

Assassination of James Garfield
Handout

The focus will be on the following people:

1. Garfield, the President who was to be assassinated. Raised in desperate circumstances. Started as a janitor. Became President of Western Reserve Eclectic Institute. Hero of the Battle of Middle Creek (1862). Appointed State Senator in 1859. A strong abolitionist.
2. Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone for the deaf who was to startle the populace at the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1876.
3. Dr. Joseph Lister, who was inventing and promoting the antiseptic view that this would affect seriously the health of the patient. In England, Lister had been forced to defend his theory but by 1876 his theory was accepted throughout Europe.
4. That was not true in the U.S. For example, Dr. Samuel Gross, the President of the Medical Congress and arguably the most famous surgeon in the country, regarded antiseptic during surgery very dangerous.
5. Dr. Frank Hamilton, a highly regarded surgeon from New York, heard Lister speak but preferred to use methods that were quite different from antiseptic. He called it "open air treatment". No dressings are ever employed but the wound is left open to the air. He also secondarily recommended soaking the dressing in warm water and applying it to the open wound.
6. We should also mention Charles Guiteau, one of the passengers in 1880 on a steamship which crashed in Long Island Sound. Amazingly, he survived. He had failed in almost everything he tried- from law to ministry and even a free love commune. He had been thrown in jail, his wife had left him, and his family had tried to institutionalize him. But Guiteau felt he was a man of great promise with a glorious future in the offering.

Election of 1876 –

Reconstruction no longer in vogue either in the North or South.

Final days of Grant Administration painful. Bad fall for Grant and bankruptcy of son's investment firm. Grant and Ward liberal Republican split. Vanderbilt grant of funds to Grant (1884).

Close election – Hayes v. Tilden. Grant off on what became 2 ½ year road trip round the world. Grant established as hero.

Republican Convention in Chicago in 1880

The Stalwarts (the spoils system) – led by Conkling and Grant – and the Half-Breeds, the Reformers led by James Blaine and John Sherman, General Sherman's younger brother.

Garfield's great speech turns the convention for him.

34 ballots – Garfield wins.

Garfield's inaugural address

Guiteau presses Blaine, the Secretary of State, for Paris Consularship. Blaine fends him off.

Garfield and Blaine go to Potomac Station. Will wait 10 minutes.

Guiteau shoots Garfield in arm and second shot in back.

Dr. Bliss takes control – Isolates the Problem.

Problem of where is the bullet?

Doctors Agnew and Hamilton openly question the value of antiseptics.

July 30 – Bell tries to find the bullet– only moderate success. Bell looking at wrong side - one month later his indication balance worked. Bell's son dies in Boston and Bell leaves.

September 19 – Garfield dies. He might have lived if the doctors had done nothing.

Insanity Defense

1859 – Sickles not guilty because of temporary insanity in shooting of Francis Barton Key – Key's son.

1873 – Edward Stokes hero murdered Fisk. Jay Gould's partners – used some deference and spent only four years in prison.

Oct. 14 – Guiteau pleads insanity.

Nov. 14 – 11 white jurors – one black.

Guiteau rambles at trial. Was on the stand for a week. 36 experts would testify against him.

Trial ended Jan. 26, 1882. One hour later jury gives guilty verdict.

June 30, 1882 – Molly, Garfield's daughter, married John Stanley Brown.

Bell would live until 75 – Passionately interested in teaching the deaf. Stayed with Mabel, his wife. Death of Bell's son inspired Bell to develop the equivalent of the iron lung.

1886 – Helen Keller brought to see Bell. Meeting: “The door through which I should pass from darkness to light.” Dedicates her autobiography to Bell.

Joseph Lister lived until 84 – Honored – recognized by U.S. Ambassador. “It is with humility and covered head we salute you.”

1884 – Blaine tries for Presidency again, against Grover Cleveland.

Blaine: “Burn this letter.”

Cleveland: “Ma, Ma, where’s my Pa? Gone to the White House Ha, Ha, Ma”.

Cleveland marries his ward, a Wells girl.