



*James A. Garfield*

SOUTHERN CALLS

# PRESIDENTIAL PASSINGS

*Written by Bob Boetticher Sr.  
Chairman, National Museum of Funeral History*

PART SIX OF OUR 8-PART SERIES

*Journey from the Jersey Shore to Cleveland, Ohio*

## A LOOK BACK AT THE GARFIELD FUNERAL TRAIN

James Abram Garfield, the 20th president of the United States, died at 10:45 p.m. on Sept. 19, 1881, in Elberon, New Jersey.

Eighty days earlier, the president was looking forward to speaking at his alma mater, Williams College, and then proceeding to his annual vacation with his family. He entered the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Station in Washington, D.C., accompanied by his sons, James and Harry, Secretary of State James G. Blaine and Secretary of War Robert Todd Lincoln, at 9:30 a.m. on July 2, 1881. As Garfield walked into the waiting room, Charles J. Guiteau, an attorney who had been denied a consular post, suddenly lurched forward and fired two shots from his British Bulldog revolver. One grazed Garfield's shoulder and the other entered his back. The president collapsed and was carried back to the White House for medical attention.

On one of the hottest days on record in Washington, hovering above the high 90s even with large fans blowing over a large box of ice, Garfield was suffering and miserable. On the advice of his doctors and urging from his wife, Garfield was taken by the Pennsylvania Railroad to the New Jersey shore, where it was much cooler and where it



The Garfield Funeral Train  
The tribute of the students of Princeton College - The Railway track strewn with flowers.



was hoped he would be able to recover from his wounds and infection. His family members, key staff members and doctors accompanied him on the train for the 250-mile journey on Sept. 6, 1881.

Charles G. Francklyn, a wealthy industrialist, made his luxurious cottage near the seaside town of Long Branch available to the Garfields. The trip would become problematic because the closest train station was more than a mile from the cottage. But within 24 hours, the railroad trackmen – with help from the townspeople who used their horses and carts to haul away the rubble and furnished sandwiches and gallons of lemonade – had laid a new one-mile spur that, unfortunately, was on a slight incline. When the train arrived with the wounded president, it could not make it up the hill, so a dozen large men had to push the heavy steel train the last few yards to the front door of the cottage.

The president's family thought he was improving, but that was not the case. Fourteen days later, on Sept. 19, 1881, his wife, Lucretia, and daughter, Mollie, were at his bedside when the death of the president from blood poisoning and other complications was announced to a stunned nation.

Garfield's body was embalmed in two stages, and a plaster death mask of his face and right hand was made under the supervision of Garfield's undertaker, Charles A. Benedict of New York. The Metallic Burial Casket Company of New York

City provided the 6-foot, 3-inch casket with a rich black covering with velvet trim and thumbscrews, a white satin interior and solid silver metal handles. A silver engraved plate adorned the lid, and two ferns formed a "V" at the foot, reaching up to the head. The president was dressed in the same plain suit he wore for his inaugural address on March 4, 1881, and his left hand was positioned over his heart.

The special Pennsylvania Railroad funeral train, heavily draped in black, consisted of two combined cars, one first class passenger car, No.395, and one executive car, "Pennsylvania," which was the personal car of George B. Roberts, the company's president. The cars were coupled to a 4-4-0 class D6 steam locomotive No. 23, draped in black from the top to the wheels. The train arrived at the cottage on Sept. 21. After a brief service, the casket was loaded into the first car, which was elaborately decorated in black. Cabinet members and their wives entered the second car, No.395, and the third car. Mrs. Garfield, her daughter, Mollie, and son, Harry, boarded the Pennsylvania.

At 10 a.m. sharp, the funeral train slowly rolled down the one-mile spur to the main track, where President Chester Alan Arthur, Gen. U.S. Grant and others waited. Before departing, rail car No. 248 was coupled to the funeral train, and Arthur and Grant boarded car No. 395. At 10:12 a.m., with his hand on the throttle and his head leaning out of



Above: President Garfield's first view of the ocean from his reclining chair. The Franklyn Cottage, Elberton, New Jersey | Cover of *Leslie's Illustrated*, New York, Oct. 1, 1881

Right Page: Workers laying railroad track to transport wounded President Garfield to Elberon NJ 1881. Hand-colored woodcut

The Franklyn Cottage, Elberton, Train Spur – When the train reached Elberon, it switched to a track that would take it directly to the door of Franklyn Cottage. Two thousand people had worked until dawn to lay the track, but the engine was not strong enough to breach the hill on which the house sat. "Instantly hundreds of strong arms caught the cars," Bliss wrote, "and silently ... rolled the three heavy coaches" up the hill. Photo/Hiram College Archives





the cab window, engineer William Page, along with firemen D.W. Dinnell and J.W. Freeman, slowly rolled the special funeral train, with smoke billowing from its stack, out of the small black-draped depot in Elberon and headed for Washington, D.C.

The one-mile spur to the cottage was immediately removed after the train departed, and later the railroad ties were carved up into souvenirs.

As the train steamed across the countryside, flags at half-staff and buildings draped, many grieving people adorned in black, with their heads uncovered, lined the train route in disbelief. Three hundred students from Princeton College placed fresh flowers on the tracks for a hundred yards and also placed flowers on the special funeral train as it slowly passed. Laborers toiling the fields stopped working, removed their hats and remained mute and sorrowful as the train rumbled passed.

The special funeral train passed through Wilmington, Delaware, where more than 10,000 mourners gathered to pay their respects to the late president. Bells tolled from the courthouse, City Hall and fire companies throughout the city as the train slowly disappeared out of sight.



At 4:45 p.m. on Sept. 21, the funeral train slowly entered the Baltimore and Potomac Railroad Station in the nation's capital and came to a stop.

Mrs. Garfield, wearing a heavy black veil, and her family descended from the Pennsylvania car, and Blaine escorted her through the depot and directly to their state carriage. While the mourning dirge "Near My God To Thee" played, the casket was carried by a military honor guard to a waiting Centennial hearse provided by undertaker W.R. Speare. Draped in somber black and drawn by six iron gray horses whose trappings were draped in black, each was led by a postilion wearing a broad sash over his shoulder as they proceeded to the Capitol rotunda to the sound of

muffled drums. With black funeral emblems arranged tastefully on the exterior marble, the casket arrived at the east portico of the Capitol. The casket processional, led by Doorkeeper Charles W. Field, ascended the marble steps through the great bronze doors into the heavily draped rotunda, with crape covering the frames of historical paintings. Outside, an artillery battery fired a salute. More than 70,000 mourners filed past President Garfield, who lay in state on the Lincoln bier until Friday morning. A floral memorial wreath sent by Queen Victoria was placed on the head of the casket. The religious funeral service was held at 3 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 23, and, following the service, six pallbearers selected by Mrs. Garfield carried the casket to the hearse, which proceeded back to the waiting special funeral train.

The train was the same one used on the trip from Long Branch, with two additional cars added for the final journey to Cleveland.

The Pennsylvania Railroad 4-4-0 class D6 steam locomotive was decorated with fresh flowers, palm fronds and a large portrait of Garfield on its front. All of the polished metal was draped in black, and the coach cars were covered with heavy folds of black drapery and the Stars and Stripes. The baggage car was first, followed by Mrs. Garfield and guests, assisted by railroad porters dressed in white coats, aboard

Pennsylvania. Members of the cabinet were in the third car, and Gen. William T. Sherman and other military leaders were in the fourth car. The casket was shoulder-carried by the military honor guards from the Second Artillery and placed in the fifth car, which was followed by a second baggage car.

The special funeral train, with the hissing of steam and the firebox ablaze, slowly rolled out of the station at 5:16 p.m. The second train, consisting of four rail coaches, including three sleeper cars and a dining car for members of the congressional delegation and others, departed 10 minutes behind schedule after a coupling pin broke between the steam locomotive and the first rail car. Repairs were quickly made, and the train continued on to Cleveland.



Left Page: Only two doctors were allowed to attend Garfield against Dr. Bliss' wishes at the insistence of First Lady Lucretia Garfield: Dr. Susan Ann Edson, Mrs. Garfield's personal physician and one of a very few women doctors in the country, and Garfield's first cousin Dr. Silas Boynton

Above and Below: Garfield lying in state at the White House







President and Mrs. Garfield Crypts  
The caskets of James A. Garfield, left, and his wife Lucretia are in the crypt of the Garfield Memorial at Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland. The caskets are closed off to the public, but can be viewed through the gates that surround them.  
Conner Flecks/Alamy Photos

As the funeral train thundered through the Ohio Valley on its final somber journey home, miners covered in coal dust came out of the pits and stood by the bonfires they built to observe a moment of silence for the brief time the train was in view. Along the route, a line of kneeling soldiers saluted as the train rumbled past.

Sept. 24 was a beautiful Saturday morning, with a cloudless sky and bright sunshine. Many thousands of people from the surrounding counties poured into Cleveland by every train available.

Continuing on its sad journey, the train passed rail depot after rail depot, all of them draped in black, with church bells tolling and immense crowds. The funeral train finally approached the small Euclid Station in Cleveland at 1:21 p.m. on the Cleveland & Pittsburgh Railroad tracks. Undertakers Charles A. Benedict, Jeremiah Hogan and Brougham E. Harris, who made the funeral arrangements, were waiting. The troops went to present arms and the casket, covered with fresh floral tributes, was immediately lifted onto the shoulders of the honor guards and carried from the funeral car. While the funeral dirge played, Mrs. Garfield, escorted by Blaine, followed the casket to the large, black-draped hearse drawn by four black horses wearing black body blankets with silver trim.

A few minutes later, the second train arrived at the station with the congressional delegation. The solemn funeral procession slowly proceeded at 1:30 p.m. to Monument Square, reaching the black-draped catafalque in the elaborately built 72-foot-tall pavilion with four open arches. A squad of Cleveland Grays ceremonially marched in and took their positions on the corners of the casket bier as honor guards.

Throughout the rainy evening and into the morning, 100,000 mourners stood in a line up to a mile long, three and four abreast, passing by Garfield's casket in silence.

The funeral service began at 10 a.m. Sept. 26, attended by the president's mother, Eliza Ballou Garfield; his widow, Mrs. Lucretia Garfield; their three children; invited guests and dignitaries. At the conclusion of the Episcopal service, the casket was carried by 10 artillerymen to an elaborate, ornate, black-draped funeral carriage drawn by 12 black horses wearing mourning blankets and with feathered black plumes with white tips on their heads, each led by a formally dressed postilion. A funeral cortege proceeded for five miles, passing under a 40-foot-high arch draped in black and inscribed "Come Home to Rest" at Lakeview Cemetery, where the casket was placed in a temporary receiving vault. A brief service followed.

Eight years later, the Garfield Monument was dedicated on Memorial Day – May 30, 1890, where the caskets of President Garfield and his wife currently rest in honor.



