



Was Abraham Lincoln our most outstanding President ever? Most agree that his greatest accomplishment was holding the Union together through the dark days of the Civil War. Bringing the eleven seceded states back into the Union was an overpowering task in itself, but Lincoln had to complete it under incredibly harrowing conditions. As one historian has written, *“Imagine a captain in a hurricane whose ship, nearly broken in half, is being blown rapidly onto the rocks. Below in the cabin his beloved son lies dead and his wife is having hysterics. On deck, nearly half of the crew is firing mutinous shots, the rest of the crew is firing back; many of the passengers are screaming contradictory orders; others are demanding a new captain or conspiring to take his place; while still others are below trying to scuttle the ship.”* Yet, Lincoln weathered the storm and came safely to port *“past the shoals of secession and emancipation and the rocks of Copperheadism and disunion.”* Still the criticisms of Lincoln, especially by his contemporaries, were some of the harshest of a sitting President.

In order to answer the question about the Lincoln Presidency, historians use subjective polling such as the 1948 Schlesinger Poll. The poll created five categories (Great, Near Great, Average, Below Average and Failure). Fifty-five “experts” were solicited. Six presidents were labeled as Great, with Lincoln first, followed by George Washington, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson. In 1962 a second Schlesinger Poll appeared, this time with seventy-five “experts” participating. The results of the poll were exactly the same for the Greats, except that No. 6, Andrew Jackson, still No. 6, had dropped to the Near Great category.

In 1976 another survey was held among 100 College History Department Chairmen. They were asked to name the Ten Greatest Presidents. Lincoln again led the list, interestingly collecting all 100 votes. Washington was second with 84, followed by F.D. Roosevelt (81), Teddy Roosevelt (79), Jefferson (78), Wilson (74), Jackson (73), Harry Truman (64), James K. Polk (38), and John Adams (35). Eighteen other presidents received votes from Lyndon Johnson (24) to seven others with at least one vote each. In another poll taken in 1983, 846 historians again rated the presidents with almost the same results. Only four were ranked as Great: Lincoln was number one, followed by Franklin Roosevelt, Washington, and Jefferson. In another poll conducted in the late-1990s by C-SPAN, 58 historians participated and were asked to name the best president to the worst without categorizing them. The top five were Lincoln, followed by Franklin Roosevelt, Washington, Teddy Roosevelt, and Harry Truman down to the bottom (James Buchanan).

It appears safe to say that Abraham Lincoln, at least in the minds of historians and scholars, heads the list as THE most outstanding president in our history. He conceivably will remain with that honor throughout our history. This month—**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22**—the Michigan Regimental welcomes **Dan Packer**, whose presentation is entitled *“Lincoln’s Connections with Women, Indians, and Michigan.”* Currently the curator of the Plymouth Historical Museum, Dan will base his program on the material gained from the collection of Dr. Weldon Petz, as well as “incorporating material from Weldon’s new books, *Michigan Remembers Lincoln* and *Seeking Lincoln in Michigan: A Remembrance Trail*. Dan says he hopes to “share some insights into Lincoln’s background that are not generally known.” Mark the date on your calendar....

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The MRRT sends out a special Thank You to last month’s speaker, **Tom Nanzig**, for his exemplary program, *“Civil War Monuments of Washington D.C.: Up Close and Personal.”* Always an engaging performer, Tom’s excellent slides and little-known stories highlighted an exceptional evening.

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The **50th ANNIVERSARY COMMITTEE** will again be in session at 5:30 P.M. before the regular meeting commences at 6:30. This meeting will be of significance as we close in on our May celebration. Tickets for the dinner and all-day affair on Saturday, May 15 can be purchased from Ron Cleveland for a check of merely \$35.



QUIZ: Lincoln quotes in letters and telegrams....To whom did he make these statements?

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| <p>___1. Sen. Lyman Trumbull
(10 December 1860)</p> <p>___2. Oliver Otis Howard
(21 July 1863)</p> <p>___3. Sec. of War Edwin Stanton
(5 February 1864)</p> <p>___4. Ulysses S. Grant
(March 1864)</p> <p>___5. Horace Greeley of <i>N.Y. Tribune</i>
(22 August 1862)</p> <p>___6. Albert G. Hodges, editor of
<i>Frankfort Commonwealth</i>
(4 April 1864)</p> <p>___7. Brig. Gen. Carl Schurz
(24 November 1862)</p> <p>___8. Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker
(5 June 1863)</p> <p>___9. Sec. of State William Seward
(28 June 1862)</p> <p>___10. Alexander H. Stephens
(22 December 1860)</p> | <p>A) "I feel better, for now I'm like the man who was blown up in a steamboat explosion and said on coming down, 'It makes no difference to me—I'm only a passenger.' "</p> <p>B) "You think slavery is right and should be extended; while we think slavery is wrong and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub. It certainly is the only substantial difference between us."</p> <p>C) "I certainly know that if the war fails the administration fails, and that I will be blamed for it....And I ought to be blamed, if I could do better. You think I could do better; therefore you blame me already; I think I could not do better; therefore I blame you for blaming me."</p> <p>D) "Let there be no more compromise on the question of extending slavery. If there is, all our labor is lost, and ere long, must be done again."</p> <p>E) "I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsakes me."</p> <p>F) "On principle I dislike an oath which requires a man to swear he <i>has</i> not done wrong. It rejects the Christian principle of forgiveness on terms of repentance. I think it is enough if the man does no wrong <i>hereafter</i>."</p> <p>G) "I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong."</p> <p>H) "I am deeply mortified by the escape of Lee across the Potomac, because the substantial destruction of his army would have ended the war."</p> <p>I) "I would not take any risk of being entangled upon the river, like an ox jumped half over a fence, and liable to be torn by dogs, front and rear, without a fair chance to gore one way or kick the other."</p> <p>J) "My paramount object in this struggle <i>is</i> to save the Union, and it is <i>not</i> either to save or to destroy slavery."</p> |
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James Abram Garfield, twentieth President of the U.S., was born on a pioneer farm in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, on November 19, 1831. Rendered fatherless as an infant, his early life was marked by deprivation, unceasing toil, and the ambition to obtain an education and better himself. He graduated from Williams College in 1856, served as a schoolmaster, and in 1859 was elected to the Ohio senate as a Republican and ardent free-soiler. When the Civil War broke out, he aided in the recruitment of the 42nd Ohio Infantry and later was promoted to colonel. Within a year Garfield was raised to the rank of brigadier general of volunteers and then became chief of staff to William S. Rosecrans. He was promoted to major general but poor health and a penchant for politics led him to Washington D.C. where he would serve nine terms in the House. Finally, in 1880 he was elected President by defeating Winfield Scott Hancock.

Four months after his inauguration, on July 2, 1881, Garfield was mortally wounded in a Washington railroad depot. His assassin was 39-year-old Charles Guiteau who had been stalking the President for weeks. Guiteau's weapon of choice was a .44 British Bulldog revolver, a relatively expensive pistol he had picked out especially for the assassination because he thought it would look attractive in a museum. At 9:30 that morning Guiteau fired into Garfield's back from less than a yard away. Guiteau then took two steps forward and fired once more as the president was half twisting and half falling. Garfield lay in a pool of vomit, bathed in sweat, with a faint, irregular pulse. Guiteau was immediately arrested while a



physician, Dr. Smith Townshend, attended to the president. One bullet had merely grazed his arm while the other had entered about four inches to the right of the spine, fractured the eleventh rib, and went into his body near the pancreas.

Taken to the White House Garfield was placed under the care of Dr. D.W. Bliss and a team of surgeons. Morphine was administered and various doctors probed the wound with their fingers but could not locate the bullet. Dr. Bliss also used a heavy Nelaton Probe without success. This instrument was introduced into the wound and turned slowly, probing to the point of least resistance, which, the doctor hoped, would be the bullet track. Unfortunately, the probe suddenly slipped downward and forward three and a half inches and did not follow the course of the bullet. The instrument did, however, become stuck in the shattered fragments of Garfield's rib and was only removed with a great deal of difficulty, causing the president excruciating pain. Garfield received constant attention: he was shifted in bed fifteen to twenty times a day to prevent bedsores, his numb feet were rubbed, and he was fed and cleaned.

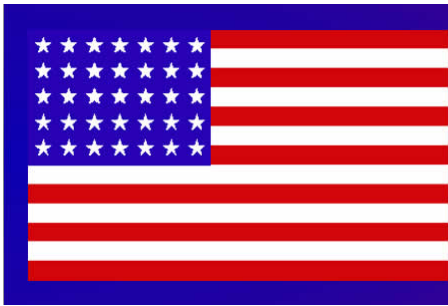
Daily bulletins on the president's condition worried the American people as the ordeal dragged on for weeks. One citizen, Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone, had a brainstorm. With one of his telephone receivers, he rigged up an electrical induction system, which, when brought into close proximity to a metal object, such as a bullet, created a slight disturbance in the balance of the circuit and sounded a faint hum in the telephone receiver. While Bell stood behind the bed with the telephone receiver to his ear, an assistant slowly moved the coils around Garfield's abdomen and back. When the coils moved across a black-and-blue spot, Bell heard the desired hum. The experiment was repeated several times, but Bell informed the doctors that the bullet was deeper than anticipated. The doctors decided that an operation to remove the bullet would be too hazardous. On into August and September the president lingered. On September 6 Garfield was taken to a cottage in Elberston, New Jersey. The journey by train of over two hundred miles lasted seven hours further weakening the president. Garfield finally died on September 17, 1881, eleven weeks after the fatal wounding.

According to some medical historians, Garfield probably would have lived had he simply been left alone. What killed him, they say was not the bullet, which became wrapped in a protective cyst, but infections caused by unsterile instruments and hands. And the bullet? In the autopsy it was located a full ten inches from where the doctors and Alexander Graham Bell had said it was. Bell's contraption had no more accuracy than a divining rod. But Bell's invention was not a total failure. Later, in a more elaborate form, it worked—for the army in the detection of land mines.

As for the assassin, Charles Guiteau, he wrote on the morning of the fatal shooting, "*The President's tragic death was a sad necessity, but it will unite the Republican party and save the Republic....I had no ill-will toward the president.*" On the day Garfield died, Guiteau wrote to the new president, Chester A. Arthur, "Never think of Garfield's removal as murder. It was an act of God, resulting from a political necessity for which he was responsible." He then proceeded to advise Arthur on the selection of a new cabinet. At his trial Guiteau pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity. The jury deliberated only an hour. On June 30, 1882, Guiteau climbed the scaffold and sang a hymn he had composed for the occasion, which began, "*I am going to the Lordy, I am so glad.*" He soon swung to his death.

QUIZ ANSWERS:

1. D—Lyman Trumbull
2. H—Oliver Otis Howard
3. F—Edwin Stanton
4. A—Ulysses S. Grant
5. J—Horace Greeley
6. G—Albert G. Hodges
7. C—Carl Schurz
8. I—Joseph Hooker
9. E—William Seward
10. B—Alexander H. Stephens



Make sure you plan on joining us for the second month of our 50th Year. The date is **MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22**—with guest speaker **Dan Packer** presenting “*Lincoln’s Connections with Women, Indians and Michigan.*” The meeting will begin at 6:30 P.M. at the Farmington Public Library (Grand River and Farmington Road). See you there..... Also try our website: <http://www.farmlib.org/mrrt/>.