THE CIVIL WAR AND GETTYSBURG: HIGH WATER MARK OF THE CONFEDERACY
THE YALE CLUB OF WASHINGTON DC

AMBASSADORS IN ACTION: AN AYA CASE STUDY
THE ASSOCIATION OF YALE ALUMNI

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WEBSITE
http://www.yaleedtravel.org/programs/10153

MISSION
To provide a significant income source to the Yale Club of Washington, DC by organizing a travel program for Yale Alumni and their families.

BACKGROUND
The Yale Club of Washington, DC, like other regional alumni associations, funds its administration, activities, and outreach largely through a dues-paying member model. A notable exception: Director Matt Dolan ’83 organizes an annual “Congressional Forum” which realizes a profit. Other events are largely break-even or not profitable. Club expenses continue to rise, and current membership dues and other income sources are viewed as unlikely to provide sufficient ongoing funding. Concerns expressed by some YCWDC Directors that focusing on new member dues as a remedy for rising expenses might not only be an insufficient solution, but was also distracting the Board from envisioning new and expansive strategic goals and programming to engage area alumni.

A PROPOSED SOLUTION
A “for profit” YCWDC sponsored travel trip. Roy Niedermayer ’69 agreed to lead a committee of three to examine the feasibility of a travel program. The trip was eventually determined to be able to accommodate 52 registrants, including Roy and AYA staffer Johnson Flucker ’80.
CHALLENGES

- **Organizational and planning.** With Roy as principal organizer, the committee members soon realized that the many components of organizing a travel trip consumed significant amounts of time.
- **Administrative.** The promotion and administrative “bandwidth” required for a first attempt at a Club-sponsored trip exceeded available skills and time resources of the YCWDC committee.
- **Programmatic.** Designing a trip with a good balance of attractive accommodation and group meals, lecture-style education, site visits, and social time.
- **Financial.** A Hotel deposit of ~$7000 was required, perhaps before a breakeven registration number was reached. Board approval was necessary to guarantee this exposure. Other expense payments could wait and be minimized in the case of low registration, but the YCWDC had to consider the worst case possibility that registration income would not cover hotel minimums, faculty compensation, tour bus expenses, etc. and that it would be recording a loss.

RESOLUTIONS

- **Organizational and planning.** As of November 2013, Roy estimated that he devoted about 100 hours towards organization and customer service inquiries.
- **Administrative.** To address this issue, Yale Educational Travel lent its considerable experience and expertise in facilitating registration and customer service inquiries. YET gave a generous amount of graphic space in its printed brochure as well as an online presence equal to its other travel trips. Additionally, YET was a model supporting partner in collecting registration deposits (the YCWDC administrator collected balance payments), and fielding a considerable number of customer inquiries, especially when the trip was fully subscribed and a waitlist was developed.
- **Programmatic.** Considerable time was spent by members of the committee in designing the content of the trip so elements of lectures/talks, would have cohesive content. A Yale PhD who is a professor at Gettysburg College was engaged to provide daily lectures/talks and lead the registrants on battlefield walks and other attractions.
- **Financial.** Board approval for financial “backstop” started the planning in earnest. A promotional campaign of YET printed catalogue, broadcast email, and website netted registration numbers to cover the financial exposure of the YCWDC. An additional dedicated broadcast email to all in the Yale Alumni family east of the Mississippi River pushed registration over the top. Within two weeks of this broadcast, the trip was fully subscribed and a wait-list was developed. At last count the waitlist comprises ~40 names. A profit of approximately $15,000 is anticipated.

THE FUTURE

The success of the planning and registration phases of the Gettysburg travel trip demonstrates that regional alumni association-planned “for profit” trips are possible and address a nagging worry on how to replace or supplement income from the dues paying member model. Next year’s trip is already being planned and other trips are under consideration. Roy and his committee, having planned this trip, now know the challenges and feel confident in planning others. Roy has stated that he is happy to share his planning sequence with other interested alumni.