

# LINCOLN LORE

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## PRELIMINARIES TO A MASTERPIECE

The supplemental value of the Lincoln Papers, presented to the Library of Congress by the President's son Robert, is well illustrated in the further details now available about the preliminaries leading up to the delivery of the Gettysburg Address on November 19th, 1863.

Possibly Abraham Lincoln first learned that his presence on the program at Gettysburg was desired from a personal interview with two members of the Gettysburg commission, Senator Alexander Ramsey of Minnesota, and Senator Thomas W. Ferry of Michigan, who volunteered to call on the President and make known the invitation of the commission.

Written confirmation of the desire of the commission for his presence at Gettysburg is found in two letters both dated November 2, 1863, and both sent under the same cover, which were directed to the President by David Wills of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. One was a formal invitation for the President to make "a few appropriate remarks" at the dedication of the national cemetery. It was signed by Mr. Wills as "agent, A. G. Curtin, Governor of Penna., and acting for all the states," which were participating in the burial ground plans. The other letter which accompanied it was of a personal character as its contents will reveal:

Gettysburg, Nov. 2, 1863

To his excellency A. Lincoln  
President U. S.  
Sir:

As the Hotels in our town will be crowded and in confusion at the time referred to in the extended invitation, I write to invite you to stop with me. I hope you will feel it your duty to lay aside pressing business for a day, to come on here to perform this last sad rite to our brave soldier dead on this 19th instant.

Governor Curtin and Hon. Edward Everett will be my guests at that time and if you come you will please join them at my house.

You will confer a favor if you will advise me early of your intentions.

With great respect  
Your obedient servant  
David Wills.

We do not have a copy of Mr. Lincoln's acceptance of the speech assignment or of the invitation to stay with Mr. Wills. Governor Curtin wrote Lincoln on November 4 that he would see him shortly and possibly through him the engagement was confirmed and the hospitality of Mr. Wills accepted. It is evident that Lincoln had two weeks and a half to prepare his few remarks, so ample time was available for meditation and reflection as to what he might say. By Sunday, November 15th, according to Noah Brooks who talked with the President about the speech, it was then in written form.

On November 17, the day before Lincoln started for Gettysburg, he presented Edward Bates, his attorney general with an elastic pen holder. Mr. Bates upon reaching his desk wrote a note of thanks for the pen which he said fitted his "rough hand, exactly." In appreciation for the gift Mr. Bates sent a pen made from the quill of a Bald Eagle with this sentiment expressed, "I hope you may find occasion to use it during your present term in signing your name to some great historic document." We would like to feel that the Bald Eagle pen may have been used in copying one of the two preliminary writings of the Gettysburg Address and in a measure served the purpose anticipated by the attorney general.

It was also on November 17 that another member of the cabinet, Secretary Stanton, was in contact with the President about the plans for transportation to Gettysburg and return. It would appear from former accounts of the proceedings that Mr. Stanton may have been responsible for the first hurried schedule drawn which planned to bring the President into Gettysburg at noon on the day of the speech, and which brought from Mr. Lincoln this reaction, "I do not like this arrangement. I do not wish to go so that by the slightest accident we fail entirely, and, at the best, the whole to be a mere breathless running of the gauntlet. But any way." Mr. Stanton immediately contacted the railroad authorities about a change in schedule and a reply received at 3:50 P.M. the same day reveals that a Mr. Smith of the railroad staff was responsible for the "running of the gauntlet" itinerary. The dispatch to Mr. Stanton from the railroad representative, J. W. Garrett, at Baltimore follows:

We will take great pleasure in making the arrangements as you propose. This program furnishes abundant margin and will be less fatiguing. I have ordered the special train as desired to leave Washington at 12 o'clock tomorrow (Wednesday) and will notify and arrange with the other roads for it to proceed directly through to Gettysburg. Mr. Smith's suggestions were designed to effect economy of time if that were essential.  
J. W. Garrett.

Secretary Stanton apparently sent this dispatch with the following memorandum to the President:

War Department  
Washington City

November 17, 1863

Mr. President:

The arrangement I proposed has been made. The train will leave the depot at 12 o'clock. I will assign the adjutant general or Col. Ferry to accompany you as personal escort and to control the train. A. Carnegie will call for you at 12. Please furnish me the names of those whom you may invite that they may be furnished with tickets and unauthorized intrusion prevented.

Yours truly  
Edwin M. Stanton

Yes, this was the famous Andrew Carnegie who called for Mr. Lincoln and accompanied him as a representative of the Railroad. What a strange coincidence that the greatest benefactor of American libraries and the man about whom the largest number of books have been written should be together on an occasion when the world's greatest oration was about to be delivered.

Secretary Stanton sent at least three telegrams to Mr. Lincoln while he was at Gettysburg, one about the war maneuvers reached him in the evening of Nov. 18 which contained this personal note, "By inquiry Mrs. Lincoln informed me that your son is better this evening." One of the other war telegrams dated Nov. 19, the day of the address, carried this personal note, "Mrs. Lincoln reports your son's health as a great deal better, and that he will be out today."

When Mr. Lincoln left for Gettysburg, "Tad," the youngest child, was severely ill and Mr. Lincoln spoke to Mr. Everett and others about the condition of the child. The encouraging telegram of the evening and the reassuring message the next morning that "Tad" was convalescing, must have brought relief to a worried mind, and would appear to have removed the last obstacle for a proper rendition of the masterpiece.