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The Rev. Prof. Philip M. Biklé, D.D.

Reminiscences by Biklé about Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg, 19 November 1863. TMs, 4 pages

Biklé recalls discussing the Gettysburg Address with an academic colleague and, when his companion discovered that Biklé had heard the speech delivered first hand and remarked on his good fortune to have been there, Biklé realized what a remarkable experience other people thought his to be.

Beginning his narration, Biklé gives a brief history of how the citizens of Gettysburg went about organizing the dedication of the cemetery. Judge Wills, in whose home Lincoln later stayed, first conceived the idea of a Federal cemetery and brought it to the attention of then Governor Curtin, who heartily agreed. Edward Everett was asked to speak at its dedication in October, but stated that he could not be ready at such short notice, so 19 November was chosen.

Biklé remarks that Lincoln was at first not thought a good choice to follow Everett, the leading orator in the nation, as his less literate background might mar Everett's eloquence. Yet Biklé notes that Everett expressed his admiration at the speech long before the crowd fully agreed with him.

Returning to the narration of the day, Biklé remarked on the number of important civil and military leaders present. He and other students were allowed to process, but only at the rear, much to their chagrin. The students assembled "on York Street in front of the Gettysburg National Bank and Mr. McCreary's residence." They happened to be across the street from the Wills house and watched as Lincoln headed the procession to the cemetery. As they entered, they found that the column had parted and they were allowed a crowded and cramped position near the front. Biklé remarks that Everett's speech was fine, but mediocre. When Lincoln rose to speak, Biklé observed that he was a "tall, gaunt figure of a man that might be called somewhat imposing but certainly not attractive." On the deliver of the speech, he remembers "he [Lincoln] spoke in a most deliberate manner, and with such a forceful and articulate expression that he could be heard by all of that immense throng." Later, he remembers remarking to a classmate that the speech was appropriate but unremarkable. He ends by declaring that now he has come to fully appreciate his extraordinary experience.

The document is then affirmed by Lee Francis Lybarger, Esq., a justice of the peace for Union county in Pennsylvania and dated 12 February 1926.

[Back to Civil War Era sources](#)