

## *Did You Know...*

*... a one-time Chagrin Falls resident treated President Garfield after he was shot?*



**James Abram Garfield was the 20th President of the United States, serving from March 4, 1881, until his assassination on July 2, 1881**



**Charles Guiteau**

Charles Guiteau had hoped to gain federal office by supporting what he expected to be the winning Republican ticket. Guiteau, who considered himself a Stalwart, thought that his small contribution to Garfield's victory justified him a consul position in Paris, despite the fact he spoke no French, nor any foreign language.

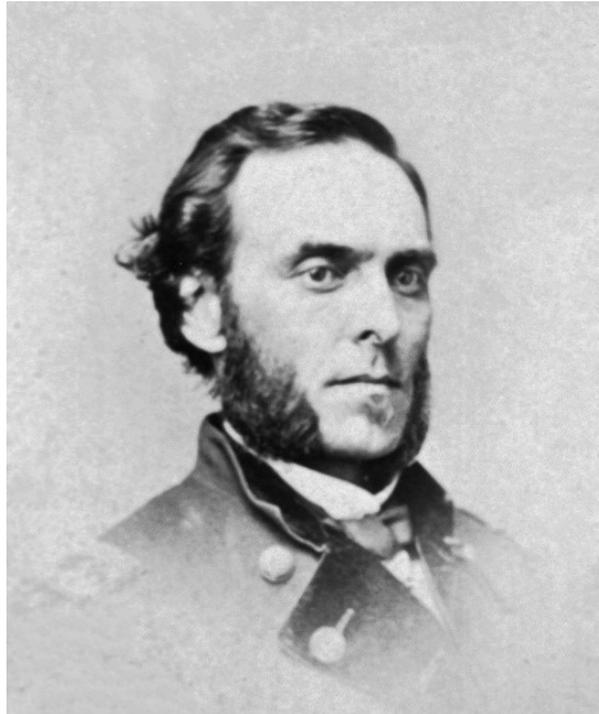
Guiteau came to believe he had lost the position because he was a Stalwart. The office-seeker decided that the only way to end the bickering in the Republican Party was for Garfield to die—though he had nothing personal against the president. Arthur's succession would restore peace, and lead to rewards for fellow Stalwarts, including Guiteau.

The assassination of President Lincoln was considered a fluke due to the Civil War, and Garfield, like most people, saw no reason why the president should be guarded; Garfield's movements and plans were often printed in the newspapers. Guiteau knew the president would leave Washington on July 2, and made plans to kill him before then. He purchased a gun he thought would look good in a museum, and followed Garfield several times, but each time his plans were frustrated, or he lost his nerve. His opportunities dwindled to one—Garfield's departure by train for Massachusetts on the morning of July 2, 1881.

Guiteau concealed himself by the ladies' waiting room at the 6th Street station of the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad where Garfield was scheduled to depart. Garfield was deep in conversation and did not notice Guiteau before he took out his revolver and shot Garfield twice, once in the back and once in the arm. The assassin attempted to leave the station, but was quickly captured.

Among those at the station was Robert Todd Lincoln. Garfield was taken on a mattress upstairs to a private office, where several doctors examined him, probing the wound with unwashed fingers. At his request, Garfield was taken back to the White House, and his wife, then in New Jersey, was sent for.

The physician who took charge at the depot and then at the White House was Dr. Doctor Willard Bliss (yes his first name was Doctor).



**Dr. Doctor Willard Bliss**

Dr. Bliss was born in Brutus, New York to Obediah Bliss (1792–1863) and Marilla Pool (1795–1857).

Bliss's first and middle names (Doctor and Willard) were inspired by Dr Samuel Willard, a surgeon from New England. During his youth, the Bliss family lived in Savoy, Massachusetts. Dr. Bliss was the third child of six born to Obediah and Marilla. His five siblings were:

- James Newton Bliss (1815-1859)
- Milton Bliss (1822-1878)
- Marana Bliss Burroughs(1829-1870)
- Zenes Bliss(1832-1877)
- Sarepta Bliss Wenham (1835-1914)

Dr. Bliss treated Zachary Taylor for malaria at Fort Jesup, Louisiana in 1844. Dr. Bliss studied at Cleveland Medical College, graduating in 1849. It was during this time that he lived in Chagrin Falls. He owned the mill on Solon road where River Run park is today until 1853 with his brother Milton..

He married Sophia Prentiss (1825-1888) in May of 1849. They had four children:

- Elliss Baker (born April 25, 1850), a dentist;
- Clara Bliss Hinds, a medical practitioner;
- Willie Prentiss (born February 1854, died August 17, 1856 "by an accident")
- Eugenie Prentiss (born August 10, 1855)

Sophia died in January 1888 in Washington D.C.; Dr. Bliss died in the same city on February 21, 1889. His death was attributed to heart failure or apoplexy.

A noted physician and surgeon, Dr. Bliss was an old friend of Garfield, and took over the treatment of President Garfield, leading as many as a dozen doctors. Dr. Bliss and others were soon probing the wound with un-sterilized fingers and instruments, which was common at the time. According to some historians and medical experts, Garfield might have survived his wounds had Dr. Bliss and others attending him had at their disposal today's medical research, techniques, and equipment. Historians agree that massive infection was a significant factor in President Garfield's demise.

Garfield was given morphine for the pain. Over the next few days, Garfield made some improvement, as the nation viewed the news from the capital and prayed. Although he never stood again, he was able to sit up and write several times, and his recovery was viewed so positively that a steamer was fitted out as a seagoing hospital to aid with his convalescence. He was nourished on oatmeal (which he detested) and milk from a cow on the White House lawn. Alexander Graham Bell tried to locate the bullet with a primitive metal detector but was unsuccessful. One means of keeping the president comfortable in Washington's summer heat was one of the first successful air conditioning units: air that was propelled by fans over ice and then dried had reduced the temperature in the sickroom by 20 degrees Fahrenheit (11 degrees Celsius).

Beginning on July 23, Garfield took a turn for the worse. His temperature increased to 104 °F. Doctors, concerned by a pus sac that had developed by the wound, operated and inserted a drainage tube. This initially seemed to help, and Garfield was able to hold a brief cabinet meeting on July 29. Doctors probed the sac, which went into Garfield's body, hoping to find the bullet but they most likely only made the infections worse. By the end of the month, the president was much more feeble than he had been, and his weight had decreased to 130 pounds.

Garfield had long been anxious to escape hot, unhealthy Washington, and in early September the doctors agreed to move him to Elberon, where his wife had recovered earlier in the summer. He left the White House for the last time on September 5, traveling in a specially cushioned

railway car; a spur line to the Franklyn Cottage, a seaside mansion given over to his use, was built in a night by volunteers. There, Garfield could see the ocean as officials and reporters maintained what became (after an initial rally) a death watch

On September 19th, Garfield, suffering from pneumonia and heart pains, marveled that he could not pick up a glass despite feeling well, and went to sleep without discomfort. He awoke that evening around 10:15 pm with great pain in his chest. The attendant watching him sent for Bliss, who found him unconscious. Despite efforts to revive him, Garfield never awoke, and died at 10:35 PM that evening.

Guiteau was indicted on October 14, 1881, for the murder of the President. In a chaotic trial in which Guiteau often interrupted and argued, and in which his counsel used the insanity defense, the jury found him guilty on January 5, 1882, and he was sentenced to death by hanging. He was executed on June 30, 1882.