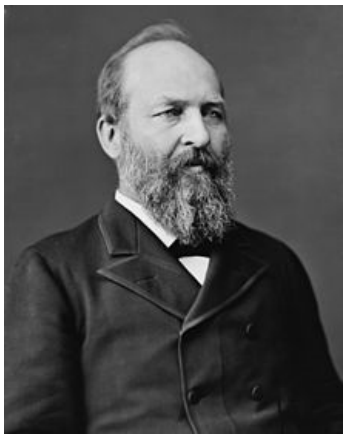
President	James A. Garfield
Chronological Order	20
Life Span	1831-1881
Home State	Ohio
Elected	1880



Political Party	Republican
Vice President	Chester A. Arthur
First Lady	Lucretia Rudolph Garfield
Children	5 sons, 2 daughters
Physical Attributes	6' tall, full beard, light brown hair, blue eyes
Undergraduate Education	Williams College
Military Service	Major General in the Union Army during the Civil War
Profession	College professor (Classical languages), Attorney
Other Political Offices	U.S. House of Representatives
Nickname	Boatman Jim
Family Lineage	English
Religious Affiliation	Disciples of Christ

Biographical Notes

1. Garfield ranked well above the average president in ability, education, and experience. He was not only a college graduate but also served as the president of a college for a time. Garfield served in the House of Representatives for seventeen years and was one of the ablest orators in Congress. He was amiable, good natured, and served as a lay preacher in his church. He performed admirably as an officer in the Civil War. But he had two serious weaknesses: he had trouble saying "no" to people and was sometimes indecisive.

Garfield's tendency to doubt himself was heightened by his ability to appreciate the complexities of public issues. Envying the assuredness of extremists, he often remarked on the pain of seeing "too many sides of a subject." Rutherford B. Hayes felt that Garfield was a "smooth, ready, pleasant man, not very strong." Senator Henry Dawes of Massachusetts, who served with Garfield for a dozen years in the House, wrote: ” Garfield is a grand, noble fellow, but fickle, unstable, [with] more brains but no such will as Sherman, brilliant like Blaine but timid and hesitating.” Since he was assassinated only four months after his inauguration, he did not accomplish much as president.

2. Garfield was born in a log cabin to poor but hardworking parents and grew up in the Western Reserve, an area near Cleveland, Ohio. His father died when he was eighteen months old. As a teenager, he spent several months driving a team of dray horses that pulled boats on the Ohio Canal, which earned him the nickname "Boatman Jim." When he was seventeen, a school teacher recognized his intellectual potential and arranged for him to attend a local academy. He then attended Western Reserve Eclectic Institute (later renamed Hiram College) for two years.

Garfield finished his undergraduate education at Williams College in Massachusetts, where he thrived. He relished the opportunity to hear Ralph Waldo Emerson speak and the challenge of confronting the strong personality of Williams's president, Mark Hopkins. At Williams, Garfield began to identify with the antislavery beliefs of the new Republican Party.

3. Religion played a significant role in Garfield’s life. In 1850, at age eighteen, Garfield experienced a religious conversion and was baptized into the denomination of his parents, the Disciples of Christ. The Western Reserve Eclectic Institute, where he initially attended college and later went to teach, was founded by the Disciples of Christ.

4. After graduating from Williams with honors in 1856, Garfield joined the faculty of Western Reserve Eclectic Institute. Although formally an instructor in classical languages, he taught a wide variety of courses, including English, history, geology, and mathematics. From 1857 to 1861, he served as president of the Institute, but he found the faculty bickering intolerable. In 1858, he married Lucretia Rudolph. In 1859, he was elected to the Ohio Senate. Studying law on his own, he passed the Ohio bar exam in 1861.

An enthusiastic abolitionist, Garfield believed that under no circumstances could the institution of slavery be allowed to extend into any Western territories. When Southern states began to withdraw from the Union, Garfield came out strongly against secession and urged the federal government to respond with force. He said, "I am inclined to believe that the sin of slavery is one of which it may be said that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission." He welcomed the fall of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, believing it would unite Northern sentiment in support of waging war on the Confederacy.

5. In August 1861, Garfield received a commission as a colonel in the 42nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The 42nd Ohio existed only on paper, so Garfield's first task was to fill its ranks. He did so quickly, recruiting many of his neighbors and former students. In December, Garfield's regiment joined the Army of the Ohio under Brigadier General Don Carlos Buell.

Buell assigned Garfield the task of driving Confederate forces out of eastern Kentucky, giving him the 18th Brigade for the campaign, which, besides his 42nd, included the 40th Ohio Infantry, two Kentucky infantry regiments, and two cavalry units. Garfield's forces defeated those of Confederate General Humphrey Marshall at the Battle of Middle Creek, driving the Rebels back into Virginia. Afterward, Garfield received a promotion to brigadier general.

6. Eventually, Garfield procured an assignment as chief of staff to Major General William S. Rosecrans, commander of the Army of the Cumberland. Garfield helped Rosecrans devise the Tullahoma Campaign to pursue and potentially trap Confederate General Braxton Bragg's army in Tullahoma, Tennessee. After initial Union success, Bragg retreated, but Rosecrans did not follow. Instead, he stopped and requested more troops and supplies. Garfield argued for an immediate advance, in line with demands from the Army Chief of Staff Henry Halleck and President Lincoln. After a council of war and lengthy deliberations, Rosecrans agreed to attack.

At the ensuing Battle of Chickamauga on September 19 and 20, 1863, confusion among the wing commanders over Rosecrans's orders created a gap in the lines, resulting in a rout of the right flank. Rosecrans concluded that the battle was lost and fell back to Chattanooga to establish a defensive line. Garfield, however, thought that the part of the army commanded by General George H. Thomas had held and, with Rosecrans's approval, headed on horseback across Missionary Ridge to survey the scene. Garfield's hunch was correct, and Thomas's troops held firm, which saved Chattanooga from being captured by the Confederates. Garfield's ride became legendary, while Rosecrans's error reignited criticism about his leadership.

While Rosecrans's army had avoided disaster, it was stranded in Chattanooga, surrounded by Bragg's army. Garfield sent a telegram to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, alerting Washington to the need for reinforcements to avoid destruction, and Lincoln and Halleck delivered 20,000 troops by rail within nine days. In the meantime, Lincoln gave U.S. Grant the command of all the western armies, and Grant quickly replaced Rosecrans with Thomas. Garfield was promoted to major general and ordered to report to Washington.

7. In fall 1862, while he was in the army, Garfield was elected to Congress from Ohio's 19th district in a campaign run by his friends. After the Battle of Chickamauga, he had to decide whether to take his seat in the House of Representatives or forfeit his seat and remain in the army. Garfield went to President Lincoln to get his advice. Lincoln told him that although the government "had more commanding generals around loose than they knew what to do with," there was a shortage of administration congressmen, particularly those with practical knowledge of army affairs. Garfield took Lincoln's suggestion, resigned his army commission, and took his seat in the House of Representatives.

Garfield served in the House from 1863 to 1880. He became an expert on government finance, firmly supported the gold standard, and favored free trade instead of protective tariffs. Garfield initially agreed with Radical Republican views on Reconstruction, but later favored a moderate approach to civil rights enforcement. He chaired the House Appropriations Committee from 1871 to 1875, and when James G. Blaine moved up to the Senate in 1876, he became the House minority leader.

8. Garfield was involved in two questionable dealings in the 1870s. Although these episodes seemed to his enemies evidence of deep-seated corruption, they more accurately indicated clumsiness, poor judgment, and a conviction that his political success had earned him the right to make a little money. In one instance, Garfield accepted a fee of $5,000 for advising a paving company who was seeking (and who later won)

lucrative public business in Washington, D.C. Accepting the money was inappropriate because he chaired the House Appropriations Committee, which controlled the city's budget. He was also implicated in a minor way in the Credit Mobilier scandal when he received a $329 stock dividend. However, the House committee that investigated the scandal produced no evidence that he had acted improperly.

9. Garfield was elected to the U.S. Senate by the Ohio General Assembly in January 1880, though his term was not scheduled to begin until March 4, 1881. Garfield was never seated in the U.S. Senate because he was elected president in the fall of 1880.

10. President Rutherford B. Hayes's decision not to run for re-election meant that the 1880 Republican nomination for president was wide open, and as the campaign of 1880 neared, former president U.S. Grant's stock once again rose sharply. Republican spoilsmen, referred to as Stalwarts, had been stymied by Hayes's civil service reforms and pined for "four more good years of stealing" like they had in Grant's previous two terms. The Stalwarts – led by New York Senator Roscoe Conkling – supported Grant, arguing that the three-term tradition only applied to three *consecutive* terms.

Grant's chief opponents for the Republican nomination were Senator James G. Blaine of Maine and Senator John Sherman of Ohio. Blaine was the leader of the "Half-Breed" faction of the party. The Stalwarts gave Blaine's faction that nickname to indicate that since they disagreed with the Stalwarts on a host of issues, they were really only half Republican. The rivalry between the Stalwarts and the Half-Breeds – already fierce due to philosophical differences – was exacerbated by an extreme personal animosity between Conkling and Blaine. Sherman was neither a Stalwart nor a Half-Breed.

11. At the 1880 Republican National Convention, three-hundred-seventy-nine votes were necessary to win the nomination for president. The tally for the first ballot was: Grant 304, Blaine 284, Sherman 93, and a few votes for minority candidates. For the next twenty-seven ballots, things stayed pretty much the same, then the convention adjourned for the night. During the wee hours of the morning, the Blaine and Sherman representatives met to try to break the impasse, but neither side would concede and give their votes to the other to defeat Grant. In particular, the Blaine contingent did not feel they should give their votes to Sherman because their support was three times as strong. Moreover, if Blaine released his delegates, many of them would switch to Grant, not Sherman. Sherman had hard feelings towards Blaine because he felt that the senator from Maine had poached delegates from Ohio (Sherman's home state), thereby seriously weakening his bid for the nomination.

The next morning's balloting continued along the same line. Grant placed first each time, without topping 309 votes, and the Blaine and Sherman vote totals changed very little. Then Garfield emerged as a "dark horse" candidate on the thirty-fourth ballot when the Wisconsin delegation – prompted by one of Garfield's friends – gave him 17 votes. On the thirty-fifth ballot, both Blaine and Sherman lost some support, and Garfield received 50 votes. At this point, Blaine realized that the only way to avoid a Grant victory was to throw his votes to Garfield. Also, Blaine calculated that if he provided the votes necessary for Garfield's nomination, the Ohioan – already his friend – would appoint him to a prominent position in the cabinet, from which he could influence or possibly even control Garfield.

After the thirty-fifth ballot, Sherman's operatives told him that he had no chance of winning, and he also threw his support to Garfield. Garfield won on the thirty-sixth ballot with 399 votes. Three hundred and six of Grant's supporters stuck with him to the very end. To have been one of the loyal "306" became a badge of honor and the ultimate bragging right amongst the Stalwart faction.

12. Since Grant's following remained very strong all the way to the last ballot, Garfield's men felt that they must appease the Stalwarts for the sake of party unity by offering them the vice presidency. First, they offered it to Stalwart Congressman Levi P. Morton, who declined. Next, they told the New York delegation, which was dominated by Stalwarts, that they could choose the vice-presidential nominee.

The New Yorkers chose Chester A. Arthur, Conkling's right-hand man in the New York Stalwart political machine. The choice was controversial (and made without consulting Garfield), but Garfield's men went along with it, even though it made them feel uncomfortable. The difficulties with the selection were that Arthur was a machine politician, had never run for elected office, and had been removed from his post as Collector of the New York Custom House by President Hayes. In the words of John Sherman: "He never held an office except the one he was removed from." Most Republicans rationalized the choice by noting that since Garfield was young and healthy, having Arthur as vice president would do no harm.

13. To win the general election, Garfield needed to win New York state, and he needed the support of Roscoe Conkling and the New York Stalwart political machine to do that. To gain that support, he traveled to New York City and met with a group of former and current Conkling lieutenants at the Fifth Avenue Hotel:

Chester Arthur, Senator Thomas Platt, Congressman Levi Morton, and Congressman Richard Crowley. Platt was blunt. He said to Garfield, "The question we would like to have decided before the work of this campaign commences is whether, if you are elected, we are to have four years more of an administration similar to that of Rutherford B. Hayes [or] whether you are going to recognize and reward the men who must do the work in this state." In other words, if Conkling's Stalwarts helped deliver New York's electoral college votes, they expected to be rewarded with control of patronage in the state of New York. If Garfield could not make such a promise, the Stalwarts would "retire from the active work of the canvass."

According to Platt, Garfield responded by harshly criticizing the Hayes administration and its civil service reforms. He acknowledged that he needed Conkling's help to win the election and promised that the Stalwarts' wishes "should be paramount with him, touching on all questions of patronage." Garfield said that he would have to reward the non-Stalwart New Yorkers who had sided with him at the Republican National Convention, but that he would "consult with [Conkling's] friends and do only what was approved by them. These assurances were oft-repeated, and solemnly emphasized, and were accepted and agreed to by all those present," Platt recalled. Arthur agreed with Platt that a deal had been struck and reported that to Conkling a few days later. The agreement is often referred to as the Treaty of Fifth Avenue.

But what the Stalwarts understood as an ironclad promise to protect their patronage meant something different to Garfield. After he met with the Stalwarts, he wrote in his diary, "No trades, no shackles, and as well-fitted for defeat or victory as ever."

14. In 1879, the Supreme Court upheld, by a five to three decision, a law that would have compelled the Union Pacific Railroad to set aside a portion of its profits to pay off its debt to the government. The decision, coming on the heels of the similar "Granger Cases," raised the specter of massive federal regulation of private corporations unless this "revolutionary" judicial tendency was reversed. With three seats soon likely to fall vacant, the next president would have the power to reshape the Court, and a group of railroad executives led by Whitlaw Reid wanted justices who would give them favorable rulings. During the 1880 general election campaign, Garfield promised to give Reid's group veto power over his Supreme Court nominees in exchange for cash contributions to his campaign.

15. In the late nineteenth century, the custom was that presidential candidates did not actively campaign. Instead, they relied on hundreds of others to speak for them throughout the country. Organizing events and obtaining speakers were crucial components for victory, and that required money and managers.

Chester Arthur was a brilliant fundraiser and a persuasive manager, and he was a central factor in the ticket's eventual victory. From his elegant office suite in the Fifth Avenue Hotel in New York City, he worked tirelessly for the ticket, levying assessments, raising money from donors, wheedling and cajoling, getting speeches printed and distributed, organizing events, and doling out campaign funds. He arranged multiple speaking engagements before huge crowds for Conkling (three cities in Ohio, three in Indiana, and nine in New York) and Grant (in Ohio and New York) on behalf of the ticket.

The standard-bearer for the Democrats, Winfield S. Hancock of Pennsylvania, was a mirror image of Garfield: a former Union Civil War general who was moderate, competent, colorless, and a compromise candidate nominated at a divided convention. In the end, Garfield eked out the narrowest of victories in the popular vote – a plurality of 9,464 votes out of more than nine million cast. The outcome in the electoral college was more decisive: 214 to 155 votes. New York, with its thirty-five electoral votes, provided Garfield with his margin of victory. The New York Stalwarts had worked hard for him and fulfilled their part of the Treaty of Fifth Avenue.

16. When it came time to select his cabinet and fill other important government positions, two things loomed large in Garfield's mind. First, that he owed, in large part, his presidential nomination to Blaine and the Half-Breeds. Second, that he owed, in large part, his general election victory to Conkling and the Stalwarts. He felt that he would have to appease both groups to have a successful administration.

He began by choosing Blaine for secretary of state. This complicated matters in two ways. First, the choice of Blaine for the most prestigious cabinet position infuriated Conkling. Second, Blaine immediately began inundating Garfield with suggestions for the other six cabinet slots. (Mrs. Blaine told her daughter, "Your father and I have picked out Garfield's cabinet for him.") Consequently, Garfield spent an inordinate amount of time trying to balance Blaine and Conkling's cabinet demands, so much time that he neglected the composition of his inaugural address. He finished writing it at 2:30 a.m. Inauguration Day and it turned out to be mediocre. In the end, Garfield chose only one Stalwart for his cabinet, Thomas L. James of New York, for Postmaster General.

After the inauguration, Garfield tried to appease Conkling by appointing five Stalwarts to important sub-cabinet positions. When Blaine heard this, he rushed to the White House and threatened to resign. To calm Blaine down, Garfield agreed to appoint William Robertson, Blaine's ally and Conkling's New York state

enemy, as Collector of the New York Custom House.

17. Conkling and the Stalwarts viewed Robertson's appointment as a direct violation of the Treaty of Fifth Avenue. Conkling called it "perfidy without parallel." Vice President Arthur was livid when he found out about it. He told a newspaper editor, "Garfield has not been square, nor honorable, nor truthful with Conkling. It is a hard thing to say of a President of the United States, but it is, unfortunately, only the truth. Garfield – spurred by Blaine, by whom he is easily led – has broken every pledge made to us. Not only that, he seems to have wished to do it in a most offensive way."

Conkling took the loss of the New York Custom House hard. He and Platt fought fiercely in the Senate Republican caucus to block Robertson's confirmation. But many of those senators wanted to give the new Garfield administration a fair shot at success and, consequently, did not support Conkling on this question. Hoping to embarrass the president, Conkling and Platt resigned from the Senate in protest, confident that the New York State legislature would side with them and return them to their seats. But the state legislature did not do this; it appointed two new senators. Conkling never returned to politics, but Platt did.

18. In April 1881, Garfield launched an investigation into the Star Routes corruption ring in the Post Office Department. Garfield's investigation revealed among the major players involved were some of the large postal contractors, former Congressman Bradley Barlow of Vermont, Second Assistant Postmaster-General Thomas J. Brady, some of the subordinates in the department, and Arkansas Senator Stephen W. Dorsey. Dorsey was Secretary of the Republican National Committee during Garfield's 1880 presidential campaign. After Garfield's assassination, President Arthur pursued the investigation. Two federal trials took place in 1882 and 1883, and the postal ring was finally shut down. Although the fraudulent scheme was widespread, there were few convictions. Many of the defendants in the Star Routes trials were successfully defended by noted lawyer and orator, Robert Ingersoll. Brady and Dorsey were acquitted by the jury in the 1883 trial. Public disgust over the Star Routes graft served as an impetus for civil service reform and the passage of the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act in 1883.

19. As president, Garfield was able to put his financial expertise, which was acquired through his congressional committee experience, to work by recalling government bonds that were paying 6 percent interest. The Treasury was able to refinance them at 3.5 percent, which saved $10 million annually—about 4 percent of the overall budget at that time.

20. Garfield authorized Secretary of State Blaine to call for a Pan-American conference in 1882 to mediate disputes among the Latin American nations and serve as a forum for talks on increasing trade. In particular, they hoped to negotiate peace in the War of the Pacific, which involved Bolivia, Chile, and Peru. Nine countries accepted invitations to the conference, but Blaine resigned from the cabinet after Chester Arthur succeeded Garfield because he refused to serve under a Stalwart president. The Arthur administration then canceled the Pan-American conference.

21. Charles Giteau was an unemployed, mentally unstable man who fancied himself a Stalwart. He had approached both Garfield and Blaine for a diplomatic post in Europe – for which he was completely unqualified – and they had rebuffed him.

The idea came to Giteau suddenly, "like a flash," he would later say. On May 18, two days after Conkling's dramatic resignation from the Senate, Giteau, "depressed and perplexed … wearied in mind and body," had climbed into bed at 8 p.m., much earlier than usual. He had been lying on his cot in his small, rented room for an hour, unable to sleep, his mind churning, when a single thought struck him: "If the President was out of the way, everything would go better."

Following Conkling's defeat, Blaine was triumphant, and Garfield felt that he had scored one for the executive branch. On July 2, 1881, Blaine accompanied Garfield to the Washington railroad station to see him off. But before Garfield reached the platform, he was shot twice by Charles Giteau. One bullet grazed Garfield's shoulder; the second lodged itself deep in his back. Quickly grabbed by onlookers and the police, Giteau calmly stated: "I did it, and I will go to jail for it. I am a Stalwart, and Arthur will be president." In the days after the shooting, there was legitimate concern that Giteau was linked to the Stalwarts and that the attempt on the president's life would cause a political crisis. However, once investigators discovered that he was deranged and acted alone, that concern abated.

The doctors could not find the bullet lodged in Garfield's back, but it was not necessarily life-threatening. Plenty of Civil War veterans walked around with musket balls in them, and Andrew Jackson did that for decades. Nevertheless, Garfield's doctors kept probing the wound – in an unsanitary manner – trying, unsuccessfully, to find the projectile. The wound became infected, and it became hard for the president to hold food down. His weight fell from 210 to 130 pounds. Garfield died of complications caused by infection

and blood poisoning on September 19.

22. During Garfield's two-and-a-half-month incapacitation, the country had no president because no legal mechanism existed for temporarily transferring the powers of the president to the next person in the line of succession (usually the vice president). This problem also existed during the latter part of Woodrow Wilson's second term, when a severe stroke disabled him. The Twenty-fifth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1967, solved this problem. The amendment provides a mechanism for the president to declare himself incapacitated; the next person in the line of succession becomes the acting president. The president can then reinstate himself when he has recovered. If the president cannot or will not declare himself incapacitated, the amendment provides a mechanism for the vice president and the cabinet to declare that he is incapacitated. Again, the next person in the line of succession becomes the acting president.

23. Garfield, who was inaugurated in March 1881, served only four months before he was shot. His greatest single service to his country probably was to die the way that he did, because it highlighted the evils of spoils-seeking and helped pave the way for true civil service reform.

24. Lucretia Garfield returned to the family home in Mentor, Ohio, after being widowed. The home is now the James A. Garfield National Historical Site. She spent much of the rest of her life preserving her husband's papers and other materials, establishing what was effectively the first presidential library.

When Garfield was assassinated, he had four sons and one daughter: Abram (age nine), Irvin (eleven), Mary (fourteen), James (sixteen), and Harry (nineteen). Two other children had died in infancy. The children all grew up to be successful and productive citizens. In 1908, Harry, a professor of politics at Princeton, became the president of Williams College. During World War I, he also served as Woodrow Wilson's fuel administrator. In 1907, James became secretary of the Interior under President Theodore Roosevelt. Irvin became a successful corporate lawyer in Boston, and Abram, a graduate of MIT, worked as an architect in Cleveland. Mary, whose husband was a prominent investment banker, was active in civic affairs in New York and Pasadena, California.

See the next page for a list of references.

References

1. Allan Peskin, *Garfield* (1978).

2. Kenneth, D. Ackerman, *Dark Horse: The Surprise Election and Political Murder of James A. Garfield* (2011).

3. Candice Millard, *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President* (2012).

4. Ari Hoogenbloom, "James A. Garfield," in *To the Best of My Ability*, edited by James M. McPherson (2000).

5. Davis Dyer, "James A. Garfield," in *The American Presidency*, edited by Alan Brinkley and Davis Dyer (2004).

6. H.W. Brands, *American Colossus: The Triumph of Capitalism, 1865-1900* (2011).