

LINCOLN IN PENNSYLVANIA

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

Abraham Lincoln had the blood of Pennsylvania in his veins--his forbears were native to Berks County; and his most famous words, despite Douglas debates and inaugural addresses and proclamations--they were declared on the soil of Pennsylvania--some 272 words softly delivered at Gettysburg. On November 18, this now beloved president of the United States left Washington. The special train pulled into Gettysburg on the dark of that day. Lincoln passed the night at the home of David Wills, who was named special representative of Governor Andrew G. Curtin. Wills was the most active agent in the establishment of this soldier's cemetery at Gettysburg--to honor the dead of the battle that had occurred only four months before. On the way, the train was telegraphed that the President would have to make a few remarks. This was Lincoln's first notification of the fact. So he took up pencil and wrote the address. He asked Secretary of State Seward, who was later to purchase Alaska, for the brown paper which Seward had removed from a package of books. General James Fry noted in his later notes that Lincoln was busy and that no-one had seen him even write or prepare the simple speech. Actually historians who later checked with private secretaries concluded that there was no record that Lincoln even had time to do so. But somehow he did it...perhaps, historians note that the words were never even written down until Lincoln had arrived at Gettysburg or even at the cemetery grounds.

Some have said that once Lincoln was at Gettysburg he inquired about the order of the next day's program, and then wrote the address in the Wills House. Regardless of when, who, what,--on the Gettysburg Address--and both the reception and the derision heaped upon it, tradition tells us that the crowd was thrilled by it--having heard the great orator, Edward Everett, declaim for two hours before the President's simple speech must have been a relief, if nothing else. After Lincoln had finished, he turned to Everett, on this gray November day and grasping his hand, said, "I congratulate you on your success". The famous orator gratefully replied, "Ah, Mr. President, how gladly would I exchange all my hundreds of pages to have been the author of your twenty lines". The reports of the 272 words uttered by Lincoln on this day 107 years ago in various Philadelphia papers was identical in every way--having been dispatched by the Associated Press. However, despite the emotion on the field, the derision of some people, the forgetfulness of the hordes at Gettysburg; not until the war ended and the great leader had fallen did the nation realize that the Gettysburg Address had given immortality to the community, and to Pennsylvania and to America; eloquence in its simplest, yet greatest form. I shall have further to say tomorrow on this subject.

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