

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 18, 2013

Lincoln and Gettysburg, Kennedy and Dallas: Tomorrow will be the 150th anniversary of President Lincoln's "few appropriate remarks" dedicating the National Cemetery where so many had lost their lives four months before as the Civil War raged on. It was a mild but dreary day, and Edward Everett of Massachusetts had been asked to give the featured address. On a wooden platform erected among the many graves, Everett spoke for two hours, and then it was the President's turn. The crowd was weary and not in the mood for another lengthy rambling. They did not get one.

The dignitaries, including Lincoln, had arrived the evening before. Secretary of State William Seward was in Lincoln's party. Lincoln was housed in the home of David Wills on Gettysburg's main square; Seward was a few doors down the street. The President stayed up late refining his speech, and he was seen slipping out to Seward's quarters, presumably asking for advice on a certain wording. Although Seward, the leading Republican seeking the presidential nomination in 1860, had originally thought himself far superior to the backwoodsman and sought to make this known in the early days of the Civil War, he had come to realize Lincoln's greatness and helped the administration in all ways possible. It was not unusual for Lincoln to ask Seward's advice on key matters by November of 1863.

Outside the Wills home the next morning, Lincoln sat on a horse for 20 minutes before Everett was ready to ride out to the cemetery, and then the procession began. A church choir sang, and the speeches were given. Lincoln's two-minute address had mixed reviews. As soon as Everett got home, however, he wired the president telling him the latter's "Gettysburg Address" said more in two minutes than he, Everett, had said in two hours. Someone close to Seward, assuming the Secretary had written much of the document, congratulated him on an excellent presentation. Seward replied: "Sir, only Abraham Lincoln could have written that speech."

On November 19, 1963, Joe Mitchell, Lindsay Greenplate, and I attended the 100th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address in the cemetery (see Weekly News of 6/3/13). Ex-President Eisenhower was the featured speaker, and while his speech did not go down in history, it, too, was brief and complemented the other things on the program. Governor William Scranton of Pennsylvania introduced General Eisenhower; Marian Anderson sang the National Anthem; Justice Musmano of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court recited Lincoln's address; and the Marine Band played the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." President Kennedy sent his regrets. We had seen him five days before when he dedicated the Delaware and Maryland Turnpikes just southwest of Newark, Delaware. Three days after the Gettysburg Centennial, on November 22, 1963, he was fatally shot in Dallas. The Lincoln convertible limousine in which he, Mrs. Kennedy, and Governor and Mrs. John Connally of Texas were riding resides permanently in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

In the days and weeks following Kennedy's assassination, similarities were published showing how fate tied Kennedy to Lincoln, such as: Both had Vice Presidents named Johnson: Andrew Johnson was born in 1808; Lyndon Johnson was born in 1908. Lincoln had a secretary named Kennedy; Kennedy had a secretary named Lincoln; both were fatally shot while sitting next to their wives, and so it went.