

"Abraham Lincoln Remembered"

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by Jay A. Graybeal

The anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth has provided numerous occasions to reflect upon his life and times. In 1901, Union Civil War veteran, Col. William A. McKellip of Westminster, wrote an article about the late president and his famous address at Gettysburg. The article was printed in the February 16 issue of the American Sentinel newspaper. McKellip first described orator Edward Everett's long speech; he then described how Lincoln spoke what would forever be known as his Gettysburg Address:

"It was after the close of such a magnificent and eloquent effort; when the magical spell of such an orator [Everett] still possessed the hearts and had control of the vast multitude, that Abraham Lincoln arose and came deliberately forward to make the grandest, the most complete and memorable address ever delivered upon any occasion. We try to picture, and with memory's aid to summon before us again that vast concourse of people. In imagination we see the tall form of the President, his careworn face, showing the wear and the stress of the heavy burden that was upon him, and yet so unconscious of self, so filled with heartfelt gratitude for what had been achieved on that field; so absorbed with recollections of the gallant dead, with a sympathy so profound and intense for those who have been bereft of near and dear ones in the struggle, that like a gleam of sunshine, his features lightened up and became aglow from the depth of feeling which possessed him, and as he stood erect, adjusted his spectacles, and slowly unfolded the crumpled manuscript, there seemed to go forth a mysterious, indefinable, all pervading influence, so that before he had completed the first sentence of that transcendent address his audience was thrilled as if by an electric shock, and its profoundest depth of feeling stirred as never before. He seemed to breathe a magical spell over his hearers, and when, with a voice singularly sweet, but so penetrating as to reach to the farthest limits of that vast assemblage, he said: "The world will little note, nor long remember, when we may say hear, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to the cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion, that we here highly resolve that the dead shall not have died in vain; that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth," there ended an address which, for its eloquent and pathetic appeal to the living "to take increased devotion to the cause," that has never been excelled if equaled by any one, on any occasion. The suppressed emotion, the absorbed attention, the reverential awe with which he inspired his audience made one feel while he was uttering his eloquent tribute to the living and dead who struggled here that he was forever linking and indelibly associating his name with the glorious victory they won. In all the years to come, as Gettysburg becomes more and more the Mecca of our people, the spot to which they will go to strengthen their love and attachment "for a government of the people, by the people and for the people," so will this address of Abraham Lincoln, since engraved on the National Monument there, sink deeper and deeper into their hearts, and inspire our people with a loftier, a truer and better patriotism than they ever experienced before.

When Everett was delivering his address, it was felt to be the speech of a scholar, polished to the last possibility; that it was elegant and learned, and delivered with all the consummate grace of diction and force of oratory for which he was so justly celebrated; but that the all inspiring, almost supernatural, eloquent and thrilling words of Lincoln, coming from a heart burdened with cares, and surcharged with emotion for the loss of life and suffering caused on that field, mingled with thanksgiving for the victory won in behalf of the Union, would be imperishable, and go down the ages wherever the English language

is spoken to be read and re-read, to be treasured and declaimed by thousands upon thousands, when no one would ever think of, much less read the scholarly address of Everett.

In the years to come, when not a trace is left of the bitter feelings engendered by our gigantic Civil War; when people of all parties and all shades of opinion, from every section of our re-united country, shall come to gaze upon the National Monument on Cemetery Ridge, surrounded by the white headstones marking the resting places of thousands who fell on that bloody field “and gave the last full measure of devotion” to the country and its flag, then will pause to read again Abraham Lincoln’s words sculptured thereon, and see in them a profounder significance, a greater depth of feeling and sympathy than was ever felt of thought of before and

“As they shall walk across the battlefield where  
once the bullets flew,  
And the green and bending grasses felt the fall  
of crimson dew,”

Stolid and callous would be the heart not filled

All aglow

With the words that Lincoln spoke there seven  
and thirty years ago.”

In a carryover from earlier newspaper publishing traditions, Col. McKellip’s article appeared on page one of the paper, the section reserved for literature and poetry. Born in Taneytown he came to Westminster before the war. He joined the 6th Regiment, Maryland Volunteer Infantry in August 1862, served with his regiment in Maryland and Virginia and was discharged for medical disability in November 1863. Early in his service McKellip and Gov. Thomas H. Hicks of Maryland had an audience with Pres. Lincoln to request weapons for the regiment. Pres. Lincoln wrote the Secretary of War the following message on the back of his calling card: “Please give the bearer, Major McKellip, of the 6th Maryland Regiment the best arms possible. A. Lincoln” The card became a favorite memento. Following the war, McKellip served as Clerk of the Court for Carroll County and practiced law in Westminster. President Theodore Roosevelt appointed him U. S. Consul to Madgeburg, Germany in 1902. He died there in 1904 and his body was shipped home for burial in the Westminster Cemetery.



*Col. William A. McKellip of Westminster, shown here in his Civil War uniform in 1862 or 1863, wrote an article about President Abraham Lincoln in 1901. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.*