

F. Post 3/27/72

Doctor Tells Of Political Assassinations

"Two of the American presidents assassinated could probably have survived the assassin's bullets, but the other two presidents were too mortally wounded to recover." This was the personal opinion expressed by the guest speaker, Dr. Robert Barnett, to the members of the Frederick County Medical Society at their last meeting.

Dr. Barnett, a practicing surgeon in Montgomery County, demonstrated a profound knowledge of his subject as he recounted the historical events surrounding the assassinations of presidents Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley and John F. Kennedy. With the aid of slides he demonstrated the type wounds inflicted in each case, the care and treatment rendered to each victim, and the findings discovered on post-mortem examination.

In the case of President Lincoln, the bullet wound inflicted to the head by John Wilkes Booth destroyed so much brain tissue that he could not have survived.

The same was true of President Kennedy's fatal wound. However, the bullet fired from the revolver held by Charles J. Guiteau into the lower back of President Garfield did not immediately cause his death, in fact it was not until two months and seventeen days following the shooting that he died. During this time he was examined and treated by many different doctors with methods which would not be acceptable today and finally succumbed to a complication of the wound which today could be corrected by a surgical operation.

Of special interest was the recounting by Dr. Barnett of the many times the doctors attending Garfield tried to locate the bullet by probing the wound with their bare fingers. Even Alexander Graham Bell was called in on the case with his new invention, an electro-magnetic machine, to try to locate the bullet. Using his machine on several occasions Mr. Bell was not

successful in locating the site of the bullet.

President William McKinley was shot by anarchist Leon Czolgosz, the bullet penetrating both walls of the stomach. One hour and fifteen minutes later, which Dr. Barnett stated, "certainly was in record time," McKinley was undergoing surgery. The stomach was repaired but the bullet was not found. The following day McKinley developed a high fever and abdominal pains. The following day, September 8 he seemed much better. On September 10, Thomas Alvah Edison attempted to locate the bullet with a new machine he had invented but without success. Two days later when severe abdominal pains developed, McKinley was given a dose of castor oil. His condition rapidly worsened and he died on September 14, 1901, eight days following the shooting. Post-mortem examination revealed that McKinley died from a complication of the shooting which, with modern surgical and medical techniques, might have been prevented.

Dr. Barnett interspersed his remarks with various interesting facts surrounding the four assassinations. "The first person to attend President Lincoln in the presidential box at Ford's Theatre immediately gave the president mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, probably the first such recorded case in history,"

stated the guest speaker. He noted that the much-maligned Dr. Mudd who treated Lincoln's assassin was awakened at about four o'clock in the morning and that John Wilkes Booth was wearing a disguise. Following his treating Booth, Dr. Mudd went out to make some house calls. "It is highly likely that Dr. Mudd under those circumstances did not even recognize Booth, and even if he had, the news of the assassination could not have been known to him at the time he treated Booth," added the speaker. Dr. Barnett also noted incidentally that the "mustard plaster" applied to Lincoln by Surgeon General Barnes did little to help in recovery of the patient.

In concluding his talk, Dr. Barnett made note of the fact that all the presidential assassins had a history of mental illness, an important fact in their decisions to kill the president of the country. The assassins of Garfield and McKinley were taken into custody immediately and later executed. Lincoln's assassin was found and shot by a military officer several days after Lincoln's death, and Lee Harvey Oswald was shot by a private citizen while still in custody.