James A. Garfield Essay, Research Paper

JAMES A. GARFIELD

James A. Garfield was born in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, in 1831. His

father died in 1833, when Garfield was only two years old and so his mother

had to carry on working the family farm by herself. With the death of his

father, the family feel into poverty. Even though they had very little money,

his mother made sure that her children went to the neighborhood school to get

a good education. He belonged to the Desciples of Christ Church.

While growing up, James drove canal boat teams, and earned enough

money to further his education at college. He attended Western Reserve

Eclectic Institute at Hiram, Ohio, and was graduated from Williams College

in 1856. He returned to Western Eclectic Institute and became a classics

professor. Later, he became the president of the College.

In 1858, he was married to Lucretia Rudolph and had seven kids.

Eliza, Harry, James, Mary, Irvin, Abram, and Edward.

James Garfield was an advocate for free-soil principles and soon

became a supporter of the newly organized Republican Party. And in 1859,

he was elected to the Ohio Legislature. During the succession crisis, he

advocated coercing the seceding states back into the Union.

During the Civil War, he helped to recruit the 42nd Ohio Volunteer

Infantry and became the infantry’s colonel. He fought at Shiloh in April 1862,

served as a chief of staff in the Army of the Cumberland, saw action at

Chickamauga in September of 1863.

When the Union victories had been few in 1862, he successfully led a

brigade at Middle Creek, Kentucky, against Confederate troops. And in

1862, at the age of 31, he became brigader general, only to be made a major

general in 1863.

Meanwhile, in 1862, he was elected by fellow Ohioans to The United

States House of Representatives. He was persuaded by President Lincoln to

resign his army job and remain in Congress. Said Lincoln, “It is easier to find

major generals than to obtain effective Republicans for Congress.” Garfield

held his House seat for 18 years by winning repeated elections and became

the leading Republican in the House. As Chairman of the House committee

on Appropriations, he became an expert on fiscal matters. He also advocated

a high protective tarriff, and sought a firm policy of Reconstruction for the

South. In 1880, he was elected to the United States Senate.

At the Republican Convention in 1880, he failed to win the Presidential

nomination for his friend, John Sherman, but became the “dark horse”

nominee on the 36th ballot.

In November 1880, he became the 20th President, winning with a

10,000 vote margain over the Democratic challenger, General Winfield Scott

Hancock.

As president, he strengthened Federal authority over the New York

Customs House, the stronghold of Senator Conkling. He named Conkling’s

arch-rival, William H. Robertson, to run the Customs House. This ruling was

contested, but Garfield would not back down. “This will settle the question

whether the President is registering clerk of the Senate or the Executive of the

United States.”

Garfield’s presidential career came to an abrupt end on July 2, 1881, in

a Washington railroad station when he was shot by Charles Guiteau, only

four months into Garfield’s presidency. For eighty days the president lay ill

and performed only one official act, the signing of an extradiction paper.

Alexander Graham Bell tried to find the bullet in Garfield’s body with a

metal detector, but was unsuccessful at locating it, because Garfield was

laying on a mattress with metal springs. He was taken to New Jersey and

seemed to be recuperating but died on September 19, 1881 from an infection

and internal hemmorage.

In my opinion, Garfield wasn’t much of a president, solely on the fact

that he only spent four months in office and never had a chance to do

anything great or stupid.