

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 627

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

April 14, 1941

PHYSICIANS AT LINCOLN'S BEDSIDE

Seventy-six years ago today, on the fourteenth of April, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated while attending a theatrical performance at Ford's Theatre in Washington. During the period between the time he was shot and the hour when the autopsy was performed the next morning, several physicians visited the bedside of the President.

It seems appropriate on this anniversary day to compile the names of such physicians as were known to be present and to note such service as they were able to render. It would not have been possible to present such a complete list of physicians had not Dr. Milton H. Shutes, author of *Lincoln and the Doctors* made some contributions in this field.

The Three Emergency Surgeons

There were three doctors at the theatre that evening who immediately responded to the call for a doctor which is said to have come from the Lincoln box. These three men, Dr. Leale, Dr. Taft, and Dr. King, will always be closely associated with the story of Lincoln's last hours.

Certainly no young surgeon but a short time out of medical college was ever called upon for professional service in a more dramatic situation than was Dr. Charles A. Leale who was the first to render medical assistance to the stricken President. Dr. Leale was but twenty-three years of age and was an assistant surgeon of United States Volunteers located at Army Square Hospital.

Upon reaching the President's side he immediately ordered that he be removed from the chair and allowed to recline on the floor. Upon finding the wound, he removed a clot which had formed which relieved intra-cranial pressure. Dr. Leale then attempted to stimulate respiration by certain pressure on the throat to free the larynx of secretion. By pressure on the diaphragm with the assistance of others, he stimulated the heart action and an improvement in pulse and breathing followed. Further stimulation was attempted by forcible in-and-out breathing into the President's mouth which brought about heart and lung action without further artificial help.

Dr. Leale then ordered that Lincoln be moved to the nearest bed which proved to be just across the street from the theatre. He supported the President's head while the body was being carried. Later a probing of the wound by Dr. Leale failed to discover the bullet.

The second surgeon to reach the box in which Lincoln had been shot was Dr. Charles S. Taft, assistant surgeon, United States Volunteers, who was stationed at the Signal Camp of Instruction at Georgetown. When the call for medical assistance came, he leaped from the top of the orchestra railing to the stage and was then lifted up to the President's box.

Dr. Taft assisted Dr. Leale in attempting to stimulate heart action, and he also helped to carry the body of Mr. Lincoln across the street to the Petersen House.

A letter written to Mr. Oldroyd by Dr. Taft on March 1, 1900, states that Lincoln was laid diagonally across the bed because it was too short for his long body. Taft wrote, "I then administered a small glass of brandy and he swallowed it without much difficulty. Twenty minutes afterward I gave him another teaspoonful, but it was not swallowed."

Dr. Taft recalled that most of the night he was engaged in supporting the President's head so "that the wound should not press upon the pillow and the flow of blood be obstructed." The last moments are described by Dr. Taft in these words, "The heart did not cease to beat until 22 minutes and 10 seconds after 7 o'clock. My hand was upon the President's heart, and my eye on the watch of the Surgeon-General who was standing by my side."

The third physician to come immediately to the box after the attack on Lincoln was Dr. Albert F. A. King. He also assisted Dr. Leale in helping to stimulate Lincoln's heart action. When the body of the President was moved across the street, Dr. King placed himself at the stricken man's left shoulder and helped to prevent any unnecessary movements of the head and shoulders. He had also assisted Dr. Leale and Dr. Taft in divesting Lincoln of his clothing and then covering his body with mustard plasters.

The Three Official Physicians

Nearly half an hour elapsed after the President had been placed on a bed before the Lincoln family physician, Dr. Stone, arrived. With him came Dr. Barnes and shortly after followed Dr. Abbott.

Just as soon as messengers could be secured after the shooting of Mr. Lincoln, word was sent to the family physician, Dr. Robert King Stone. Although of different political faith, he was a great admirer of Mr. Lincoln and once said to Carpenter, the artist, "It is the province of a physician to probe deeply the inner lives of men, and I affirm that Mr. Lincoln is the purest hearted man with whom I ever came in contact."

It is not known that Dr. Stone did more that fatal night than suggest that another teaspoonful of brandy might be needed. His suggestion was followed out but Mr. Lincoln was not able to retain it. Stone was seated on the edge

of the bed when Lincoln passed away.

Apparently viewed from the military aspect of the situation, Surgeon-General Joseph K. Barnes was the ranking medical adviser present. At about 2 A. M. he searched for the bullet but the ordinary silver probe was too short. He then secured a longer probe and discovered the bullet but did not try to remove it. Passing the bullet he was confronted with broken segments of the right orbital plate of the frontal bone, but no further attempts were made to explore the injury.

The task seems to have fallen to Dr. Ezra W. Abbott to keep the chart of the condition of the President during the night. Thirty-three different times he made notations. His first entry was made at 11:00 when he noted that the pulse rate was 41. Other notations follow: 12:00, pulse 45, respiration 22; 1:00, pulse 86, respiration 30; 4:15, pulse 60, respiration 25; 6:00, pulse falling, respiration 28; 7:00, symptoms of immediate dissolution; 7:22, death.

Dr. Abbott also noted that Mrs. Lincoln, who occupied a room just across the hall, came to the bedside of the President with Robert Lincoln at 1:45 and remained until 2:10, returning again at 3:00.

Altogether there were at least sixteen physicians who were at Lincoln's bedside at some time during the fateful night, and their names are to be found alphabetically arranged on this page.

Abbott, Dr. Ezra W.
Barnes, Dr. Joseph K.
Crane, Dr. Charles H.
Curtis, Dr. Edward
Ford, Dr. William Henry
Gatch, Dr. C. D.
Hall, Dr. Neal (J. C.)
King, Dr. Albert F. A.
Leale, Dr. Charles Augustus
Lieberman, Dr. Charles Henry
May, Dr. J. F.
Notson, Dr. W. M.
Stone, Dr. Robert King
Taft, Dr. Charles S.
Todd, Dr. Lyman Beecher
Woodward, Dr. Ashbel