

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Schiller Byron Maupassant Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Kipling Doyle Willis  
Baum Henry Nietzsche Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Crane  
Leslie Stockton Vatsyayana Verne  
Burroughs Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Curtis Homer Tolstoy Darwin Thoreau Twain Plato  
Potter Zola Lawrence Stevenson Dickens Harte  
Kant Freud Jowett Andersen London Descartes Cervantes Burton Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving  
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse  
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# **Lincoln's Inaugurals, Addresses and Letters (Selections)**

Abraham Lincoln

# Imprint

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**LINCOLN'S INAUGURALS, ADDRESSES AND LETTERS  
(SELECTIONS)**

**EDITED**

**WITH AN INTRODUCTORY MEMOIR AND NOTES**



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**CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION**

**BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

**CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE—LINCOLN**

**INAUGURALS, ADDRESSES, AND LETTERS**

Address to the People of Sangamon County, March 9, 1832  
The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions, January 27, 1837  
Speech at Springfield, Illinois, June 16, 1858  
Second Joint Debate at Freeport, August 27, 1858  
The Cooper Institute Address, Monday, February 27, 1860  
Farewell Address at Springfield, Illinois, February 12, 1861  
Farewell Address at Springfield, Illinois, February 11, 1861  
Address in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, February 22, 1861  
First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861  
Response to Serenade, March 4, 1861  
Letter to Colonel Ellsworth's Parents, May 25, 1861  
Letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862  
Extract from the Second Annual Message to Congress, December 1,  
1862

The Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863  
Thanksgiving Proclamation, July 15, 1863  
Letter to J. C. Conkling, August 26, 1863  
Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863  
Letter to Mrs. Bixby, November 21, 1864  
Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865  
Last Public Address, April 11, 1865

APPENDIX. Autobiography, December 20, 1859

## NOTES

## INTRODUCTION

The facts of Lincoln's early life are best stated in his own words, communicated in 1859[see Appendix] to Mr. J. W. Fell, of Bloomington, Illinois. Unlike many men who have risen from humble surroundings, Lincoln never boasted of his wonderful struggle with poverty. His nature had no room for the false pride of a Mr. Bunkerby, even though the facts warranted the claim. Indeed, he seldom mentioned his early life at all. On one occasion he referred to it as "the short and simple annals of the poor." Lincoln himself did not in any way base his claims to public recognition upon the fact that he was born in a log cabin and that he had split rails in his youth, although, on the other hand, he was not ashamed of the facts. More, perhaps, than any other man of his time he believed and by his actions realized the truth of Burns' saying, "The man's the goud, for a' that." The real lesson to be drawn from Lincoln's life is that under any conditions real success is to be won by intelligent, unwavering effort, the degree of success being determined by the ability and character of the individual. Still less profitable is the attempt to contrast the success of Lincoln with that of Washington, or Jefferson or of any other American whose early circumstances were more favorable than Lincoln's. In each case success has been worthily won, and we Americans of the present generation should rejoice that our country has produced so many great men. True patriotism

does not consist in the recognition of only one type of Americanism, but rather in the grateful acceptance of every service that advances the fortunes and raises the reputation of the republic. Peculiar interest attaches to the character of Lincoln's early reading and especially to the small number of books that were accessible to him. In these days of cheap and plentiful literature it is hard for us to realize the conditions in pioneer Kentucky and Indiana, where half a dozen volumes formed a family library and even newspapers were few and far between. There was no room for mental dissipation, and the few precious volumes that could be obtained were read and re-read until their contents were fully mastered. When Sir Henry Irving was asked to prepare a list of the hundred best books he replied, "Before a hundred books, commend me to the reading of two, the Bible and Shakespeare." Fortunately these two classics came at an early age within the reach of Lincoln and the frequency with which he quotes from both at all periods of his career, both in his writings and in his conversation, shows that he had made good use of them. The boy Lincoln not only read books, he made copious extracts from them, often using a smooth shingle in the absence of paper and depending upon the uncertain light of the log fire in his father's cabin. Such use of books makes for intellectual growth, and much of Lincoln's later success as a writer can be referred back to this careful method of reading.

Lincoln's later reading shows considerable variety within certain limits. He himself once remarked that he liked "little sad songs." Among his special favorites in this class of poetry were "Ben Bolt," "The Lament of the Irish Emigrant," Holmes' "The Last Leaf," and Charles Mackay's "The Enquiry." The poem from which he most frequently quoted and which seems to have impressed him most was, "Oh, Why Should the Spirit of Mortal be Proud?" His own marked tendency to melancholy, which is reflected in his face, seemed to respond to appeals of this sort. Among his favorite poets besides Shakespeare were Burns, Longfellow, Hood, and Lowell. Many of the poems in his personal anthology were picked from the poets' corner of newspapers, and it was in this way that he became acquainted with Longfellow. Lincoln was especially fond of humorous writings, both in prose and verse, a taste that is closely connected with his lifelong fondness for funny stories. His favorite

humorous writer during the presidential period was Petroleum V. Nasby (David P. Locke), from whose letters he frequently read to more or less sympathetic listeners. It was eminently characteristic of Lincoln that the presentation to the Cabinet of the Emancipation Proclamation was prefaced by the reading of the latest Nasby letter.

Lincoln's statement in the Autobiography that he had picked up the little advance he had made upon his early education, or rather lack of education, is altogether too modest. It is known that after his term in Congress he studied and mastered geometry; and, like Washington, he early became a successful surveyor. His study of the law, too, was characteristically thorough, and his skill in debate, in which he had no superior, was the result of careful preparation. During the presidential period Lincoln gave evidence of critical ability that is little short of marvellous in a man whose schooling amounted to less than a year. In a letter to the actor Hackett and in several conversations he analyzed passages from "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and other plays with an insight and sympathy that have rarely been surpassed even by eminent literary critics.

At an early age Lincoln's interest was aroused in public speaking and he soon began to exercise himself in this direction and to attend meetings addressed by those skilled in the art of oratory. Many stories are told of his local reputation as a speaker and story-teller even before he moved to Illinois, much of his success then as in later life being due to the singular charm of his personality. Lincoln never overcame a certain awkwardness, almost uncouthness of appearance, and he never acquired the finer arts of oratory for which his rival Douglas was so conspicuous. But in spite of these physical difficulties he was acknowledged by Douglas to be the man whom he most feared in debate; and Lincoln was able to sway the critical, unfamiliar audience assembled in Cooper Union as readily as the ruder crowds gathered about the Illinois stump.

On the subject of Lincoln's religious belief, about which such varying opinions have been held, it is sufficient to state that, although he was not a member of any religious body, he had a firm conviction of the protecting power of Providence and the efficacy of special prayer. This latter characteristic seems to have been especially developed during the presidential period. Both in his proclamations

and in many private interviews and communications he expresses himself clearly and emphatically upon this subject. It is probable, too, that Lincoln read more deeply and more frequently in the Bible during the storm and stress of the Civil War than at any other period of his life. There seems to be no authority for the statement sometimes made that after the death of his son Willie, Lincoln showed a tendency to believe in the doctrines of spiritualism. He was not free, however, from a belief in the significance of dreams as portending important events. He was also not a little of a fatalist, as he himself once stated to his friend Arnold.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of Lincoln's personality apart from his honesty and sincerity was his perfect simplicity and naturalness. Frederick A. Douglass, the great leader of the colored race, once remarked that President Lincoln was the only white man that he had ever met who never suggested by his manner a sense of superiority. Not that Lincoln was lacking in personal dignity. Neither as a practising lawyer nor as President of the United States, would he permit anyone to take what he regarded as liberties with him. But, on the other hand, he did not allow his elevated position to change his personal relations. His old Illinois friends found in the White House the same cordial welcome and simple manners to which they had been accustomed in the pleasant home at Springfield.

During the first few weeks of the administration it was believed by many persons, including Mr. Seward himself, that President Lincoln would be greatly influenced in his policy by the superior experience in public affairs of his Secretary of State. Mr. Seward even went so far as to draw up a plan of action, which he submitted to his chief. Lincoln soon showed, however, that he was not a follower, but a leader of men, beneath whose good nature and kindly spirit was a power of initiative that has rarely been equalled among the statesmen of the world. Even the dictatorial Secretary of War found it necessary to yield to the President on all points that the latter regarded as being fundamental. Few other presidents have been so bitterly attacked and so cruelly misrepresented as Lincoln, but nothing could turn him from his purpose when that was once formed. Like the wise man that he was, Lincoln was always ready to listen to the suggestions of others, but the conclusion finally reached

by him was always his own. He applied to questions of state the same methods of careful, impartial inquiry that had served him so well as a lawyer on the Illinois circuit, and if, being human, he did not always avoid committing errors, he never acted from impulse or prejudice. Lincoln was a strong leader, but he was at the same time a wise leader.

Turning now from the man to his works, we note first that the development of Lincoln's style was slow. One might almost be tempted to say that Lincoln developed several different styles in succession. This, however, is hardly true, for in spite of the numerous marked changes and improvements in Lincoln's manner of writing, certain fundamental qualities remained, the real expression of his personality, that is, the real style of Lincoln. From the beginning to the end we find an effort to say something and to say it in as clear a manner as possible, an effort without which there can be no real success in writing. After a practice in public speaking of over thirty years Lincoln as President could still say: "I believe I shall never be old enough to speak without embarrassment when I have nothing to talk about."

The first specimen of Lincoln's writings that has been preserved is a communication to the voters of Sangamon County in 1832, when Lincoln was for the first time a candidate for the State legislature. It is significant of Lincoln's imperfect command of English at that time that "some of the grammatical errors" were corrected by a friend before the circular was issued. Although this circumstance makes it impossible for us to judge exactly what his style was at this period, we may be sure that the changes were comparatively slight and that the general form at least was Lincoln's. The question naturally arises whether there is anything in this first specimen of Lincoln's writing that suggests, however remotely, the Gettysburg Address and the Second Inaugural. A little study will discover suggestions at least of the later manner, just as in the uncouth and awkward young candidate for the Illinois State Legislature, we can note many traits, intellectual and moral, that distinguish the mature and well-poised statesman of thirty years later. It is the same man, but developed and strengthened, it is the same style, strengthened and refined. If

Nicolay and Hay go too far when they say of the address: "This is almost precisely the style of his later years," it would be quite as wrong to deny any likeness between the two. In the first place, we have the same severely logical treatment of the subject matter, from which Lincoln, a lawyer and public speaker, never departed. Lincoln's grammar may not have been impeccable at this time, but his thinking powers were already little short of masterly. This, then, is the first element in the makeup of Lincoln's style, the ability to think straight and consequently to write straight. His legal training, which was then very meagre, cannot account for his logical thinking; it is more correct to say that he later became a successful lawyer because of the logical bent of his mind.

Closely connected with this early development of the form of thinking was Lincoln's interest in words, and his desire always to use words with a perfect understanding of their meaning. Even in his boyhood he found pleasure in discovering the exact meaning of a new word and in later life he was constantly adding to his verbal stores. Shortly before his inauguration Lincoln remarked to a clergyman, who had asked him how he had acquired his remarkable power of "putting things": "I can say this, that among my earliest recollections I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand. I don't think I ever got angry at anything else in my life. But that always disturbed my temper, and has ever since. I can remember going to my little bedroom, after hearing the neighbors talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down, trying to make out what was the exact meaning of their, to me, dark sayings."

In this first address we find no loose use of words. The character of the address does not of course admit of ornament or figurative language, but any subject, however simple, admits of digressions and mental excursions by the illogical and careless writer. Of these there is not a trace. Even in the most informal letters and telegrams, written at post haste and at times under the most extreme pressure of business and anxiety, Lincoln shows a natural feeling for the appropriate expression that is found only in the masters of language.

Five years later, in 1837, the interval being represented by only a few unimportant letters, Lincoln entered upon a period distinguished by qualities that are not usually associated with his name, a tendency to fine writing that we should look for earlier than at the age of twenty-eight. The subject of the address is "The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions," and the complete text is given in this volume. Here for once Lincoln speaks of an Alexander, a Buonoparte, a Washington. The influence of Webster is apparent, in this first purely oratorical attempt of Lincoln's. It could hardly have been otherwise at a time when the great Whig orator was making the whole country ring with his wonderful speeches. It is almost certain, too, that Henry Clay, to whom Lincoln later referred as *beau ideal* of an orator, had a part in moulding this early manner, though this is probably less apparent here than in the later soberer addresses.

But it must not be supposed that this speech consists merely of what Hamlet would call "words, words, words." Neither are all the figures inferior and commonplace. Although it is more ornate than anything in the later period, the following description of the passing away of the heroes of the Revolution is a fine example of the Websterian style: "They were a forest of giant oaks; but the all-resistless hurricane has swept over them, and left only here and there a lonely trunk, despoiled of its verdure, shorn of its foliage, unshading and unshaded, to murmur in a few more ruder storms, then to sink and be no more." The closing sentence of the address is almost wholly, in the later style and might have served for the close of the First Inaugural, which, in its original form, did actually contain a Biblical quotation.

That the rhetorical manner had not gained entire possession of Lincoln at that time, but was simply used by him on what seemed to be appropriate occasions, is sufficiently shown by a speech delivered in the legislature early in 1839, in which we find the strictly logical discussion of the first address. This speech is especially interesting because of the fact that it is the earliest encounter of Lincoln and Douglas that has been preserved. In a way, therefore, it may be regarded as the first Lincoln-Douglas debate.

One other rhetorical effort was made, in 1842, and then we find no more specimens of this class of speaking until the so-called Lost Speech of 1856. This address of 1842 was delivered before the Springfield Washingtonian Temperance Society, on Washington's Birthday, and it is even more inflated than the first specimen. Combined with the rhetoric, however, there is a mass of sober argument that again suggests the later Lincoln. The arguments, too, are characterized by a sound common sense that is no less characteristic of the speaker. The peroration deserves quotation as being one of the finest and at the same time one of the least familiar passages in Lincoln's writings: "This is the one hundredth and tenth anniversary of the birthday of Washington. We are met to celebrate this day. Washington is the mightiest name of earth: long since mightiest in the cause of civil liberty, still mightiest in moral reformation. On that name a eulogy is expected. It cannot be. To add brightness to the sun or glory to the name of Washington is alike impossible. Let none attempt it. In solemn awe pronounce the name, and in its naked, deathless splendor leave it shining on." This approaches very closely the beauty and strength of the presidential period.

In 1844 Lincoln wrote several poems, which are not without merit. As a boy he was famous among his companions for his skill in writing humorous verses, but these later specimens of his muse are serious, even melancholy in their tone.

We next come to the congressional period, from 1847 to 1849. The best-known speech from this period, Lincoln's introduction to a national public, is that of July 27, 1848, on General Taylor and the veto, Taylor being then the Whig candidate for the presidency. This speech, which was received with immense applause, owes its special prominence to the fact that it is the only purely humorous speech by Lincoln that has been preserved. The subject of the attack is General Cass, Taylor's Democratic opponent, whom Lincoln treats in a manner that somewhat suggests Douglas' later treatment of Lincoln on the stump. Its peroration is of peculiar interest, since it consists of a funny story.

To anyone familiar with Lincoln's habit of story-telling the introduction of a story at the end of a speech may not seem strange. But, as a matter of fact, this is the only case of the kind that has been

noted, and a careful reading of the speeches shows either that they were not fully reported or that as a rule he confined his story-telling to conversation. Even in the debates with Douglas, when he was addressing Illinois crowds from the stump at a time when stories were even more popular than they are now, Lincoln seldom used this device to rouse interest or to strengthen his argument. A partial explanation of this curious contrast between his conversation and his writing, so far as the debates are concerned, may be found in a remark made by Lincoln to a friend who had urged him to treat the subject more popularly. Lincoln said; "The occasion is too serious, the issues are too grave. I do not seek applause, or to amuse the people, but to convince them." With Lincoln the desire to prove his proposition, whatever it might be, was always uppermost. In the earliest speeches were noted the severe logic and the strict adherence to the subject in hand. To the end Lincoln never changed this principle of his public speaking.

Although the stories, then, have but little direct bearing upon Lincoln's writings, they are so characteristic a feature of the man that they cannot be wholly disregarded. In the two cases already noted the stories were illustrative, and this appears to be true of all of Lincoln's anecdotes, whether they occur in his conversation or in his writings. He apparently never dragged in stories for their own sake, as so many conversational bores are in the habit of doing, but the story was suggested by or served to illustrate some incident or principle. Indeed, in aptness of illustration Lincoln has never been surpassed. Emerson said of him: "I am sure if this man had ruled in a period of less facility of printing, he would have become mythological in a very few years, like Aesop or Pilpay, or one of the Seven Wise Masters, by his fables and proverbs." Many of the anecdotes attributed to Lincoln are undoubtedly to be referred to other sources, but the number of authentic stories noted, especially during the presidency, is very large.

The question has often been raised whether Lincoln originated the stories he told so well. Fortunately we have his own words in this matter. To Noah Brooks he said: "I do generally remember a good story when I hear it, but I never did invent anything original. I am only a retail dealer." Slightly differing from this, though probably not contradicting it, is Lincoln's statement to Mr. Chauncey

M. Depew: "I have originated but two stories in my life, but I tell tolerably well other people's stories."

During the Civil War Lincoln's stories served a special purpose as a sort of safety valve. To a Congressman, who had remonstrated with him for his apparent frivolity in combining funny stories with serious discussion, he said: "If it were not for these stories I should die." The addresses of the presidential period, however, with the exception of a few responses to serenades, are entirely without humorous anecdotes. Although Lincoln never hesitated to clear the discussion of the most momentous questions through the medium of a funny story, his sense of official and literary propriety made him confine them to informal occasions.

The Eulogy of Henry Clay of 1852 is of interest as being the only address of this kind that Lincoln ever delivered. It might perhaps better be called an appreciation, and because of its sincerity and deep sympathy it may be regarded as a model of its kind. Two years later Lincoln engaged in his first real debate with Douglas on the burning question of the day, the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. From the purely literary point of view the Peoria Speech is superior to the better-known debates of four years later. While it lacks the finish and poise of the two Inaugurals it is far more imaginative than the Debates. One of its most striking features is the comparatively large number of quotations, both from the Bible and from profane writings. Although as a rule Lincoln quotes sparingly, this one speech contains no fewer than twelve quotations, seven of these being from the Bible. The only other speech that equals this one in the number of quotations is the so-called Lost Speech of 1856, the authenticity of which is doubtful. The very much shorter Second Inaugural, however, with its four Bible quotations, has a larger proportionate number. Lincoln's quotations seem to be suggested emotionally rather than intellectually. This is indicated by the fact that the most emotional speeches contain the greatest number of quotations. The first Inaugural, for example, which is in the main a sober statement of principles, intended to quiet rather than to excite passion, is four times as long as the emotional Second Inaugural, but contains only one quotation to the four of the other. We may note in this connection that almost exactly one-half of the total number of quotations occurring in Lincoln's writings are taken from the Bible,

and that a large proportion of the profane quotations are from Shakespeare. Lincoln was also fond of using proverbial sayings, a habit that emphasized his character as a popular or national writer. For most of his proverbs are local and many of them are intensely homely. Quotations of this class occur at all periods of his life, beginning with the first address, and they are sometimes used in such unexpected places as official telegrams to officers in the field. Strange to say, the maxim that is most frequently associated with Lincoln's name cannot with any certainty be regarded as having been used by him, either as a quotation or as an original saying, "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

At the first regular Republican State Convention in Illinois, held at Bloomington, May 29, 1856, Lincoln delivered an address on the public issues of the day that roused the enthusiasm of his hearers to such a degree that the reporters forgot to take notes and therefore failed to furnish the text to their respective newspapers. In the course of time it came to be known as the Lost Speech, and such, in the opinion of many who were present on the occasion, it continued to be. Mr. W. C. Whitney, a young lawyer from the neighboring town of Champaign, later prepared a version based upon notes, from which some general idea of the character of the speech can perhaps be gained.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates furnish perhaps the best example of this class of public speaking that is available. Although they were extempore, as far as the actual language is concerned, they have been preserved in full. In spite of the informal style appropriate to the "stump," these discussions of the Dred Scott decision, Popular Sovereignty, and the other questions suggested by slavery are marked by a closeness of reasoning and a readiness of retort that show the great master in the difficult art of debate. These qualities are not confined to the one speaker, for his opponent was no less adroit and ready. We may well say in this connection, "there were giants in those days."

Much of Lincoln's success in these historic debates was due to his intense conviction of the righteousness of the cause for which he was pleading. As lawyer and political speaker Lincoln always felt

the necessity of believing in his case. He frequently refused to appear in suits because he could not put his heart into them, and he never defended a policy from mere party loyalty. Much of Lincoln's success as a speaker was due to the fact that his hearers felt that they could trust him. This is simply a new application of the old principle that the chief qualification for success in oratory is character. In reading a man's books we may forget his character for the time, but in listening to an orator we have the man himself constantly before us, and he himself makes or mars his success.

In 1859 Lincoln delivered his second and last long occasional address—a discussion of agriculture at the Wisconsin State Fair at Milwaukee. This is the only important non-political speech by Lincoln that has been preserved and it is interesting as showing his ability to treat a subject of general interest. Here, as in his discussions of political questions, Lincoln displayed true statesmanlike insight and foresight, long before the time when experiment stations and farmers' institutes began to teach the very principles that he so wisely and effectively expounded.

In 1860 Lincoln appeared for the first time before a New York audience and we have his own word for it that he suffered a severe attack of stage fright on that occasion. The event showed, however, that he had no reason to fear the judgment of one of the most critical audiences that ever assembled in the Cooper Union. The Hon. Joseph H. Choate, who was present, writes of his appearance: "When he spoke he was transformed, his eye kindled, his voice rang, his face shone and seemed to light up the whole assembly. For an hour and a half he held his audience in the hollow of his hand." This address may be regarded as a precursor, and a worthy precursor, of the First Inaugural, and by many competent critics it has been given the first place among the discussions of the political situation just before the war. After such a performance there could be no hesitation on the part of those that heard it in acknowledging Abraham Lincoln as one of the most powerful speakers of his day. Before returning to Illinois Lincoln travelled through several of the New England States, making speeches in a number of the larger towns.

The speeches delivered by Lincoln on the journey to Washington, in 1860, beginning with the exquisite Farewell Address at Spring-