OLD STATE CAPITOL: Analyzing a Photograph
Court House at Frankfort, Ky., where Corbell was killed.
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

William Goebel and Politics

William Goebel was born in Sullivan County, Penn., in 1856 to William and Augusta Goebel. The family moved to Covington, Ky., when his father returned from the Civil War. In 1877, Goebel graduated from Cincinnati Law School and went on to specialize in corporate and railroad law. Elected to the Kentucky Senate in 1887 as a Democrat from Kenton County, Goebel became President Pro Tem in 1897. While a senator, he supported such issues and laws as railway rate legislation, anti-lottery laws, end of textbook monopolies, regulation of toll bridges and roads, and extended civil rights for women and minorities. Many have referred to Goebel as “a friend of the common man.” On Feb. 1, 1898, the Goebel Election Law was introduced into the General Assembly. This proposal was met with opposition from both sides, for it proposed the creation of a Board of Elections Commissioners, who would be chosen by the General Assembly each election year. In turn, they would select an Election Commissioner for each county. This was seen by many as a way for Goebel to increase his own political power, similar to what he was accustomed to in the politics of Kenton County. In 1899, William Goebel won the Democratic nomination for governor. The election of 1899 proved to be one of the most corrupt elections in Kentucky history. The final tally was 193,714 for Republican candidate William Taylor, 191,331 for Goebel, and 12,040 for another Democrat, John Y. Brown. Taylor was inaugurated governor on Dec. 12, 1899. A few days later, an investigation was ordered by the elections committee to determine whether the election had been fraudulent. In a vote of 2-1, the elections commissioners certified that Gov. Taylor had won. The Democratic majority in the General Assembly was not happy with the results of the investigation, so they launched their own investigation.

The Assassination of Governor William Goebel, 1900

On Jan. 30, 1900, Goebel approached the State Capitol to attend the legislature’s deliberations. An assassin hiding nearby in the annex at the Office of the Secretary of State shot him in the chest. Taylor, serving as governor pending a final decision on the election, called out the militia and ordered the General Assembly into a special session, not in Frankfort, but in London, Ky., a Republican area. The Republican minority agreed to meet in London, while Democrats decided to meet in Louisville. Both factions claimed control of the General Assembly, but the Republicans were too few in number to have a quorum.

On Jan. 31, the legislature awarded the election to Goebel and he was sworn in as governor. In his only act in that capacity, Goebel signed a proclamation to dissolve the militia called up by Taylor, an order which was not heeded by the force’s Republican commander. Despite the attention of 18 physicians, Goebel died the afternoon of Feb. 3, 1900. In the crisis of Republicans versus Democrats that followed, state militiamen occupied the grounds of the building, and soldiers and armed citizens from both parties faced each other, threatening more violence. Soon after, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the deceased Goebel had been legally declared governor, and his lieutenant governor took office.
1. Study the photograph for two to three minutes. Note your overall impressions.

2. Using the chart below, list the people, objects and activities you see.

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<th>PEOPLE</th>
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3. What text is written directly on the photograph?

4. Who do you think the people in the tents are?

5. Who do you think people on the porch are?

6. What time of year do you think this photograph was taken?

7. Why do you think a photographer chose to document this scene?

8. What does this photograph tell us about the aftermath of the Goebel assassination?