

President William Mckinley

By

Jerry Sandifer

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McKinley

I would like to thank Brother Lauris Eek for contacting me at the White House to invite me to participate in your program today. I am very honored to be here today, and in a sense, lucky. I don't know how many of you are aware, but for my recent 2nd inaugural I was offered a ride in one of those horseless carriages in the inaugural parade. Well, I didn't have to think about it very long before I realized it would be very embarrassing if the carriage broke down on Pennsylvania Avenue. So, I told them no thank you. However, just last week two fellows came to my house in Canton, Ohio to try to get me to ride in their horseless carriage. Let's see, I forget what they called it, it ran on steam; oh yes, it was a Stanley Steamer. I told them I didn't want to be seen riding this new fangled machine, but they assured me they would take me where no one would see. So I agreed, and had one of the most harrowing experiences of my life. We were shaking and lurching down the streets of Canton — I tell you, I was frightened. You know, the driver told me that at one time we were going up to 18 miles an hour! The wind blew my hat off, and I almost lost it.

Sandifer

Today, we need to distinguish between William McKinley speaking to you, and me speaking about William McKinley. McKinley will speak to you in the first person, and when I need to talk about things McKinley wouldn't or couldn't talk about, such as his assassination, I will speak to you in the third person. My name is Jerry Sandifer, and I am a Docent at the William McKinley Presidential Library and Museum in Canton Ohio.

I have been asked to talk about the Civil war and my relationship to Freemasonry. Now, explaining the Civil War to The Civil War Lodge of Research is like Jerry Sandifer going across the Potomac to explain politics to President Bush. So McKinley and I will restrict our comments to His personal Civil War experiences.

I would like to start with an experience from McKinley's life that illustrates his attitude toward war and tells a little about his character. William and Ida McKinley loved music, and often had performances in the White House. They held a piano recital in the Blue Room, probably playing ragtime, which was a favorite of theirs. This was at the time when the Spanish American War was imminent, and McKinley was quite distraught about the impending conflict with Spain. He looked quite haggard, he had dark circles under his eyes, he had to take sleeping powders to be able to sleep, and he had lost quite a bit of weight. He noticed his good friend, H. H. Kohlsaat, a Chicago newspaper editor across the room. He nodded to Kohlsaat and nodded toward the Red Room indicating he would like to talk with Kohlsaat. They met in the Red Room, and Kohlsaat listened sympathetically as McKinley told of his wife's poor health. He had almost no sleep in the last two weeks. McKinley then proceeded to unload his war troubles on his friend. Congress wanted to go to war, the press wanted to go to war, the American public wanted to go to war, but McKinley had seen enough bloodshed during the Civil War. He participated in the battle at Antietam Creek in '62, when more men were killed than at any other day in the western hemisphere. He didn't want to go to war with Spain unless he was sure that God and Man approved. He told Kohlsaat he didn't even think that there was enough Ammunition on the Atlantic Seacoast to fire a salute. As he revealed his troubles, McKinley buried his head in his hands and began to sob. After calming himself, he asked Kohlsaat, "Are my eyes red, does it look like I have been crying?" Kohlsaat told him yes. Knowing that the President had to return to his guests, Kohlsaat suggested a plan. "When you enter the room, blow your nose very hard and loud. It will force tears to your eyes, and they will think that is what made your eyes red." McKinley took the advice and, upon entering the Blue Room, gave a loud nasal blast heard by all.

The Civil War

McKinley

When Fort Sumter surrendered and President Lincoln called for volunteers to suppress the rebellion, one of the many military companies to respond was the Poland Guard, from my hometown of Poland Ohio. When the Guard gathered at the Sparrow House Tavern for patriotic talks, my cousin Will Osborne and I were there to listen. The talk by local attorney Charles E. Glidden was very stirring. After the war I read law with Glidden in preparation for passing the Bar, as I also became a lawyer. Well, Will and I accompanied the Poland Guard to Youngstown where they caught the train for Columbus to be mustered into the service of the United States. We went to our homes, and after due consideration decided that we should volunteer. Five days later with permission from our parents (I was only 18 years old), we headed for Columbus and enlisted in the Poland Guard just two days before they were mustered into the service. The Poland Guard became Company "E" of the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry (OVI) and our field officers were Colonel Scammon, Lieutenant Colonel Mathews, and Major Hays. As you know, Hays was later to become a President of the United States. While we were at Camp Jackson near Columbus, Ohio, General Fremont visited the camp and was invited to review the troops. I still remember that as he came by me, he looked me in the eye, pounded my chest and pronounced me fit for a soldier.

Sandifer

During the war, in a talk to Congress, President Lincoln had said that "There were many regiments whose members possessed full comprehension of all the known arts, and there was scarcely a one from which could not be selected a President a Cabinet, a Congress, and perhaps a Court." He couldn't have known how prophetic he was. The 23rd OVI with 950 Mustered in and 732 Mustered out (Much Recruiting) there were 2 Presidents, 3 Congressmen, 2 Governors, 1 Supreme Court Justice, 1 American Consul, and 1 Minister to a foreign country.

McKinley

The Battle at Carnifex Ferry, Late Summer, 1861

We were at Cheat Mountain to repel an expected confederate attack — we were anxious for our first face-to-face meeting with the enemy.

Floyd's confederate troops had routed the 7th Ohio at Cross Lanes and retired to a well- fortified position at Carnifex Ferry. Rosecran's Army (which included the 23rd Ohio Volunteer Infantry) moved southwest to Carnifex Ferry and engaged the confederate army.

The 23rd was involved in a flanking movement and didn't catch the brunt of the battle, which lasted from 3PM to nightfall.

This was the 23rd's first real fight, & although we weren't in the thick of it, we did gain confidence in ourselves, and faith in our commander.

Sandifer

The Battle at Antietam, September 17, 1862

In the summer of 1862, Lee invaded Maryland. The Union forces in the east under McClellan were trying to check Lee's advance.

General Jacob Cox's Kanawha Division from the western theater went to Maryland to support McClellan. The Kanawha Division had Scammon's Brigade, which included the 23rd OVI. Sergeant McKinley was involved in the ensuing battles at South Mountain and Antietam.

The battle at Antietam took place on September 17. More men were killed that day than on any other battlefield in the Western Hemisphere. The Union Soldiers rushed into battle at 2:00 AM that morning with no opportunity for food or drink. At 2:00 PM, Commissary Sergeant McKinley drove a team of mules carrying supplies along a 2½-mile front to the exhausted and hungry soldiers. Along the way, one mule was killed by Confederate fire, and the rear of the wagon was shot off. The mule was replaced, the supplies were not hurt by the blast, and McKinley continued on. Twice ordered back by officers who thought he couldn't make it, McKinley delivered food and coffee to the exhausted and hungry troops. Even though he disobeyed orders twice, McKinley was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant for bravery at Antietam.

McKinley

Morgan's Raiders, summer 1863

In the summer of 1863, Morgan's Raiders had swung up out of Tennessee, across Kentucky & into Indiana. They turned into Ohio and across the southern part of the state.

Local Militia offered minor opposition, but the federal cavalry was hot behind them, forcing them further upstream toward Gallipolis.

Hays' Brigade (which included the 23rd OVI) got the news and headed from Camp Maskell toward Gallipolis to help chase Morgan's Raiders. Due to the hot Union pursuit, Morgan bypassed Gallipolis and Pomeroy, and tried to hurry to West Virginia via Buffington Island.

At Buffington, they were confronted by Union Militia, Federal Cavalry, 2 U.S. Navy Gunboats and assisted by Hays' Brigade. Most of the 2600 were captured there, but Morgan and 336 made it to West Point Ohio before they were captured. This was within 25 miles of my home in Poland, Ohio, and the farthest north reached by any confederates.

Berryville, September 3, 1864

For the spring campaign of 1864, we headed to Cloyd's Mountain, Virginia to burn the bridge over the New River, where some of the toughest hand to hand combat took place. Then we headed to Lynchburg to destroy its railroad and canal, but the Confederates turned us back.

Then in the summer of 1864, Cook's Army (of which we were a part) was sent to Maryland to protect against invasion by General Early. Early had burned a city in Pennsylvania & was moving toward Maryland.

We waltzed up and down the Shenandoah Valley fighting & skirmishing the Confederates.

On Sept 3, a battle at Berryville was fought in the dark till after 10 PM. The weapon firing looked like a thousand gas jets. I was ordered to direct a regiment to a new position, but I didn't know the country & our position was almost surrounded by confederates. We were stopped and challenged with "halt, who goes thar?" in a soft southern accent. Well my heart started pounding in my chest, and I immediately whirled my horse around and led the regiment the other way. Again, we were stopped and confronted with "Halt who goes there?", but this time in a Yankee twang. I gave the countersign and got the regiment moving.

Freemasonry

Toward the end of the war, I was stationed in Winchester, Virginia. I had the occasion to visit a hospital with prisoners from the battle at Opequan. Almost as soon as we passed the guard, I noticed that the doctor who was escorting me shook hands cordially with a number of Confederate prisoners. He also took from his pocket a roll of bills and distributed all he had among them. Boy-like, I looked on in wonderment; I didn't know what it meant. On the way back to our camp I asked him, "Did you know those men or ever see them before?" "No," replied the doctor, "I never saw them before." "But how did you know them, and why did you give them money?" I asked. "They are Masons, and we Masons have ways of finding that out." "But," I persisted, "you gave them a lot of money, all you had about you. Do you ever expect to get it back?" "Well," said the doctor, "if they are ever able to pay it back, they will. But it makes no difference to me; they are brother Masons in trouble, and I am only doing my duty." I said to myself. "If that is Masonry I will take some of it myself." The following is a list of my ensuing involvement with Masonry:

Hiram Lodge #21 Winchester Virginia
Worshipful Master (Confederate Chaplain — J.B.T. Reed)
May 3, 1865

Mahoning Lodge #394 Niles, Ohio
1865- 1867

Canton Lodge # 60 Canton Ohio
1867- 1869

Eagle Lodge # 431 Canton Ohio
Charter Member 1869

Canton Commandry #38 Canton Ohio
Knight Templar 1884

Washington Commandry #1 (Washington, DC)
Elected Life Member 1896

Illinois Masonic Veterans Assn
Honorary Member 1898

Other Masonic Activities

Visited Mother Lodge in Winchester Virginia, May 19, 1899

Participated in Masonic Centennial observance of the Death of George Washington, 1899

Reviewed several parades of Knights Templar from the White House, 1897 & 1900

Attended a reception of California Commandry #1 in San Francisco, 1901

Lawyer

At the time I passed my bar exam to become an Ohio lawyer, my sister Anna was a teacher in Canton, Ohio. She convinced me that there were good opportunities for a Lawyer in Canton, so I opened a law office and waited for business. It might have been a long wait if it hadn't been for Judge Belden. He knew I was interested in becoming his law partner, so he came into my office one day with a sheaf of papers. He threw them down on my desk and said 'McKinley, I have a replevin case of appeal to try tomorrow morning and I can't be there. I'm not feeling well, and if I do recover I have another obligation out of town. You will have to try the case for me', and he started out of the office. I said "wait a minute Judge, I can't do that, I've never tried a case before, only mock cases in law school, and I only have until tomorrow morning to review the papers." He said, "McKinley if you don't try it, it won't be tried", and he left. Well I don't mind telling you, I was frightened, but there wasn't anything else I could do, so I started going through the papers he gave me. I was up all night reading the papers. It was a very complicated case, but the facts finally started to come together, and I realized that if I could present these facts in a logical order, the jury should find for our client. To make a long story short, I won the case that morning, but as I looked around the courtroom, there sat Judge Belden under the balcony! He was testing me. He was aware that I wanted to be his law partner and he wanted to see how I would operate under pressure. We did in fact become law partners a little later, and stayed partners for a few years until his untimely death. I then became partners with my brother Abner.

Another interesting case concerned a physician friend of mine. He had set a man's broken leg, and now the man was suing him, saying that he set the leg crooked. The surgeon was sure he did a good job and I was sure of my surgeon friend's integrity, so I took the case expecting to find something amiss with the fellows crooked leg claim. Sure enough, when we went to court I watched the crooked leg man walk across the room and as I watched his gait, I was pretty sure I knew what was going on. The fellow's lawyer got him on the stand, asked him a few questions, and then asked him to pull up his right pants leg for the Jury to see. Sure enough, his leg was very crooked. There were ooh's and ah's from the Jury, and they seemed to think McKinley was going to lose this case. When I got up to cross-examine, I asked a few necessary questions and then asked the man to lift his left pants leg. Of course, his lawyer quickly objected saying that the case was about his right leg not his left. The Judge overruled, and when the fellow showed us his left leg, it was just as crooked as his right. Well I immediately asked that they dismiss the case, which they did, and then I made a recommendation. I said that if the fellow ever broke his other leg, he should have my client set it, because he did a better job than nature.

President

When I ran for Congress for my first term, my opponent, Levi Lamborn from Alliance, Ohio came to our debates with a scarlet carnation for me. He was the first person to raise carnations in the United States. I fell in love with the flower, and have worn one whenever I could every since. Whenever children come to visit me in the White House, I always give them a carnation that I have been wearing. For example, congressman Honey Fitzgerald came to visit me recently with his two daughters Agnes and Rose. Of course, I approached the two little girls to give them a carnation. Agnes was closest, so I handed her the carnation from the lapel of my coat, and told her, "Agnes, you are the prettiest little girl that has ever been in the White House. Agnes beamed from ear to ear, but Rose didn't look very happy. I hastily clipped another carnation from a flower vase and gave it to Rose with a few words of endearment. Rose still didn't look happy.

Sandifer

And then eighty five years later, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy confided in her family at a Thanksgiving reunion that every since that day she was concerned that Agnes was prettier.

McKinley

Ida and I love to entertain. We have three grand pianos in the White House and one upright. We love piano music, particularly ragtime. We have also doubled the size of the Marine band. Another kind of entertainment that I enjoy, as you can tell by my profile, is eating. I have a sweet tooth, and I want to share a recipe with you for my favorite dessert, dark horse cherry pie. I would like for all of you to try this and let me know what you think of it. You simply make an ordinary cherry pie, but you add two tablespoons of orange juice, and two tablespoons of cherry liqueur to the filling, and then grate the peel of the orange and sprinkle it on the top crust. It is sumptuous. Please try it and let me know what you think. I'm sure you can find the address for the White House. And we have a policy at the White House of responding to any letters within twenty-four hours. It keeps some of the staff up late at night, but we will respond quickly.

Sandifer

Boy! I hope President Bush doesn't get too many letters on this one.

McKinley

One of the problems confronting a president is how to shake many hands without damaging your own. I have developed a technique over the years that helps me considerably. As the people approach with right hand extended, I extend my hand as far into theirs as I can so they can't press my hand too hard, and then as I say a few words, I put my left hand on their elbow to push them along. Using this technique, I set a record of shaking over 4800 hands in an hour and forty-five minutes.

Sandifer

As you know, McKinley was assassinated in 1901 at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo New York. There was an anarchy movement in Europe at the time, and several heads of state had been killed. McKinley's people knew about it, but McKinley didn't think it would happen in the United States. Unfortunately, however, at a public reception in the

Temple of Music, the assassin, Leon Czolgosz, had a gun in his hand with a handkerchief wrapped around it so it couldn't be seen. As he approached the President, he shot McKinley two times. McKinley died eight days later. Funeral services were held in Buffalo, Washington and Canton, with thousands of people attending. Margaret Leech in the final paragraph of her book, "In The Days of McKinley", states a fitting tribute to the President as she describes the funeral services:

McKinley's Bier traveled from the services at Buffalo to the Rites at Washington, and then to the resting place at Canton. ... The Eulogies reverberated as orators and journalists and poets extolled the virtue of an upright life, a death of Christian fortitude. Uncelebrated among the tributes was the farewell of Chiefs Geronimo, Blue Horse, Flat Iron and Red Shirt, and the seven hundred braves of the Indian Congress at the Pan American Exposition. They had thought of President McKinley as their good friend. Many of them had gone to see him lying in state at the Buffalo City Hall. Like visitants from an earlier day, the men with painted faces had filed past the flower-banked casket, sharing the nation's grief; and among the gathered cards, was the big crudely lettered square of pasteboard that had come with their wreath of purplish evergreen leaves.

It read:

"The rainbow of hope is out of the sky. Heavy clouds hang about us. Tears wet the ground of the Teepees. The palefaces too are in sorrow. The great chief of the Nation is dead. Farewell! Farewell! Farewell!"

Thank You.



**Private William McKinley
18 years old**



