

THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS - A HISTORY LESSON

The year was 1863. America was two years into the bloodiest war in its history.

The previous September, at Antietam Creek, Maryland, America lost more sons in battle than any day before or since in our history. At the beginning of 1863 the war had no end in sight, with bloody battle after bloody battle being fought. But by the end of 1863, not only had the fate of the war been decided but the character of a nation was forever changed.

That was also the year President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in January, the first powerful blow to the institution of slavery. There could be no turning back for America.

Those first three days of July 1863 were three days that changed the course of the civil war, and in turn changed future of the Nation.

The decisive battle of the Civil War was fought in a small south central town in Pennsylvania. Gettysburg, a sleepy little town of 3500 was the county seat of Adams County, Pennsylvania and was a light manufacturing center in addition to its agriculture commerce. At one time it was home to a shoe factory. The Confederates knew this and were in desperate need of food and supplies. They headed for Gettysburg to see if they could find some shoes. Emboldened by their past victories the Confederates had daringly come North to force peace on the North. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and Meade's Army of the Potomac converged on Gettysburg almost by chance.

The battle of Gettysburg was fought the first three days of July 1863. Those three days became the turning point of Civil War. The South's hopes completely faded with the failure of Pickett's charge. The courage shown by the Union soldiers at Little Roundtop saved its left flank and prevented a Confederate victory.

Lee hastily retreated south to Virginia never to invade the North again. The South's fate was sealed. There would be no independent Confederacy.

The casualties on both sides were devastating, more than 51,000. Almost 8,000 men lost their lives during those three days at Gettysburg. The landscape was horrific, encompassing thousands of bodies of North and South lay on its fields, plus hundreds of dead horses and destroyed wagons as well as hundreds of trees with their tops blown off. It seemed if the wounds of the previous three days would never heal. It was as if a violent storm had descended on this previously quiet Pennsylvania town and almost destroyed it. It took months for the town of Gettysburg to begin to recover from the scars of July.

Local attorney David Wills of Gettysburg came up with the idea of making a National Soldiers Cemetery to honor the Union dead. It was an idea conceived from the necessity to properly bury the dead but also wanted the Nation to remember the sacrifice of the fallen soldiers. The governors of the Northern states created a commission to establish the National Soldiers Cemetery. The dedication ceremony was to be at Gettysburg on October 23, 1863. The commission had asked Edward Everett,

President of Harvard and former Governor of Massachusetts to give the dedicatory oration. He wrote he needed more time to prepare such an important speech. The date for the Gettysburg Cemetery dedication was moved to November 19th, 1863.

In preparation for cemetery's dedication, the commission did its best to ignore President Lincoln. The commission sent him - The President of the United States - a generic formal invitation that it had sent all members of congress and cabinet member. Lincoln ignored this slight and decided to go and be part of the dedication ceremony and to especially to speak. Lincoln was well aware of the untrue and unfair attacks by his enemies from his pervious visit to the Antietam battlefield the year before. These attacks deeply hurt Lincoln and he was determined to let his true feelings be known at Gettysburg.

When Lincoln replied he was going to attend, the board of Commissioners felt obliged to let him speak. They wrote him a letter that it was their desire "that after oration, you as Chief Executive of the nation formally set apart these ground to their sacred sue by a few appropriate remarks."

The commission was telling Lincoln not to speak very long and to limit his remarks to almost a performing ministerial duty.

The commission felt satisfied it had prevented Lincoln from giving any long or political speak. The commissioners had no idea what "a few appropriate remarks would become" to their event at Gettysburg and American History.

"A few appropriate remarks" would become the greatest speech every given by an American President.

The actual events of President Lincoln going to Gettysburg are very interesting. President Lincoln asked for a special train from Washington to Gettysburg. The train left on the afternoon before the ceremony on November 18th 1863. Some of his aides and cabinet traveled with him. Lincoln very much enjoyed the trip to Gettysburg talking cheerily with almost everyone there. While on the train, Lincoln even consoled a man who lost a son on Little Roundtop. Also at a stop Lincoln received a bouquet of roses from a very young girl who was lifted up to the train window. He bent over and kissed her on the cheek and said "you're a rose bud yourself."

Lincoln did not write the Gettysburg Address on the way to Gettysburg. He had been thinking about it for almost three weeks. He started on it in Washington and finished the night before he delivered it at Gettysburg.

When Lincoln arrived at Gettysburg the town had swelled to 15,000 people. At Gettysburg Lincoln stayed at the home of David Wills with Edward Everett. People where everywhere, most of where families who had lost a son, brother or other family member at Gettysburg. After dinner, Lincoln put the finishing touches on his speech and went to bed.

The morning on November 19th began with more than 15,000 people already assembled at the battlefield south of town at Cemetery Hill. Lincoln wore a black suit and white gloves. He mounted a

special horse chosen for him to ride and joined the procession that left town toward the battlefield. It was a somber procession that lasted only 15 minutes. There were marching bands, all levels of elected officials from the Northern states and military personnel that represented the government. Private groups such as the Masons, Oddfellows, local fireman and citizens all marched from town to Cemetery Hill.

Although it had rained in the early morning, by noon the sun had come out. November 19th was a spectacular fall afternoon.

Americas' entire history arrived with Lincoln at that moment. And its entire future would be cast moments later with Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

As most of the crowd was made up of family members of those who perished in Battle of Gettysburg, emotions were high and feelings were still low, it was a very somber moment.

The dedication began with a prayer from Thomas H. Stockton, the U.S. Chaplain at the House of Representatives. It was reported by a Philadelphia newspaper there was hardly a dry eye in the crowd during the prayer. A newspaper reported even seeing a tear roll down Lincoln's cheek.

Fifteen thousand people listened politely for two hours as Edward Everett delivered his oration.

The Baltimore Glee Club sang an Ode written for the event, a very moving piece written by one of the top poets of the day, Benjamin French.

Great God in Heaven!
Shall all this sacred blood be shed?
Shall we thus mourn our glorious dead?
Oh, shall the end be wrath and woe,
The knoll of Freedom's overthrow,
A Country riven?

It will not be!
We trust, O God! Thy gracious power
To aid us in our darkest hour.
This be our prayer – "Oh Father! Save
A people's freedoms from its grave
All praise to thee"

And then, Lincoln was introduced. He put on his spectacles, took two pieces of paper out of his coat and delivered his address in his high pitch, clear and strong voice. It was brief...just 268 words. It went:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a

portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

It was well received by the people there but not overly enthusiastic. Lincoln finished and sat down, he turned to his friend and said he was disappointed, he should have spent more time preparing it saying “that speech won’t scour” an old farming term for wet soil sticking to the plow. Lincoln thought the speech just didn’t “scour”.

The reviews from the press were mixed, some loved it some didn’t, but it was the great orator, Edward Everett, who wrote Lincoln a note the next day, “I should be glad if I could flatten myself that I came as near the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes”

Everett also asked Lincoln to write him a copy of the speech, Lincoln did. In fact Lincoln himself wrote five copies. According to the Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association the following are interesting facts about the different manuscripts. Each of the five known manuscript copies of the Gettysburg Address is named for the associated person who received it from Lincoln. Lincoln gave a copy to each of his private secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay. Both of these drafts were written around the time of his November 19 address, while the other three copies of the address, the Everett, Bancroft, and Bliss copies, were written by Lincoln for charitable purposes well after November 19. In part because Lincoln provided a title and signed and dated the Bliss copy, it has become the standard text of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and is on display in the Lincoln Room of The White House. Nicolay and Hay were appointed custodians of Lincoln's papers by Lincoln's son Robert Todd Lincoln in 1874. After appearing in facsimile in an article written by John Nicolay in 1894, the Nicolay copy was presumably among the papers passed to Hay by Nicolay's daughter Helen upon Nicolay's death in 1901. Robert Lincoln began a search for the original copy in 1908, which resulted in the discovery of a handwritten copy of the Gettysburg Address among the bound papers of John Hay—a copy now known as the "Hay copy" or "Hay draft."

The Hay draft differed from the version of the Gettysburg Address published by John Nicolay in 1894 in a number of significant ways: it was written on a different type of paper, had a different number of words per line and number of lines, and contained editorial revisions in Lincoln's hand

Both the Hay and Nicolay copies of the Address are within the Library of Congress, encased in specially designed, temperature-controlled, sealed containers with argon gas in order to protect the documents from oxidation and continued deterioration.

After the ceremony Lincoln had lunch at the Wills' home with dignitaries and shook hands for more than an hour at a reception. At 5pm he attended a patriotic service at the Presbyterian Church in Gettysburg.

The train trip back to Washington was exhausting for Lincoln. It was well after midnight when the train pulled into the DC Station. On the way back Lincoln was so tired he didn't visit much with his companions and had to have a wet towel over his face as he reclined. As worn out as Abraham Lincoln was, he had given America its New Birth of Freedom. The promise made that autumn afternoon at Gettysburg, was that America would live up to the ideals of our Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. The central theme of the Gettysburg Address of equality of its citizenry was enshrined with his challenge of government by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

That promise of Lincoln made at Gettysburg was the foundation for the "dream" of Dr. Martin Luther King, made 100 years later on the steps on the Lincoln memorial.

Our challenge for America today is to see that Lincoln's promise is fulfilled in every generation. And that it is each of our duty to make sure that this more perfect union will not perish from the Earth.

Prayer at the
DEDICATION OF THE NATIONAL CEMETERY AT GETTYSBURG
by Reverend Thomas H. Stockton,
Chaplain of the House of Representatives
Thursday, November 19, 1863

O God our Father, for the sake of Thy Son our Savior, inspire us with Thy Spirit and sanctify us to the right fulfillment of the duties of this occasion.

We come to dedicate this new historic center as a National Cemetery. If all departments of the one Government which Thou had ordained over our Union, and of the many Governments which Thou hast subordinated to our Union, be here represented; if all classes, relations, and interests of our blended brotherhood of people stand severally and Thoroughly apparent in Thy presence; we trust that it is because Thou hast called us, that Thy blessing awaits us, and that Thy designs may be embodied in practical results of Incalculable and imperishable good.

And so, with Thy holy Apostle, and with the Church of all lands and ages; we unite in the inscription: - "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

In emulations of all angels, in fellowship with all saints, and in sympathy with all sufferers; in remembrance of Thy works, in reverence of Thy ways, and in accordance with Thy word; we laud and magnify Thine infinite perfections, Thy creative glory, Thy redeeming grace, Thy providential goodness, and the progressively richer and fairer developments of Thy supreme, universal, and everlasting administration.

In behalf of all humanity, whose ideal is divine, whose first memory is Thine image

lost, and whose last hope is Thine image restored; and especially of our own nation, whose history has been so favored, whose position is so peerless, whose mission is so sublime, and whose future is so attractive; we thank Thee for the unspeakable patience of Thy compassion and the exceeding greatness of Thy loving kindness. In contemplation of Eden, Calvary, and Heaven; of Christ in the Garden, on the Cross, and on the Throne; say more of Christ as coming again in all subduing power and glory; we gratefully prolong our homage. By this Altar of Sacrifice, on this Field of Deliverance, on this Mount of Salvation, within the fiery and bloody line of these "munitions of rock," looking back to the dark days of fear and trembling, and to the rapture of relief that came after; we multiply our thanksgivings, and confess our obligations to renew and perfect our personal and social consecration to Thy service and glory.

O, had it not been for God! For lo! Our enemies – they came unresisted, multitudinous, mighty, flushed with victory, and sure of success. They exulted on our mountains, they reveled in our valleys; they feasted, they rested; they slept, they awaked; they grew stronger, prouder, bolder every day; they spread abroad, they concentrated here; they looked beyond this horizon to the stores of wealth, to the haunts of pleasure, and to the seats of power, in our Capital and chief Cities. They prepared to cast the chain of Slavery around the form of Freedom, binding life and death together forever. Their premature triumph was the mockery of God and man. One more victory; and all was theirs! But, behind these hills was heard the feebler march of a smaller but still pursuing host. Onward they hurried, day and night, for God and their country. Foot-sore, way-worn, hungry, thirsty, faint – but not in heart, they came to dare all to bear all, and to do all, that is possible to heroes. And Thou didst sustain them! At first they met the blast on the plain, and bent before it, like the trees in a storm. But then, led by Thy hand to these hills, they took their stand upon the rocks and remained as firm and immovable as they. In vain were they assaulted. All art, all violence, all desperation, failed to dislodge them. Baffled,

bruised, broken, their enemies recoiled, retired, and disappeared. Glory to God, for this rescue! But, O, the slain! In the freshness and fullness of their young and manly life; with each sweet memories of father and mother, brother and sister, wife and children, maiden and friends; they died for us. From the coasts beneath the Eastern star, from the shores of Northern lakes and rivers, from the flower of Western prairies, and from the homes of the Midway, and the Border, they came here to die for us and for mankind. Alas, how little we can do for them! We came with the humility of prayer, with the pathetic eloquence of venerable wisdom, with the tender beauty of poetry, with the plaintive harmony of music, with the honest tribute of our Chief Magistrate, and with all this honorable attendance: but our best hope is in Thy blessing. O, Lord, our God! O, Father, bless us! Bless the bereaved, whether present, or absent; bless our sick and wounded soldiers and sailors; bless all our rulers and people; bless our army and navy; bless the efforts of the suppression of the rebellion; and bless all the associations of this day; and place, and scene, forever. As the trees are not dead, though their foliage is gone, so our heroes are not dead, though their forms have fallen. In their proper personality, they are all with Thee. And the spirit of their example is here. It fills the air, it fills our hearts. And, long as time shall last, it will hover in the skies, and rest on this landscape; and the pilgrims of our own land, and from all lands, will thrill with its inspiration and increase and confirm their devotion to liberty, religion and God. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen

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