

Gettysburg Address



Abraham Lincoln was the second speaker on November 19, 1863, at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg. Lincoln was preceded on the podium by the famed orator Edward Everett, who spoke to the crowd for two hours. Lincoln followed with his now immortal Gettysburg Address. On November 20, Everett wrote to Lincoln: "Permit me also to express my great admiration of the thoughts expressed by you, with such eloquent simplicity & appropriateness, at the consecration of the Cemetery. I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes."

Drawn from the Library's collections, the presentation that follows gathers the key documents linked to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

Preservation Techniques for Original Drafts

In order to assure the long-term preservation of the two drafts of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in the Library of Congress collections, in the 1990s the Preservation Directorate commissioned the design and manufacture of two environmental cases, one for each document. In addition, the Library constructed a low temperature vault where these encasements and other Top Treasures of the Library are permanently stored.

Executive Mansion.

Washington, 1863

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon 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 battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it, as a final resting place for those who died here, that the nation might live. This we do, in all propriety do. 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 hallowed it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here; while it can never forget what they did here.

It is rather for us, the living, to stand here,

Of the five known manuscript copies of the Gettysburg Address, the Library of Congress has two. President Lincoln gave one of these to each of his two private secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay. The other three copies of the Address were written by Lincoln for charitable purposes well after November 19. The copy for Edward Everett, the orator who spoke at Gettysburg for two hours prior to Lincoln, is at the Illinois State Historical Library in Springfield; the Bancroft copy, requested by historian George Bancroft, is at Cornell University in New York; the Bliss copy was made for Colonel Alexander Bliss, Bancroft's stepson, and is now in the Lincoln Room of the White House.

Library of Congress