

James A. Garfield

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Historic Site
Ohio



Conducting a "front porch" campaign from his Ohio home, James A. Garfield (*inset*) changed the style of presidential politics. The home is shown as it appeared in 1880.

BOTH—NPS



FROM LOG CABIN TO WHITE HOUSE

By the time of his death at age 49 in 1881, James Abram Garfield had been a teacher, college principal, minister, state legislator, lawyer, Civil War general, congressman, US senator-elect, and president of the United States. Born in Orange Township, Ohio, in November 1831, he was the youngest of four children born to Abram and Eliza Ballou Garfield. They had carved a farm out of the frontier of Ohio's Western Reserve. James was almost two when his father died, leaving the family in poverty. At 16 James took a job as a tow boy on the Ohio canals. His canal career ended after six weeks when he got malaria and had to return home.

In 1851 James entered the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute (later Hiram College) in Ohio. In 1854 he enrolled at Williams College in Massachusetts, graduating with honors in 1856. Garfield's speaking ability gained him leadership positions, including principal of the Eclectic Institute in 1857. That same year he began preaching in northeast Ohio. In 1858 he married Lucretia Rudolph and was elected to the Ohio Senate on an antislavery platform in 1859.

When the Civil War began in 1861, Garfield became lieutenant colonel of

the 42nd Ohio Volunteer Infantry. Given brigade command in 1862, he won minor victories in Kentucky and was promoted. These and other military accomplishments led to his 1862 election to the US House of Representatives. Congress did not meet until December 1863, so he served as chief of staff to Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans through the 1863 Chickamauga campaign in Georgia and Tennessee.

Garfield's congressional career lasted 17 years. As head of the House Appropriations Committee 1871–75, he managed the nation's finances, reduced government spending, and fought inflation. He pushed for civil service reform to end abuses of the patronage system. He took a moderate stance on protective tariffs, a major issue in the 1880 campaign.

Elected to the US Senate in January 1880, he was asked to nominate John Sherman for president at the Republican National Convention in Chicago. When the convention deadlocked, Garfield became the nominee. He was elected 20th US president in November and inaugurated in March 1881. His term was cut short on July 2 when he was shot by Charles Guiteau, a political fanatic. President James A. Garfield died on September 19.

James A. Garfield



James A. Garfield and Lucretia Rudolph at the time of their engagement, 1858.

WESTERN RESERVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



James Garfield purchased the Mentor, OH, farm from Harriet Dickey in 1876. In 1880 he enlarged the main house from the modest building seen here to the 20-room structure shown at top.

HIRAM COLLEGE



Lucretia and James Garfield (*center*) with children Abram (*seated*), James, Mollie, Harry, and Irvin (*seated*). At right is the president's mother, Eliza Ballou Garfield, to whom he was devoted.

LAKE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
SIGNATURE—NPS

PRESIDENT GARFIELD'S LIFE AND CAREER

1831 Born Nov. 19, the last US president born in a log cabin.

1848 Works six weeks as boat tow boy on Ohio canals.

1849 Enters Geauga Seminary in Chester, OH.

1851 Enters Western Reserve Eclectic Institute (now Hiram College) in Ohio.

1854–56 Graduates from Eclectic Institute. Enrolls in Williams College in Massachusetts; graduates in two years.

1857 Becomes principal of Eclectic Institute; becomes a Disciple of Christ minister.

1858 Marries Lucretia Rudolph, Nov. 11. Over the years seven children are born; five survive to adulthood.

1859 Elected to Ohio Senate; studies law.

1861 Admitted to bar; Civil War begins; appointed lieutenant colonel, 42nd Ohio Infantry.

1862 Wins battles in Kentucky; promoted to brigadier general

at Battle of Shiloh, TN; elected to Congress.

1863 Chief of staff to Gen. William S. Rosecrans; resigns from Army to serve in 38th Congress.

1871–75 Chairs House Appropriations Committee.

1876 Garfields buy farm in Mentor, OH.

1880 Elected to US Senate; Republican presidential nominee; conducts "front porch" campaign at Lawnfield; elected president.

1881 Inaugurated in March; shot and mortally wounded July 2; dies in Elberon, NJ, Sept. 19; entombed in Lake View Cemetery, Cleveland.

Garfield funeral memorial ribbon
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION



The Garfield Home



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James Garfield called his wife Lucretia “one of the coolest and best-balanced women I ever saw.” After his death, she stayed at Lawnfield, making it the focus of extended family life and a memorial to his work.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



WESTERN RESERVE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Garfield once kept books and papers in the small building he used as his 1880 campaign office (above center). His books are now in the Memorial Library (above) that Lucretia added to the main house 1885–86.

NPS / MICHAEL CARPENTER PHOTOGRAPHY

FROM FARM TO MEMORIAL

When James A. Garfield bought the Dickey farm in November 1876 he hoped it would become a place “where I can put my boys at work, and teach them farming” and “where I can touch the earth and get some strength from it.” The property had been neglected and needed repairs. By the spring of 1880, Garfield had improved the landscape and transformed the nine-room, one-and-a-half-story farm house into an expansive 20-room, two-and-a-half story structure.

In summer 1880 the farm—reporters named it Lawnfield—became the backdrop for Garfield’s successful presidential bid. Breaking from the tradition of previous candidates who remained in the background during elections, he waged a precedent-setting “front porch” campaign, paving the way for future presidential races.

Dignitaries, students, well-wishers, and political supporters came to hear the Republican candidate talk about patriotism, protective tariffs, labor, and other issues of the day. The center of activity was a small library building that Garfield converted into his headquarters, equipping it with a telegraph.

Promoting a Legacy After the president’s assassination, Lucretia Garfield and her family lived comfortably at Lawnfield. Thanks to contributions from the public, she was able to make improvements. In the 1880s she added a wing to the main house to serve as a presidential library, a vault to safeguard her husband’s books and papers, and a monument to the president’s memory.

Lucretia oversaw construction of a farm manager’s residence; a gasholder to provide fuel for cooking, heating, and lighting; a chicken coop; a carriage house; and a windmill to supply water. She also relocated the 1877 horse barn—one of the few structures remaining from Garfield’s time—and the granary, which most likely dated to the Dickey era.

Lucretia Garfield died at her winter home in California on March 13, 1918, at age 85. After her death the family kept Lawnfield until 1936, then donated it to the Western Reserve Historical Society. In 1980 Congress authorized the James A. Garfield National Historic Site. Here you can learn about the life and legacy of the 20th president of the United States.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

James A. Garfield National Historic Site is open daily May through October, with limited days and hours the rest of the year. Check the website for details.

The visitor center in the former carriage house has information, exhibits, a park film, restrooms, and a bookstore.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, programs, and services accessible to all. The visitor center, restrooms, and first and second floors in the

main house are accessible to persons in wheelchairs.

What To See and Do The site includes the main house and memorial library (guided tour only), 1880 campaign office, 1893 carriage house, other outbuildings, and windmill. Most furnishings in the main house belonged to the Garfield family.

Tours Self-guiding cell phone tours are available. Tours of the main house are scheduled regularly. Space may be limited and group

tours require advance reservations. Call for schedules and fees.

For a full list of park regulations, including firearms information, visit the park website.

Nearby Garfield Sites

- James A. Garfield birthplace site at Moreland Hills. Historical marker, replica cabin, Garfield statue, and trail to the site of the original cabin. 440-248-1188.
- James A. Garfield memorial and tomb. Lake View Cemetery. 216-421-2665; www.lakeviewcemetery.com.

More Information

James A. Garfield National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks and National Park Service programs, visit www.nps.gov.

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