

0. TRIAL AND EXECUTION - Story Preface

1. A POPULAR PRESIDENT

2. A SHOOTING IN BUFFALO

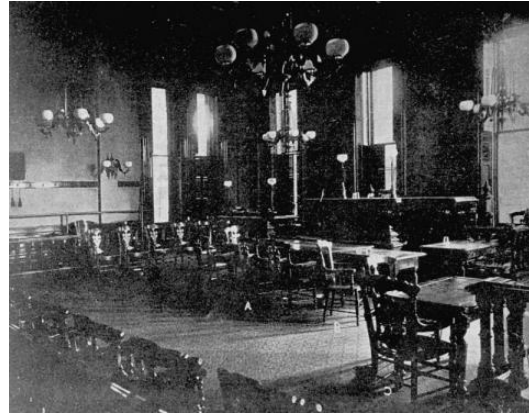
3. TOO LATE

4. IF ONLY...

5. IT IS OVER

6. A PRESIDENTIAL FUNERAL

7. TRIAL AND EXECUTION



Leon Czolgosz, assassin of President McKinley, was tried at the Superior Court Chambers in Buffalo, New York. This photo, by an undetermined photographer (perhaps Werner), depicts the courtroom where the defendant was tried and convicted. Published in the *Buffalo Courier*, on the 19th of September 1901, the picture shows us where the key players were seated during trial. "A" marks the chair used by Czolgosz; "B" marks the chair used by his defense counsel (Robert Titus); and "C" marks the chair used by the Erie County District Attorney (Thomas Penney). Click on the image for a better view.

The public cry for swift justice was intense.

The first-degree murder trial for the death of the President's assassin started barely a week after McKinley took his last breath. Lawyers for Czolgosz had little time to learn the facts. Their efforts were complicated by a client who refused to talk with them.

Convincing the jury their client was insane was the best the defense team could do, but the judge's instructions even paralyzed that effort. The jury was told Czolgosz was presumed to be sane unless his lawyers proved otherwise.

What proof would they need? That Leon did not know his actions were wrong. Although historians think he probably was insane, his lawyers did not have the requisite proof.

The District Attorney, Thomas Penney, needed only 8 hours and 25 minutes to try the case and get his guilty verdict. The sentence, on September 26, 1901, was a foregone conclusion.

As Judge Truman White told the prisoner he would die in Auburn Prison's electric chair, the court had a few other things to say:

Czolgosz, in taking the life of our beloved President, you committed a crime which shocked and outraged the moral sense of the civilized world. You have confessed that guilt, and after learning all that at this time can be learned from the facts and circumstances of the case, twelve good jurors have found you guilty of murder in the first degree.

Standing erect in the courtroom, as he listened to the judge, Czolgosz showed little emotion as he learned his fate:

You have said, according to the testimony of credible witnesses and yourself, that no other person aided you in the commission of this terrible act. God grant it may be so. The penalty for the crime for which you stand is fixed by this statute, and it now becomes my duty to pronounce this judgment against you. The sentence of the court is that the week beginning October 28, 1901, at the place, in the manner and means prescribed by law, you suffer the punishment of death. May God have mercy on your soul. Remove the prisoner.

On October 29, 1901 Czolgosz was led to the chair. One news organization reported that "he was intensely pale and his chin quivered as he tried to look brave."

As he was strapped into the device that would end his life, the condemned man blurted out why he killed William McKinley:

I killed the President because he was the enemy of the good people! I did it for the help of the good people, the working men of all countries! I am not sorry for my crime.

At 7:12 p.m., the Warden (J. Warren Mead) gave the signal to begin. For 45 seconds 11,700 volts of electricity were sent through Czolgosz' body. To make sure the assassin was dead, the executioner brought power to full force once more.

Following an autopsy, the corpse was doused with sulphuric acid to prevent anyone from stealing it or Czolgosz' clothes. (Museums had offered up to \$5,000 to purchase them.) The body disintegrated within 12 hours.

Thomas Edison's company once again filmed this important part of the McKinley assassination story. But the

movie of Czolgosz taking 11,700 volts of electrical energy was a recreation. Even so, it eerily depicts what happened when the assassin paid for his crime with his own life.

The Edison film company's catalog describes the movie it sold for \$24:

A detailed reproduction of the execution of the assassin of President McKinley faithfully carried out from the description of an eye witness. The picture is in three scenes.

First: Panoramic view of Auburn Prison taken the morning of the electrocution. The picture then dissolves into the corridor of murderer's row. The keepers are seen taking Czolgosz from his cell to the death chamber, and shows State Electrician, Wardens and Doctors making final test of the chair. Czolgosz is then brought in by the guard and is quickly strapped into the chair.

The current is turned on at a signal from the Warden, and the assassin heaves heavily as though the straps would break. He drops prone after the current is turned off. The doctors examine the body and report to the Warden that he is dead, and he in turn officially announces the death to the witness.

Ida McKinley was totally shaken by her husband's death. Retiring to the couple's home in Canton, she visited his grave nearly every day. Still the loving wife, she created a kind of shrine in her bedroom/sitting room.

Living only 6 years longer, Ida Saxton McKinley is buried with her husband not far from their Canton home.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TRIAL-AND-EXECUTION-President-McKinley-Assassination>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/TRIAL-AND-EXECUTION-President-McKinley-Assassination>

Media Stream

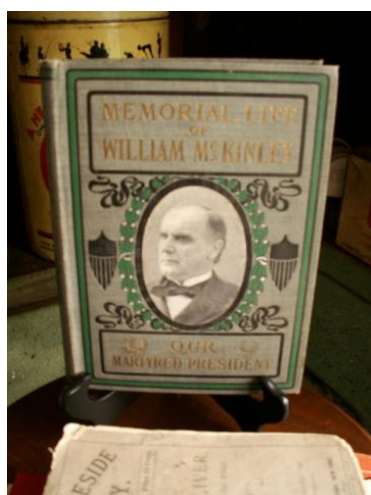


Demand for Justice - Illustration

Image online, courtesy Dana Ward, Professor Emeritus of Political Studies at Pitzer College.
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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Demand-for-Justice-Illustration>



Memorial Life of William McKinley

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.
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Leon Czolgosz - Photo

Image online, courtesy University at Buffalo Libraries.

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Thomas Penney

Image online, courtesy University at Buffalo Libraries.

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Judge Truman White

Image online, courtesy University at Buffalo Libraries.

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Auburn Prison

The image, described above, is maintained by the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, Pan-American Exposition Scrapbooks Collection, and is online via [University at Buffalo Libraries](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Auburn-Prison).

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Czolgosz - Convicted Presidential Assassin

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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Execution at the Prison - Photo

Image online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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J. Warren Mead

Image online, courtesy [University at Buffalo Libraries](#).

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Ida McKinley's Memorial of her Husband - Photo

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

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TRIAL AND EXECUTION

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Electric Chair - Execution Simulation

Film simulating the execution of Presidential assassin, Leon Czolgosz - produced by the T.A. Edison Company.

Video online, courtesy Library of Congress.

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