



East Cemetery Hill at Gettysburg "The Hour Was One of Horror"

John M. Archer

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It has been long neglected by historians and visitors to the battlefield, but the eastern-most reaches of Cemetery Ridge formed the critical apex of the Union battle line. The land nestled between Culp's Hill and the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg is the only ground on which fighting occurred during each of the three pivotal days of the battle. Crested by the State of Maine monument where the statue of Oliver Otis Howard still stands watch over the valley below, East Cemetery Hill is a little known and less visited piece of the Gettysburg battlefield. Within days of the fighting in July 1863, the pivotal role of Gettysburg in the war was already apparent, and efforts were underway to preserve sites considered essential to commemorate and interpret the battle. The first areas to be secured and those most popular with early visitors, were where the scars of war intruded on the rural landscape. With its sweeping view of the town and battlefield from near the center of the Federal position, East Cemetery Hill was popular with early tourists and veterans' reunions alike. But as the scars faded and the historic significance and visual appeal of other areas became known, sites such as the High Water Mark, the Peach Orchard, and Devil's Den grew in popularity. It is ironic then, but not surprising, that interest in one of the first areas chosen for preservation has declined dramatically. Today, the exigencies of development have permanently altered much of the ground around East Cemetery Hill, making it difficult to interpret the site and understand what made the area critical to the development of the battle. This study invites the reader to tour this seldom explored segment of the battle, using first-hand accounts to help understand the area-much of which has changed dramatically in the past 130 years-with a participant's eye.

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