

The Assassination of President William McKinley



Both William McKinley and his assassin, Leon Czolgosz, were Ohioans, the former born in Niles, the latter in Detroit before living on the family farm in Warrensville. It was on September 6, 1901, at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York that Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist whose family once resided in Cleveland's Warszawa neighborhood, assassinated President William McKinley at the Temple of

Music. This program will detail the events which brought these two men together in so tragic an event in this time of transition of the country from a 19th century agricultural nation to a 20th century industrial powerhouse. The America of 110 years ago bears a striking resemblance to the America of today. As then, we now seem to be in the throes of a new economic upheaval punctuated by high unemployment, labor uncertainty and the diminishing of the middle class. More wealth concentrates at the hands of the few while the unionized voice of the laboring masses is ignored and deemed irrelevant to today's economy.

A quote from the Sunday, July 31st edition of The Plain Dealer strikes at the heart of current disenchantment: "And where does this growing exasperation with the country's political leaders prevail? Everywhere. The sense of disenchantment and frustration has settled into the solar plexus of everyday people from Washington to Westminster, from Tahir Square to Topeka, Kansas.

"We may just be living through one of those stages of history when the people start dismantling an old era and begin the construction of a new one.

"We won't know for some time whether new ideas and ways succeed in overtaking the old, but it is clear that a global political crisis is under way. The spectacle of debt talks in Washington, the hacking scandal in Britain and the popular uprisings in the Arab world may seem unrelated, but beneath each of them lies a sense of rage at governments that cannot be trusted."

In his time, Leon Czolgosz, influenced by popular socialists of the day, directed his mounting

disgust of perceived injustice of the common man at the President of the United States.

Leon Czolgosz

Born in 1873 in Alpena, Michigan, Leon Czolgosz was one of seven children of poor Russian-Polish immigrants. In 1881, the family moved to a small farm near Cleveland. At the age of ten he left home to work at the American Steel and Wire Company with two of his brothers. After the workers of his factory went on strike, he and his brothers were fired. Czolgosz then returned to the family farm in Warrensville. At the age of sixteen, he was sent to work in a glass factory in Pennsylvania for two years before returning home.



An introverted young man, Czolgosz had never shown any interest in friendship or romantic relationships, and was bullied by his peers throughout childhood. He became a recluse and spent much of his time alone reading Socialist and anarchist newspapers while drinking milk in his mother's attic. He rejected his parents' Roman Catholic beliefs and became interested in the plight of the working man. Czolgosz believed there was a great injustice in American society, an inequality which allowed the wealthy to enrich themselves by exploiting the poor. He concluded that the reason for this was the structure of government itself.

When anarchist Gaetano Bresci assassinated King Umberto I of Italy in 1900, he collected the newspaper articles, reading them over and over. Bresci told the press that he had decided to take matters into his own hands for the sake of the common man. The assassination shocked and galvanized the American anarchist movement, and Czolgosz is thought to have consciously imitated Bresci.

In May 1901, he traveled to Cleveland to hear famed anarchist Emma Goldman speak. The two talked briefly, and he met her again a few months later after her speech in Chicago. Other anarchists were suspicious of him, and some even thought he was a government spy on their organization. While in Chicago, he read that President William McKinley would visit the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York.

On August 31, 1901, Czolgosz moved to Buffalo, New York. There, he rented a room near the site of the Pan-American Exposition.



On September 6 he went to the exposition with a .32 caliber Iver-Johnson "Safety Automatic" revolver (serial #463344) he claimed he had purchased on September 2 for \$4.50. With the gun wrapped in a handkerchief in his pocket, Czolgosz approached McKinley's procession, the President having been standing in a receiving line inside of the Temple of Music, greeting the public for 10 minutes. At 4:07 p.m. Czolgosz reached the

front of the line. McKinley extended his hand; Czolgosz slapped it aside and shot him in the abdomen twice at point blank range.

Emma Goldman



Emma Goldman was an anarchist known for her political activism, writing and speeches. She played a pivotal role in the development of anarchist political philosophy in North America and Europe in the first half of the twentieth century.

Goldman emigrated to the US in 1885 and lived in New York City, where she joined the burgeoning anarchist movement. Attracted to anarchism after the Haymarket affair, Goldman became a writer and a renowned lecturer on anarchist philosophy, women's rights, and social issues, attracting crowds of thousands. She and anarchist writer Alexander

Berkman, her lover and lifelong friend, planned to assassinate industrialist and financier Henry Clay Frick as an act of propaganda of the deed. Although Frick survived the attempt on his life, Berkman was sentenced to twenty-two years in prison. Goldman was imprisoned several times in the years that followed, for "inciting to riot" and illegally distributing information about birth control. In 1906, Goldman founded the anarchist journal Mother Earth.

Following Czolgosz's assassination of McKinley, Emma Goldman was arrested on suspicion of being involved in the assassination, but was released, due to insufficient evidence. She later incurred a great deal of negative publicity when she published "The Tragedy at Buffalo". In the article, she compared Czolgosz to Marcus Junius Brutus, the killer of Julius Caesar, and called McKinley the "president of the money kings and trust magnates." Other anarchists and radicals were unwilling to support Goldman's effort to aid Czolgosz, believing that he had harmed the movement.

In 1917, Goldman and Berkman were sentenced to two years in jail for conspiring to "induce persons not to register" for the newly instated draft. After their release from prison, they were arrested along with hundreds of others and deported to Russia. Initially supportive of that country's Bolshevik revolution, Goldman quickly voiced her opposition to the Soviet use of violence and the repression of independent voices. In 1923, she wrote a book about her experiences, *My Disillusionment in Russia*. While living in England, Canada, and France, she wrote an autobiography called *Living My Life*. After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, she traveled to Spain to support the anarchist revolution there.



During her life, Goldman was lionized as a free-thinking "rebel woman" by admirers, and derided by critics as an advocate of politically motivated murder and violent revolution. Her writing and lectures spanned a wide variety of issues, including prisons, atheism, freedom of speech, militarism, capitalism, marriage, free love, and homosexuality. Although she distanced herself from first-wave feminism and its efforts toward women's suffrage, she developed new ways of incorporating gender politics into anarchism. After decades of obscurity, Goldman's iconic status was revived in the 1970s, when feminist and anarchist scholars rekindled popular interest in her life.

She died at age 70 in Toronto on May 14, 1940.

William McKinley

Elected Governor of Ohio in 1891, William McKinley presided over the last years of the largely agrarian 19th century and then again as first President of the burgeoning industrial 20th century.



The Panic of 1893, one of America's most devastating economic collapses, restored Ohio Governor McKinley's stature in national politics. McKinley dominated the political scene at the opening of the 1896 Republican presidential nominating convention held in St. Louis. His commitment to protectionism as a solution to unemployment and his popularity in the Republican Party as well as the behind-the-scenes political management of his chief political supporter, affluent

businessman Marcus Hanna of Ohio, gave McKinley the nomination on the first ballot.

The Republican platform endorsed protective tariffs and the gold standard while leaving open the door to an international agreement on bimetallism, which is pegging the value of the dollar to the dual value of gold and silver. It also supported the acquisition of Hawaii, construction of a canal across Central America, expansion of the Navy, restrictions on the acceptance of illiterate immigrants into the country, equal pay for equal work for women, and a national board of arbitration to settle labor disputes.

The Democrats, meeting in Chicago, rallied behind William Jennings Bryan, a former congressman from Nebraska. A superb speaker, Bryan stirred Democrats with his stinging attack on the gold standard and his defense of bimetallism and free silver. He won the nomination on the fifth ballot. The Democrats pegged their hopes for victory on their opposition to (1) the protective tariff, (2) the immigration of foreign "pauper labor," and (3) the use of injunctions to end strikes. They also supported a federal income tax, a stronger Interstate Commerce Commission, statehood for the western states (Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona), and the anti-Spanish revolutionaries in Cuba, who were also supported by the Republicans.

Faced with the loss of the Solid South and the Far West, owing to the silver issue, the Republicans raised a staggering \$4 million for the campaign. A majority of the contributions came from business, particularly protectionist manufacturers who supported high tariffs and bankers who wanted to maintain sound money policies. Most of these funds went into the printing and distribution of 200 million pamphlets. McKinley, following the tradition of previous candidates who campaigned for President from their homes, delivered 350 carefully crafted speeches from his front porch in Canton to 750,000 visiting delegates. Some 1,400 party speakers stumped the nation, painting Bryan as a radical, a demagogue, and a socialist.

Republican speakers de-emphasized their party's stand on bimetallism and instead championed a protective tariff that promised full employment and industrial growth.

With the advent of the movie camera, one-reelers were being screened in nickelodeons. In September Mark Hanna invited American Mutoscope founder W. K. L. Dickson and camera operator, Bill Bitzer, to Canton to stage and document a re-enactment of McKinley receiving the news of his nomination

earlier in the summer. Bitzer set his camera in the front yard facing the front porch and started cranking as McKinley and his secretary walked towards the lens.

McKinley pauses and puts on his hat and dons his spectacles. He squints down at a piece of paper then doffs his hat and mops his brow. The two men then walk out of the view of the camera. Thus William McKinley had become the first presidential candidate to appear on film.

Dickson premiered the film the evening of October 12, 1896, in New York City. At the sight of Major McKinley's image, the crowd burst into shouts and applause. Now a man who would be president, who wanted them in some way to know and trust him, was coming to them, looking at them, walking past them, through this mysterious medium. Screened repeatedly in New York, Baltimore, Chicago, New Haven, and St. Louis this one minute movie transported the Major's image around the country. McKinley and his front porch could now be seen anywhere, anytime someone flipped the switch on a projector.

Bryan, in response, stumped the nation in a strenuous campaign, covering 18,000 miles in just three months. He spoke to wildly enthusiastic crowds, condemning McKinley as the puppet of big business and political managers. However, midway through his campaign, Bryan's pace faltered. His strategy for dual party support failed. Gold Democrats bolted the party, unhappy with Bryan's stand on bimetallism and free silver. Some urban-based progressives, who worried about Bryan's evangelistic style and moralistic fervor, also deserted the Democrats. Moreover, Bryan failed to build support outside his Populist and agrarian base, especially in the face of McKinley's effective campaigning on economic issues.

Bryan lost to McKinley by a margin of approximately 600,000 votes, the greatest electoral sweep in twenty-five years. McKinley received over a third more electoral college votes than Bryan.

The Republican victory reflected a winning coalition of urban residents in the North, prosperous midwestern farmers, industrial workers, ethnic voters (with the exception of the Irish), and reform-minded professionals. It launched a long period of Republican power lasting until 1932, broken only by Woodrow Wilson's victory in 1912, which occurred principally because of a split in the Republican Party.

Innaugurated on March 4, 1897, McKinley rode a wave of popularity because

of his image as the victorious commander-in-chief of the Spanish-American War and because of the nation's general return to economic prosperity. Hence, he was easily renominated in 1900 as the Republican candidate.

The most momentous event at the Philadelphia convention centered on the vice presidential nomination of Governor Theodore Roosevelt of New York. Setting up the stage for a rematch of the 1896 election, the Democrats again nominated Bryan at their convention in Kansas City.

Grover Cleveland's former vice president, Adlai E. Stevenson, took the second spot on the Democratic slate.

The rematch played to old and new issues. Duplicating the campaign tactics of 1896, the Republicans spent several million dollars on 125 million campaign documents, including 21 million postcards and 2 million written inserts that were distributed to over 5,000 newspapers weekly. They also employed 600 speakers and poll watchers. As in 1896, McKinley stayed at home dispensing carefully written speeches. His running mate, Theodore Roosevelt, campaigned across the nation, condemning Bryan as a dangerous threat to America's prosperity and status.

Although not a landslide shift comparable to election swings in the twentieth century, McKinley's victory ended the pattern of close popular margins that had characterized elections since the Civil War. McKinley received 7,218,491 votes (51.7 percent) to Bryan's 6,356,734 votes (45.5 percent) a gain for the Republicans of 114,000 votes over their total in 1896. McKinley received nearly twice as many electoral votes as Bryan did.

The Pan-American Exposition of 1901

William McKinley liked world fairs. They were, he said, "the timekeepers of progress. They record the world's advancement." He had been to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and the Cotton States Exposition in Atlanta two years later. He did not want to miss the Pan American Exposition, to be held in Buffalo during the summer of 1901.

The Pan-American Exposition, staged in Buffalo, New York, presented in microcosm all of the trends, developments, innovations, and attitudes of the McKinley years. The great and colorful buildings along the Grand Canal, built in ersatz Spanish colonial style, symbolized American suzerainty over the hemisphere. The amazing Electric Tower announced to the world the nation's



technical superiority. In memory of the late frontier, there was a wild west show. The subjugation of the American Indian was evident for all to see in the Indian Village. The now-aged Apache chief Geronimo was displayed as a side show exhibit -- accompanied by a U.S. Army guard. The Indian Wars, now just a memory, were turned into spectacle and mock Indian vs. cavalry skirmishes were staged three times daily for exposition visitors.

The exposition was opened on May 1, 1901 by the new vice president, Theodore Roosevelt. President McKinley had been scheduled to do the honors but had to cancel because of his wife's illness. It was not until September that the McKinleys were able to inspect the exposition grounds. While in Buffalo, McKinley and his wife were guests of John Milburn, President of the Pan-American Exposition and stayed at the Milburn home on Delaware

Avenue. On the morning of September 5th, the president and first lady crossed the Triumphal Causeway and entered the fair grounds in an open carriage preceded by troops, military bands, and a mounted honor guard.

The president gave a major address on trade policy to a large crowd gathered on the Esplanade. Afterwards he toured the exhibits, complimenting all. He had an unscheduled coffee at the Porto Rican Building with the Latin American commissioners.



On September 6, President McKinley awoke early as was his custom. At 7:15 A.M., fully dressed for the day in his habitual black frock coat and black silk hat, he eluded the small Secret Service entourage that surrounded the Milburn house and took a solitary walk down Delaware Avenue. Later that morning, accompanied by a host of city and exposition officials, the McKinleys boarded a train for Niagara Falls. They visited the falls, walked along the gorge, and toured the

Niagara Falls Power Project, which the President referred to as "the marvel of the Electrical Age." After lunch the presidential party returned to Buffalo. Mrs.



McKinley went to the Milburn house to rest, and the president to the exposition, where he was scheduled to meet the thousands of people who, in spite of the oppressive heat, were waiting at the Temple of Music, a large, vaguely Byzantine structure on the north side of the fairgrounds.

When the Pan-American Exposition Company was formed in 1897, there was some concern amongst the Board Of Directors as to where the Exposition should be held. At first, Cayuga Island was chosen as the place to hold the Exposition because of the island's close proximity to Niagara Falls, which was a huge tourist attraction at that time. But when the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, all plans were put on the back burner.

After the war, when the interest in the Exposition began to pick up, there was a heavy rivalry between Buffalo and Niagara Falls over the location. Buffalo eventually won out for several reasons. First, Buffalo had a much larger population -- roughly 350,000 people, and second, Buffalo had an extensive railroad system that put the city within a day's journey of 40 million people. In July of 1898, Congress pledged \$500,000 for the Exposition to be held at Buffalo.



Now that the Board of Directors had the town, they now needed the site on which to build the Exposition. The final site they chose was the Rumsey property; together with a portion of Delaware Park. When completed, the site would occupy 350 acres -- north to south would be framed by the New York Central Belt Line and Delaware Park, and

east to west would be framed by Delaware Avenue and Elmwood Avenue. Delaware Park Lake would be one of the attractions at the fair.

This location proved to be a fantastic plus for bringing crowds to the Exposition. Trolley lines extended along three sides of the grounds, and for five cents one could ride to the fair from any point in the city. The ride was only 20 minutes from downtown. All trains would come up the belt line and stop right at the

Exposition's northern boundary. The directors even planned a railroad exhibit at the station stop.

In 1899, ground was broken and the tremendous job of creating the Pan-American Exposition was under way.

Czolgosz Targets McKinley



On Friday, September 6, McKinley returned to the exposition to greet the public at the Temple of Music at 3:30 p.m. In the building, a large crowd had formed a line to meet the president and shake hands. In that line was Leon Czolgosz, his right hand wrapped in a handkerchief. Concealed in the handkerchief was an Iver Johnson .32-caliber revolver.

McKinley's secretary, George Cortelyou, disliked these types of receptions because of their security risk. At the time, the president did not have an official bodyguard force. The Secret Service, created in 1865 as part of the Treasury Department to combat counterfeiting, was occasionally assigned to provide informal protection to the president. Thus a few Secret Service agents were on hand, along with some Buffalo detectives and a detachment of U.S. Army soldiers roaming the premises. While this security force scrutinized the crowd, no searches were conducted.



Flanked by aides and guards, McKinley stood and shook hands with people filing by in a long line as soft music played in the background. He requested that the line be speeded up so he could shake more hands. Czolgosz moved forward, keeping his hand concealed to make it appear as if it was injured. A Secret Service agent asked Czolgosz if he needed first aid, but Czolgosz replied that he wanted to meet the president first.

When Czolgosz reached the front of the line, he extended his left hand. McKinley shook the left hand and Czolgosz moved on. After some more people passed through the line, Czolgosz returned at 4:07 p.m. A Secret Service agent grabbed Czolgosz's shoulder to move him



along, but Czolgosz brushed his hand away, lunged forward and fired twice through his handkerchief into the president standing no more than three feet away.

McKinley shuddered, stiffened, stared at Czolgosz in astonishment and stumbled back into the arms of surrounding aides. His white shirt reddened with blood. Secret Service agents and detectives knocked Czolgosz to the floor and extinguished the handkerchief, which was on fire. Czolgosz was severely beaten but McKinley, still conscious, ordered

that Czolgosz not be harmed. McKinley also asked that care be taken when informing his chronically-ill wife of the event.



McKinley remained standing in his aides' arms while guards dragged Czolgosz away. When Leon Czolgosz was removed from the Temple of Music and taken to Buffalo Police Headquarters, he was in near death condition. Having suffered a terrible beating at the hands of President McKinley's military escort and the secret service, it was questioned as to whether or not he would survive to go to trial. The police had a terrible time trying to keep the angry

mobs of Buffalo away from Czolgosz. If given the chance the mobs would have torn him apart, so security and protection for the assassin were to be a constant problem.



At 4:18 p.m., an ambulance arrived and took McKinley to the hospital on the exposition grounds.

At the hospital, the president underwent emergency surgery. The first bullet was easily found and extracted, having deflected off McKinley's breastbone. This bullet caused minimal damage.

However doctors could not find the second bullet. They determined that it had passed through his stomach and hit his colon, pancreas and kidney before lodging in his back muscles.

The doctors feared that attempting to extract the bullet would cause more harm than good, so they left it alone and closed the wound. An experimental

x-ray machine was at the exposition, but doctors were reluctant to use it on McKinley because they feared the rays could cause side effects. There was also no electric lighting in the operating room, even though the exposition buildings were filled with electric light bulbs. Doctors used a pan to reflect sunlight onto the operating table as they treated McKinley's wounds.

After the operation, doctors were optimistic that the president could recover. McKinley, still unconscious from the ether used to sedate him, was taken to the home of exposition director John Milburn to begin his recovery.

At John Milburn's home, President McKinley appeared to be recovering from his wounds. The day after the shooting, McKinley was relaxed and conversational. After a few more days, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt and cabinet members who had visited the president expressed confidence that he would recuperate.



On September 12, doctors informed the press that they believed McKinley would recover. McKinley continued his convalescence and received the first food orally since the shooting toast and a small cup of coffee. However by afternoon, the president began feeling pain and nausea, and his pulse weakened.

The next day, McKinley began rapidly deteriorating and he went into shock. He was given adrenaline and oxygen but it was no use. At 2:15 on the morning of September 14, McKinley died of infection and gangrene surrounding his gunshot wounds. Surgical protocol of the time did not demand disinfection of wounds.



William McKinley was the third U.S. president to have been assassinated, following Abraham Lincoln and James Garfield. McKinley's body was placed aboard a train and the funeral procession went through the streets of Buffalo to Washington, DC, then on to his final resting place at Canton, Ohio.

The Trial of Leon Czolgosz

Just nine days after McKinley's death, Leon Czolgosz went on trial. He was assigned two lawyers for his defense but he refused to speak to them, claiming he did not believe in courts or lawyers. Czolgosz also refused to talk to the medical expert assigned to test his sanity. Instead Czolgosz only spoke with his

prison guards.



The defense argued that Czolgosz was insane, but prosecutors refuted that assertion by pointing to his affiliation with anarchist groups. Czolgosz's lawyers produced no witnesses and did not contest unanimous medical testimony that Czolgosz was legally sane. Czolgosz showed no interest in the proceedings and refused to take the stand.

In a trial that lasted only eight hours and 26 minutes, Czolgosz was found guilty and sentenced to death in the electric chair. On September 27, 1901, Czolgosz was moved from Buffalo to Auburn prison where he was to receive the punishment for his crime. When he arrived at Auburn, he came into contact with more people than he ever had during the entire ordeal. At 3:10am, his train arrived at the prison and he was brutally dragged from the train and shoved through a crowd of three hundred people who were constantly mauling him. Czolgosz was handcuffed and the continuous beatings made it almost impossible for him to walk. The prison guards were caught completely off guard by the crowd's reaction and had to use clubs and revolver butts to keep the mobs back. Many times he was knocked to his knees so the guards found it necessary to drag him up the stairs to the prison office. He was thrown to the ground upon reaching the office and cried out in terror, frothing at the mouth and uttering the most horrible sounds.



He stumbled into a cane seat and lay there moaning in terror, while the crowd hung on the iron gates outside and chanted, "GIVE HIM TO US! GIVE HIM TO US!" Shivering uncontrollably, Czolgosz nearly jumped out of his skin when a guard approached him and removed the handcuffs. He was then dragged through heavy oaken, iron-barred doors that led to the warden's office; in fact, he was carried. Four husky guards held his shoulders and arms. They dumped him in a chair; a limp, disheveled figure, his cries echoing down the long corridors and arousing all the other convicts.

Czolgosz was in a state of absolute collapse, and when left alone rolled onto the floor, convulsing uncontrollably.

Two guards grabbed him and ripped him off the floor. Unable to stand, he quickly collapsed, screaming in pain. The angry cries from the crowd outside could be heard from the open window in the office.

"Shut up! You're faking!" said Dr. Gern, the prison physician. Czolgosz obeyed the order, but still continued to moan quietly and writhe in agony. Two prison guards stripped him of his clothing and placed a prison uniform on him. He was then removed to his cell where he would not emerge again until his execution. He showed no emotion when the verdict was delivered. On October 29, Czolgosz was escorted to his execution at Auburn State Prison in New York, where he proclaimed, "I killed the president because he was the enemy of the good people the good working people. I am not sorry for my crime."

On October 29, 1901, Leon Czolgosz was led from his cell and slowly walked the twenty feet down the corridor to the door of the death room. He stumbled when his feet touched the stone pavement of the room and again when he got onto the platform that held the chair. It was there that he got the first look at the instrument that was about to take his life.

The electric chair was a plain looking, but heavy piece of furniture. It was decorated with wide leather straps and heavy buckles. From the ceiling came a coil of wire no wider than a common pencil to which the electrode for the head-piece would attach. Electric lamps were along the wall behind the chair and about the ceiling.

The chair was large enough to hold a man much heavier than Czolgosz, so a broad plank was placed on its edge across the seat and against the back of the chair, that there might not be any movement of the prisoner's body to break the circuit.

Just before the electrocution was to begin, a leather-backed sponge soaked with salt water was tightly buckled below the knees, and on the head was placed a helmet, the top of which was filled with a wet sponge. The top of Czolgosz head was shaved so that perfect electrical contact could be made.

As he was being strapped into the chair, Czolgosz blurted out, "I killed the President because he was the enemy of the good people! I did it for the help of the good people, the working men of all countries!" The guards quickly finished preparing him. Then they slowly stepped away from the platform, turned, and walked away.

After what seemed like an eternity, the signal was given to throw the switch and send the current through his body. Czolgosz immediately gave a gurgled cry and his body lunged upward. He seemed to tremble with a slight rigidity as his body was converted into a piece of iron. As the 1,700 volts of raw energy

exploded into his body, Czolgosz arched his body backwards and remained still. The current flowed for a full minute and was gradually backed down to 200 volts.

After the electricity was turned off, some time passed without anyone saying a word. Then one of the prison officials said, "Give him another poke."

The current was turned on at 1,700 volts for another full minute without any reaction from Czolgosz's body. After this round was finished, the medical examiner went up to the lifeless body and pronounced Czolgosz dead. His eyes were open and seemed to be staring out at everyone in the room. The matter was finished. Justice was served.

The following year, the execution was reenacted and recorded by Thomas Edison's kinoscope, providing a primitive motion picture account of the event.

"Big Ben Parker", Unsung Hero

When U.S. President McKinley was assassinated at the Pan American Exposition, as it was first rumored a Negro was involved, Blacks all over the U.S. held their breath until certain it was not a Negro at fault. This is the story.



No one had stayed in line to greet McKinley longer than "Big Ben" James Parker, a six-foot six inch Negro waiter from Atlanta who was laid-off by the exposition's Plaza Restaurant. Parker had been standing outside the Temple of Music since mid-morning in order to get into where the president was to appear. Finally, at 4:00 P.M. the doors of the Temple of Music opened and hundreds of people made an orderly, single-file procession to the front of the auditorium where President McKinley, flanked by John Milburn and his personal secretary, George Cortelyou, stood waiting. It was extremely hot in the room -- over ninety degrees -- and everybody was carrying handkerchiefs, either wiping their brows or waving them at the president. Anarchist Leon Czolgosz had wrapped his right hand in a handkerchief like a bandage and held it as if it were in a sling. His revolver was hidden underneath. A short, Italian man with a thick mustache caught the eye of the president's chief of security, Foster, as suspicious. Foster quickly grabbed the man who was shocked, but harmless. He was let go. This incident distracted Foster and the other guards, by the time it was Czolgosz's turn to shake the President's hand. But Big Ben Parker was in line

behind Czolgosz.

As the fast-moving line brought him directly in front of the president, Czolgosz shot twice. The first bullet knicked off a button on McKinley's vest, the second tore into the President's stomach. The handkerchief burst into flames, falling to the floor.

A secret service man's initial eyewitness account:

"Parker struck the assassin in the neck with one hand and with the other reached for the revolver which had been discharged through the handkerchief and the shots had set fire to the linen. While on the floor Czolgosz again tried to discharge the revolver but before he got to the president the Negro knocked it from his hand."

Parker's own remembrance of the event as told to a reporter from the Buffalo Times began:

"I heard the shots. I did what every citizen of this country should have done. I am told that I broke his nose- I wish it had been his neck. I am sorry I did not see him four seconds before. I don't say that I would have thrown myself before the bullets. But I do say that the life of the head of this country is worth more than that of an ordinary citizen and I should have caught the bullets in my body rather than the President should get them.

I can't tell you what I would have done and I don't like to have it understood that I want to talk of the matter. I tried to do my duty. That's all any man can do."

Parker said, "I went to the Temple of Music to hear what speeches might be made. I got in line and saw the President. I turned to go away as soon as I learned that there was to be only a handshaking. The crowd was so thick that I could not leave. I was startled by the shots. My fist shot out and I hit the man on the nose and fell upon him, grasping him about the throat. I believe that if he had not been suffering pain he would have shot again.

I know that his revolver was close to my head. I did not think about that then though.



Then came Mr. Foster, Mr. Ireland and Mr. Gallagher. There was that marine, too. I struck the man, threw up his arm and then went for his throat. It all happened so quickly I can hardly say what happen, except that the secret service man came right up. Czolgosz is very strong. I am glad that I am a strong man also or perhaps the result might not have been what it was."

"I am a Negro, and am glad that the Ethiopian race has what ever credit comes with what I did. If I did anything, the colored people should get the credit."

He Saved McKinley's Life.
Buffalo, N. Y.—George Parker, the big Afro-American who seized Czolgosz, the Cleveland Pole who shot President McKinley, saved the latter's life by preventing the would-be assassin from firing a third time, and will doubtless be given a life government job. Parker is six foot tall, broad-shouldered and strong as a giant. He is a waiter in the Boston inn and was next to Czolgosz in line for the purpose of shaking hands with the president. Just as the second shot was fired Parker seized Czolgosz's right hand with his right, and with his left arm yanked the Pole's head back, almost breaking his neck. When he grabbed the fellow he certainly destroyed his aim. After the shooting and after Parker's quick work, the hat was passed and nearly \$100 was raised for him. James Parker was formerly a constable in Savannah, Ga.—Mr. W. H. Talbert left the first of the week for Cleveland and Oberlin.

According to a September 10, 1901, news article, Parker appeared in the Pan American Exposition Mall, near the west gate, after the incident. A group of people surrounded him and he was asked to sell pieces of his waistcoat and other clothing. He recounted the story of the assassination and sold one button off his coat for \$1.00. In the time between the shooting and McKinley's death, Parker had numerous offers to work on the Midway at the Exposition recounting his participation. One company wanted to sell his photograph, but he refused. In a quote in the Buffalo Commercial, dated Sept. 13, 1901, Parker said, "I happened to be in a position where I could aid in the capture of the man. I do not think that the American people would like me to make capital out of the unfortunate circumstances. I am

no freak anyway. I do not want to be exhibited in all kinds of shows. I am glad that I was able to be of service to the country."

News of the part Parker played in this national drama quickly spread. The Atlanta Constitution had a story in the September 10, edition with the headline "Testimonial to Jim Parker." The article related how the Negroes of Savannah were planning to set up some type substantial testimonial for James Parker. The Constitution said that he was well known in the city but he had not been there for several years. On September 13 in the same newspaper an article entitled "Negros Applaud Parker" with the sub-heading "Mass Meeting in Charleston Hears Booker Washington." On September 12, to a mass meeting of 5,000 African Americans, Booker T. Washington delivered an address and resolution denouncing the reckless deed of the "red handed anarchist" and rejoicing that a southern Negro "had saved the President McKinley from death."

Prior to the Czolgosz trial, which began September 23, 1901, Parker was considered a major character in the assassination. However, the trial itself clouded Parker's participation in the events of September 6, 1901. Not only was Parker not asked to testify, but those who did testify never identified Parker as the person who took the assassin down.

Two days after McKinley died, a grand jury, meeting for the first and only time, indicted Leon Czolgosz for murder. His trial proceeded expeditiously. It opened on September 23, and by the end of the first day, a jury had been selected. On the second day both prosecution and defense attorneys completed their cases, the judge charged the jury, and in less than half an hour a guilty verdict was returned. The case was closed twenty-four hours after it opened.

While he had quickly become a hero to the American people, Parker's stature unraveled just as quickly. In a September 13, article about Parker in the Buffalo Express, Mr. James Quackenbush, an attorney, stated that he had been standing six feet from the President. He said that he was looking to the right of President at the time the first shot was fired and looked to Czolgosz at the sound of the second shot. Quackenbush stated that he saw Mr. Gallagher, Mr. Ireland (both Secret Service men), Private O' Brian and the other men from the 73rd Seacoast Artillery, lunge forward toward Czolgosz who then went down. He also stated that he saw no one else seize upon Czoglosz except the Secret Service men and the artillerymen. John Branch, an African American porter in the Temple of Music and eyewitness to the shooting according to the record, did testify but wasn't asked if he saw any person of color in the event.

Even the Secret Service Men who earlier reported Parker's role testified they saw no Negro involved. Both the Buffalo Courier and the Commercial newspapers, responded in an indirect fashion to the controversy by stating that the evidence brought out at the trial proved that Parker had nothing to with the capture of Czolgosz. In addition, they accused Parker of lecturing and receiving money for the "Parker Fund" under false pretenses.

The African American community was outraged because of Parker not testifying at the trial. It appeared to many that the Secret Service and the military were embarrassed that this man essentially brought the assassin down instead of them. Parker was asked to comment about not testifying. He said, " I don't say it was done with any intent to defraud, but it looks mighty funny, that's all."

The African American community held a ceremony to honor James Parker for his part in capturing Czolgosz and to inquire as to why Parker was not recognized as

a participant in the assassin's arrest. The gathering was held at the Vine Street African Methodist Church on September 27, 1901. The church was packed and the general feeling, according to the Buffalo News, was that the audience was incensed that no credit or recognition was given to Parker.

The meeting was called to order by the Reverend E. A. Johnson, pastor of the church. Former pastor Reverend J. C. Aylmer led a hymn and gave a prayer. The discussion that followed resulted in the formation of a committee to inquire into the merits of Parker's case. The committee members were Rev. J. E. Nash, pastor of Michigan Baptist Church, Rev. J. C. Ayler, M. H. Lucas, W. Q. H. Aikens and J. W. Peterson.

While the committee went into private discussion, Parker's fellow named Shaw delivered a short testimonial on Parker. He said, "When I first entered this hall, it was my intention to go quietly way back and sit down. Yesterday. I feel the inspiration of defense arise within me. The evident attempt to discredit Parker is a sign of conspiracy and should we fail to emphatically resent it, I claim we are a disgrace to our race. " When Jim Parker entered the hall, he refused all demands to make a speech and sat down amidst cheers.

The committee entered and read their position on the matter.

"Whereas, there is a conflict of statements between the Associated Press and the Supreme Court of New York with respect or disrespect to the heroic act of James Parker in having thwarted the purpose of Leon Czolgosz in inflicting immediate death of our William McKinley. Whereas, we, the colored citizens of the City of Buffalo, N.Y. in this mass meeting assembled, that they very much regret the clash of statement in respect to the reported act of heroism on the part of James Parker, in that the Associated Press as a molder of public sentiment and as a herald of accepted facts. Reported said heroic act both in America and Europe, and that the Supreme Court, the arbiter of justice . Entirely eliminated said James B. Parker from the part he is reported by the press to have played in this tragedy."

James Ross, the Negro mason and publisher, wrote to the newspapers in support of Parker's heroism and hired him to be a traveling agent (magazine salesman) for the Gazetteer and Guide; Ross' magazine for African Americans published in Buffalo. Thus, Parker left Buffalo after the trial. He had been promised a lifetime government job, but no such job materialized.

The Disposition of Leon Czolgosz's Body



After hours of controversial discussion with Czolgosz's brother, Waldeck, the Superintendent of State Prisons and the Warden of the Auburn State Prison obtained from him the relinquishment of the family's claims to the body. The surrender of claims to the body was deemed necessary because of two offers made to prison officials. One offer of \$5,000 cash was made for either the body or clothing of Czolgosz, while the other offer of \$2,000 sought permission to film a motion picture of

Czolgosz entering the death chamber. The Superintendent also suspected the motives of some of the Czolgosz relatives in seeking the body in view of their poverty and the possibility of violence associated with its removal and disposal. Burial at the prison would avoid spectacle. Superintendent Collins assured Waldeck that the family could attend the burial, that they would be protected, and that the body would be given a decent burial. Waldeck initially became obdurate and Superintendent Collins strongly advised him that if there were any suspicion as to the motives in claiming the body, he would refuse to surrender it. After consultation with his brother-in-law, Thomas Bandowski, Waldeck acquiesced and the paper was drawn up.

While the legalities were being prepared for the release of the body, Cleveland police were contacted and asked to discuss the matter with Leon Czolgosz's father, Paul. Cleveland police expresses the hope that the body would never be sent to that city for fear of violence.

Since the Buffalo Crematory would not accept Leon Czolgosz's body, it was decided to bury the body at the Auburn Prison.



Following the autopsy the body was placed in a black stained pine coffin. Shortly afterward it was taken to the prison cemetery and an extraordinary precautions taken to completely destroy it. A few days ago under the warden's order 12 pounds of meat was placed in a glass jar, and the same proportion of lime which would be used to consume a human body was placed in it.

It was found upon examination that the meat had shown little sign of disintegration. Warden Mead in consultation with some of the physicians present and the superintendent determined that the purpose of the law was the destruction of the body and that it was not necessary to confine themselves to the use of lime.

Therefore, a carboy of acid was obtained and poured upon the body in the coffin after had been lowered into the grave. Straw was used in the four corners of the grave as the earth was put in to give vent to gases that might form.

The physicians believe that the body would be entirely disintegrated within twelve hours. During that time and as long as deemed necessary a guard was kept over the unmarked grave.

The clothing and personal effects of the prisoners were burned under the direction of Warden Mead shortly after the execution.

Waldeck Czolgosz and Waldeck Thomas Bandowski, brother and brother-in-law of the assassin, called at the prison that afternoon. They sent word to the Wharton that they wanted to see the body of Leon Czolgosz. The warden told them that the body had been buried for more than an hour and if they wished he would send a guard to guide them to the grave.

They answered that they did not care to go to the cemetery but that they were anxious to arrange for the collection of the insurance on the life of the dead



murderer and asked that a certificate of death be given to them. The warden promised the certificate and they departed. The insurance about which they talked is supposed to be in a fraternal society to which the murderer belonged.

The final resting place of Leon Czolgosz is the Soule Cemetery in Auburn, New York, in an unmarked grave.

When the body of Czolgosz been removed from the room where he was killed to the autopsy table, Auburn prison return to the routine of its ordinary life. The prisoners, who had been kept locked in their cells, were released at 7:45 am and prison work was resumed at once.

The assassination of William McKinley turned many Americans against immigrants and radical political groups. It touched off a wave of arrests and attacks on anarchists, and Congress passed strict anti-anarchist laws to limit the influence of radical organizations. Ironically Czolgosz's act inflamed public opinion against the cause that he claimed to champion.

At the 10th anniversary of the World Trade Center attacks, the United States has entered a similar state of terrorist paranoia manifested in the abdication of individual rights for a dubious sense of security. Air travel has become a tortuous intrusion of personal space in the name of safety from terrorists. Homeland Security maintains lists of individuals pre-determined to be terrorist "types" based upon supposed terrorist profiles.

The vigorous forty-two year-old Progressive, Theodore Roosevelt, was now in the White House. The nineteenth century was over and the modern era had begun. Old Guard party boss Mark Hanna complained to a colleague, "Now look! That damned cowboy is president of the United States!"

The Secret Service began providing full-time security to McKinley's successor in 1902. In 1906, legislation was enacted that officially designated the Secret Service as the agency empowered to protect the president at all times. With McKinley's death, reconstruction following the Civil War ended and the Progressive era under Roosevelt began.

When the fair ended, most of the buildings were demolished and the grounds were cleared and subdivided to be used for residential streets. Similar to previous



world fair's a majority of the buildings were constructed of timber and steel framing with precast staff panels made of a plaster/fiber mix. These buildings were built as a means of rapid construction and temporary ornamentation and not made to last.. The New York State building, was designed to permanently outlast the Exposition and is used by the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society as a museum.

The scene of the crime, the Temple of Music, was demolished in November 1901,



along with the rest of the Exposition grounds. A stone marker in the middle of Fordham Drive, a residential street in Buffalo, marks the approximate spot where the shooting occurred.



Czolgosz's revolver is on display in the Pan-American Exhibition exhibit at the Buffalo and Erie County

Historical Society in Buffalo.