Wills, Selleck, and several other state agents accompanied him to the site of the proposed cemetery. They walked over the seventeen-acre tract as Saunders studied the high and low portions and considered the best spot to locate the central monument. In time, the eminent landscape gardener recommended that the monument be placed on the highest reach of ground and that the parcel to be allotted to each state run toward the common center, fitting together in a semicircular arrangement. He promised the services of a surveyor to lay out the 12-foot wide semicircular parallels, allowing five feet for a walk between the parallels and seven feet for each grave.

Selleck spent some of his time during this stay in Gettysburg calling on the Wisconsin soldiers recuperating in hospitals or in private homes. He fretted about the intense summer heat, fearing its effect upon some of the wounded. He was pleased, on the other hand, that the citizens of the Gettysburg area had been so solicitous about the welfare of the wounded and sick soldiers. “The people of Gettysburg,” Selleck reported to Salomon, “are very attentive in supplying the wants and looking after the comforts of the wounded soldiers.” Selleck added a sentence about the cemetery project: “I will write you to-morrow respecting the plans and arrangements

---

23 Salomon to Selleck, Aug. 24, 1863, Letter Books General, Executive Department (Administration), 1861-1865.
24 Selleck to Salomon, Aug. 30, 1863, Executive Department (Administration), Civil War Memorials Correspondence, 1861-1913.
25 Selleck to Wills, Aug. 31, 1863, ibid.
proposed for the laying out of the National Cemetery on the late Battle Field.”

In the weeks which followed Selleck returned to Washington to minister to the needs of soldiers in that area while Wills dealt with the problems arising out of the proposed cemetery. A controversy developed over the question whether the reburials in the cemetery would be “by state” or “promiscuous” and for a time Massachusetts even threatened to withdraw from the venture unless she could have her way—each state’s soldiers buried together. At Governor Curtin’s prompting, Wills was tempted to discard his “promiscuous” plan and surrender to Massachusetts demands. Then, after Saunders’ surveyor laid out the state sections and cemetery plots, Wills was ready to publicize the reburial specifications and plan the dedication program. Actually, he did not plan to have the reburying begun until after the grounds were dedicated in ceremonies he set for October 22, 1863. Nor did he wish to begin the reburial program until late fall. “I think it would be showing only the proper respect for the health of this community not to commence the exhuming of the dead, and removal to the cemetery,” he wrote to Governor Curtin, “and in the meantime the grounds should be artistically laid out, and consecrated by appropriate ceremonies.”

After Wills invited Edward Everett, the renowned Massachusetts orator, to give the oration for the occasion, he wrote another round of letters to the governors. He informed them that satisfactory progress had been made on the cemetery project, that he had set October 22 as the dedication date, and that Everett had been invited to give the day’s oration. He asked each governor—including Salomon—whether his state preferred promiscuous reburials or grouping by states. And he invited each governor to attend the ceremonies in person and expressed the hope that each state would have a good-sized delegation in attendance.

Salomon again replied promptly. He preferred that Wisconsin’s dead soldiers, killed at Gettysburg, be buried together, so that immediate comrades in life could be together in death. “The selection of Hon. Ed. Everett as orator,” Salomon added, “is eminently satisfactory.”

Everett, meanwhile, expressed the desire to give the oration for the dedication of the cemetery, but commitments in hand would

---

31 Wills to Salomon, Sept. 15, 1863, Executive Department (Administration), Civil War Memorials Correspondence, 1861-1913.
make it impossible to compose and memorize an oration before November 19. Since Wills had his heart set on Everett as the day's orator, he had to change the date of the dedication ceremonies from October 22 to November 19.

While Wills and Everett were exchanging letters and changing the date of the proposed ceremonies, Selleck wondered about the progress of the cemetery project while he performed his regular duties in the hospitals and army camps in the Washington area. He fretted about the lack of information from Wills, and since he was returning to Wisconsin for a hurried trip, he wanted to take a progress report to his governor. "I intend going to Wisconsin the last of next week and shall see the Governor," he wrote on October 9, "and I desire to be able to give him some information in reference to the matter." Thus prodded, Wills wrote a brief note to Selleck, assuring him that he was "pushing the matter" vigorously and enclosing a Wills-to-Salomon letter. "The enclosed letter," Wills wrote to Selleck, "gives you the information desired in your letter."

The "enclosed letter" told Salomon that, at Edward Everett's insistence, the proposed date for the dedication ceremonies had been changed to November 19. The change in dates also made it imperative that the reburials begin before, rather than after the official dedication ceremonies. In the first place, heavy frosts and an early winter might delay the exhumations until spring. In the second place, there was fear of a pestilence in the Gettysburg area. Furthermore, Edward Everett had suggested that "it would make the scene more impressive to have the dead interred in the Cemetery for the occasion." Wills added that he had adopted Everett's suggestion and planned to make "arrangements" to commence the "reburials" about the "26th" of the month. The Secretary of War had promised to furnish "the requisite number of coffins—supplying them at the rate of one hundred per day." Curtin's competent agent also expressed the hope that Governor Salomon, with a large Wisconsin delegation, would be present "to participate with the consecration exercises" on the 19th of November.

Consulting Selleck and several other state agents, Wills finalized the "reburial specifications" and invited interested parties to bid on the grisly chore. These "specifications" not only set standards and procedures for exhuming the bodies and reburying them in the proper plots in the new cemetery, but limited the number of

---

34 Selleck to Wills, Oct. 9, 1863, Executive Department (Administration), Civil War Memorials Correspondence, 1861-1913.
35 Wills to Selleck, Oct. 13, 1863, ibid.
36 Wills to Salomon, Oct. 13, 1863, ibid.
reburials to one hundred per day. Everything must be done with care and under close supervision.37

After opening the bids on October 22, Wills awarded the contract to Frederick W. Biesecker, the lowest bidder—the bids had ranged from a low of $1.59 per body to a high of $8.00. Then Wills hired Samuel Weaver to superintend the exhumation, identification, and reburial of the Union dead.38

While Wills kept a watchful eye on the progress of the reburials and planned the program for the 19th, Selleck worked long hours as state agent in and around Washington. He visited sick and wounded soldiers in the nearby hospitals and performed sundry miscellaneous chores. He secured furloughs for several of the “walking wounded,” checked out a report that a Wisconsin soldier had been “disloyal,” delivered a new regimental banner to the battle-scarred Seventh Wisconsin, and looked into the case of “2 soldiers at the General Hospital in Baltimore.”39 “Mr. W. Y. Selleck, the State Agent,” a newspaperman reported, “is again at his post, and he is busy, as is also his faithful assistant, Wm. P. Taylor, Esq., attending to the wants of the wounded Wisconsin men as they come into the [Washington] hospital.”40 Governor Salomon, on a trip to the national capital, stopped at Selleck’s quarters to inquire about his work and to say that affairs back home would prevent him from attending the dedication ceremonies on November 19.41

Selleck, thus, inherited the unpleasant task of telling Wills that Wisconsin’s governor would be among the missing at the dedication rites. “He also instructs me to inform you,” Selleck wrote, “that he has authorized me to act for him on behalf of the State of Wisconsin in the matter pertaining to the Soldiers’ National Cemetery at Gettysburg.” Selleck added that he was returning with Governor Salomon to Wisconsin and would not get to Gettysburg until early in November.42

In late October Wills asked Ward H. Lamon, Lincoln’s confidant, bodyguard, and U.S. Marshal for the District of Columbia, to serve as chief marshal for the procession and master-of-ceremonies for the program of the 19th. Lamon, in turn, wrote to each governor, asking him to name “two suitable persons” to serve as assistant

---

38 Report, Wills to Curtin, March 21, 1864, published in ibid.
40 Milwaukee Sentinel, Nov. 17, 1863.
41 Selleck to Wills, Oct. 16, 1863, Executive Department (Administration), Civil War Memorials Correspondence, 1861–1913.
42 Ibid.
marshals on the day of the dedication of the soldiers’ cemetery, helping to supervise the day’s events.43

Since Selleck had performed his agent’s duties well and since Washington was much closer to Gettysburg than Madison, Governor Salomon asked him to assume the additional responsibility of serving as assistant marshal in Gettysburg on the day of the dedication program. Selleck, therefore, took the train for Gettysburg to confer again with Wills and to discuss his new responsibilities with Ward H. Lamon, chief marshal for affairs on the 19th.

Wills, pleased with the cooperation he had received from the various state agents, let his enthusiasm run away with him. He expected an “immense concourse of people” to descend upon Gettysburg for the ceremonies and he supposed that most of the governors would be present in person with large delegations.44 Caught up in the enthusiasm emanating from Wills, one newspaper editor predicted that the consecration ceremonies would be “the most interesting ever witnessed in the United States” and that the affair would be “one of the most imposing spectacles of this century.”45 Both Wills and Curtin expected most of the governors to attend the ceremonies, and they therefore arranged for a special Harrisburg-to-Gettysburg train, leaving the capital city at one o’clock in the afternoon. Most of the governors, Curtin assumed, would come to Harrisburg the day before the ceremonies, then they could proceed to Gettysburg together as his guests. “We learn that the Governors of all the loyal States will assemble in this city on the 17th inst.,” wrote the editor of a Harrisburg newspaper, “where they will remain until the 18th, and on that day proceed in a body to Gettysburg”—aboard the governor’s special train. Believing that no “like assemblage” had ever taken place “in the career of the country,” the editor hoped that the city’s citizens would give “the distinguished guests . . . the hospitable welcome for which the people of the capital of Pennsylvania are celebrated.”

Evidently Wills had failed to inform Curtin that the governor of Wisconsin would not be present in person for the ceremonies. “I will be pleased,” Curtin telegraphed to Salomon on November 12, “to see you at Harrisburg on the seventeenth or eighteenth on your way to Gettysburg—arrangements will be made to leave Harrisburg at one p.m. on the eighteenth for Gettysburg.”47 On the same day Wills also sent a telegram to Salomon: “Let your delegation bring your state flag for the nineteenth (19) inst.”48

43 Lamon to Tod, Nov. 5, 1863, Tod Papers.
44 Wills to Curtin, Nov. 7, 1863, published in Adams County Sentinel, Nov. 10, 1863.
45 Harrisburg Evening Telegraph, Nov. 10, 1863.
46 Ibid., Nov. 13, 1863.
47 Telegrams, 1861–1865, Executive Department, Archives Section, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
48 Ibid.
Selleck witnessed the inundation of Gettysburg by a human flood. Some had come on foot, having trudged the dusty sideroads and the turnpikes; some had come on horseback, riding either bareback or in saddle; many had come in carriages and farm-wagons; most, however, had taken one of the numerous special or excursion trains which had come into the once sleepy city. Every house and shed and stable was turned into a lodging-house. Most of those who arrived on the 18th spent a part of the day touring the battlefield. Selleck, delegated to "shepherd" Wisconsin citizens who came to attend the dedication ceremonies, invited every Wisconsin soldier or civilian he met to march in the procession and follow the state flag on its trip from downtown Gettysburg to the top of Cemetery Hill where a platform had been erected for the formal program.

During the evening of the 18th, Selleck attended a briefing session called by Ward H. Lamon, in charge of the next day's procession and program. Lamon explained the duties of the assistant marshals and specified on which street corner each state's delegation would gather and what place each state had in the procession. Earlier, Lamon had spelled out the "proper attire" for his corps of assistant marshals:

1. Plain black suit (preferably a frock coat), black hat, and white gloves.
2. White satin scarf, five inches wide, to be worn over the right shoulder and carried across the breast and back to the left hip, and there fastened with a rosette, the ends to be fringed, and to extend to the knee. At the center on the shoulder the scarf should be gathered and mounted with a rosette.
3. Rosette, four inches and raised in center to be made of black and white ribbon, the outer circle only to be white.
4. Rosette of red, white, and blue on left breast. The initials of state in center for identification. The saddle cloths on their horses, of white cambric bordered with black.

Earlier the Chief Marshal had also instructed Selleck and the other assistant marshals to secure their own horses and he promised each a place on the program platform after the procession reached the top of Cemetery Hill.

Dressed in the assistant marshal's regalia and mounted on a horse, Selleck spent the early morning hours of the 19th directing Wisconsin soldiers and civilians to the street corner assigned the state's delegation. As the crowd in downtown Gettysburg swelled to "immense proportions," it became a milling mass of humanity, resisting efforts of the assistant marshals to transform it into a procession.

---

40 Gettysburg Compiler, Nov. 23, 1863.
42 Adams County Sentinel, Nov. 17, 1863; Washington Daily Morning Chronicle, Nov. 18, 1863.
43 Gettysburg Compiler, Nov. 23, 1863.
Shortly after ten o'clock, the scheduled hour for the procession to begin its one-half mile southward trek, President Lincoln emerged from David Wills' house to take his assigned place in the cortege. It took nearly an hour for Ward H. Lamon and his assistant marshals to get the show on the road, down the Taneytown Road and to the summit of Cemetery Hill. "Pennsylvania," an observant newsman reported, "furnished the largest numerical representation, Ohio next, Wisconsin third and Massachusetts fourth." Selleck, evidently, had done a good job of rounding up Wisconsin's soldiers and civilians to march in the state's delegation.

It took time to put the military units in their previously assigned places atop Cemetery Hill, seat the dignitaries on the 20' x 12' platform and herd the thousands of marchers into a semicircle in front of it. Selleck, serving both as Lamon's aide and the state's representative on the proposed cemetery commission, was the lone Wisconsin resident to occupy a place on the platform.

Selleck, thus, was in a good position to hear every speaker and watch the crowd's reaction to each and to the musical numbers. Borgfield's Band of Philadelphia opened the formal program with a solemn dirge. The Rev. Thomas H. Stockton, chaplain of the House of Representatives and a popular Washington preacher, gave the invocation—"a prayer which thought it was an oration." The Marine Band then played Luther's hymn, "Old Hundred." Next Ward H. Lamon, serving as master of ceremonies, introduced Edward Everett, orator of the day. Although Everett delivered his two-hour recitation "with his accustomed grace," it was "smooth and cold," without "one stirring thought, one vivid picture, one thrilling appeal." A chorus of twelve members of the Maryland Musical Association then chanted an ode, drew considerable applause, and set the stage for Lincoln's "few appropriate remarks."

After Lamon introduced "the President of the United States," Selleck watched Lincoln arise from his chair and step forward to keep his rendezvous with destiny. The crowd interrupted Lincoln's brief address with applause five times and complimented him with "tremendous applause" when he finished the dedicatory "remarks." The responsive audience then gave three cheers for the president and three more for the governors.

---

53 Boston Journal, Nov. 23, 1863.
54 Entry of November 23, 1863, in Diary of John Hay, John Hay Papers.
55 Adams County Sentinel, Nov. 24, 1863.
57 The Cincinnati Daily Commercial, Nov. 23, 1863, and the Washington Daily Morning Chronicle, Nov. 29, 1863, carried the most complete accounts of the program. Martin R. Potter of the Commercial not only witnessed the ceremonies but sent back a report which filled seven full columns of type. The best secondary account, marred by occasional errors of fact, is Louis A. Warren, Lincoln's Gettysburg Declaration: "A New Birth of Freedom" (Fort Wayne, Ind., 1964).
After Lincoln’s memorable performance, a mixed chorus of Gettysburgers sang a doleful dirge and finally the Rev. Henry L. Baugher, president of Gettysburg (Lutheran) Seminary, closed the formal program with a brief benediction. An eight-round salute, fired by the Fifth New York Artillery, formalized the end of the ceremonies. Marshals reformed the military portion of the procession to escort President Lincoln back to Gettysburg and the Wills house, while the civilian portion “dispersed in all directions.”

“Many lingered until the shades of evening approached,” noted one newspaperman, “seemingly loath to leave the ground consecrated to the blood of those heroes who fought, and died, and found a grave there.”

Selleck returned to Washington, D. C., to pursue his manifold duties in the nearby camps and hospitals. Later he submitted a bill of $30.90 for “expenses in attending the consecration of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg.”

Perhaps Selleck was disappointed that his governor, Edward Salomon, had failed to attend the ceremonies. Selleck also could have complained that some Wisconsin men who came to Gettysburg for the dedication of the cemetery, neither marched in the procession nor gathered around the platform atop Cemetery Hill to watch and hear the speakers and the music. 1st Lt. Frank A. Haskell, who had fought in the three-day battle and later wrote a famous letter which described the encounter, spent November 19 visiting those parts of the battlefield where Wisconsin boys had fought and died. “We obtained horses,” Haskell wrote to his brother, “and during the afternoon of the 19th we rode all over the field . . . we had little interest in the ceremonies . . .

The conclusion of the dedication ceremonies did not sever Selleck’s link to the cemetery project. Early in December, Wills wrote a final round of letters to the cooperating governors—including Edward Salomon of Wisconsin. The letter set December 17 as the meeting date of the “commissioners” of the cooperative state cemetery, and Wills expressed the hope that each of the eighteen states which had soldiers buried at Gettysburg would have representatives present at the Jones House in Harrisburg to devise “a plan for the protection and preservation of the grounds,” complete the work already begun, arrange for the proper adornment and care of the grounds, and provide for expenses already incurred.
Governor Salomon, of course, instructed Selleck to represent the state at the December 17 meeting of the commission. On that day twelve commissioners (including W. Yates Selleck) representing ten states assembled at the Jones House. Wills, presiding over the ad hoc assembly, suggested formal organization as a commission or association. The delegates responded by electing Wills as president and Selleck as secretary. The commissioners then adopted five resolutions, all concerned with the completion and operation of the eighteen-state “Soldiers’ National Cemetery.”63 On motion of Commissioner Levi Scoby of New Jersey, Wills appointed a five-member committee “to procure designs of a monument to be erected in the cemetery.”64

After the commission concluded its business, Selleck returned to Washington to resume his chores as state agent and to write a report on his role in the establishment and administration of the Soldiers’ National Cemetery. In the concluding paragraphs of this report he called Salomon’s attention to the fact that the amount expended for the cemetery nearly doubled that stated by Wills in “his circular letter of August last.” Selleck listed the reasons: “1st. There are seventeen acres to be enclosed instead of fourteen as at first proposed. 2d. The sum to be expended on the Monument, $25,000, instead of $10,000, as at first proposed. 3d. That in the laying out and ornamenting of the grounds and the finishing and placing of the head-stones to the graves of soldiers, would, if properly done, be more expensive than at first calculated.”65

Selleck stated that the sum of $63,500, “designated for the completion of the Cemetery” should “more than cover the expenditures”—“if judiciously handled.” Wisconsin’s share of the $63,500, Selleck projected, should be $2,523.18, or $420.53 for each of her six members in Congress.66

In his lengthy report, Selleck also stated that many Wisconsin soldiers, mostly belonging to the “Iron Brigade,” were buried in that section of the cemetery reserved for “the unknowns.” “Nearly all of the remains of the Union Soldiers killed in the battle of Gettysburg,” Selleck added, “have been removed to the Cemetery; all of those killed in the first day’s fighting have been removed; a great many of them were not identified; such, are placed in the lots that are marked unknown!”67

---

63 The cemetery remained a cooperative state venture until 1895, when it became a national cemetery within the Gettysburg National Military Park.
64 Report of the commissioners, dated December 17, 1863, and signed by David Wills as “President” and W. Yates Selleck as “Secretary,” in Tod Papers. A copy of the printed proceedings is in the Civil War Memorials Correspondence, 1861–1913.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
The Wisconsin State Legislature, at the governor’s recommendation, passed a bill appropriating $2,523 to cover the state’s “share” of the costs of the Gettysburg cemetery project, indemnifying, in effect, both Salomon and Selleck for their roles in the cooperative venture.\(^{68}\)

In the days and months which followed, the cemetery project moved towards its completion. After spring’s mild weather thawed the frozen ground, the contractor responsible for exhuming the bodies and reburying them in the appropriate plots of the “Soldiers’ National Cemetery,” returned to his grisly task. The reburial crew finished its work on March 18, 1864. “And I here most conscientiously assert,” the superintendent of the project proudly wrote, “that I firmly believe that there has not been a single mistake made in the removal of the soldiers to the cemetery by taking the body of a rebel for a Union soldier.”\(^{69}\)

Of the 3,512 reported buried by March 18, 1864, seventy-three were recorded as Wisconsin soldiers, including twenty “unknowns” who could not be identified by name.\(^{70}\)

In late March, 1864, the legislature of Pennsylvania passed an act to incorporate the “Soldiers’ National Cemetery,” thus finalizing David Wills’ dream—transforming a portion of the battlefield into “a final resting place for those who gave their lives that the nation might live.” The articles of incorporation listed “W. Yates Selleck, Wisconsin” as one of the “corporators.”\(^{71}\)

Selleck, subsequently, attended two meetings of the Board of Commissioners of the new cemetery, one on April 6–7 and the other on June 10, 1864—both held in Gettysburg. The committee named to select the design for the national monument to be located in the cemetery recommended a 60-foot high memorial, with a massive pedestal twenty-five feet square at the base and the fancy column crowned with a colossal statue representing the Genius of Liberty. The monument, completed as designed, would cost $102,000. The commissioners, concerned with the burgeoning costs of the project, adopted a resolution asking Congress to appropriate “the sum of fifty thousand dollars” toward the monument.\(^{72}\)

In late July, 1864, Selleck returned to Milwaukee for a visit and then took a trip to Madison to report on his work as a commissioner of the “Soldiers’ National Cemetery” and as state agent in the Wisconsin area. General U. S. Grant’s heavy losses in the

---

\(^{68}\) *Journal of the Proceedings of the Senate of Wisconsin ... 1864* (Madison, 1864), p. 709.

\(^{69}\) Samuel Weaver, report of March 18, 1864, published in *Revised Report of the Select Committee ...*, pp. 16–18.

\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 5, 1864.

battles of the Wilderness (May 5–6), Spottsylvania (May 8–12), and Cold Harbor (June 3), taxed Selleck’s resources and multiplied his work. The Milwaukee Sentinel reported on Selleck’s return and praised him as an “efficient” state agent.\textsuperscript{73}

During the early months of 1865, as the war moved into its final phase, W. Yates Selleck wrote his second official report regarding his role in the establishment of the soldiers’ cemetery at Gettysburg. He addressed this second report to Governor James T. Lewis who had replaced Salomon as the state’s chief executive early in January.\textsuperscript{74} Selleck reported on the April 6–7 and June 10, 1864, meetings which he had attended and he justified the proposal for a $102,000 national monument. “Every portion of the work and material used in and about the Cemetery for its adornment and preservation,” Selleck stated, “is of the most substantial kind and put up in the most durable manner, and will, when completed, be a most attractive and beautiful place; a credit to the country and a noble monument to the gallant and loyal dead who rest within its limits.” Wisconsin’s share of the added expenses for the completion of the “Soldiers’ National Cemetery” were $2,623.00. And he asked the governor to request an appropriation from the state legislature.\textsuperscript{75}

The legislative Committee on State Affairs quickly and quietly recommended payment of the $2,623 which Selleck requested. “Other states,” the committee recommendation read, “are contributing to this national and patriotic object, and Wisconsin, never behind in all concerning her own and the nation’s honor, and the lives and memory of her gallant volunteers, will not be so in helping to complete a work which largely commemorate the devotion of worthy sons whose deaths have passed to her credit on the scroll of honor and heroic fame.”\textsuperscript{76}

The end of the war and the demobilization of Wisconsin troops signified that Selleck’s work as state agent was about at an end. He tendered his resignation as “Military Agent for the State of Wisconsin” on May 29, 1865, asking that “it take effect on the 1st of June, 1865.” In his letter of resignation he stated that he had conscientiously looked after “the interests and welfare of Wisconsin soldiers” for three years, “rendering to them aid as far as the means placed in my hands” would allow. “As the rebellion is

\textsuperscript{73} Milwaukee Sentinel, July 26, 1864.
\textsuperscript{74} The Republicans did not nominate Salomon for re-election, choosing Lewis in his stead, a bitter pill for Salomon who had performed his duties efficiently and with ability. Salomon resumed law practice in Milwaukee. Unhappy that Wisconsin Republicans had failed to support him for re-election, Salomon moved to New York City in 1869. After his retirement from law in 1894, Salomon returned to Germany to live at Frankfort-on-Main, where he died and was buried.
\textsuperscript{76} Report of the Committee on State Affairs, James Ross, chairman, in ibid., 489.
over and our victorious troops are now about to return to their homes," he concluded, "I feel that my services will not be too much longer required, and my private affairs need my attention and impose upon me the necessity of resigning."

Although Selleck resigned his post as "state military agent," he remained Wisconsin's representative on the Gettysburg cemetery commission. In that capacity, he attended the July 4, 1865 ceremonies held in connection with the laying of the cornerstone of the National Monument—Wisconsin's governor, James T. Lewis did not attend.

In a sense, the dedication of the monument indicated that David Wills' dream of a national cemetery at Gettysburg had been realized. Both Salomon and Selleck had helped Wills transform his dream into a reality. Salomon supported the project from the very beginning, always cooperating with both Wills and Selleck. And W. Yates Selleck, as a competent and conscientious state agent, worked closely with Wills to develop, promote, and finalize the project, transforming a portion of the battlefield, consecrated by the blood of the "Iron Brigade" and other Wisconsin troops, into "a final resting place" for "the honored dead."

---

Selleck to "His Excellency, Jas. T. Lewis, Gov. of Wisconsin," May 29, 1865, published in Milwaukee Sentinel, June 23, 1865. Six months after resigning as state agent, Selleck left Wisconsin for Connecticut. The Milwaukee Sentinel of Jan. 26, 1866, carried the following story: "W. Y. Selleck, Esq., of this city, leaves to-day for Hartford, Conn., where he has accepted the responsible position of Special Adjusting Agent of the Traveler's Insurance Company. Mr. Selleck is well known to a great number of Wisconsin soldiers as late the efficient Military State Agent of Wisconsin in Washington. The duties of this office were performed with great faithfulness and tact, and many a hundred of the Badger State's 'boys in blue' will hold his name in grateful remembrance for the valuable service which he has rendered them, and will unite with his friends in Milwaukee in wishing him success in the new horizon in which he is now to labor. We congratulate the insurance company in securing so efficient an agent."