

Witness Calls Garfield Death Badly Reported

**Most Accounts Inaccurate,
Says Sylvester Breen,
of Alexandria.**

Most of the versions of the shooting of President James A. Garfield on July 2, 1881, in the old Baltimore & Potomac Railroad Station at Sixth and B streets northwest, are either entirely or partly inaccurate, according to Sylvester A. Breen, of Alexandria, Va., perhaps the only living person who witnessed the assassination.

At the time Breen was 15, employed by the Union News Co. to take charge of the parcel checking stand at the station. On the day of the assassination, knowing that President Garfield was to board the train out of the city, Breen was lingering around the gate. Suddenly he saw the gatekeeper, Joshua Davis, dart toward the ladies' room.

Thinking a thief had snatched the pocketbook of one of the passengers, Breen followed. When he reached the waiting room he saw the President stagger out. He would have fallen had not Mrs. Sarah V. E. White, matron in charge of the room, caught him. The President slid to the floor.

The old B street station had an entrance on B street leading into the ladies waiting room, Breen recalled. President Garfield was walking arm in arm with a friend through the door, when Charles J. Guiteau, a disappointed job-seeker, stepped out from behind the storm door where he was hidden and fired two shots. The first went wild, the second hit the President in the back.

Guiteau was captured without much resistance, Breen says. In the hope that the sea breezes would aid in his recovery, the President was taken to a New Jersey resort, the train bearing him there running at the then unprecedented speed of 60 miles an hour. Officials of the Pennsylvania Railroad, Breen recalled, placed a full glass of water in the train and not a drop of water was spilled on the journey.

After the shooting, Breen became acquainted with a reporter for one of the Washington newspapers and accompanied this reporter to the jail to interview Guiteau.

"The prisoner was very courteous to me," recalled Breen. "In fact, it did not seem possible that he would commit such a crime as shooting the President of the United States."

When the new Union Station was built, the old Baltimore & Potomac Station was torn down. On the spot in the waiting room of the station where Garfield fell, a large brass star was set, the flowered carpet being cut away. A tablet reciting the tragic details of the assassination was placed on the wall of the waiting room.

When the building was torn down star and tablet both disappeared.

To locate the spot on which Garfield fell, Breen communicated with District engineers and was informed that the probable spot was near the center of Constitution avenue, some 30 or 40 feet west of the west curb of Sixth street.

Some day, Breen hopes, a permanent marker will be erected on this spot.

'It Was Right Here—I Remember Well'



On Constitution avenue, where thousands of Washingtonians daily roar past in their cars, Sylvester Breen, of Alexandria, has determined the location of the exact spot on which President Garfield stood when he was shot by an assassin.