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Grover Cleveland Under the Knife

Lead: In the summer of 1893, with the country in a financial panic, President Grover Cleveland underwent a secret cancer operation.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: As both Governor of New York and President, Cleveland had a reputation as a corruption fighter and political independent. He was the only United States President elected to two nonconsecutive terms in 1884 and then again in 1892 and the first Democrat in the White House since James

Buchanan in 1856. Under the President who served between Cleveland's terms, Benjamin Harrison, Congress had passed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Western farmers were in favor of this believing that with more money in circulation, loans would be cheaper and life easier for the average American. The problem was that the government had to buy silver with treasury gold causing reserves to drop below the \$100,000,000 required by law. People panicked and began to demand gold in exchange for paper money. Banks failed in this the so-called Panic of 1893 and the country was thrown into a short but violent economic depression.

President Cleveland called a special session of Congress to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act but then he noticed a rough spot on the roof of his mouth, about the size of quarter. A suspicious White House doctor sent a sample to Johns Hopkins: cancer. The political problem was delicate. If the news got out, the depression might deepen so he decided to keep the operation secret.

On June 30, 1893, the President left Washington aboard a yacht. A surgical team slipped on board, strapped the President to a chair tied to the mast, removed two teeth and most of the left jaw. Ten days later more tissue was removed and later a rubber prosthetic jaw was installed. All the while the

yacht sailed up and down the coast. In August the President delivered a message to Congress. No one knew the difference and the country slowly recovered from the panic.

Grover Cleveland never discussed the surgery outside his immediate family but nine years after his death one of the doctors involved described the operation for the "Saturday Evening Post."

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Nevins, Allan. *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage*. New York, NY: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1933.

Welch, Richard E., Jr. *The Presidencies of Grover Cleveland*. Manhattan, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988.

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