

# LINCOLN'S FIRST INAUGURAL

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ORIGINAL DRAFT  
AND  
ITS FINAL FORM

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"With *you* and not with *me*, is the solemn  
question 'Shall it be *Peace* or a *Sword*?' "

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## Foreword

In Nicolay and Hay's "Abraham Lincoln, A History," a complete statement of the changes made in "Mr. Lincoln's original draft" of his First Inaugural is given in the shape of footnotes showing what the changes consisted of and by whom they were suggested.

Nicolay and Hay had before them the original draft, the copy used by Mr. Seward, Mr. Seward's letters, and, of course, the final copy of the Address so that nothing new can be said with respect to the composition of the Inaugural.

The original draft was put in type shortly before Mr. Lincoln left for Washington by Mr. Bailhache, one of the proprietors of the *Illinois State Journal*—a friend to whom President Lincoln entrusted his manuscript. Only a few copies were printed and so far as known only one was allowed permanently to pass from Mr. Lincoln's possession: This one was the copy given by Mr. Lincoln to his friend, O. H. Browning, who accompanied Mr. Lincoln as far as Indianapolis on the journey to the Inauguration.

I recently acquired this original draft of the First Inaugural bearing Mr. Browning's autograph notations, and it seems to me proper to print this original draft, not accessible to students of Lincoln's life, with the First Inaugural as finally delivered, and with the notes given by Nicolay and Hay.

There is in the minds of some the impression that Seward's was the master mind in framing the First Inaugural and to such the reproduction of the original draft will be especially welcome and illuminating. While Secretary Seward, who was given a copy of the original draft the day Mr. Lincoln reached Washington, suggested a great many changes in verbiage and phraseology, the most important modification, according to Nicolay and Hay, was that suggested by Mr. Browning. Mr. Browning suggested but the one change; Mr. Lincoln himself, that is, without any outside suggestion, made fourteen changes; of the thirty-three changes suggested by Mr. Seward Nineteen were adopted, Eight were modified (and improved) by Mr. Lincoln, Six were not adopted.

To my mind Mr. Seward's most important suggestion was the substitution of "acquiesce" and "acquiescence" for "submit" and "submission" and, notwith-

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## LINCOLN'S FIRST INAUGURAL—*Foreword*

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standing the fact that the beauty of the closing sentence was suggested by Mr. Seward's memorandum, yet the ending of the original draft—

"You can forbear the assault upon it. (the Government) I cannot shrink from the defense of it. With you and not with me, is the solemn question of Shall it be peace or a sword"—it seems to me far surpassed in its majesty, truth and fearlessness—Seward's proposed ending.

It is also evident that many of the changes suggested by Mr. Seward would have been made by Mr. Lincoln without such suggestion. His original draft was written in Springfield, and in the following letter to Geo. D. Prentice, Editor of the *Louisville Journal*, he says that this original draft will be subject to revision and change up to the time of delivery.

PRIVATE

SPRINGFIELD, Ills., Feb. 2, 1861.

*My dear Sir:*

Yours of 31st ult. requesting a copy of the inaugural is received. I have the document blocked out; but in the now rapidly shifting scenes, I shall have to hold it subject to revision up to near the time of delivery. So soon as it shall take what I can regard as its final shape, I shall remember, if I can to send you a copy.

Yours very truly,

A. LINCOLN.

(Original of this letter is in my collection).

On his way to Washington Mr. Lincoln had an opportunity to get near to a great many people at the receptions where he listened to and made Addresses and one need but read his talk in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, and at Harrisburg, both delivered on February 22d, to know that there would be no harshness in the final Inaugural Address.

On the other hand, the reading of the original draft shows that Mr. Lincoln approached his Inauguration with no timidity, with no exaggerated attempt to conciliate or compromise and with firm confidence in the righteousness of his cause.

He realized the seriousness of the situation, faced the problem unflinchingly, putting it up to the malcontents to choose between "peace or a sword."

The original draft of the Inaugural given Mr. Browning bears this notation on the back:

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## LINCOLN'S FIRST INAUGURAL—*Foreword*

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"INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana, Tuesday, Feby. 12, 1861.

Having come this far with Hon. Abraham Lincoln, President elect, on his way to Washington, where he had requested me to accompany him, and being compelled to quit him here, and return to Springfield, Illinois, on important business, before we parted, being in his room at the Bates House, he took this copy of his inaugural address from a small carpet bag, and requested me to read it, and give him my candid opinion of it before we separated. I did so. It met my hearty approbation, and I so informed him. He permitted me to retain this copy, and after now re-reading it more calmly, I think it a most admirable document.

O. H. BROWNING.

Springfield, Feby. 15, 1861."

And on page 3 it has the following notation by Browning:

SPRINGFIELD, Illinois, Feby. 17, 1861.

To-day I wrote to Mr. Lincoln suggesting that for the purpose of avoiding everything of an irritating chara(c)ter, he had better modify the above passage so as to make it read

"All the power at my disposal will be used to hold,  
"occupy and possess the property and places belonging  
"to the government, and to collect the duties on imposts,  
etc."

As it now stands it will be construed into a threat and will be irritating.

The document consists of 7 pages, 36 lines to the page, except the last, which has 40 lines. It is double leaded with wide margins and printed on one side of sheets only.

The Librarian of Congress writes me they have no copy of the original draft, only the final form, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 1, which I have reprinted as the official and final form of the Inaugural.

JUDD STEWART.

Feb. 12th, 1920.