

"Lincoln Day Speech 1970"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Each year the Maryland House of Delegates honors President Abraham Lincoln's memory with a speech presented by a delegate. After listening to last year's speech delivered by Del. Joe Getty, I learned that Del. Jacob M. Yingling made the speech in 1970. The speech was printed in the Legislature's Journal of Proceedings:

"Lincoln Day Address to Maryland Legislature

by Jacob M. Yingling (Republican-Carroll County)

It is an easy drive from Carroll County to Gettysburg, one that I often make since I have a son in college there. Many times we've strolled among the circling stones marking the dead and the damned of that Battle of Gettysburg; moved by the inherent beauty of that spot, by the verdant sweeping of the trees; and by the overwhelming feeling of American history. There is the battle in 1863 to be considered at Gettysburg; the inevitable questions of its rights and its wrongs; of the failures of commanders and of men; of the deeds of heroes on both sides. Above all there is Abraham Lincoln's classic address. I defy you to stand on the spot where Mr. Lincoln spoke and not quote, at least to yourself, ". . . four score and seven years ago . . ." The words of his speech were few, only 10 sentences in all; but his earnest phrases have been impressed on our national conscience. Less well known are the closing words of President Lincoln's first inaugural address. . . "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, are the momentous issues of the Civil War. The Government will not assail you. You have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I have a most solemn one to preserve, protect, and defend it. I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break, the bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every patriotic grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature." As you stand at Gettysburg, you know that a lesser man, a man with less feeling for the American tradition, a less human man could not have held the nation together. Scholars have debated how Mr. Lincoln came to Gettysburg. They have dissected his learning years; studied the impact of his parents on his beliefs; traced the genesis of his thoughts to their literary endings; and identified the traditions which gave him the strength to hold a firm line against the temporizers and equivocators. There seems to me to be three clues to the man's art of leadership. First, the reading of his youth, his "five faithful companions" as they are called, Aesop's Fables, Weem's Life of Washington, Robinson Crusoe, Pilgrim's Progress, and the King James Bible, are moral and traditional in nature. Another clue is found in a statement of O. H. Browning, a lawyer who knew Lincoln well. He said, "Lincoln was always a learner, and in that respect, the most notable man I have ever seen. I have known him for 10 years, and every time I meet him I find him much improved. He is now about 40 years old. I knew him at 30 and every time I have seen him I have observed extraordinary improvement. Most young men have finished their education, as they say at 25; but Lincoln is always a learner." Third, the young Lincoln picked up what bits of knowledge he could from listening to grown-ups talk. A lanky, silent lad, he kept his ears open while his elders visited in the local store; tagging along with this father, he absorbed every bit of conversation among the older men. However, he hated gobbledygook and in later years was to complain, "Among my earliest recollections I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when any body talked to me in a way I couldn't understand. I do not think I ever got angry at anything else in my life; but that always disturbed my temper; and has ever since." These are three great forces to remember: first, the impact of indepth study

of traditional and morally inspiring literature; second, a questioning mind broadened by a continuous and expanding educational experience; and third, the impact of adult opinion and action. He was a plain-spoken man and wished everyone were. Mr. Lincoln was the product of adult example, of his own questioning mind, and of exposure to a tradition which caught and inspired his youthful imagination. In some ways we are in a time of questioning as turbulent as the pre-Civil War days. We hear that we are not relevant to youth if we are over 30; we say that youth does not understand money because these young people did not grow up in the depression; there are increasing questions about the morality of work; the pressures toward a welfare-dominated state mount every day. Middle class virtue is square; the dignity of the individual and the quality of his life are under daily assault. Can we learn from this great man Lincoln? Or shall we continue the abandonment of our traditions to the point where your youth has no moral code to live by? Shall we permit our leaders and our institutions to refuse to accept the responsibility of giving our searching youths the limits needed to restrict their activities to reasonable bounds? Shall we refuse to exercise the judgment and restraint in our personal lives that could give our children a guide to grow by? It seems to me that the lore of Abraham Lincoln clearly shows how a youth is shaped into a man by the forces of his family, his education, and his belief in moral traditions. The lessons of Lincoln and of Gettysburg are twofold. Leaders have an obligation. They have accepted a responsibility and that responsibility requires the setting of limits as well as the establishment of opportunity. A leader, whether a legislator, a military commander, a businessman, or simply the head of a family, has accepted that responsibility to be an example for his people. Mr. Lincoln understood and accepted his responsibilities to set limits and to be an example. Any legislation which permits or encourages the abdication of personal leadership responsibility is not in the Lincolnian Republican tradition. Also, we must find ways to foster continuing education as a way of life for our youth. By integrity and by legislation we will find ways to promote our sixteenth president's pattern of personal growth to supply our leadership for the difficult days ahead. Let us adopt the moral fiber of Abraham Lincoln. His party leaders were afraid his stand on slavery in the senatorial election of 1858 would cost him the election. He steadfastly refused to change his "house divided" statement. That expression is a truth for all human experience 'a house divided against itself cannot stand' and 'he that tuns may read.' The proposition also is true and has been for 6,000 years. I want to use some universally known figure expressed in simple language as universally well known, that may strike home to men in order to raise them up to the peril of the times. I do not believe I would be right in changing or omitting it. I would rather be defeated with this expression in the speech, and uphold and discuss it before the people, than be victorious without it." Let us stand with Lincoln at Gettysburg and know ". . .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."

Del. Yingling's speech was delivered during the social upheaval of that defined the late 1960s in America, including Carroll County. The impact of that turbulent era can still be seen in social movements, education and politics.

Photo caption: The carte-de-visite size photograph of an illustration entitled "Lincoln and Family" was widely distributed throughout the North during the Civil War. The image was originally placed with images of family members in small photograph albums kept by most families during the Civil War ear. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.