

THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS: Drafts

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 copy on exhibit, which belonged to Nicolay, is often called the "first draft" because it is believed to be the earliest copy that exists.

Considerable scholarly debate continues about whether the Nicolay copy is the "reading" copy. In 1894 Nicolay wrote that Lincoln had brought with him the first part of the speech, written in ink on Executive Mansion stationery, and that he had written the second page in pencil on lined paper before the dedication on November 19, 1863. Matching folds are still evident on the two pages shown here, suggesting it could be the copy that eyewitnesses say Lincoln took from his coat pocket and read at the ceremony. However, one of the arguments supporting the contrary theory that the delivery text has been lost is that some of the words and phrases of the Nicolay copy do not match contemporaneous accounts. The words "under God," for example, are missing from the phrase "that this nation [under God] shall have a new birth of freedom...." In order for the Nicolay draft to have been the reading copy, Lincoln uncharacteristically would have had to depart from his written text in several instances. This copy of the Gettysburg Address remained in John Nicolay's possession until his death in 1901, when it passed to his friend and colleague John Hay.

The "second draft," probably made by Lincoln shortly after his return to Washington from Gettysburg, was given to John Hay, whose descendants donated both it and the Nicolay copy to the Library of Congress in 1916.

There are numerous variations in words and punctuation between these two drafts. Because these variations provide clues into Lincoln's thinking and because these two drafts are the most closely tied to November 19, they continue to be consulted by scholars of the period.

ENGLISH

ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE DEDICATION
OF THE CEMETERY AT GETTYSBURG

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.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

November 19, 1863.