



Lincoln Lore

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The Precise Location Where Lincoln Delivered the Gettysburg Address

Editor's Note: This article was written in collaboration with Dr. Louis A. Warren, the former editor (1929-1956) of *Lincoln Lore*. The question of where Lincoln stood at the time he delivered the Gettysburg Address was first discussed in Dr. Warren's book, *Lincoln's Gettysburg Declaration: "A New Birth of Freedom"* (pages 182-183). The question was reviewed again in *Parade Magazine*, November 14, 1965 by Neal Ashby, an associate editor of that Sunday newspaper magazine. The following treatise, largely the work of Dr. Warren, is in answer to the claims set forth by *Parade Magazine* that have long persisted about the precise location where Lincoln stood.

Under the caption, "The New Battle of Gettysburg," the November 14, 1965 issue of *Parade Magazine* released an article featuring the accuracy of the statement appearing at the Soldiers' National Monument: "Abraham Lincoln delivered his Gettysburg Address on this spot Nov. 19, 1863." However, a manuscript in the library of the Lincoln National Life Foundation at Fort Wayne, Indiana, written by the secretary of the original cemetery commission, states that the platform on which the President stood "was located 40 ft. north east of the outer circle of soldiers' graves" at a point he designated on a map. This site is 350 feet north of the monument.

One may comment, "What difference does it make where Lincoln gave it?" True, the contents of the address would have been the same delivered at either site. Nevertheless, one of the veteran cemetery guides commented that the question most often asked by the tourist is:



Art Work by Marie Sanner

- Parade line of march July 4, 1865. Corner stone laying.
 - Parade line of march Nov. 19, 1863. Dedication of cemetery.
 - A. Site of platform where Lincoln gave address.
 - B. Audience assembled here facing platform.
 - C. Site of Soldiers' National Monument.
 - D. Evergreen Cemetery. Town Burial Ground.
- This revised map (greatly enlarged) is drawn from the original map which appears opposite page 208 of the REVISED REPORT OF THE SOLDIERS' NATIONAL CEMETERY, 1867.

"Where did Lincoln give his address?" If this is the number one question, at the number one national park, a correct answer is significant.

As late as December 3, 1863, there was some confusion as to where the monument for the soldiers should be erected. On the above date the Gettysburg Compiler noted: "It was proposed to place the Soldiers' Monument at the extreme southwest corner, on account of the ground being ten feet higher at that place." The item states that the majority of the citizens are in favor of "a place in the center of the cemetery. It is thought that the location will be changed to that place." William Saunders, who had drawn the plans for the cemetery, had designated a small plat at the center of the semi-circular arrangement of burial lots, for the construction of a monument, and his suggestion was adopted.

Several factors have contributed to the conclusions drawn about the traditional site where Lincoln is said to have made his address. Inscribed on the Soldiers' Monument itself are the closing words of the oration, beginning with the phrase: "It is rather for us the living. . ." The complete address was read by General O. O. Howard, during his remarks at the laying of the corner stone of the monument, in 1865. A third convocation took place there when the monument was dedicated in 1869.

Of necessity, these last two programs were held at the monument site, and as time went on, the ceremony where Lincoln made his speech was associated with the same location.

By an act of Congress, the United States, on Lincoln's Birthday, 1895, acquired from the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association: "A tract of land embracing about 800 acres and the improvements thereon." The act also provided for a Lincoln Speech Memorial, to be erected at the cemetery. The provisions specified that it should consist of a bust of Lincoln and a bronze tablet inscribed with the Gettysburg Address. A companion tablet was ordered, which contained a copy of the letter the President had received inviting him to make a few remarks. The monument took the form of an exedra, or a low semi-circular bay of white marble, with a taller section in the center, before which the bust was placed.

Proceedings of the committee given charge of the erecting of this memorial, reveal that it was hoped that it might occupy the site where the speech was delivered. Cast in the bronze tablet, below the letter inviting the President to come to Gettysburg, is this notice: "Abraham Lincoln near this place delivered the address at the dedication of the cemetery." Along with the land and the monuments, certain traditions were passed on to the Government, one of them to the effect that Lincoln had delivered his famous address at the site where the Soldiers' Monument was erected. The acceptance of this tradition defeated the purpose of the Speech Memorial Committee and caused them to search for what they termed "a suitable place" for the memorial. It was decided to erect the monument on the "higher ground" previously mentioned as a proper place for the Soldiers' National Monument, and it was constructed there in 1912.

This additional shrine associated with the address caused considerable confusion, and the park authorities arranged for this information to be printed on a tablet near by: "Lincoln Address Memorial . . . The address was delivered about 300 yards from this spot along the Upper Cemetery Drive. The spot is now marked by the Soldiers' National Monument."

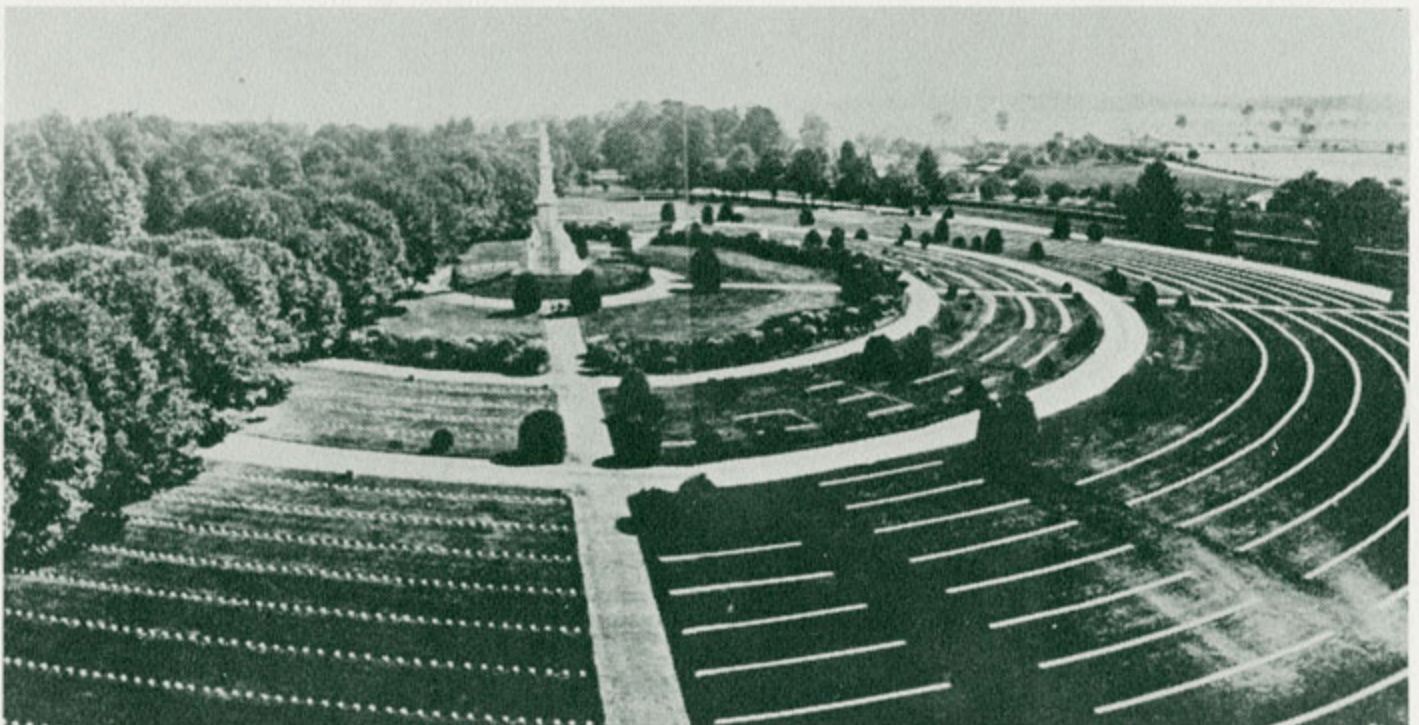
The consistent emphasis given through all information mediums at the park, including circulars, pamphlets, picture displays, information markers, as well as the cinema presentation at the Gettysburg Center, declares the Soldiers' National Monument site to be the precise location where Lincoln gave his oration. Book and magazine

articles referring to the speech, with scarcely an exception, have supported the supposition. Inasmuch as the tradition can be nullified by statements appearing at the time of the dedication in the local press, as well as in the official report of the cemetery commission prepared by David Wills at Gettysburg, it is difficult to understand how the erroneous claim has survived through the past seventy-five years or more.

Fortunately, the 1867 edition of the commissioner's report contains the programs of both the cemetery dedication and the laying of the corner stone of the monument, both occurring within a period of three years. Naturally, the ceremonies for the latter event would be at the monument. The program of arrangements states with reference to the parade: "The head of the column will move at precisely ten o'clock A.M. up Baltimore Street to the Cemetery Grounds. . . and all who are to occupy the stand will pass to the same." Baltimore Street, where the monument is located, serves as part of the eastern boundary of the cemetery.

Appearing in the same book are the instructions for the order of march at the dedication of the cemetery at which Lincoln gave his address: "The head of the column shall move at precisely ten o'clock A.M. The route will be up Baltimore Street, to the Emmitsburg Road, thence to the junction of the Taneytown Road, thence to the latter road to the Cemetery." The Taneytown Road furnished part of the western boundary of the cemetery. The destination of this parade could not have been the site of the monument; if so, it would have continued straight out Baltimore Street. This exhibit alone should be sufficient to nullify the tradition that the programs for the dedication of the cemetery, and the laying of the corner stone, were both conducted from a platform located on the same site.

The contractor for the exhuming of the soldier dead states that he began his task on October 27, caring for about 60 bodies daily. He further reports: "I also took the name, company and regiment of each body as soon as placed in the ground, personally superintended the proper marking of the graves with the proper head-boards." From his working schedule it will be observed that considerably over a thousand remains, or about a third of the total number, had been interred by November 19, 1863. Not only were the graves newly made, but more than a thousand wooden markers stood several inches above the ground, over the entire field. Not only would it be pro-



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The Soldiers' National Cemetery of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, showing the sixty foot high national monument which has erroneously been pointed out as the site from which President Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address.



From *The Gettysburg Times*. Battle of Gettysburg Centennial Edition, 1863-1963.

The crowd at the dedication of the battlefield cemetery at Gettysburg, November 19, 1863.

A careful examination of this blurred photograph will reveal on the horizon the cemetery gate house (left), and the speakers' platform and tent (note slight elevation in center).

inhibitive for thousands of people to assemble in this area, but the desecration of the graves by a throng of persons standing upon them would be inconceivable.

While the exact position of the speakers' stand cannot be determined by the report submitted, a general idea of the location can be learned. When the Taneytown Road entrance to the cemetery was reached, the official order states: "The military will form in line as the general in command may order, for the purpose of saluting the President of the United States. The military will then close up and occupy the space on the left of the stand, the military leaving sufficient space between them and the line of graves for the civic procession to pass." The "line of graves" was on the perimeter of the semi-circle where the New York soldiers had been interred. It is evident that the platform faced away from the graves, the open field giving ample room for the thousands of visitors to assemble there.

One member of the military stated: "Our regiment marched in front of the stand and formed a semi-circle in four ranks, 75 feet from the platform." A student from Pennsylvania College, who was in the "civic" section of the parade, mentioned the "evolution and counter marches" upon reaching the cemetery, but finally found himself "in front of the platform."

In addition to the evidence produced by the divergent parade routes, and the impossible terrain conditions in front of the monument site, the fact that original photographs of the occasion were made furnishes what may be considered our most significant refutation of the current monument site tradition. The Adams County *Sentinel* of November 19, 1863, stated: "A flagpole was raised in the National Cemetery yesterday near the stand prepared for the world renowned orator, Hon. Edward Everett." At the rear of the platform a tent was erected at the request of Dr. Everett. The photographs show the great crowd of people in front of the speakers' stand, and also extending to both the right and the left. The flagpole mentioned by the newspaper may be observed, and also the tent is plainly visible. In the far distant background, the gateway of Evergreen Cemetery can be seen. It was not far from the Soldiers' Monument site. The photographs also reveal that the terrain had not been disturbed by the preparations for burials and is free from any impediments. There is a general rise of the land up to the location of the speakers' platform. No such photograph could have been made of an audience facing a stand located on the site where the Soldiers' Monument was to be erected.

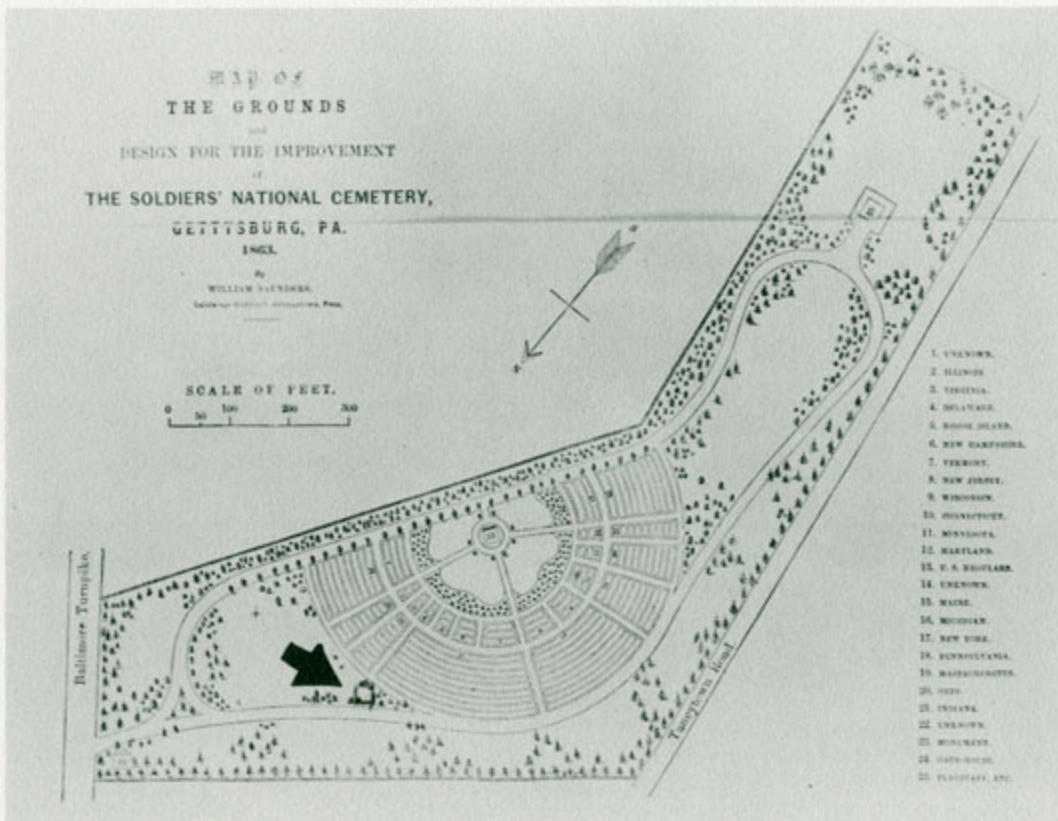
Perhaps the exact location of the speakers' platform never would have been known had it not been for the discovery of a marked map and a note of explanation by W. Yates Selleck, recorded in a second edition of the *Revised Report of the Select Committee of the Soldiers' National Cemetery*, published in 1865. This valuable book is now the property of the Lincoln National Life Foundation.



From the State Historical Society of Wisconsin

W. Yates Selleck

Secretary of the Soldiers' National Cemetery Commission at Gettysburg. (See LINCOLN LORE No. 1519, September, 1964, page 3)



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The small arrow points to the rectangle or square drawn on the map by W. Yates Selleck to indicate the location of the speakers' platform from which Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address.

This book bears the impressive autograph of "W. Yates Selleck" and it came to him with the "compliments of David Wills," the chairman of the cemetery commission.

With a pencil, Col. Selleck placed a rectangular mark on the map opposite page 152, thereby indicating the exact location of the speakers' stand. Then he appended to page 152 the following note in ink: "The stand on which President Lincoln stood in the National Cemetery at Gettysburg on November 19th, 1863 when he delivered his ever to be remembered address, was 12 ft. wide and 20 ft. long, and facing to the North West — It was located 40 ft. North East of the outer circle of Soldiers Graves as shown by pencil mark on the Cemetery Map in the book to which this memorandum is attached."

Fortunately, a cleared enclosure of about five acres, adjacent to where the speakers' platform was located and where the people congregated, was presented recently by the Bethlehem Steel Company to the National Park System. Perhaps this new acreage will someday be correctly designated by the Park Department as the area where thousands of Americans heard one of the greatest forensic declarations in the history of civilization.

Who was W. Yates Selleck? He was one of the last surviving members of the original commission in charge of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. For many years he resided in Milwaukee, but in later years he moved to Philadelphia. During the Civil War he was a military agent for the State of Wisconsin and was stationed at Washington, D. C. Two days after the battle, on July 6, 1863, Col. Selleck was on the field to look after wounded Wisconsin soldiers. On August 3, 1863, within one month after the battle, Governor Edward Solomon appointed him to represent Wisconsin at Gettysburg to work with David Wills and other state commissioners to establish a National Cemetery. As a cemetery commissioner, Selleck was again on the battlefield on August 8, 1863, planning with Wills and the other commissioners (representing in all, eighteen states that had lost soldiers in the battle) the establishment of the Soldiers' National Cemetery.

In the summer of 1907 Col. Selleck visited Milwaukee, and his reminiscences of the Gettysburg dedication ceremonies were published by *The Evening Wisconsin* on

February 6, 1909. Among other things, he stated that "The stand was near the outline of the semi-circle where the graves of the soldiers were placed, and faced the northwest where the crowd in attendance listened to what took place." Apparently, this statement was either overlooked by historians or they were reluctant to abandon the National Monument site which had so long been accepted as the spot where Lincoln delivered his famous oration.

Following Selleck's diagram, today's battlefield visitor can locate "the platform's location about 350 feet almost due north of the Soldiers' National Monument, and forty feet from a point in the outer circle of lots where Michigan and New York sections are separated by a path." Arriving at the precise spot it is easy to see that "with this arrangement, the soldiers' graves would be at the rear of the platform, thereby protecting the burial area from tres-

passers during the exercises." Col. Selleck should be considered a reliable witness as to the location of the speakers' stand as he was a marshal in the parade and was seated on the platform when Lincoln made the address.

Today, many students sincerely believe that Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, so far as world impact is concerned, is of greater significance than the three day battle which was so valiantly fought on both sides on July 1st, 2nd and 3rd of 1863. The Gettysburg National Military Park features battle sites properly marked, spots where heroes fell adequately memorialized, and graves of soldiers with headstones carefully inscribed. Considering the general pattern of the hallowed ground, would it not be appropriate to mark the precise location where the world renowned address was delivered, with a memorial in keeping with the significance of the event?

W. Y. Selleck,
2320 Thompson St.
Philadelphia, Pa.

The stand on which President Lincoln stood in the National Cemetery at Gettysburg on November 19th 1863 when he delivered his ever to be remembered address was 12 ft wide and 20 ft long and facing to the North West. It was located 40 ft North East of the outer circle of Soldiers Graves as shown by pencil mark on the Cemetery Map in the book to which this memorandum is attached.

From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

The note of explanation written in ink by W. Yates Selleck relative to the location of the speakers' platform and appended to page 152 (opposite the map) of the second edition of the *Revised Report of the Select Committee of the Soldiers National Cemetery, 1865.*