

## 1. *Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address in the National Cemeteries*

Abraham Lincoln was born February 12, 1809. Less than a month after his fifty-second birthday, on March 4, 1861, he was sworn in as the sixteenth president of the United States. Lincoln led the nation through four years of civil war. Witnessing huge death tolls among Union troops, in 1862 Lincoln first identified the need for a "national cemetery" for soldiers who died "in the service of the country." The features and administration of the new burial grounds would be defined in legislation signed after Lincoln's death.

Among Lincoln's most lauded words are the brief comments given at the dedication of the Gettysburg Soldiers' National Cemetery on November 19, 1863. These words – the now-famous Gettysburg Address – were literally placed in all national cemeteries for the centennial of his birth. Through federal and state government commemorations in 1909, as well as expressions in popular culture, the nation formally celebrated Lincoln.

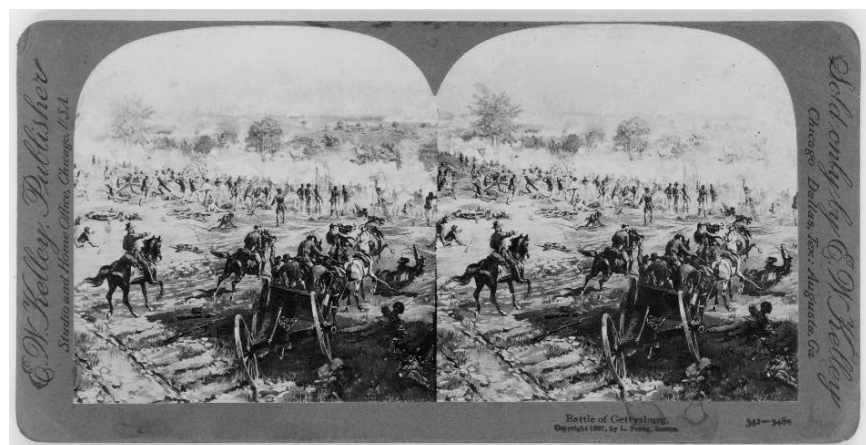


*Lincoln photographed by Alexander Gardner on November 8, 1863. Library of Congress.*

## 2. **Battle of Gettysburg**

The **battle** was fought on the farmland of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 1-3, 1863. It was the second time during the Civil War that Confederate troops entered the North. The fighting resulted in more than 51,000 soldiers killed, wounded, or missing.

More men fell here than in any other battle fought in North America before or since, and the Union victory impeded the political and military aims of the Confederacy.



*Stereograph, Battle of Gettysburg with Lincoln's address printed on the back, ca. 1897. Library of Congress.*

### 3. Soldiers' National Cemetery

That fall, President Lincoln was the second speaker at the Soldiers' National Cemetery dedication on November 19. In 272 words and less than five minutes he inspired an estimated throng of thousands who gathered at Gettysburg *and* a grieving nation.

Afterward, orator Edward Everett, who spoke first and for two hours, reflected that Lincoln "is the idol of the American people at this moment. Anyone who saw & heard as I did, the hurricane of applause that met his every movement in Gettysburg would know that he lived in every heart."

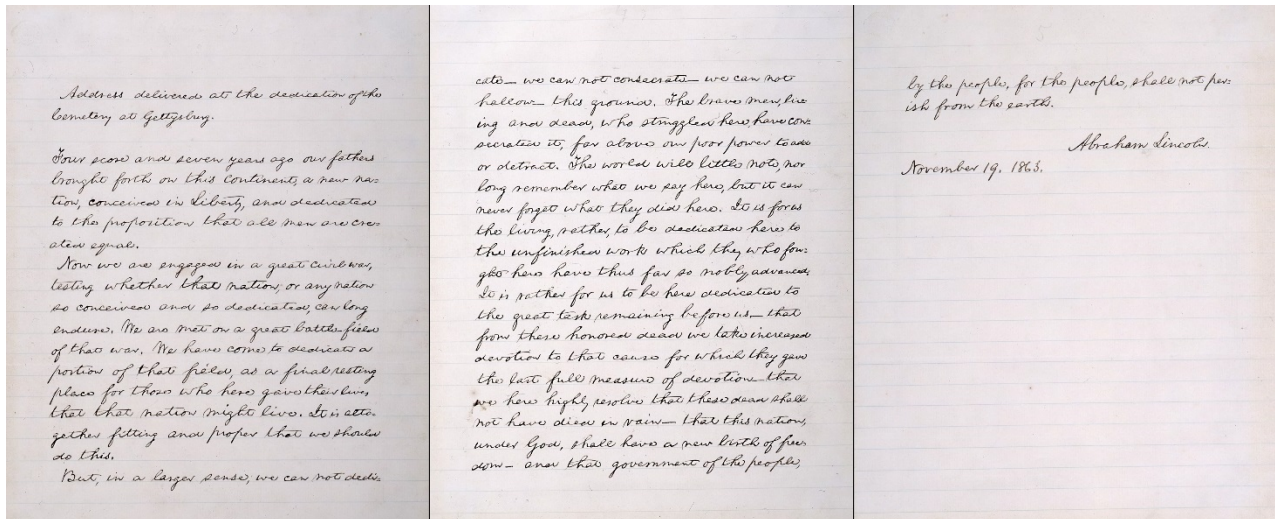


The only known image of President Lincoln at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863. Library of Congress.

#### 4. Different Versions of the Address

Five months after the Gettysburg cemetery dedication, President Lincoln spoke at the opening of the Maryland State Fair for U.S. Soldier Relief, held April 18 - May 2, 1864. Also known as the Baltimore Sanitary Fair, it was organized by benevolent and patriotic women. He also contributed a signed-and-dated copy of the speech for inclusion in a book to be sold at the fair to raise money for Northern relief organizations: the U.S. Sanitary and U.S. Christian commissions. Lincoln wrote out this copy for historian George Bancroft, who asked for it on behalf of his stepson Colonel Alexander Bliss. Bliss was a member of the committee collecting manuscripts for the fair's publication *Autograph Leaves of our Country's Authors*.

Five known copies of the Gettysburg Address exist in Lincoln's handwriting. Each are slightly different and are named for their recipients. John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's personal secretary, and White House assistant John Hay each received a copy. Lincoln wrote three versions for charitable purposes after November 19. He gave them to orator Edward Everett, Bancroft, and Bliss. The Bliss version of the speech would become the official version reproduced by the Federal government.



**Bliss** copy of speech that Lincoln wrote out in 1864 for charity.



## 5. Assassination

On April 15, 1865, **President Lincoln** died hours after being shot by John Wilkes Booth, an actor and Southern sympathizer. In his eulogy of Lincoln, Senator Charles Sumner, a politician and abolitionist from Massachusetts, described the Gettysburg Address as a "monumental act...the world will never cease to remember it. The battle itself was less important than the speech."

## 6. Monument to the Speech

The first permanent display of the Gettysburg Address in a national cemetery came through legislation to preserve the Pennsylvania battle site.

The law authorized transfer of the soldiers' cemetery from Pennsylvania to become a component of the fourth U.S. national battlefield park. The act of February 11, 1895—the day before the 86<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Lincoln's birthday—also allocated \$5,000 to erect a monument to Lincoln's speech at the cemetery. Specifically, a "suitable bronze tablet" with the Gettysburg Address and a likeness of the president.



Gettysburg Address Monument at Gettysburg National Cemetery. National Park Service.

Completion of the monument was delayed until 1912, after government officials resolved an issue that would plague a related project—providing standard Gettysburg Address tablets to all national cemeteries.

## 7. Tablet Authorization

Congress authorized the placement of cast-iron Gettysburg Address tablets in the cemeteries in 1908.

**LINCOLN'S GETTYSBURG ADDRESS: For placing iron tablets containing the address of President Lincoln delivered at Gettysburg, in seventy-seven national cemeteries, three thousand dollars.**

The quantity and cost of \$3,000 is reflected in the *Report of the Chief of Ordnance* of 1909-1911, which stated: "In the foundry and forge shop...a number of cast-iron tablets containing President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address...have been made for placing in National Cemeteries."

## 8. Tablet Production

An unusual obstacle delayed this acquisition until Memorial Day 1909. The resolution accelerated completion of the congressionally funded cast-iron Gettysburg Address tablets authorized the previous year *and* the Gettysburg National Military Park monument approved in 1895.

“The delay was almost entirely due to difficulty in determining the text of the Gettysburg Address.” *Which of Lincoln’s five written versions to use?* The dilemma arose because, in 1895, the “public printer” had edited Lincoln’s punctuation according to the Government Printing Office’s editorial style when the law was published as statute. During a “painstaking” process, according to War Department officials, they considered three variations of the speech, input from the late president’s son Robert T. Lincoln, and “the best historical advices that we could obtain.” Consensus led to selection of the Bliss, or Baltimore sanitary fair, version to become the “standard use of the Lincoln Gettysburg Address.” The same text of the address, albeit not the same layout, is inscribed on the wall of the south chamber of the Lincoln Memorial, designed by Henry Bacon and constructed in Washington, D.C., in 1914-1922.

The War Department moved quickly with the approved text. By early July, it Rock Island Arsenal in Illinois awarded a contract to the nearby Moline Scale Company to make the cast-iron tablets. By August, the tablets were delivered to the arsenal to be “copper plated before being shipped to their final destinations.” The *[Davenport IA] Daily Times* described it as “one of the most interesting pieces of work—that is from a historical and patriotic standpoint, at least—ever executed by the company.”

Excerpt, [Washington D.C.] *Sunday Star*, May 30, 1909. Newspapers.com. **Read the whole story.**

**Version Adopted.**

The version adopted, including phraseology, punctuation, paragraphing and capitalization, is as follows:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on 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 that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

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 consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

## 9. Centennial of Lincoln's Birth, 1909

The Gettysburg Address tablets were placed in national cemeteries as a tribute to Lincoln in 1909 when the nation celebrated the centennial of his birth as an official observance. State and federal government events incorporated patriotic and service organizations, including the Grand Army of the Republic and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Federal government participation in the Lincoln centennial resulted in some very familiar items. The Lincoln penny was the first U.S. coin to feature a historic figure, and a 2-cent stamp issued February 12, 1909, with a portrait image based on an Augustus Saint-Gaudens sculpture.



Far left: Obverse of Lincoln penny struck for the centennial; later it was redesigned to depict the Lincoln Memorial on the reverse. Left: Abraham Lincoln Centenary of Birth, 2-cent carmine stamp, definitive, issued February 12, 1909. National Postal Museum, cat. 1980.2493.4504.

The State of Illinois' Lincoln Centennial Association aimed to preserve, nationally, the memory of his "words and works, and to stimulate the patriotism of the youth of the land." The anniversary included efforts to designate February 12 as a national holiday and to establish a memorial highway linking Lincoln-associated sites. The noble arts – fine arts' sculpture and medallions, music and prose – formally demonstrated Lincoln's influence on the nation. But the scope and sentiment of the commemoration was also broadly disseminated through popular culture of the day.

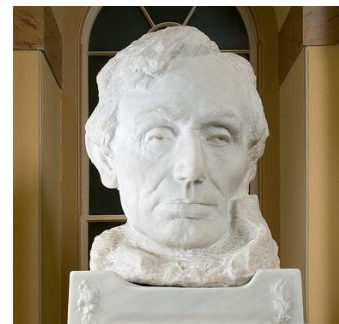


Left: 1909, made out to James R. Van Gleave. Library of Congress.

*Lincoln Centennial Association certificate*, February 12th,



Middle: *Cover of Lincoln centennial grand march* by E.T. Paull, New York, 1909. Library of Congress.



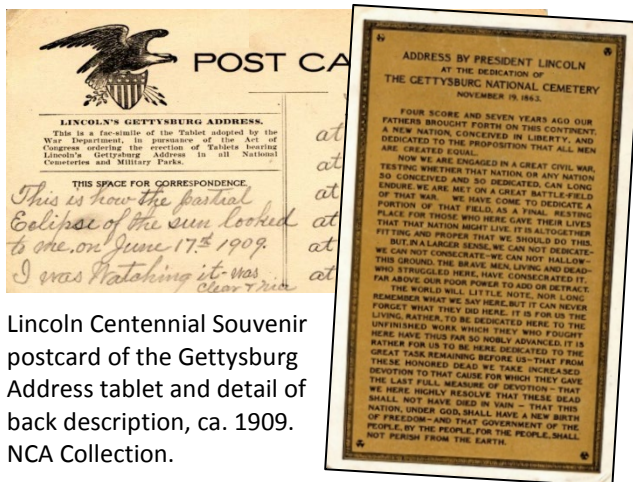
Head of *Lincoln* by *Gutzon Borglum*, sculptor of Mount Rushmore, was intended as a study. The massive marble head was completed and purchased by Eugene Meyer, Jr., in 1908; he donated it to the capitol in advance of the centennial. U.S. Capitol Historical Society.



## 10. Lincoln & the National Cemeteries in Popular Culture

Wide-spread evidence of Lincoln enthusiasm is evident in early twentieth-century ephemera: disposable paper mementos such as posters, broadsides, ticket stubs—and penny postcards. Designed to be discarded, these scraps of American culture have become informative collectibles. Inexpensive cards bore a colorful image or “real photograph” on the front, and after 1906 the back contained space to dash off a note to a friend. Postcards were most fashionable through the World War I years.

The debut of postcards coincided with the rise of American tourism, a movement fueled by affordable automobiles, adventure-beckoning highways, and increased leisure time. National cemeteries as a type of historic destination was popularized by views of picturesque landscapes, headstones, monuments, and even veteran funerals. Lincoln-centennial zeal is reflected in postcards issued by at least three publishers, including a facsimile of the standard Gettysburg Address tablet installed in national cemeteries in 1909.



Lincoln Centennial Souvenir postcard of the Gettysburg Address tablet and detail of back description, ca. 1909. NCA Collection.



Sentimental souvenir postcards published for the Lincoln centennial, 1908-09. Top: “Lincolns (sic) Birthday, Series No. 1, E. Nash Publisher. Left: “Lincoln’s Birthday,” Series No. 155, Raphael Tuck & Sons. NCA Collection.



## 11. Inter-World War National Cemeteries

Between World War I and World War II, the federal government planned its first expansion of the national cemetery system to serve veterans of twentieth-century conflicts. Some of the seven previously existed as military post cemeteries, others were new. Sites developed by the U.S. Army between 1934 and 1939 were the last to feature a superintendent's lodge and a Gettysburg Address tablet.

Long Island National Cemetery, established 1936, with Gettysburg Address tablet installed in front of the lodge, 2005. HALS NY-2, Library of Congress.



## 12. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial

In 2009, the United States again commemorated the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. As part of the recognition, NCA chose to reintroduce the Gettysburg Address tablet to the national cemeteries—specifically those developed since the mid-twentieth century. It selected the Rock Island Arsenal to again produce Gettysburg Address tablets for 62 national cemeteries. The replicas were made of cast iron using a 1909 original borrowed from nearby Rock Island National Cemetery.



Casting at the arsenal: pouring molten iron into a mold of the Gettysburg Address tablet; an original and new tablet side by side. 2009, NCA.

Each tablet measures 56 inches tall and 33 inches wide, and weighs about 350 pounds. The most common paint scheme is a black background with white or silver letters and edging; a bronze finish was used occasionally.



Today the original tablets are designated NCA historic assets, and to avoid any confusion, the replicas are stamped on the back with a production date. All have been installed in national cemeteries that did not have one—generally because they were established after 1950.

### 13. Gettysburg Address Tablet at VA Headquarters

Just in time for November 2018, which VA Secretary Robert L. Wilkie designated as *Veterans Month*, a 1909 Gettysburg Address tablet from the NCA History Collection was installed at the Department of Veterans Affairs headquarters. The tablet had been removed from Los Angeles National Cemetery years ago because, by the twenty-first century, its corners had failed. The Lincoln Bicentennial project was an opportunity to replace the damaged tablet with a secure replica.

Now employees and visitors can view the historic tablet and learn about the long association that Lincoln and his iconic Gettysburg Address have with NCA's national cemeteries.



A Los Angeles National Cemetery ceremony, photographed 1940s, shows Gettysburg Address tablet on the rostrum. NCA Collection. The same tablet exhibited as a historic artifact at VA headquarters, November 2018.



## 14. The Gettysburg Address

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

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Abraham Lincoln  
November 19, 1863

