

LINCOLN LORE

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THE EARLIEST DRAFT OF THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

There are still extant five autograph copies of the Gettysburg Address written by Abraham Lincoln. Three of these manuscripts were penned after the speech was presented, the other two were composed before the delivery of the oration. There is considerable difference of opinion relative to which one of these two pre-dedication copies was *The Earliest Draft of the Gettysburg Address*. Both of these original documents are now preserved in The Library of Congress. One we shall call the Battlefield Copy, because it is believed by historians to have been in Lincoln's possession at the time the speech was delivered. The other copy we have chosen to designate as the Preliminary Draft because all Lincoln students are agreed it was written before the President gave his address.

The preponderance of evidence against the generally accepted tradition that the President first wrote the address while traveling on a railroad train enroute to the ceremonies removes from consideration the time and place elements associated with this untenable story. However, the tradition that Lincoln did some writing in connection with the address after he reached the home of Col. Wills at Gettysburg seems to have been confirmed by a display of dependable testimony. Just how much of the text of the address, if any, was first put down on paper by Mr. Lincoln after reaching Gettysburg is a question more to the point.

The Battlefield Copy

The Battlefield Copy consisting of two different sheets, in reality, comprises two separate documents. One was written on executive mansion stationery, the other on a wide ruled paper. One was evidently prepared in Washington, the other at Gettysburg and this implies that they were written at different times.

Evidently the first sheet, carefully written in ink was supplemented originally by a second sheet of the same character as the last line on the first sheet ends abruptly in the middle of a sentence. We may feel certain that the President finished this sentence on another sheet of paper and also wrote the few remaining lines which concluded the address. This second sheet however is not now known to be in existence. Whether it was inadvertently left at Washington or destroyed after having been re-written at Gettysburg it is impossible to say, but certain evidence points toward the former supposition.

It is not difficult to associate the first sheet with the second sheet written in pencil because the last three words in ink on the first sheet are crossed out with a pencil and a new transition clause is written in pencil above the marked out words. Then Mr. Lincoln completed the address with a pencil on the wide ruled paper. In this way the two sheets were incorporated into what we have called the Battlefield Copy. It should also be observed that Lincoln underlined with pencil the word "did" written in ink on the first page. Undoubtedly this was done to serve as an attention director that it should be given an emphasis.

Possibly now we may draw the following conclusions that may harmonize several traditions referring indirectly to the Battlefield Copy. It is almost universally accepted that the first sheet was penned by Lincoln in Washington and taken with him to Gettysburg. It is also generally accepted that he wrote the second sheet with pencil at Gettysburg and as Nicolay states went almost directly from the writing to the place where the ceremonies were to be held. The tradition also has wide circulation that Lincoln inadvertently left some paper associated with the address in Washington. If this was the second written page of the original that was mislaid we

can well understand why he found it necessary to re-write all of the second page after reaching Gettysburg. If the second page were available carefully written out in ink, probably he would have made the slight correction necessary and retained the original.

This deduction can be made with reference to the primacy of the Battlefield Copy; if the pencil portion of it was written just before Lincoln went to the ceremonies that part at least could not be considered as the earliest writing in view of the fact that we have another complete copy drafted before the address was given. If the first page of the Battlefield Copy written with ink is regarded as the earliest copy then the Preliminary Draft would have been transcribed sometime between the writing of the ink and pencil versions of the Battlefield Copy. This leads us to consider the possibility of the Preliminary Draft having been the earliest writing.

The Preliminary Draft

The Preliminary Draft is written in ink on two sheets of paper without printed letterheads. We are entirely dependent upon the internal evidence of the manuscript itself for any claims which may be made for it. It has been designated as a Preliminary Draft because it does not contain in the written text the two words "under God" which Lincoln most certainly used in the spoken rendition of the speech. These two words appear in the three copies the President prepared after arriving back in Washington and also the words "under God" are included in the stenographic reports of what Lincoln said. The absence of these two words "under God" is our best evidence that it was drafted before the speech was delivered.

This draft of the address has all the earmarks of a working copy. Its very appearance with as many as nine corrections indicate it was a revised abstract and not a final writing. It is the only one of the five copies of the address written by Lincoln, with the exception of the pencil corrections already mentioned, which is mutilated by interpolations.

The first four corrections consist of crossed out words with more appropriate ones written above them. These are the substitutions Lincoln made: "are" for "have," "met" for "come," "the" for "a," and "of" for "for." All four of the words substituted for the crossed out words are used in the Battlefield Copy, very definitely implying that the Preliminary Draft was not copied from the Battlefield Copy but vice versa.

The next correction was made by the use of a caret which was placed before the word "power" and above the caret the word "poor." In every other draft except this one the version is "our poor power." This seems to indicate the improvement was made after the first writing of the address. The other marked out corrections in the address come after the first sheet of the Battlefield Copy was written so cannot be used for any further comparison. Lincoln did however use one additional phrase in the Battlefield Copy not in the Preliminary Copy. It would be natural for him to re-edit the Preliminary Draft as he proceeded not only incorporating the corrections on the Preliminary Draft but making other improvements as he proceeded to write the Battlefield Copy.

We do not contend that the Preliminary Draft was the first copy of the address which Lincoln had written; there may have been many working copies. However we feel that internal evidence which the Preliminary Draft affords indicates it is the earliest draft extant and preceded the Battlefield Copy.