

CSPAN/FIRST LADIES IDA MCKINLEY

JUNE 16, 2014

10:00 a.m. ET

SUSAN SWAIN, HOST: The story of Ida McKinley can best be told through an exploration of her relationship with her husband, President William McKinley. Married in 1871, their 30 years together bring them happiness early on, but tragedy strikes and changes their relationship into a life of illness and devotion that shapes the presidency at the turn of the new century.

Joining us tonight to help tell the story of Ida Saxton McKinley are two guests returning to the table, Presidential historian Richard Norton Smith and first ladies historian Carl Anthony.

Tonight, we're going to start our program with some film. And this is the first time that a president and first lady have ever been captured on film in the United States. This rare footage is of President McKinley and Mrs. McKinley arriving on stage at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo, New York on September 5th, 1901. That date is significant, because the very next day, the president would be felled by an assassin's bullet.

Richard Norton Smith, as we look at this footage, what was it about this exposition that attracted the president to want to go in the first place?

RICHARD NORTON SMITH, PRESIDENTIAL HISTORIAN: Well, it was a world's fair that could not have been better timed, because it was a celebration in some ways of America's new place in the world. The McKinley presidency was very surprising in many ways. McKinley has been identified all his political career with protectionism.

And in fact, he would be the president who took the country onto the world stage, annexed Hawaii in 1898, fought the Spanish American War; turned America, it was argued, from a republic into an empire; and at the end of his life in the last speech that he gave at that fair, in effect, recanted his earlier protectionist outlook and talked in ways that I think 100 years later, we could all appreciate about opening America to the world.

SWAIN: Carl Anthony, we were looking at our Facebook and Twitter postings and everyone so far is asking about what's known of Ida McKinley, and that is her ill health. But here she was traveling with the president.

So what did the country think of the first lady and know about her at that point, as opposed to what we know about her today?

CARL SFERRAZZA ANTHONY, AUTHOR, "IDA MCKINLEY - THE TURN OF THE CENTURY FIRST LADY THROUGH WAR, ASSASSINATION AND SECRET DISABILITY": It's -- it's a very interesting dichotomy because this is the pattern of her life. She has been grossly miscast by history as, you know, this Victorian invalid on the fainting couch. That wasn't the truth. But there were times when she was that way. And she actually had three chronic illnesses. One was seizure disorder, known as epilepsy otherwise. She had some kind of a neurological damage along her left leg which often led to immobility or periods of it. And she also had a weakened -- compromised immune system, which made her susceptible to colds and infections.

They took a tour across the country to California six months before he was shot. And when they got to California, she almost died in San Francisco. And the presidency, with half the cabinet and

secretaries and everybody, you know, the way they used to travel with a traveling White House, set up a Western White House. And the whole not only nation, but the world was focused on it.

So they -- so they had this thought of her -- that helped to gel this idea of her as the invalid, and then six months later, she was walking unassisted.

SWAIN: As we said, the very next day, September 6th, 1901, an assassin struck and killed President McKinley. Who was he and what were his motives in doing this?

NORTON SMITH: Well, his name was Leon Czolgosz, and if you can spell it, you're doing a whole lot better than I can. I have trouble enough pronouncing it. He was -- I guess you would call him a drifter. He was an anarchist in his politics.

SWAIN: What does that mean?

NORTON SMITH: He believed, with many people at the turn of the century, that the existing systems of government, particularly monarchs, for example, in Europe, existed to the detriment of the common man. They were -- some anarchists were against all organized governments. They certainly were against the system that was topped by the powerful. Czolgosz said, you know, McKinley had power and he had none, in effect.

He had planned on killing the president early in the year. I think it was early in the year, the king of Italy had been murdered. And his -- Czolgosz's family later on said that Leon would stay up late at night reading newspapers about the death of the king. And it may have been the thing that triggered it. But in any event, he -- he made plans to kill the president.

Ironically, the people around McKinley -- there was no Secret Service protection. There was one guard at the White House and he retired early at night.

SWAIN: And I have to say, we -- we asked this with the last assassination. I mean, this is the third president to be assassinated.

NORTON SMITH: Which is why we finally got serious about protecting our presidents. I mean, the Secret Service up to that time was busy working on counterfeiters, you know. But in any event, George Cortelyou, who was the president's secretary/chief of staff, wanted very much to cancel the reception at the Temple of Music at the fair. He worried about just such a threat.

And ironically, you know, Czolgosz got in. He managed to wrap his gun in a bandage around his hand, so it was unnoticed, and shot the president twice. First, it was thought that McKinley would recover and then about a week later, he took a turn for the worst. And in a very real odd way, that's the last time the American people focused on William McKinley rather than his successor, Theodore Roosevelt.

SWAIN: We're showing an illustration of Ida McKinley at the president's death bed, but she was not at this side day two when the assassination took place. How did it all play out with regard to her and the assassination?

ANTHONY: Well, it's interesting. The -- the -- at this point, and we'll get later on to the story of the -- her epilepsy, her seizure disorder. But finally, among the string of doctors she had, she had one who really committed to helping her at least in trying to control the seizures. And part of that required a very strict regimen of food, of diet, but also rest at regular points.

And so she had been with him on the opening day there. Then they went to Niagara Falls. But then the doctor said, you know, it's time for your rest. And both the President and Mrs. McKinley had

bought off on that. And so she was taking her scheduled rest. And she suspected something had happened when the hours started going by and he didn't come back. She was very calm, actually, when she was told, and not only calm, really rose to the occasion.

In fact, almost like in some extraordinary way. There's the story of her during this period of convalescence when there's hope that he will recover, where she's going out walking, for a carriage ride. She walks along the sidewalk on her own and she talks to the reporters, which defies the perception of her.

SWAIN: We have some video that we're going to show of McKinley's funeral. What was it like in the country at that time?

NORTON SMITH: The country was convulsed. It's hard, again, for us 100 years later, because you've got T.R. standing in the way. But the fact is, you know, if you talked to, you know, the man on the street in September of 1901, he would have told you McKinley was certainly the greatest president since Lincoln. There were people in fact who compared him to Lincoln.

He wasn't simply admired. This was the man who had brought us out of the greatest depression to that date in American history. And then projected American power, economic and military, onto the world stage. He's a very large presence for someone to have become almost forgotten.

And so when he died, much as was the case when Warren Harding, but I would argue more deservedly, there was enormous grief in the country. And one reason why people loved McKinley, even people who didn't vote for him, was because of what they saw as his tenderness and devotion to this invalid wife.

SWAIN: Well, we're going to spend the rest of our program, now that we've told you the end of the story, going back in time and learning more about Ida Saxton and her life with William McKinley.

We're going to go back to her early days in her home town of Canton, Ohio, taking you to the Saxton-McKinley House, which is what it's called today, where Ida grew up, and then across the town of Canton to the McKinley Museum.

This our first video you'll see tonight.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

PATRICIA KRIDER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - NATIONAL FIRST LADIES' LIBRARY: We're in the formal foyer of the Saxton-McKinley House, which is significant in the life of Ida Saxton McKinley because this is the house in which she was born. She grew up in this house, along with her sister and brother and her parents and her grandmother. And this is the house that she lived in right up to the time that she met and married future President William McKinley.

This is the family parlor where the family would have spent evenings reading and conversing with each other. This is not a place where they would entertain. We have on the wall here one of the earliest known photographs of Ida McKinley in the center, along with her sister Mary, also known as "Pina" or "Little One," and her brother, George.

On the wall above the mantel, we have a portrait of Ida's father, James Saxton. And over on this wall, we have a photograph of Ida's beloved mother, Kate Saxton. This room was actually replicated from a photograph that we received from a descendant, and it's one of the few interior photographs that we have of the house.

We are in the formal parlor of the house. In this room, we have examples of Ida's love for music. We have Ida's piano sitting over here. During the White House years, Ida McKinley became the first first lady to provide entertainment after state dinners, again showing that love of music that was part of her very formal education.

When Ida and her sister went on a grand tour of Europe in 1869, one of the items that she brought home was this wonderful music box which was donated to us by a descendant of William McKinley's.

And she bought this music box in Geneva, Switzerland and there are letters that she wrote home to her parents throughout the trip talking about looking for music boxes. And she sees music boxes in different places, but she doesn't care for the quality. And she says, "I think I'm going to wait until I go to Geneva, Switzerland and I'm going to buy a music box there." And this is the box she bought as a gift for her mother.

KIM KENNEY, CURATOR - MCKINLEY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY & MUSEUM: We're going into storage to see some of the letters. And the letters that we have are written to her parents from her and her sister Mary. And they went to Europe to see all of the countries that they could. And the letters that we have detail a lot of the things that they saw, the countries that they went to.

This one's from Edinburgh, from Scotland. She said, "People ought to travel to see how much there is to learn and read; how much I will enjoy reading anything Burns has written now since I have visited his home and the scenes of so many of the things he has written." So she really made the most of her trip. She was intensely studying the different countries and seeing the things that you could see on this grand tour, which took six months.

We have a few other things that represent her life as a young girl. This is the hymnal that she would have carried in her hands to go to and from church. It is monogrammed "Ida Saxton," so this is before she met and married William McKinley. And she was a Sunday school teacher. And so these are some of the hymns that she would have sung at church.

Another piece that we have representing her early life is one of my favorites. This is the actual wedding license that William McKinley, Jr., signed. He dropped the "Jr." after his father was -- after his father died, so this would have been what they filed before they got married in January of 1871. And at the time, it was not necessary for the woman to sign it. So William McKinley signed it. Ida did not.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: Carl Anthony, she was born in 1847 to obviously well-off parents. What's important to know about her earliest years?

ANTHONY: Well, her parents were not only well off, but they were what you almost would call radically progressive, particularly on the issues of abolition -- they were rabidly against slavery -- and on equal education for women. And Ida's mother was extremely well educated. Ida McKinley is the most fully educated, formally educated of all the first ladies up to that time.

She -- her father also was friends with, again, a fellow abolitionist. Her grandfather friends with Horace Greeley, and really involved. You know, Ohio was very much like the California of the day, of its day. Sort of in the -- in the earlier part of the 19th century, representing almost the far west. And that's where you really find this movement for equal education for women.

And so Ida's father helps to bring this woman--famed abolitionist--whose first name I can't remember right now. But she -- Ida then follows her when the teacher goes to teach at Delphi Academy, this is

during the Civil War, and then she goes onto study in Cleveland and then she goes to study at Brooke Hall Seminary in Pennsylvania.

And what you see here is a worldly, educated young woman with an interest in finance and a capability for mathematics and also great physical activity. She's an unusually physically fit young woman and hikes upwards of 10 miles a day on that trip to Europe.

Two significant factors on that trip to Europe.

One is she sees for the first time poor and working class women working in Belgium on lace and finds out how very little they make and have to live on. And she's sort of devastated by this. It's reflected in a lot of letters. So she starts buying a lot of lace as a way to sort of try and do her part to help them.

And secondly, she sees an artist who's born with no hands who is painting, copying a painting in one of the galleries. And at first, she's put off by this. But she starts to sort of open up and reflects a real sense of empathy for people living with disabilities.

SWAIN: And she was so good at numbers, her father who owned a bank gave her a job first as a teller and she worked her way up to manager of the bank.

Gary Robinson wants to know on Twitter, "Was it normal for a woman during that time to work or was it OK because it was for her father"?

NORTON SMITH: Well, the answer to the first is no, certainly not in a -- in a professional or managerial capacity like this. And secondly, it does tell you a lot about the relationship with her father.

SWAIN: We want to invite you to join in. We're already using some of your tweets and Facebook comments on air. Twitter used the hashtag firstladies and go to CSPAN's Facebook page if that's your preferred route and there's already a conversation about Ida McKinley. Add your comments to it.

We also have the good old-fashioned telephone call. We like to hear your voices. You can join in by calling us. And we've got the phone numbers on the screen and divided by the region of the country, Eastern and Central and everything west of the -- of the Mississippi and we welcome your participation.

So she met at the bank Major William McKinley. Who was he?

NORTON SMITH: It must be said that McKinley married up. There's no doubt, I mean, from what Carl said that this is a young woman with a pretty cosmopolitan and sophisticated background, neither of which could be said of McKinley.

He was born in Niles, Ohio from a family that had been in the iron-making business. In fact, there are people who think that's maybe where the seeds of his interest in protectionism were planted. Went to a place called Allegheny College for a year, came back homesick and perhaps sick sick.

And then of course, the real classroom, as for so many of his generation, was the war that began in 1861. He entered as a private. He ended the war as a brevet major. And along the way, critically found the patronage of his fellow Ohioan, Rutherford B. Hayes, the 23rd Ohio Regiment.

And Hayes took a liking to this young man. He became a protégé of sorts and in fact, years later, Ida would spend a good deal of time in the Hayes White House, actually babysat for the Hayes children

while the president and first lady were away for a couple weeks. So that relationship became a very significant one.

SWAIN: They married when she was 23. He was 27.

What were their early years like?

ANTHONY: Well, their early years were frankly a little bit conventional. She stopped working and he was interested in politics.

There's no question -- I went through in writing this new biography of her -- that you see the very first legal cases, the business he was handling, it was all through the Saxton family. I mean, that family really helped build the city of Canton. And Canton went on to become a major and important industrial center in Ohio at that time.

Certainly her -- Ida's father and grandfather helped build it and -- and -- and McKinley helped sustain it and make it famous. But he rose in prominence largely because of her.

SWAIN: And just a few years after they got married, 1873, came an onset of problems for her.

ANTHONY: Yes.

SWAIN: What were they?

ANTHONY: Well, they were living in a house that has been mistakenly described as their house. It was a house actually that her father had bought and leased to them.

She gave birth on Christmas Day, 1873 to their first daughter, Katie, who was a very healthy little girl, kind of the -- the central focus of their lives. And Ida's mother became very ill, it turns out, with cancer.

Now I should say that that house, the Saxton-McKinley house was the first the Dewalt house. It was owned by Ida's maternal grandmother and may in fact be the only house in America that has passed through four generations of a family all through women.

And Ida was very close to her mother and grandmother. She was pregnant a second time at the time her mother had cancer. And two weeks before she gave birth, her mother died, there was a fall out of the carriage, either stepping into the carriage or out of it, at her mother's burial service.

And Ida, from what we can tell, from firsthand accounts at the time, people later on in life recalling it, struck her head. She may have had some kind of a very bad injury to her spine. But she gives birth two weeks later to a child who only lives four months and at this time, at this relatively advanced stage, starts developing seizure disorder.

SWAIN: (Jennifer Sanangaro) on Facebook says, "I've heard that she suffered from depression after her second daughter passed away and it got worse after the other daughter passed away. My question is were there more depression episodes throughout her time as first lady"?

ANTHONY: It -- it -- it comes and goes and no, actually.

You know one of the great discoveries, I think, that this -- the new biography will point out is that for almost the entire first half of the McKinleys' years in the White House, Ida McKinley was fine. Ida McKinley was travelling on her own to New York and to Baltimore. She was really relatively active.

She was still disabled in the sense of she had the mobility problem but she adapted the role of first lady and she didn't hide the fact that she had this occasional walking problem.

The depression, you know, this is -- this -- this -- this -- Ida McKinley's physical problems and her -- the resulting frustrations and the emotional problems, sometimes frustrations with her husband because even though it was an extremely loving and devoted relationship, there were -- like any marriage, there were times of strain, you know, it's all well and good about being optimistic and not giving into depression when you're the one that could get up and -- and walk away. But there were times when this young woman who'd been so active suddenly found her life confined.

SWAIN: Take -- oh, sure.

NORTON SMITH: No, I was just going to ask you a quick question because I've -- I've read -- and you know more about it, certainly -- that in fact, halfway through that first term, there was this amazing scandal that had entailed the murder of the first lady's brother...

ANTHONY: Yes.

NORTON SMITH: ... supposedly by a discarded mistress...

ANTHONY: Yes.

NORTON SMITH: ... and then a trial, which must've been pretty sensational, in which the mistress was acquitted.

And -- and supposedly there was a cause and effect that following that, she went into a severe depression.

ANTHONY: And that was a story that was largely put out in -- by a book called "In the Days of McKinley" by Margaret Leech. And well, I just -- I just treat it frankly more as a caricature and that -- and that's actually not true because that happened in October of 1898 and it's not until June of 1899, a good amount of time after the trial is over, that other factors, his reelection campaign and his not telling her that he's going to run for reelection begin to cause this depression that your viewer asked about.

SWAIN: We're going to take a few phone calls.

Glen is watching us in Waldwick, New Jersey.

Hi Glen.

GLEN (ph): Hi. Thank you for having me on this wonderful program.

My question is -- relates specifically to the Hobarts and the McKinleys and more specifically the role that Jennie Tuttle Hobart played as sort of an acting first lady during the years that they were in the White House with the McKinleys.

Can you speak to that issue?

ANTHONY: Yes. I mean, I'll -- I'll just summarize it by saying it's actually false. She was there more as a friend and a support. But Ida McKinley never was absent from any of the official duties of first lady and had somewhat substitute for her.

She had her young nieces, particularly one, her niece, Mary Barber with whom she was very close -- and the nieces were sometimes a little bit frustrated because they didn't want to come and -- and undertake this kind of social obligation.

And Mrs. Hobart was very close to her and advised the president, you know, "You're president, you can do what you want. If you want to change the seating arrangements." But -- and Ida really considered her a very genuine friend but she never substituted for Ms. McKinley.

SWAIN: Maria is watching us in Wakefield, Rhode Island.

Hi Maria.

MARIA (ph): Hi. Thank you so much for having me on. I really enjoyed this program.

My question is how did Ida McKinley deal with the death of her children in comparison to other first ladies such as Mary Todd Lincoln?

SWAIN: Or Jane Pierce who we were talking about earlier.

NORTON SMITH: Yeah, at least, I mean, she wasn't up in the attic writing letters to them.

ANTHONY: Well...

NORTON SMITH: But -- but it clearly was a traumatizing experience. I mean, it's the worst thing that any parent can go through and -- and that's universal.

ANTHONY: She, particularly with the second child, Katie, who -- who lived -- you know, I -- I should -- in picking up the thread of what we were talking about before, after the first child died, they actually moved out of that house. Now that house later on was on postcards and everywhere, it became famous as the McKinley home, the Honeymoon -- so all these, you know, sort of euphemisms that were used, they only lived there for two and a half years.

They moved into the Saxton-McKinley House. And actually he, McKinley, lived longer in the Saxton-McKinley House than any other place at all that -- that he ever considered his official residence.

Katie came with them. She died of scarlet fever. And this is after Ida has already been through the trauma and is going through dealing with this very bewildering new factor in her life of seizure disorder.

She began to, some years later, take comfort in certain tenants of Buddhism and one in particular was reincarnation. And you began to see Ida McKinley instead of writing letters to her -- her dead child, essentially kept Katie alive, kept her memory alive. She always had her picture on the wall. She kept the girl's clothes and rocking chair visible. She spoke as if the child sometimes was still alive. And there's also a lot of firsthand accounts of her looking at young children, because she believed that perhaps Katie had been reincarnated.

SWAIN: We're going to return to the Saxton McKinley House to learn more about the -- the political partnership between the McKinleys.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KRIDER: During the years of William McKinley's political career, the Saxton McKinley House served as William and Ida's Canton residence. They had living quarters up on the third floor of the

house, which originally was a ballroom, but was turned into living quarters with a bedroom and a sitting room, an entertaining area, and also, off of that room, an office that William used to conduct business.

We're in William McKinley's office, and it's right outside the ballroom, which then later becomes the living quarters of Ida and William McKinley while they're in Canton.

This the kind of setup that they had everywhere that they went during his political years. Always when he conducted business, the door stayed open to the living quarters. And Ida stayed in the living quarters, but she could hear what was going on.

She was silent political help mate to William McKinley. They would discuss things, but she would never take part in meetings. She would never express her political opinion. She would never come and join in. But this type of setup they had when they were in Columbus while he was governor -- there was no governor's mansion then -- also in Washington, and then here at the Saxton House.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So, William McKinley, U.S. congressman, then Ohio governor, and then became the party's nominee in 1896. What were his party politics? What was the Republican Party like with him in it?

NORTON SMITH: Well, it's associated with the party of big business. I mean, that's part of what the tariffs were all about. Protecting American industry. It's -- it's hard to believe, but you would -- you could look at the political map in 1896 and would flip-flop today.

McKinley and the Republicans swept the cities -- the industrial Northeast. William Jennings Bryan swept the South and the West. It was absolutely reverse of what we take for granted today.

McKinley had become identified with this issue of the tariff. His name was on the tariff. He had, by the way, been gerrymandered out of his job. Oh, the Democrats tried -- tried twice, and the second time, they got him. And they should have reconsidered. Because the next year, he was elected governor of Ohio. He was reelected two years after that. And then, of course, he also -- one reason why I think he -- he, again, is today thought of as almost a prisoner of big business -- of the trusts, as they were known -- at the turn of the century is his association with Mark Hanna. And that's something we probably want to talk about at some point.

SWAIN: As U.S. congressman, there's a -- a story that was very compelling to me, that he had a ritual that he would get up from his desk every afternoon at 3:00 and wave to Ida out the window.

ANTHONY: This was actually as governor.

SWAIN: Ah.

ANTHONY: And he would go to the -- their -- their home was a residential hotel. The suite overlooked the plaza in front of the capital. And he would go out and do this. And stories were written about him. And tourists actually started to come. And they'd know at 3:00, they'd go, "Oh, there's Governor -- look how devoted he is." And none other than future President Warren Harding, who was lieutenant governor of Ohio later, told the story.

He would -- he kind of, you know, gave the deal away here, at one point, telling about how legislators were, you know, bent over in laughter, because they were watching Governor McKinley wave his handkerchief. And they all knew that Mrs. McKinley had been back in Canton for about a week. So, he was putting on a good show. And, you know, that devotion to Ida he began to sort of use as presidential timber.

You know, he had -- you know, he -- he was disciplined and he was focused and he was devoted and he was loyal. And these were the kinds of things you could look for in him as president.

SWAIN: So, what seems a little strange to us today -- that he would get up in the middle of meetings and wave -- was actually rather shrewd political...

ANTHONY: Very shrewd political theater. And -- and he actually -- I was saying to you, Susan, he used this little bit of theater -- literally, theater -- because it was on stages, and it was getting on and off of trains where he would do things like carry her parasol. And, you know, the audience would be, "Oh, look at him." You know, he'd put the shawl around her. People would clap. So, this became part of his persona.

SWAIN: Regina...

NORTON SMITH: No one ever accused Warren Harding of waving to his wife at 3:00 in the afternoon.

(LAUGHTER)

SWAIN: Regina Crumkey wants to know, were the McKinleys as popular in the rest of America as they were in Ohio.

NORTON SMITH: They -- they were. They -- again, you know, this fabled -- however you want to describe it -- relationship -- you know, we're talking about the height of the Victorian era.

ANTHONY: Yeah.

NORTON SMITH: You know. And men and women's roles being what they are -- but quite apart from that, McKinley was a lovable public figure. That's hard to believe. He had this -- he had this other trick.

Public men -- people in office are always being petitioned. People want jobs. People want something for a friend. You know, they want something. And the governor of Ohio was no different. And the story was, McKinley had this ability -- people would go in there wanting something, and he couldn't give them what they wanted. But he -- he had developed -- he would instead -- he would change the subject. He would take his trademark carnation...

ANTHONY: Yeah.

NORTON SMITH: ... off his coat, and he would pin it on that of his petitioner. And he would send the guy out, who didn't get what he wanted, but who thought he had this extraordinary moment of connecting to the governor. That's the kind of native political genius -- he wasn't a great intellect. He wasn't a sophisticated figure. But whatever it is, he had.

SWAIN: Charlotte in Columbia, Maryland.

Hi, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE (ph): Hi. I just wanted to say, before I get to my question, that I really do enjoy this show. This is the second time I've been watching this with my mom. And my question is, did Ida McKinley play anything besides -- else besides the piano?

SWAIN: Thank you. And hello to you and your mom. We're glad to have you in the audience.

Did she play anything beside the piano?

ANTHONY: No. I -- I -- I have -- I found no evidence that she did, but she took a real interest in a wide variety of music. She loved the opera. She was really big on the theater. And she had a lot of friends -- one of the great things she loved about being first lady was having all of the stars of the stage -- of course, this is before Hollywood -- come to the White House.

And she had all kinds of music played at the White House. She had Mexican -- native Mexican music. She had a British club. She had glee club. She had African-American music. She even had the very first bit Ragtime performed at the very first Valentine's Day dance held at the White House.

SWAIN: Marylou is in Minneola, Kansas.

Hi, Marylou.

MARYLOU (ph): Hi. I think my question was answered already. But I -- I -- first I want to thank you so much for the program. I've really enjoyed it. And I want to ask, will there be a DVD of the programs available later?

SWAIN: Well, actually, all of them are available online if you have the Internet. And you can also order DVDs from our web site. So, you go to c-span.org, find the video library. It walks you through the process of doing that. But you don't need to buy the DVD. We've got it all online for you to watch again.

The 1896 campaign, again, was William Jennings Bryan versus William McKinley. William Jennings Bryan campaigned through many states. He was on the road all the time. Whereas -- whereas William Jennings Bryan -- excuse me -- whereas McKinley conducted what was then known as the front porch campaign. We're going to learn more about that in our next video.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KRIDER: Ida McKinley played a very active role in the campaign and in the front porch campaign. She would be seated on the porch. She would never speak, but she was always there. She was always present.

There was a perception by the public that Ida was an invalid. And so, the campaign managers wanted to dispel that somewhat. They wanted to show that Ida would serve her role as first lady. And, you know, there had been many first ladies in the past that were ill, that did not play an active role.

But now it's 1896. We're coming up on a new century. Communication is better. People are learning more about their president and their first lady. And so, now they're starting to have expectations that that first lady play a role. They don't want her hiding away in the White House.

And so, that was another thing that the campaign managers wanted to do. They wanted to bring out to the public that this was not an invalid in a wheelchair. This was a woman who was active and who wanted to play that role.

In the case here, we have some of those items that were created for the campaign for Ida McKinley. We have the campaign biography. We have some wonderful campaign ribbons that were put out by different organizations. We have a piece that is a paper tray that depicts the not only Ida McKinley, but the wife of the other candidate, Mary Bryan.

And then we have a piece of China that has Ida's image. A spoon that has not only Ida's image, but the White House. So, all of these pieces were out there in the public, and Ida was out there in the public. She didn't make speeches, but she was always there. She was always present.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So, Delia Turner wants to know on Twitter, "How well known were Ida McKinley's health issues to the public or press and media at the time of the -- of William's presidency?"

ANTHONY: Well, it was really brilliantly handled. Because the greater issue and the greater problem which -- William McKinley never ceased searching for a cure to -- to end the seizures.

But because visually, you would see her with a gold-handled cane -- and the wheelchair didn't really come until the -- towards the second -- at the end of his administration -- but it was mostly the cane, where he would always give his arm to her. And so, it was very easy to focus on that, which is what he did.

And she would talk to reporters, and say, "Oh, you know, I have a lameness in my leg." That kind of for a while kept things -- you know, kept the public satisfied.

Occasionally, you would start hearing things -- things would creep in -- expressions like "nervous affliction." There was never -- they didn't -- never used the word "epilepsy" in her lifetime.

But what was really going on -- and what's, you know, tragic in its -- in and of itself -- is -- is the ignorance of the vast population at the time about seizure disorder, which -- even just as the age of neurology, at this point, is dawning, people equated with insanity -- mental problems -- as opposed to physiological.

And McKinley, in trying to contain this from the public learning about it -- because there was a fear, of course, that it would damage his career -- and there were these ideas that his wife had -- had this form of a mental illness. And he contracted, I think well intentioned, with a doctor in New York -- John N. Bishop -- who, you know, this is before the FDA, of course, came in but this guy really broke the -- the Hippocratic code by giving me McKinley bromide salts to -- which at that time, very strongly and much of the 20th century, could at least control the onset of seizures.

And the doctor started writing and saying, you know, "I gave you these on the condition that I would get a weekly report of her symptoms because it's a very precise measurement that -- that has to change week to week based on that." And McKinley would never write because he didn't want to put anything in writing about this.

And so over time, it -- it actually created a greater harm called bromism. And you know, this effect of the nerves, it dulled the nerves but over time, it could damage the nerves.

SWAIN: So in attempting to help her, he actually made her condition worse.

ANTHONY: Yes.

NORTON SMITH: Could you define for people who've heard the term but not sure of what it exactly means, what are bromides?

ANTHONY: Bromides, they're bromide salts and they came and -- and they are -- I can't recall the -- the chemical derivation but I think it's a potassium salt. But it is a white powder that would be stirred into water. And so it would be -- you know, it wasn't a tablet.

There were some tablets I found references to and by the way, I was able to trace this largely by looking at his canceled checks because even though he -- they were careful about getting rid of and him not replying to Dr. Bishop's letters, he didn't think about the checks.

NORTON SMITH: But is it a sedative?

ANTHONY: It is -- it is a -- it's a -- it's a sedative technically but it dulls the senses. It dulls the nerves.

SWAIN: I wanted to ask you, we saw in that video the use of the wives in campaigning. Was this really a new trend coming into the country where the wives became something to help make the candidates appeal to the public?

NORTON SMITH: Well, this is another -- in so many ways, McKinley is a bridge, you know. He's the last of the old-fashioned candidates, presidents then and the first of the modern ones.

It became -- certainly Theodore Roosevelt exploited the hell of his family and they were very exploitable. But probably Edith Roosevelt was the least willing to go along. But the children had a great time.

I mean, this is -- this is a hinge of modernity where you have newspapers with pictures. And so all of a sudden, presidents and their families who were very remote revered figures before, they have faces, they have personalities and -- and that extended to the families as well. And it would just take off as -- as the media became increasingly more sophisticated.

SWAIN: Kip is in Atlanta.

You're on the air now, Kip.

KIP (ph): Good evening.

I -- first of all, I want all of the callers to know I've got a comment to make. Ms. Swain, I think this program that you have put together on CSPAN has been phenomenal. I have watched most of the series and I've been educated and enlightened.

I had a couple of comments.

SWAIN: Well, can I just...

KIP (ph): Yes.

SWAIN: ... pause a moment to tell you the gentleman sitting right across from me, Richard Norton Smith, it was his idea to do this series and our producer, Mark Farkas, and his team have worked very hard on it. So thanks for your kind words...

KIP (ph): Absolutely.

And let me just say, Ms. Swain, you're absolutely right. Richard Norton Smith, Carl Anthony, it's just a pleasure and an honor to be able to talk to both of you folks.

I have -- as a lover of history, I have followed both of your work for years, especially Carl Anthony in your work in first ladies and I just want to -- I'm just honored to be able to talk to you tonight.

First of all, with regard to Ms. McKinley's health, I -- I noticed that you had a comment earlier about, maybe about six months before President McKinley was assassinated that she was gravely ill when they had a trip out in the West Coast. And I noticed that there was a -- there was a -- a report that was in the New York Times that -- that talked about how gravely ill that she was and almost near death.

My question is was that the first time that a first lady's health was publicly reported? And I guess I'm curious to know why did they feel that they needed to even get that out there because I think maybe 20 years hence that they -- a -- a president or first lady probably would not have wanted that information to be released.

SWAIN: Thank you, Kip. Appreciate it.

ANTHONY: It's a really great question and a great observation.

The only other first lady who had gone through a really bad health problem and then died was Caroline Harrison. And it wasn't until it was really at the very, very end, like a day or two before she died, that more details were learned.

I think in large part, the problem was -- was they travelling. They were -- they went from -- through Tennessee down to New Orleans across through Texas. By the way, Ida McKinley, when President McKinley went to speak in El Paso, Texas, she got out on the other side of the train and kind of ran away with a bunch of women who took her to a big breakfast across the border in Juarez, making her the very first incumbent first lady to ever leave the United States.

They came through to Los Angeles, to the Fiesta of Flowers. And at that point, she had -- she had been shaking hands and she had cut her finger, she had a ring on and this became infected. And as they were going up the coast and you know -- I go into all this detail in the -- in the new book but it -- you know, to summarize it, there was a debate about, you know, is she going to get better?

McKinley was a little -- "Oh, I've seen her, she's always gotten better, don't worry about it," and the doctor was like, "Well, this is pretty serious." And finally when they had to cancel everything and she was really near death, that's when -- and of course, reporters were travelling with them.

So you know, they really had to kind of tell the truth. And in fact, they were very honest about it. They gave daily reports.

SWAIN: With regard to her seizure disorder, the president developed a technique when they were at events, particularly dinners and it was described by William Howard Taft, future president attending an event in the home in Canton. And let me read to you how he described it.

"At that moment, we heard a particular hissing sound. Instantly, McKinley threw a napkin over his wife's face and simultaneously, without a trace of excitement, handed me his pencil. In two or three minutes, the napkin was removed and Mrs. McKinley was asking about the election as though nothing had happened and not a word was said about the incident by anyone in the room."

So many people have heard the napkin story. They're true, right? Obviously...

ANTHONY: Well, they're true but they've been so exaggerated and so distorted. Here's what the truth is.

That only occurred in private. This was at their home, Taft's description of this. The other three or four eyewitness accounts that I found of it are all in reference to private dinners. This never happened at state dinners. This never happened in public.

What -- what the -- and in -- in a way, it would've been better so to speak because the reason it didn't happen in public was she was being kept on these bromides that were dulling her senses and what you instead begin to have firsthand accounts like from John Hay, from -- from Henry Adams talking about how vague and distorted her conversation was becoming, how -- and again, this is post -- this is 1899 and afterwards.

And -- and -- and you know, it was -- it was effects of the bromism. It was the effects of -- of the nerve damage that was occurring.

SWAIN: We're going to return to Canton, Ohio and look at some of the dresses of the first lady that they have preserved there as a sense of how she presented herself as first lady.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KENNEY: In order to see some of the more fragile and important pieces from Ida McKinley's White House years, we have to go into our main storage area.

This is where we keep Ida's White House dresses and some of our other White House artifacts. And this dress is my favorite. And we are in the middle of a conservation process so that we can have these dresses repaired so they will be able to be on a mannequin.

Now this one is my favorite because it's so heavily ornamented. And you can see all of the bead work.

It actually has silver beads. It has metallic thread. It also has tiny little mirrors. These little squares are little mirrors. So this would have reflected light beautifully.

This is typical of Ida's style. The fashion in the late 1890s would have been high collar, the puffy leg-of-mutton sleeves although towards the end of the decade, they toned down a little bit.

But her favorite was this kind of ivory color. She also loved blue so most of the dresses that we have are typical of that type of color palette.

She didn't have a lot in her life to be excited about. She was what we would call a semi-invalid so fashion was extremely important to her as reflected by the gowns in her collection.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: We're beginning to see first ladies who have set the trends. Was she a trendsetter at all of the fashion world?

ANTHONY: She was not. But she did get into a bit of trouble with the Audubon Society by wearing an egret feather in her hair.

And you know, you had Mrs. Cleveland, Mrs. Hayes, great lovers of animals, Florence Harding, later a member of the ASPCA. Ida McKinley was not a great animal lover.

However I will also take this chance to clear up a very sort of stupid and untrue story, which was that she ordered the drowning of cats during the Spanish-American War that had been named after these Spanish leaders, political and military leaders and I -- I, you know, really tried to track that down. And there's zero evidence not only that she didn't do it but that there were any cats in the White House.

SWAIN: Richard Norton Smith, the McKinley presidency was a very busy time in this country. We have (inaudible) just some of the major events that were occurring during the administration. 1898, of

course, the Spanish-American War that among other things brought Teddy Roosevelt to national prominence, in --

NORTON SMITH: See, even there, McKinley's roll is remembered for Teddy Roosevelt...

SWAIN: I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

NORTON SMITH: ... charging up San Juan Hill.

SWAIN: 1898, the War Revenue Act and the Treaty of Paris signed 1899, the Open Door Policy announced in 1900, the Gold Standard Act, gold and silver have been an issue for several cycles here.

And you talk about him as establishing the power of the presidency.

(CROSSTALK)

NORTON SMITH: Yeah.

Well, two quick examples. First of all, 1896 matters because it's a realigning election. We don't have a lot of those. They couldn't know it in 1901 but the fact is that William McKinley had transformed American politics for the next almost 40 years. Up until FDR and the New Deal, Republicans would be the dominant party.

So he's the man who broke the logjam after the Civil War when it went back and forth. That -- that's important.

One other case of presidential power that is relevant to our own time, of course, and that is McKinley unilaterally dispatched 5,000 American soldiers to combat the Boxer Rebellion, which was this -- it was always referred to as a secret society of Chinese who were fed up with the exploitation of their country by Western imperial powers. And they had laid siege to the Western delegation in both Peking and in Tientsin, where, by the way, a young honeymooning couple named Herbert and Lou Henry Hoover were -- were ensconced.

In any event, hundreds of westerners had been killed, thousands were threatened with death, and McKinley sent these troops along with -- as part of an international expedition. In the nick of time, they arrived in Peking and were able to save most, about 900, westerners who were there.

But the thing is, he did it on his own power. He never talked to Congress. And subsequent presidents would use that example in situations that may or may not have been similar.

That's just one way in which war, which McKinley never wanted in the first place, transformed his presidency and the presidency.

SWAIN: Warren, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, you're on.

WARREN (ph): Yes, I love this program. And my question was, when we were in elementary school, our teacher in geography told us that when McKinley was assassinated and had died, his wife sat in the White House for quite a long time playing the piano and then just got up and took a canary or a parakeet and left the White House with everything else in it. Is that true or false?

ANTHONY: False. Ida -- that was either -- that was Florence Harding. Ida McKinley, well, it's -- it's pretty shocking how so many of the things that she made simple requests about regarding her husband and his coffin and his remains and his burial were ignored.

And without him there to sort of look out after her, she was not really treated with much -- her requests as a widow were not honored.

SWAIN: Back to his first term. When he was working through all of these issues, it's reported in some place that it was his custom and perhaps the custom of the times to drink a mixture to stay awake that contained what we think of today as cocaine.

NORTON SMITH: Yeah, well it was an American drink. Coca-Cola well into the whatever -- the '20s, '30s, '40s -- when it contained the same -- the same substance. So...

SWAIN: And so the answer is yes.

NORTON SMITH: The answer is yes.

SWAIN: Now, he...

ANTHONY: It was a tonic that the pope was also using.

SWAIN: So he had this consuming presidency, and yet, he was consumed with his wife's health.

Well, how -- how did that affect his ability to govern?

ANTHONY: You know, there's one or two times, periods, right after, you know, the Maine, the battleship Maine is sunk in -- in Havana harbor in February, 1896. He's reluctant to go to war, you know. The negotiations with Spain broke down. We go to war.

Now, there were times when he stayed up late at night, but the truth was, she was worried -- that was the period when she was worried about him. And, in fact, there's a -- a strong record that shows that she was trying to talk to Cortelyou, his assistant, "We need to do something about him."

So she was playing the protective role.

Again, this is a period when she's very physically strong. It's the later period that he -- after the war, after the war is declared over with Spain, but we are at what we were never told was another war, which is the Philippine-American War, because when we took the Philippines, they did not welcome us; they resisted. And it was a bloody and horrifying, and there were atrocities committed on both sides. And that's when she was her neediest, and that's when the pressure really did get to him, where he was -- he had to constantly make this choice between, you know, his work and his wife.

NORTON SMITH: Yeah. And striking parallels between then and now. John Hay famously referred to the Spanish-American War as "the splendid little war." That was the 113 days that it took to defeat the decrepit Spanish empire.

But, as Carl said, what we tend to forget it, rather like in Iraq and Afghanistan...

ANTHONY: Yeah.

NORTON SMITH: The immediate victory...

ANTHONY: Yeah.

NORTON SMITH: ... was immediately followed by a protracted, very bloody, insurrection.

ANTHONY: Oh, yeah.

NORTON SMITH: Which went on for four years. And there were 70,000 American soldiers who were in the Philippines trying to put down this uprising, while McKinley is preaching what he calls "benevolent assimilation."

But the problem was, the Filipinos didn't want to be assimilated, benevolently or otherwise.

SWAIN: Joshua, Delray Beach, Florida, you're on.

JOSHUA (ph): Well, hi. I just -- first of all, I just want to thank you. I very much enjoy these programs.

I wanted to talk a little about something you mentioned last week, and then tie it into this week.

Last week, the historian mentioned that Mamie Eisenhower was really the first fashion icon, and, obviously, thereafter, Jackie Kennedy was. And I couldn't help but think that they were the first ladies to be seen regularly on TV.

And Ida McKinley was obviously the first first lady to be seen regularly on film. Can you talk a little about the import in -- of imagery in creating the images of first ladies, especially Ida McKinley?

ANTHONY: You know, I wouldn't place too much emphasis on it. It was more a matter of her being captured as sort of a matter of fact. And, again, these were shown more on nickelodeons. In a few of the movie theaters, you begin to see what will become news reels by the time of Woodrow Wilson.

But there's a -- the very first one, 1896 presidential campaign of William McKinley, his brother, Abner, who was always, you know, asking for railroad passes and looking, you know, to make good on his...

(CROSSTALK)

NORTON SMITH: As presidential brothers do.

ANTHONY: Yeah, his brother's fame -- got involved in the Biograph Company, one of the first film companies. So there's a film. And in that, McKinley is sort of very steady, he sort of takes a lettered -- his notification. But you see Ida McKinley on the front porch, rocking.

So it was more of a haphazard fact that she appeared, and it really was not a factor.

What I will -- will add is the newspaper illustrations, the hand-drawn newspaper illustrations, where now the technology allows for them to take photographs, really almost like a cut-and-paste of actual photographs of people's faces and then, you know, do drawings of them in -- in, you know, various scenarios.

In fact, that's the first impression cast of Ida McKinley in a wheelchair, when she almost dies in San Francisco, is done -- is done that way.

SWAIN: And that is 1899. I want to talk about that (inaudible).

(Rachel Schweier) on Facebook asks, "What was Ida's view on women's suffrage?"

In 1899, she goes to Massachusetts for college graduation ceremonies at both Smith College and Mount Holyoke. Do we learn about her views about women's rights in those speeches?

ANTHONY: Well, she is, again, this is something I discovered, because, like everybody else, you know, I had sort of a -- sort of a general impression of her as the -- as the -- as the invalid.

In fact, she goes with the president, and he becomes, at Smith College and Mount Holyoke, the first president of the United States to speak on, to address the issue of women's education. Who -- today we don't think of that as a big deal. Back in that day, people thought this was going to be the end of American society. You educate women, they're going to want to get jobs. The fabric of the family will fall apart.

And Ida McKinley, we don't have the text of what her speech was, but she delivered a short speech. She was given at Smith College, not on the main stand there, but in one of the rooms inside a building, presented with a silver cup, and made some remarks.

She was very decidedly in favor of women's right -- equal right to vote. And when on one day a delegation of the Anti-Suffrage League came, and President McKinley met with them, he didn't mention her. Ida McKinley did not come downstairs. And nothing further was said.

When Susan B. Anthony and the Suffrage Leaguers came, Mrs. McKinley said, "Please bring them up into my private suite." And went and gave a huge load of lilies to Susan B. Anthony and said, "When you go to the Suffrage Convention, I want you to tell them that this is from me, as a gift to all of you."

Later on, she corresponded with Susan B. Anthony. And her -- a friend of hers later confirmed that she very strongly believed in women's suffrage. So that's the first incumbent first lady to publicly support suffrage.

SWAIN: On this trip, she has a massive epileptic seizure. That's correct?

And is this when her health really begins to deteriorate?

ANTHONY: Yes, June of 1899. What also happens is, is McKinley has purchased -- it's come up for sale -- that original house that they spent the first two and a half years of their married life together.

NORTON SMITH: Not the front porch house?

ANTHONY: That is -- yes, the front porch house. Yes. And so -- and they had rented it, we should clarify that. They rented it for a year during the 1896 campaign. It's a little confusing.

So the Saxton McKinley House, which still stands, where he lived longer than anywhere else, that's not where the campaign was. The campaign was at the other house they rented. And then it came up for sale.

Well, he unrolls the -- she's very depressed because of this -- the onset of the seizures now, but he unrolls these sort of blueprints of we're going to -- I'm buying the house, we're going to expand it. And he sort of gets her into this idea that this, finally we're going to retire.

She had a very strong and stated for the record fear of his assassination. And it was based, very rationally, not on any kind of hocus-pocus or anything or anything like this -- because of the movement of all of -- of the anarchists killing leaders around the world.

And she did not want him to run for a second term. And he refused to say whether he was or not. And as that summer of 1899 unfolded, it began to become very clear to her that they were expanding that house not for their retirement use, but to house his campaign and campaign staff.

And there are letters. Again, John Hay writes, and others, that this is the most depressed and the lowest that she has ever been.

SWAIN: One of the things that Ida could do was knit, and knit she did, and made what was counted as many thousands of slippers that actually had a political benefit.

We're going to learn more about that in our next video.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KENNEY: We have this billfold. This has never been on exhibit. This was just recently donated by a descendent. And what's wonderful about this is inside, it has a picture of William McKinley.

And this is something that we see in a lot of her personal belongings. This was her sewing bag. And she would keep her crochet items in here. This is one of her crochet needles. And again, it is her favorite color blue.

And inside, we have a picture of William McKinley. So even when he was away from her, she would have something to remind her of him.

Ida McKinley was known for her crocheted slippers and she would spend hours crocheting these slippers. We think that she made approximately 4,000 pairs in her lifetime.

And these are unique for the soles that they have. They were leather soles on the bottom.

She would make them in various sizes. We have a pair from obviously a child size.

And they were usually made in a variation of blue, gray or an ivory color. These represent sort of the -- the basic colors that she would use.

Since she was not well and was not able to do other types of work as a first lady, this was one of the things that she could contribute, one of the ways that she could contribute because she would either donate these to a charity, to needy children and war veterans or she would donate to be auctioned to raise money for a charity.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: So Carl Anthony, on Twitter, Sheldon Cooper wants to know, "Did William ever give knitted slippers to his political friends and adversaries"?

ANTHONY: Yes. And it was actually pretty brilliant because -- by the way, I should say Ida McKinley was a very witty woman and a little bit subversive.

She would -- if she didn't like someone -- and the one area politically where you do see her really having an influence is in judging the character of -- of people that he is considering for higher positions or to be around him. If she didn't like someone or didn't trust someone, it wasn't like she threw some kind of a fit. She gave them a very rational explanation.

Anyway, she also indicated how she felt about them by the color of the slippers she gave. So she would give purple as an act of -- as a way of saying this guy is very loyal and yellow if she thought the guy was a "yes man" and a bit of a coward in expressing himself.

SWAIN: Well, the so-called friend, Julia Foraker, was watching this relationship between the two more closely than the public could. And here's one thing she said. "The fact that her husband has been

a shield between her and reality had made her a pathetically spoiled and difficult woman. Mrs. McKinley knew what she liked and she got it royally."

ANTHONY: And I would say that's partially true.

It was -- it was more true and held up when she found out that he was going to run for reelection and he hadn't told her. And at this point, she is more physically disabled. This is now going into the year 1900 and his reelection campaign and she was very frustrated.

Later in life, as a widow, she actually wrote something that was really remarkable. It was basically saying "The longer live without him, the more I realize how completely dependent I was."

And you know, the story's always been painted like, you know, he was the great hero and the protector but he was also controlling the situation. And he controlled her medicine. He controlled a lot of things.

And you know, from her point of view, she was willing to accept her limitations and adapt herself, and there were times he didn't want that.

SWAIN: Joe -- and I'll come back to you in a second, Richard -- Joe in Kankakee, Illinois.

JOE (ph): Hi. I've been enjoying the program a lot. I'm looking forward to the second season, especially since I'm a presidency history geek.

I actually meant to call with this question last week and didn't. I have been to the Harrison home in Indianapolis and the weekend I was there, they were doing re-enactors.

Do any of the other presidential homes, the McKinley home or -- or any of the others do re-enactors where local citizens portray the presidents and their families?

Thank you.

SWAIN: How about specifically Canton, Ohio? Does the McKinley home have reenactments?

ANTHONY: At the -- at the Saxton-McKinley home, you have docents who I know haven't been there recently but I know in the not-too-distant past certainly did volunteer there and had -- would study particular first ladies because it serves the dual purpose of being a center for the study of all the first ladies as well as the Saxton-McKinley House.

So yes, there have been docents at the McKinley -- Saxton-McKinley House who have done that.

SWAIN: John is in Chicago.

Hi, John.

JOHN (ph): Yes. I grew up just a few miles away from Canton, Ohio and I visited the McKinley monument where William and Ida are buried and I was very impressed.

My question, as I go down the freeway in Chicago, in the south side, there's an area called the Ida McKinley Home. I believe it's some type of public housing project.

And I wonder if there is any direct connection. Are they just memorially named after her, did she have any connection with that or what, if you guests would know that?

ANTHONY: Specifically that, I don't know. However I will say this. There was, you know, again, you know -- the story never gets fully written and people get miscast and caricatured and then it just sort of carries.

She was very involved with two organizations. One was called the Crittenden House and the other was the Red Cross.

The Crittenden House though was very interesting because it specifically helped women who had been battered, who were homeless and it -- it provided them with shelters and with shelter, education and really helped them reestablish their lives.

And she didn't, you know, just willy-nilly support every group and everything. She did do the slippers and they fetched a lot of money at auction. But she was very careful about where she allowed her name to be used and it might well be -- I seem to recall that there was a connection either with Jane Addams and Hull House and the Crittenden organization but I'm not sure entirely.

SWAIN: So Richard Norton Smith, we heard that the president didn't really consult Ida on its decision to run for reelection. We have a quote about this time period where she said of him, "I will be glad when he is out of public life. I do not want him to run a second time. I thought he had done enough for the country and when his term expires, he will come home and we will settle down quietly and he will belong to me."

Well, she certainly didn't get her wish. What was the 1900 election all about?

NORTON SMITH: Well, the 1900 election was in some ways a rematch of 1896. McKinley again ran against William Jennings Bryan. But the issues were different, which in some ways is a testament to how much McKinley had succeeded. Prosperity, he was by 1900 seen as the man who as I said earlier, brought us out of the -- the Great Depression of the 1890s.

The new issue was America's place in the world and a word that was new to most Americans, imperialism.

Bryan and the Democrats and a number of what you might call "good government" Republicans, liberal Republicans, Andrew Carnegie, et cetera, basically opposed the idea of American empire. McKinley on the other hand, for a number of reasons, was -- thus far, he was a reluctant convert to the war in the first place.

The question I have, we've been told, I believe, by the White House military aid, the single most important decision McKinley had to make as president after going to war was deciding whether to keep the Philippines, a hugely important question, very controversial.

The White House military aide said that in fact, it was Ida's constant harping on all the good work done by Methodist missionaries that heavily influenced her husband's ultimate decision, which he always said had religious connotations to take the Philippines and, quote, "educate and civilize and Christianize them."

Does that ring a bell?

ANTHONY: Yes. And I -- I actually found that evidence not just by Benjamin Montgomery, his military aid who was there in the middle of the night -- you know, he was the guy transmitting all the -- the messages to and from the front with President McKinley in that little telegraph room upstairs at the White House -- but also Julia Foraker, the Senate wife, William Beer who was a political operative and I'm trying to remember -- but there were several people.

And it's -- but what's interesting is Mrs. McKinley is not what you'd consider a traditionally religious person. She never went to church. She went to the theater a lot on Sunday but she sure didn't go to church.

NORTON SMITH: Well, he was a very devout Methodist. His mother thought he was going to be a minister.

ANTHONY: Right.

NORTON SMITH: That never quite took.

But he -- literally all his life, it was a significant influence in his decisions.

ANTHONY: And he went alone. She did not come with him.

The -- the suggestion is though that she really believed that -- from the reports they were getting, they were -- they were -- they were slanted and they were untrue because the whole population was summarized as if they were, you know -- you know, living in a primitive way that -- their lives less per se about Christianity but more that -- that their lives needed to be improved, you know, in a way that, you know, only the Americans...

NORTON SMITH: McKinley believed that's why he was annexing the Philippines.

SWAIN: And with Ida's concern about reelection, one of those worries was about potential assassination...

NORTON SMITH: Sure.

SWAIN: ... and she had good reason to.

Here's a list of some of the assassinations all happening around the globe at that time: 1894, the president of France, 1895, the prime minister of Bulgaria, 1897, the prime minister of Spain, 1900, the king of Italy and three of those four were attributed to anarchists.

NORTON SMITH: And there'd been several attempts on the life of Queen Victoria as well.

SWAIN: So again though, we weren't protected...

NORTON SMITH: So anarchism -- yeah, anarchism was a -- well, it's what -- terrorism today. Anarchists were -- were the terrorists...

ANTHONY: Yeah. It's really interesting.

NORTON SMITH: ... of their time.

SWAIN: And their choice were the leaders of the countries.

NORTON SMITH: And you lop off the head of the system and then the system will die.

ANTHONY: And it was always a lone individual. It was not, you know -- it was not always cooked up, you know, by a large -- you know, it was -- it was lone -- it was people acting on their own.

SWAIN: Would you also speak to his decision to put Theodore Roosevelt on the ticket?

NORTON SMITH: Well, it wasn't exactly his decision.

The fact of the matter is that T.R. had managed to alienate the very political bosses in New York who had in desperation turned to him as the great hero of the war, as the only one who could win election as governor of New York in 1898.

He was a reformer. Most of his reforms seem pretty mild to us today but they -- they struck at the heart of the political bosses and the status quo that they wanted to preserve.

And so Boss Platt, the United States senator from New York, Tom Platt, the "Easy Boss" as he was known, basically hatched the idea of getting rid of T.R., kicking him upstairs into the vice presidency where no one would ever hear from him again.

McKinley seemed to have been ambivalent about this. People might ask: Why did you have -- he already had a vice president. Garret Hobart had died in 1899. So there was an opening. The convention went wild for T.R., who had tried to in advance indicate that he didn't want to be vice president. He knew his own temperament. It was like taking the veil, and that was not T.R.'s style.

ANTHONY: And there was a very important factor in this that I have to mention about Ida McKinley. She was crucial in at least two instances at very important points in the rise of Theodore Roosevelt. Perhaps the most dramatic one, I'll just tell you that one, is that when Roosevelt was with the cavalry in San Antonio with the Rough Riders and was trying to get onto a train so he could get to the transport ships in Florida so they could go to Cuba, nobody would give him permission. He was sending wires and telegraphs to the secretary of war.

And he sent one to Mrs. McKinley. She took it and she brought it to the president, and she had met Roosevelt and trusted him. And that is what got Roosevelt to those transports in Florida and Roosevelt responded to the president, "Please tell Mrs. McKinley to think of the Rough Riders as her very own, and we will make her proud." And from that point on, Roosevelt curried favor with Ida McKinley. And there was an event in 1899 where she came in -- big dinner, thousands of people there. Roosevelt was governor of New York. He was speaking. And he saw she was coming in, and right at the right moment, said, you know, "Three cheers for Mrs. McKinley."

So he, you know, he knew how to curry her, but she sort of gave favor to him with her husband.

SWAIN: We have just 13 minutes left, and a lot more story to tell.

David in New York (inaudible).

DAVID (ph): (inaudible) I wanted to ask, is it true that Robert Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's son, who was at this bedside when he died, was also at Garfield's assassination and was also at McKinley's assassination?

NORTON SMITH: He was at Garfield's. I think he was in the train station at the time that Garfield was shot. He was not -- I don't believe he was in the Temple of Music. He was in Buffalo, though. So...

SWAIN: A bit like "Zelig."

(LAUGHTER)

NORTON SMITH: I think at that point in time, he probably decided it would be best for him not to accompany presidents on business.

SWAIN: So, our story is coming full circle. But before we get to the assassination, and we have to do it briefly because we started it at the outset, Donna McCauley asked the question: "If she was so frail, how did she function as first lady in the White House?"

We -- we've talked so much about parlor politics and bringing dinners together to perform politics. Did the McKinley White House do that?

ANTHONY: She was not interested in -- and it's interesting. Apart from her illness, because even before she had gotten -- before she was having her seizure disorder, she was not interested in housekeeping. She was not really interested in menus or, you know, entertaining. I mean, they had basically lived in hotel suites in Washington and then in Columbus.

She was interested in him. And again, that's a good question, but it's -- from the idea, this whole idea that she was always this kind of invalid. And she was not. McKinley took control and McKinley was the one who actually planned a lot of the dinners.

So she was at them. There was -- she had weekly receptions. She did a lot of the traditional stuff. But she was not particularly interested in, you know, making those decisions.

SWAIN: Presidents are still being sworn in in March at this time in the country's history.

NORTON SMITH: That's right.

SWAIN: And so it was just six months later, in September, that they went to the exposition. We have some more footage about the exposition. It's a new American century, and is America really beginning to change its place in the world?

NORTON SMITH: Oh, absolutely. The Pan American Exposition was in fact a celebration of the Western Hemisphere. But in a larger sense, it was America's coming out party. American now owned much of the Western Hemisphere as a result of the Spanish American war -- Cuba, Puerto Rico, and in the Pacific, Guam.

ANTHONY: Hawaii.

NORTON SMITH: Of course, Hawaii, and the Philippines -- all in one presidency, one truncated presidency. So again, you had this remarkable overnight explosion of activity and the American people were having this debate, which in some ways goes on to this day. What is our role in the world? It began with William McKinley.

SWAIN: And so at that fateful time, he was shot, as we talked about, by this anarchist. How long did he linger before he died?

NORTON SMITH: I think it was six -- was it six days or eight days?

ANTHONY: Eight days.

SWAIN: And what happened to Ida McKinley after his death?

ANTHONY: Well, you know, she -- it's -- it's very interesting. But she -- she wanted to be with him. She wanted some privacy. She wanted to have a moment with him. I mean, on the day before he died, the night before -- in the late hours, she was brought in to be with him. And they did have some private words together.

And, you know, McKinley said something that I found that has never been quoted widely before. But after she was brought out, he said to the doctor, "What will become of her?" It's almost a little bit cold. It wasn't, he loved her, but he knew he was dying. And the doctor -- Dr. Rixey was his name. And he was really a good guy. I mean, he was the one who really got her on a regimen.

George Cortelyou both McKinleys trusted, and they looked to him like a son. And so, they would not allow her to attend any of the public ceremonies. She was in the White House. She had some time downstairs with the closed coffin in the East Room. And then she was just brought to the train, brought back to Canton. There were -- he was, you know, the coffin was an open coffin for the public to file by and pay their respects to in Canton, in city hall there.

And -- and she was not permitted. And she said one thing. She said, "I want him one last night in this house alone with me, so I could look at him one more time." And they brought the coffin and they had sealed it. So she was very bitter, frankly. She was very angry. And I very rarely found instances of her saying things that were really sharp and frustrated, and she did after they did that.

SWAIN: Our final video is returning to Ida McKinley's -- the museum, and learning more about Mrs. McKinley in mourning.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

KENNEY: Now, we want to take a look at some of the things that happened to Ida after the White House. Of course, her White House years were cut short by McKinley's assassination, and she spent the next six years in mourning. So there aren't a lot of things that represent this period for her. She mostly was a recluse. She stayed at home almost all the time. When she left, it was usually only to visit her husband's grave.

So when McKinley first was assassinated, condolences poured in from all around the world. And she couldn't take care of each one of them personally. So she found this card, which would acknowledge that she appreciated what people had sent to her. And she often didn't sign these. So this would have been something you would have received after you sent her a condolence.

Now, we also have a bound book. And this is family and intimate friends. We have lots of professional and public condolences. This one is extremely special, because these would have been the closer friends of hers. They would have been family members, cousins, things like that, and these would have been the types of things that she would have wanted to keep close. And it would have been bound for her to -- to have and to look through.

Some of them are acknowledged. Up on the corner in pencil they will have a date on them, so that the secretary could keep track of which ones that she had acknowledged. Not all of them have that.

But, see, these are also -- this one's a good one because it shows from a McKinley family member. So these would have been the most nearest and dearest friends and family.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

SWAIN: As we close out here, John Richardson asks a very interesting question to both of you on Facebook. To the historians, he writes, "If Ida McKinley had written a description of herself in the third person, what do you think she might have said about herself?"

ANTHONY: A willfully -- a devoted wife by her own choice.

NORTON SMITH: I'll leave it at that. I'm not good at what-ifs.

(LAUGHTER)

SWAIN: And Dave Murdock wants to know, "Were Ida's daily trips to her husband's grave seen more as a physical or mentally therapeutic process for her?"

ANTHONY: Well, they began right after his burial -- well, after -- after the services. He wasn't buried -- they would build that monument. And so, it was actually his flag-draped coffin on a stand in what looks like a church. It was stone. And in it were large floral displays and then eventually banners of groups that came. And every day she went.

And at first it was thought therapeutic, in that in a way it was healthy to physically get her out. But, over time, it became rather ghoulish and grim for her, because she was focused on death.

And so, she was even focused on the flowers that were dying and trying to keep them alive. And trying to get new flowers that she would put in.

And it really -- it was -- it was sort of grim. And she wanted it done. But there's a really incredible little moment that happened.

And, again, I thought that was the rest of her story, and it's not, because what happens is, her two nieces both have a daughter each. And suddenly at the end of her life are these two little girls in her life. And she stops going to the tomb every day, and she starts walking again, on the porch, in the middle of winter, and gardening and talking about the flowers and the new building. And she really returns to life.

SWAIN: Almost a rebirth of her in her last couple of years.

You have something you're dying to say...

(CROSSTALK)

NORTON SMITH: Well, you know, Queen Victoria for 40 years fetishized the death of Prince Albert. I mean, part of this is the times, you know, the Victorian obsession with death.

To me, the eeriest chapter in this whole story is allegedly she never had another seizure after the president's death.

ANTHONY: And part of it -- and this is very complicated and I won't get into it here, but, you know, seizures and, you know, we -- but people still have seizures. There's many different types of seizures. It's a very -- I had the material reviewed by members of the Board of the National Epilepsy Foundation. It's a very sensitive issue that has to be handled well in describing it.

And we can only base so much -- we only know so much. The fact that Rixey had regulated her life to this point in terms of rest and diet and then instructed the nurses who took care of her later on, kind of became secretaries, may account for that. But also the stress, the paradox of this. Part of the reason she would sometimes get very stressed out, is she was worried about him being shot. And so by him now being gone, that stress was removed.

SWAIN: She died in May of 1907, just shy of her 60th birthday, 59 years old. I'm wondering how the country reacted when she died.

ANTHONY: Well, it -- it reacted with, you know, as so often happens in the context of this young family, the Roosevelts in the White House, there was some sort of sharp, nasty little things that, you know, oh, the Roosevelts were aristocrats and the McKinleys were, you know, sort of village people

from Ohio. There was almost nothing said about her as a person, and everything that really was said about her was as a symbol. It was all through the lens of him.

And the truth is in her lifetime, she really didn't care what people thought about her. She didn't really care whether the people, the public loved her. She cared about what they thought about him. And she would attack somebody who attacked him.

NORTON SMITH: It bears noting that T.R. attended her funeral.

SWAIN: You -- one of our Facebook questions wants to know about the fact that you've written a whole book about her. We've got a picture of what the cover looks like. And they want to know why were you so interested in this First Lady to tackle a biography?

ANTHONY: Well, it was really inspired by Mary Regula who was the founder and president of the National First Ladies Library. And you know, with great instinct, with great intuition, she sensed that there was a real story to tell here. And so that really began. It was quite an undertaking. It was a lot of work because there's not one repository of all of Mrs. McKinley's papers.

So the effort was far and wide. And it was like -- I describe it like taking a magnet and picking up metal filings, you know, just in one letter here from here, one letter -- it was really pretty arduous.

But like I said, even that story at the end, you know, at the 11th hour, as long as you're alive, there's hope. And that, at the end of her story, proved true. And so, I hope what it will do is eventually wear away at that caricature and give history a little bit more of a fully developed human being.

SWAIN: So we're going to give you the last word on this, which as we're running out of time here. Where do you think she should fit in the pantheon of First Ladies that we're going to ...

NORTON SMITH: Let me read Carl's book.

(LAUGHTER)

NORTON SMITH: I say this seriously. Carl's book is exactly what this series is all about, taking a fresh look below the surface, beyond the caricature, making the re-acquaintance of women who we may know very little about or we may know wrongly about. So it's a wonderful note on which to end this first part of the series and a wonderful springboard for part two.

SWAIN: Well, thanks to both of you for helping us learn more about the McKinley presidency and, of course, about the life of Ida Saxton McKinley, the first lady during that first term and that very aborted second term. We appreciate your helping us learn more.

And as we close here tonight, you've heard several times, this is the final installment of our first part. But we'll be back on September 9th to pick it up again, all the way through President's Day of 2014 with the modern First Ladies, beginning with Edith Roosevelt. So we'll see you then. And during the summer months, we'll continue to have historic things on the first ladies during this time slot. So if you've gotten interested in this subject, we're going to continue to try to feed that interest.

Thanks for being with us.

END