

LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG

Good day everyone...it's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.

On November 19, 1963, the President of the United States delivered a talk at Gettysburg, commemorating the Centennial of Abraham Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address--an event which makes Gettysburg doubly important in American history. I feel always close to that event, for I have had the privilege--one year before in 1962--of writing the Memorial Address of that year. When Abraham Lincoln journeyed to Gettysburg to deliver his speech, feeling against him was so high and hate so prevalent, as it has not been before or after against the personage of any president. Newspapers lambasted him--printing for example, the full text of Edward Everett's speech on that day and commenting on Lincoln as one newspaper did--"We pass over the silly remarks of the President. For the credit of the nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them, and that they shall be no more repeated or thought of". --that was about the Gettysburg Address. Lincoln, you see, was no hero to many of his countrymen in 1863, on that day when he stood virtually alone against the crowd who came not to hear his few hundred words, but the two hour and more declamation of Mister Everett. Newspaper editors particularly saw nothing distinguished about Lincoln. One Pennsylvania paper called him a "miserable low buffoon who disgraces the presidential chair"...another..."more like a well-trained monkey than a man of sense and a gentleman"... another said of his talk at Gettysburg that he was a "wholesale slaughterer of the King's English". But one Pennsylvania editor--

and I mention no names here although these words are all documented (for no community would have it said today that one of its editors had said these things about Lincoln after he spoke for posterity at Gettysburg)--this man called Lincoln "a liar, a thief, a robber, a brigand, a pirate, a perjurer, a traitor, a coward, a hypocrite, a cheat, a trickster, a murderer, a tyrant, an unmitigated scoundrel, and an infernal fool". "Next to George III", he wrote, "Lincoln has got to be the worst". This citizen hated Lincoln so much that once he went so far--as if what I haven't told you were not enough--that the townsfolk got rope and were ready to lynch him, had he not shouted "Three cheers for the Union". There were a few--if only a very few--who retained their sense of judgment to listen to the Address and its beauty and to praise it. Mary Shaw Leader, a 28-year-old reporter for the weekly Hanover Spectator in York County, praised it after covering Lincoln's Gettysburg trip, and for this praise she has been remembered as "Pennsylvania's first girl reporter". Even Lincoln was in error about it, as one recalls, for he said in its context-- "the world will little note what we say here"...and he was wrong. The world has long remembered, for more than 100 years, the beauty, the simplicity, the spirituality of the short, momentary talk which Abraham Lincoln delivered on November 19, in the year of war, 1863, at Gettysburg.

This is Pete Wambach. It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania.