

Lincoln Comes to Gettysburg: The Creation of the Soldiers' National Cemetery and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

Kent Gramm

Gettysburg College, kgramm@gettysburg.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr>

Recommended Citation

Gramm, Kent (2022) "Lincoln Comes to Gettysburg: The Creation of the Soldiers' National Cemetery and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 24 : Iss. 2 .

DOI: 10.31390/cwbr.24.2.15

Available at: <https://repository.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol24/iss2/15>

Review

Gramm, Kent

Spring 2022

Gottfried, Bradley M. and Linda I. *Lincoln Comes to Gettysburg: The Creation of the Soldiers' National Cemetery and Lincoln's Gettysburg Address*. Emerging Civil War Series. Savas Beatie, 2021. PAPERBACK. \$14.95 ISBN 9781611215595 pp.170

Savas Beatie continues to publish engaging and informative titles in their Emerging Civil War Series. Other volumes feature young and “emerging” writers and researchers who approach well-worn subjects, such as various aspects of the Battle of Gettysburg, in fresh but soundly researched essays. *Lincoln Comes to Gettysburg* differs from these in that its authors are well-seasoned, and the book is not a series of essays by different writers but a unified whole, written by Linda and Bradley Gottfried. The latter has published fourteen books on the Civil War and is both a Gettysburg Licensed Town Guide and an Antietam Battlefield Guide. The couple has produced an outstanding book—clearly written, judicious, entertaining, and very well supplemented by photographs and maps.

It is difficult to imagine an aspect of the Cemetery and the Address that is not covered in this volume. The book begins by vividly describing the need for a cemetery. The authors quote a witness who came to Gettysburg two weeks after the battle: “the graves of those killed . . . are in all directions . . . Some . . . have merely a stick with the initials scratched on it . . . The graves are generally very hastily dug not more than 18 inches deep.” A soldier reported, the “stench on the battlefield was something indescribable, it would come up as if in waives [*sic*] and when at its worst the breath would stop in the throat; the lungs could not take it in, and a sense of suffocation would be experienced” (6,7).

Two chapters are devoted to the location and design of the Soldiers' National Cemetery, and another to “Moving the Corpses.” The authors have consulted highly respected sources, such as Frank Klement's *The Gettysburg Soldiers' Cemetery and Lincoln's Address*, but the research is fully and interestingly integrated into the text, never feeling “academic” in the negative sense. The attendant dignitaries—particularly Edward Everett, who was to give the top-billed

Gettysburg address—are well-described, with accompanying images. As one who has been interested in the subject for years, I especially admire the chapter on the location of the speakers' platform. The authors present the three main options for where the President and the others were seated, each given succinctly. While the authors state that the Evergreen Cemetery site is now favored by the Park Service despite multiple eyewitnesses to the contrary, they are not overawed by the photographic evidence and leave the other options open for the reader to investigate.

The trip to Gettysburg was not easy for the 10,000 - 15,000 attendees of the ceremony, nor was it simple for President Lincoln, who needed three different trains for the journey. Gratitude is due the authors for (once again) putting to rest the atrocious canard that the President wrote the Address on the back of an envelope while on the train to Gettysburg. The carefully composed Address had its genesis over years of thought, and at least the first page was written in the White House. The careful President consulted others, and deeply moved by his tour of the battlefield on the morning of the ceremony, appears to have made small changes (such as adding the phrase “under God”) on the morning of Nov. 19th.

Unforgettable glimpses of Abraham Lincoln are offered, such as the observation of a woman who looked up at the President's window and saw “Lincoln pacing his room as though ‘engaged in deep thought.’” Most of the witnesses thought the president seemed “sad and pensive”; another observed that the President was “by far the most striking man in that great cavalcade” that paraded down the Emmitsburg Road. “His deeply cut features looked hard and worn . . . He looks much older than when we last saw him, two years ago.” “It is a thoughtful, kindly, care-worn face,” observed a newspaperman. (89, 91, 94, 103)

Highly readable chapters on the ceremony, on writing the Address, and reactions to the Address are supplied. As a reviewer of one of my books explained to me, “negative criticism gives a review substance.” If that is the case, I can offer little “substance” to this review of an excellent book. However, the chapter on the meaning of the Address could have been stronger, in my opinion, explicating Lincoln's text more fully. This quibble leads to another minor observation: The authors present suggestions for further reading, citing very solid titles by Boritt, Klement, and Johnson. Unfortunately the best-selling Wills title contains two fundamental and misleading claims: a) that Lincoln radically departed from Jefferson's ideas in the Declaration, rather than drawing out their inherent and implicit meaning, and b) that Mr. Lincoln fashioned his speech according to the rules of classical rhetoric. An examination of Robert Bray's “What

Abraham Lincoln Read: An Evaluative and Annotated List” in the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 28-81 reveals no reading in classical rhetoric. But on the other hand, the Address is replete with King James Bible language and cadences; the President profoundly integrated the essential story of Christianity: miraculous birth (“our fathers brought forth”), suffering and death (“the last full measure of devotion”), and new life in the future of believers (“it is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated”). That might seem to be academic quibbling, but writing on this weekend of Good Friday and Easter and the 162nd anniversary of the Emancipator’s death, the matrix of Lincoln’s meaning feels especially appropriate.

This is an excellent book, written with care, clarity, and vigor, and it should supply everything one might want to know about the Cemetery and the Address. The volume appends a useful tour guide of the Cemetery. Of special interest is the appendix by series editor Chris Mackowski, “The Gettysburg Address Turns 100,” which features President Eisenhower’s compellingly relevant speech given at Gettysburg on the anniversary: “we have not paid to his message its just tribute until we—ourselves—live it . . . the work still to be done awaits . . . [our] doing” (166). This book, Eisenhower’s message, and especially President Lincoln’s words, are especially important now, when more than at any time since the Civil War, this country is being tested from within and without as to its commitment to “the proposition that all . . . are created equal,” and as to its resolve that government *by the people, shall not perish*.

Kent Gramm teaches Civil War Era Studies at Gettysburg College. He is the author of November: Lincoln’s Elegy at Gettysburg, Sharpsburg, and the 2019 volume with photographer Chris Heisey, Gettysburg: The Living and the Dead.