

The Presidency of William McKinley

By Charlie McBriarty

It was a clear day on March 4, 1897, in Washington, D.C. At noon the temperature was about 3 degrees higher than the city's average temperature of 37 degrees as the 25th President of the United States, William McKinley, took the oath of office. An inaugural address followed the swearing in of the new president. At 3,968 words, McKinley's speech was modest in comparison to the 8,460-word address delivered by our ninth president, William Henry Harrison, but it remains among the ten longest inaugural addresses ever delivered.

Some of the noteworthy topics included in McKinley's address were needed legislative action to facilitate a more rapid economic recovery from the 1893 depression; his pledge to work with Congress to stabilize the Nation's monetary system; and concern about the growing federal debt, suggesting higher tariffs imposed on foreign goods would speed the eventual payment of the debt. Additional challenges included improvements to existing immigration regulations, continuation of civil service reforms, and sustaining the modernization of the U.S. Navy while also renovating the country's Merchant Marine. Finally, he concluded that now was the time to begin to deal with these issues and alerted Congress of his intention to convene a special session on March 15.

McKinley's initial action was the appointment of his cabinet. Immediately after convening Congress, he pressed the members to review and revise the revenue structure of the United States and to examine the feasibility of increasing the terms of the existing 1893 tariff so that it could produce greater income. The new Dingley Tariff bill passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law by McKinley on July 24, 1897.

When Congress assembled for its regular session in December, additional domestic matters quickly took a back seat to the growing concern about the battling between Spain and Cuban revolutionary forces. The resulting plight of the Cuban people was trumpeted by newspapers to the point that public sentiment began to push for U.S. intervention. On January 25, 1898, the U.S. battleship *Maine* arrived in Havana to discourage the Spanish blockade of goods and services to the Cuban people and ensure the protection of U.S. visitors in Cuba. During the night of February 15, the *Maine* exploded and sank in the harbor. Initial press coverage blamed the Spanish for the sinking that killed 266 crew members. Following a U.S. review, it was found that an explosion caused by a malfunction within the *Maine* resulted in the sinking of the ship. Nonetheless, the continuing cry of "Remember the *Maine*" added fuel to the pro-war reaction.

McKinley, who did not wish to become entangled in a war, in April sent Spain a message of "neutral intervention." On April 23 Spain's reaction was to declare war on the U.S. Two days later McKinley supported the declaration of war against Spain passed by Congress.

The Spanish-American War was brief. The Spanish fleet blockading Cuba was quickly destroyed and U.S. troops quickly overcame Spanish forces in Cuba and gained control of the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico.

A couple of uprisings in the Philippines and negotiations over the terms of a treaty extended the development of the peace treaty eventually ratified by the U.S. Senate on February 6, 1899. Terms of the treaty included the transfer of Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the U.S. as well as jurisdiction of Cuba until their independent government was formed.

The strategic importance of the Hawaiian Islands became apparent with the acquisition of these new territories in the Pacific. Early attempts to obtain Hawaii had been blocked by anti-imperialists of the previous administration. Although McKinley favored the annexation of the islands, it took him more than a year to finally push the process through Congress on July 7, 1898.

On the domestic front, Congress passed a measure that authorized the use of voting machines for federal elections, which was signed by McKinley in February 1899. In May of that year McKinley issued an executive order exempting 3,000 to 4,000 positions from the required civil service examination, thus slowing the more aggressive reforms of his predecessor. On March 7, 1900, he was able to fulfill one of his campaign promises by signing the Gold Standard Act.

With the approach of the election of president and vice president, the national party conventions became a focus of attention. The Republican National Convention was held in Philadelphia from June 19 to 21 and renominated McKinley as the party's standard bearer, and New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt was chosen as their candidate for vice president. Kansas City, Missouri, was the site of the Democratic National Convention from July 4 to 6. The delegates again selected William Jennings Bryan of Nebraska for president and Adlai E. Stevenson of Illinois as the vice presidential candidate.

The 1900 campaign for president involved the same two major presidential candidates who faced off in the 1896 campaign. The economy was booming and the end of the recent

war with Spain had left the nation as a significant and important member of the world community. The campaign leading to Election Day on November 6, 1900, was quite similar to the previous contest. The incumbent President McKinley replicated his "front porch" approach while Democrat Bryan traveled thousands of miles speaking throughout most of the East and Midwest. Republican vice presidential candidate Theodore Roosevelt campaigned actively in 24 states. When Election Day ended, McKinley garnered nearly 52% of the popular vote and 292 electoral votes and captured a second term as president. The Republicans also retained control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.

McKinley's second inauguration was held on March 4, 1901, the first to occur in the 20th century. Briefer than the one delivered four years earlier, the major thrust of his second address was his desire that a lasting peace be achieved. In a major step toward that goal, on March 23, 1901, the U.S. captured the leader of the Philippine independence pressure group, and by mid-April the U.S. military secured the islands and the rebellion was proclaimed to be ended.

The end of the Spanish-American war renewed a focus on the long-planned Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. This 350-acre exposition praising the marvels of electricity opened on May 1, 1901. McKinley traveled to Buffalo on September 6 to deliver an official welcome. After concluding his remarks in the exhibition's stadium, he walked to the Temple of Music building to participate in a public reception.

Upon McKinley's arrival he was placed at the head of the receiving line. The line was moving well until one man reached out his handkerchief-covered right hand as if to shake the president's hand. Instead, he fired two bullets at the president. The first bullet deflected off McKinley's chest; the second pierced his stomach. McKinley's first words were of his wife: "Be careful how you tell her, oh, be careful."

President McKinley was rushed to a Buffalo hospital where doctors unsuccessfully searched for the bullet. McKinley's reactions in the hospital gave signs of a potential recovery, and he was eventually discharged from the hospital to recover in a friend's house in Buffalo. It was here that on September 14 he took a turn for the worse and died. He had served only six months of his second term. Later that day Theodore Roosevelt was sworn in as the 26th President of the United States.

The assassin was an anarchist named Leon Czolgosz who not only admitted he had fired the shots but also exhibited no remorse. He was immediately captured by authorities and taken to prison. Later in September he went to trial; a jury found him guilty and he was given the death sentence. On October 29, 1901, he was strapped into the electric chair, where he was put to death.

President McKinley's funeral was held on September 19 in his home town of Canton, Ohio. On that very day a group met to begin the plans for a McKinley memorial to be built in Canton, which was completed in 1907. Numerous other monuments and tributes were dedicated to memorialize McKinley. In 1903 a monument was placed in the battlefield at Antietam, Maryland, in honor of Sgt. William McKinley's service during the Civil War. A memorial in front of the Ohio capitol building featuring President McKinley was dedicated in 1906. The Scarlet Carnation was named the Ohio state flower in 1908 in honor of McKinley, who always wore one on his lapel. As late as 1917, the same year the highest peak in North America was officially named Mount McKinley, an impressive memorial was erected in his birth town of Niles, Ohio.

In spite of these tributes, McKinley's position among Presidents of the United States is far from the top tier. Perhaps the outgoing and aggressive personality of his vice president, Theodore Roosevelt, completely dominated and overshadowed the more reserved McKinley throughout those early years of the 20th century. It may explain how in 2015, more than 100 years after McKinley's death, with little fanfare or debate, the name of the Alaskan mountain named in his honor was changed to its original name of Denali.

This Month's Puzzle Solutions

C	U	R	E	D	E	D	D	O	R	A	V	E	
A	R	A	R	A	R	E	E	D	E	R	I	S	
R	E	M	A	R	K	A	B	L	E	G	I	L	T
D	A	S	S	I	E	T	I	S	I	S	L	E	
			C	A	R	O	M	S	M	E	A	R	
S	P	A	S	O	R	I	O	L	E				
P	A	R	T	A	K	E	T	R	A	N	S	I	T
A	C	C	E	D	E		E	N	T	I	C	E	
R	E	S	P	O	N	D	E	S	T	A	T	E	S
			S	P	O	R	T	S	L	E	S	T	
A	M	B	I	T	A	H	E	A	D				
S	E	A	S	A	W	E	S	I	M	I	L	E	
S	A	L	T	R	I	N	G	L	E	A	D	E	R
E	L	S	E	I	N	C	A	T	R	E	E	S	
T	S	A	R	A	G	E	D	S	T	A	R	T	

5	1	4	3	9	7	2	8	6				
9	6	3	8	2	4	7	1	5				
7	2	8	5	1	6	3	9	4				
8	3	9	7	4	5	1	6	2				
6	5	2	1	3	9	4	7	8				
1	4	7	6	8	2	9	5	3				
4	8	5	9	7	3	6	2	1				
2	9	6	4	5	1	8	3	7				
3	7	1	2	6	8	5	4	9				