

Residents made plans for President's memorial

"The sound of the deep tone bells, Tuesday morning, as the solemn toll pierced the air and was wafted to every home in the city, spoke louder, with a terrible awe that tongue cannot tell — the President is dead!" Bloomington Telephone, Sept. 24, 1881.

Every so often some demented person gets the idea that some kind of problem or other can be solved by shooting the president. Only 16 years after Abraham Lincoln paid the price for being the leader of the victorious Union cause, James A. Garfield was cut down by a disappointed office-seeker.

Monroe Countian had been disturbed about Garfield's condition since he was shot July 2. Commenting on his death on Sept. 19, the Telephone revealed that "The news was in every house by 8 o'clock, and people began to collect on the square, eagerly watching the bulletin board, as if, by some unsurmised accident, the sad information might be a mistake."



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

The post office flag was lowered to half-staff, preparations were made for decorating the court house and stores and classes were dismissed as soon as the students assembled. That included IU. Continued the paper, "A public meeting was called at the court room at 10:30 a.m. At that hour the room was crowded."

Prominent citizens took charge of Bloomington's reaction to the tragedy. Judge Wilson presided and IU President Lemuel Moss and a committee were delegated to arrange for a memorial service. Meanwhile, the IU students were making plans of their own. Two students from each class were to be responsible for writing memorial resolutions, which would be read at chapel the following Sunday

afternoon."

IU Professor Theophilus Wylie had been following the progress of Garfield's condition (he was actually shot on July 2 and did not die until Sept. 19). Wylie wrote in his diary on July 26, "Dr. Maxwell told me this a.m. of the bad news from Washington respecting the President that he was worse — yesterday 2 p.m. much fever and pulse high. This Ev g he reported that a telegram had been received by Mr. Wagner stating that at 1 p.m. today he was better, pulse not normal but lower and symptoms better."

By Aug. 28, Wylie's diary reflect pessimism. "A good discourse with reference to the low condition of the President, who is hardly expected to recover." There were a couple of other brief diary comments about the president before he noted that Garfield had died.

The community memorial service was held at the Methodist Church. "A few minutes after the ringing of the first bell, every seat was occupied. The room was

tastefully decorated, long sections of crepe extending around the walls, entwined about the chandeliers and pulpit. Two flags draped were on each side, and in front on a table was a photograph of President Garfield..."

After the song, "He's Gone," had been sung by the choir, a prayer was given by Reverend Clay of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Judge Wilson spoke about Garfield, as did Professor Atwater, who had grown up with the president. Atwater said that Garfield's desperate struggle for life was his "first failure."

In their resolutions the students expressed uneasiness. "That we view with alarm this second successful attempt upon the life of the Chief Magistrate of our republic, and we pray God that beloved land may long be spared a repetition of a crime at once so shocking in itself and so abhorrent to the nature of a government by the people."

Twenty years later, an anarchist shot President William McKinley.

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