

Grant at 200

Reconsidering the Life and Legacy
of Ulysses S. Grant

Edited by
Chris Mackowski
and
Frank J. Scaturro



Savas Beatie
California

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Dedications

Frank: To Kathleen and John

Chris: To my favorite Illinoisians,
my Aunt Marney Bess and Uncle Buck

We jointly dedicate this book to the faithful stewards of Ulysses S. Grant's memory at historic sites and in archives across the country, who have kept the flame for two centuries and who will carry it forward for many more.

With respect to General Grant, I confess to being an admirer of his tremendous ability to fashion a path to success despite adversity along the way. The chief lessons I draw from Grant's generalship are the value of bold initiative and the absolute necessity for calm in the middle of danger, uncertainty, and the inevitable fog of war. In my view his most brilliant campaign came at Vicksburg. There, after several setbacks, he maneuvered completely around the city, isolated the fortress from reinforcements and won a decisive victory. Throughout that campaign and the Virginia campaign of 1864–65, his unflappable leadership steadied the Union Army and turned tactical setbacks into operational triumphs.

Colin L. Powell
Chairman
Joint Chiefs of Staff

From a 28 June 1991 letter to Frank Scaturro

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and the Grant Monument Association.*

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This volume would not have been possible without the assistance of John F. Marszalek, the tireless former executive director of the USGA, who drew contributors to this project and helped coordinate its successful completion from beginning to end. The support of former USGA President Emeritus Frank J. Williams was likewise invaluable. Both have since used the bicentennial as an opportunity to retire from their longtime positions, and we wish them all the best (and knowing neither will ever be far from Grant's story).

The editors also thank Al Felzenberg and Ryan P. Semmes for their guidance and help with research and review even as they were working on their own essays for this book. Al would like to add his thanks to Emily Greenhouse, editor, *The New York Review of Books*, and journalist Judith Miller for their assistance during the course of his research.

Special thanks to the staff of the USGA and Mississippi State University for their support; to Jimmy Kemp of the Jack Kemp Foundation; the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College; and Tamara Elliott of the Senate Library, Senate Judiciary Committee archivist Amanda Ray, Stephen Spence and Alexandra Villaseran of the National Archives, and Stuart Fraser of the Newberry Library for their help identifying and navigating source materials. The editors also thank Emily Morris and Jon Schmitz of the Chautauqua Institution, current USGA President James Bultema, and Karen Needles for their help with several photo-related questions.

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Finally, Kathleen Scaturro's support of her husband's work and her editorial prowess have been an immeasurable help.

Ulysses S. Grant at 200

Foreword | *Frank J. Williams*

Momentous events during a president's term, and his response thereto, define his legacy. Theodore Roosevelt acknowledged this fact, as he said, "a man has to take advantage of his opportunities; but the opportunities have to come. If there is not the war, you don't get the great general; if there is not a great occasion you don't get the great statesman; if Lincoln had lived in times of peace no one would have known his name now."¹ That the circumstances of a presidency define the president in the eyes of future generations is exemplified by our nation's collective memory of Ulysses S. Grant.

Momentous events surrounded Ulysses S. Grant's life. During the Civil War, Grant earned President Abraham Lincoln's complete confidence. The general made his fair share of mistakes during the Civil War, but he was a great wartime leader. He learned from his mistakes, listening to and asking questions of his advisors.

During the Civil War, he and President Lincoln directed the war effort in concert. By 1864, Grant had become a respected strategist and tactician. His efforts led to the creation of one of his most enduring legacies: the modern command system the military still uses.

The modern command system developed by Grant and Lincoln was led by the commander-in-chief, President Lincoln himself, who set overall strategy for the prosecution of the war. Grant, as general-in-chief, executed President Lincoln's overall strategy. His function was to plan and direct the movements of the entirety of the Union army. Between them was a chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, who relayed information to both Grant and Lincoln. Grant may not have known it at the time, but this relationship with Lincoln set a precedent that the executive branch and the United States military still follow to this day.

When Congress reauthorized the rank of lieutenant general with Grant in mind, Lincoln feared that Grant might get the political bug and challenge him for the Republican Party presidential nomination in 1864. When he was assured this was not the case, Lincoln promoted Grant. Grant's leadership justified Lincoln's

1 Theodore Roosevelt, *African and European Addresses* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1910), 151.

belief in his capacity and abilities. Grant possessed the ability to see the “whole picture” of the military conflict. He worked to harmonize his strategic thinking with the overall strategy Lincoln prescribed. Grant directed the Union to confront Confederate armies from all sides, attempting to punish those armies—not Confederate cities—with strong and decisive coordinated attacks. He submitted to Lincoln broad outlines of his battle plans. Lincoln trusted Grant’s analysis and approved the plans without seeking details.

Although Grant’s achievements during the Civil War may not be considered as part of his presidential legacy, those momentous events shaped Grant and the nation as a whole. The military model he spawned is a brilliant illustration of simplicity. Military leaders to this day continue to study that system and his leadership that ended the Civil War.

Little more than three years after the Civil War, the Republican Party nominated Grant as its candidate for president. Grant reluctantly accepted the nomination, writing to William T. Sherman on June 21, 1868, that “[i]t is [a position] I would not occupy for any mere personal consideration, but, from the nature of the contest since the close of active hostilities, I have been forced into it in spite of myself.”²

Grant’s reluctance to become president did not render him an ineffective national leader. In fact, as recently as 2021, C-SPAN’s Presidential Historians Survey rated Grant number 20 out of the 44 U.S. presidents who had served (excluding the incumbent).³ He ranked highest under the poll’s “pursued equal justice for all” category as the sixth highest, while his administrative skills were ranked at number 36. Yet, to this day, Grant’s presidency seems to be overshadowed by the surrounding events of his life.

With the rise of the media relations profession and the twenty-four-hour news cycle in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, not to mention the omnipresence of the internet, public figures—from politicians to athletes, CEOs to celebrities—are shaped and preened by professionals in the hopes of capturing the nation’s attention in a positive manner. For celebrities, the electorate appears to tolerate misrepresentations by the press for the sake of human interest; however, coverage of the government demands rigorous honesty (sometimes lost amid the turmoil in current political news coverage). This news is consumed by a ravenous public, always hoping for more information, from newspaper articles to social media. Nineteenth-century Americans were as hungry for information about

2 USG to William T. Sherman, 21 June 1868, John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 32 vols. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–2012), 18:292.

3 “Presidential Historians Survey 2021, Total Scores/Overall Rankings,” C-SPAN, accessed 15 February 2022, <https://www.c-span.org/presidentsurvey2021/?page=overall>.

prominent individuals as we are today. However, sources of that information were less widely or quickly available.

Grant was one of those prominent individuals. By the end of the Civil War, Americans knew him, and most considered him a hero who helped to save the Union. His luster may even have surpassed that of Lincoln, as shown by the throngs of Americans who paid their respects during Grant's funeral, the many photographs taken of Grant as compared with Lincoln, and various other metrics.

After being elected president, Grant planned his time in office with self-confidence and independence. He believed that he understood the American people and their wants. Republican members of Congress—having been victorious over Grant's predecessor, President Andrew Johnson—had no intention of yielding to President Grant their legislative agenda, prerogatives, and supplies of patronage opportunities. However, when Grant took office, he was determined to enforce civil rights legislation, reform Indian policy, and maintain a transparent government. He was met with obstacles and criticism for this agenda, not only from Democrats, but also from members of his own party.

President Grant maintained a stoic silence when criticized. He thought that answering these criticisms would simply lead to more. He opted to leave approval of his performance to the people.

But even before Grant's second term, scandals from his administration began to unfold in the press. None involved Grant directly, nor his honesty or integrity, yet each scandal diminished Grant's administration in the American people's eyes. However, individual Americans continued to embrace Grant and his leadership. He was also challenged, as any president would have been, by the Panic of 1873, which forced Grant to confront an economic crisis for which he had little experience and fewer solutions.

Many have written about General Grant, ending their narratives at Appomattox, seemingly wishing he had accepted President Lincoln's invitation to the theater. In fact, since it was taken over by the National Park Service in 1959, Grant's resting place has been officially named the "General Grant National Memorial." But biographies such as Ronald C. White's *American Ulysses*, Ron Chernow's *Grant*, Charles W. Calhoun's *The Presidency of Ulysses S. Grant*, and Joan Waugh's *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* have done much to reconcile the disparate opinions regarding Grant's generalship and presidency.

Until recently, colleges and universities with American history survey courses seemed almost uniformly to end the first semester with the close of the Civil War. This meant that college students learned of Grant's skill and success as a general in the fall semester and returned after winter break to study Grant's supposedly "inept" presidency. But as American history has itself continued to grow, more

American history courses are divided at 1877 or later. Nevertheless, American college students are introduced to two different, and at odds, Grants.

These differing portraits of General Grant and President Grant may lead to an inability to understand Ulysses S. Grant as a complex but consequential president. These misunderstandings show a broader misunderstanding of the crucial period of American history that many have to this day. Yet, today, we must strive to understand him as one individual who helped shape the nation we live in today—just as the essays in this book accomplish.

Frank J. Williams

President, Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library and Association



Library of Congress

In honor of Ulysses S. Grant's two-hundredth birthday, all six living U.S. presidents issued commemorative messages, shared here courtesy of the Grant Monument Association. The original documents are at Grant's Tomb in New York City. The presidents' messages appear on the following pages in the order in which each chief executive served:

- Jimmy Carter
- William Jefferson Clinton
- George W. Bush
- Barack Obama
- Donald J. Trump
- Joseph Biden

In 1866, after receiving a promotion to full general and a fourth star, Ulysses S. Grant became the highest-ranking soldier in American history up to that point, surpassing even George Washington. The highest-ranking soldier of our own time, General Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has also shared a message with us in honor of Grant's bicentennial; it follows the messages from the president.



JIMMY CARTER

April 27, 2022

As a boy growing up in Georgia, I was not taught to admire Union General Ulysses S. Grant. In latter years, I learned to appreciate him. His military skill and leadership were vital in saving the Union. When he became President, he worked both to restore and to transform the South. He advocated amnesty for Confederate soldiers but insisted that they must accept the full citizenship of African Americans. Celebrating the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, he sought to protect the right of African Americans to vote and hold public office, to be educated, and to live free from violence.

I also admire him for signing the act establishing Yellowstone as the first national park. Rosalynn and I are pleased to join our fellow citizens in celebrating the 200th birthday of President Ulysses S. Grant.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jimmy Carter".



WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON

April 27, 2022

Warm greetings to all those gathered to celebrate the 200th birthday of our nation's 18th President, Ulysses S. Grant.

This bicentennial gives all Americans the opportunity to reflect on Grant's enduring legacy of saving our Union on the battlefield, then making it more perfect in his two terms as President.

Grant faithfully worked to carry forward Lincoln's vision of Reconstruction, oversaw the passage of the 15th Amendment, and soundly defeated the Ku Klux Klan. In a time of growing divisive tribalism, his actions to heal our nation and defend the foundations of our democracy are more important than ever.

Thank you for your efforts to share more broadly the legacy of President Grant, who I am glad is finally beginning to receive the historic recognition he so richly deserves. I wish you all a wonderful celebration at his final resting place.

Bill Clinton



GEORGE W. BUSH

April 27, 2022

Happy 200th birthday to President Ulysses S. Grant.

As Commanding Army General, President Grant helped lead our country through one of its darkest periods. As President, he restored faith in a unified nation. President Grant worked hard to create a just society and protect the civil liberties and human rights of its citizens. I'm grateful for all he did to promote peace, unity, and equality in America.

Laura and I appreciate all the Ulysses S. Grant Association has done over the years to preserve the history of our country's 18th President. May his legacy inspire us to fight for what is right, lead with integrity, and create a more hopeful tomorrow for our fellow citizens. God bless the memory of President Ulysses S. Grant, and may He continue to bless America.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "GWB", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.



BARACK OBAMA

July 23, 2022

It's an honor to join the Ulysses S. Grant Association and Americans across the country in celebrating President Grant's 200th birthday.

On the battlefield, President Grant kept our Union intact with remarkable courage and perseverance. In the White House, he took on the Ku Klux Klan, championed the 15th Amendment, and established the Department of Justice. With these actions and more, he laid the groundwork for equal rights for Black Americans and strengthened a fractured nation.

In the years following his presidency, forces of division and hate have threatened these achievements, but the Union he fought so hard to preserve has held. This bicentennial provides us all an opportunity to recommit ourselves to President Grant's vision of a more equal and just America. Continuing to nurture and protect our democracy is the most powerful tribute we can pay to his legacy.

Sincerely,

A stylized, handwritten signature of Barack Obama, featuring a large, circular 'O' and a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.



DONALD J. TRUMP

April 27, 2022

I am pleased to join the Ulysses S. Grant Library, the Ulysses S. Grant Association, and all Americans in observing the 200th birthday of our 18th President.

President Grant believed in and embodied the American spirit of determination, courage, loyalty, and honor. From modest beginnings in Point Pleasant, Ohio, Hiram Ulysses Grant would grow to change the course of American history. Quiet and unassuming but regarded as highly intelligent, Grant trained in the great military tradition of West Point, where he steadily rose through the ranks to become one of our Nation's most emblematic heroes. His chronicle of military accomplishments shaped his political doctrine. History remembers the iconic images of General Robert E. Lee surrendering his sword to General Grant at the Appomattox Court House. Still, little is retold of President Grant's many political achievements—the achievements that moved our war-torn and tormented country forward after the end of a bloody civil war and the assassination of a beloved president.

As President, Grant set his sights on not only rebuilding America, but renewing her broken soul. At 46, the youngest President in our Nation's comparatively young history, Grant envisioned and worked tirelessly toward peace and unity. Ever a champion for the civil rights of African Americans, he fortified the 14th Amendment, assuring citizenship and equality, and secured the ratification of the 15th Amendment granting Black Americans the right to vote.

As a consummate statesman, President Grant promoted goodwill and unity both at home and abroad. His diplomatic agreements with Spain and Great Britain reduced the threat of war at a time when our country desperately needed peace and healing, and the Treaty of Washington set the framework for future conflict resolution—instituting his legacy as a conservative tactician and advocate for peace and prosperity. At home, his conservation and preservation of our lands remind Americans of the infinite beauty of our great country and the immeasurable value and splendor of our natural resources and national parks.

History is long overdue in the commendation of President Grant. Our country must never be timid in telling the story of our Nation's great warriors. They deserve honor, recognition, and lasting tribute for the battles they won, the ideas they championed, and the freedom they secured. We must always remember their hopeful vision passed down to all of us—that united as one American people trusting in God, there is no challenge too great and no dream beyond our reach.

Melania joins me in sending our very best wishes as you celebrate the bicentennial of Ulysses S. Grant's extraordinary life and legacy.

May God bless you, and may He bless the United States of America.

A large, bold, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Donald Trump".



THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 27, 2022

The First Lady and I are pleased to help celebrate President Ulysses S. Grant's 200th birthday.

As commanding general, President Grant led our Nation through the most trying time in our history, the Civil War and its aftermath. For generations, we have admired his brilliance as a military tactician, his courage on the battlefield, his values as a defender of rights for Black Americans, and his leadership as a President who helped unite a divided people.

President Grant lived many lives. Born and raised in Ohio, he went on to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point and command hundreds of thousands of men in the Union Army. Once a struggling farmer, he went on to serve two terms as President of the United States. Once a slaveowner, he helped to emancipate the South, beat back the first Ku Klux Klan, and establish the Justice Department to protect the civil rights of all Americans, rebuilding our country as it emerged from the long shadow of slavery. President Grant rose to the occasion in one of our darkest periods to preserve our Union, defend our democracy, and pursue justice and unity.

As we observe the bicentennial of his birth, let us honor his legacy by carrying forward his charge to pursue hope over fear and unity over division and forever setting our sights on the more just Nation we know we can and must be.



CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20318-9999

27 April 2022

**A MESSAGE IN HONOR OF PRESIDENT
ULYSSES S. GRANT BICENTENNIAL**

As the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I am pleased to join the Grant Monument Association (GMA) and our country in celebration of the Ulysses S. Grant Bicentennial—a momentous occasion honoring the 200th birthday of America's 18th U.S. President. Since its inception more than 100 years ago, the GMA has been dedicated to commemorating the life and legacy of this highly regarded statesman, Army General, and American hero.

We acknowledge President Grant's extraordinary bravery and commitment to our national values and principles embedded in the U.S. Constitution. His critical role in guiding and leading our country through some of the most turbulent times turned the tides of war in the face of merciless opposition and strong resistance. He willingly shouldered great responsibility, and made a profound impact on the course of our country's history through his tactical ability and strategic brilliance on the battlefield. He stood to preserve the freedoms and liberties we now enjoy.

In this country, in these United States, every single one of us is born free and equal—and all of us, each generation, must continue to aspire to that ideal. President Grant understood this and dedicated his life to this belief. He continues to be an inspiration for all of us that wear the cloth of our Nation.

On behalf of the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces, we respect and pay homage to President Grant, and his long storied history of triumph over unimaginable adversity. We are humbled by his selfless service, compassion, and commitment to his fellow Americans and this country. Hollyanne and I join all of our Service members and Veterans, past and present, in recognizing and celebrating President Ulysses S. Grant's 200th birthday.

Sincerely,


 MARK A. MILLEY
 General, U.S. Army



To the very end, Grant was interested in words. This photo of Grant, reading on the porch of the cottage at Mt. McGregor, was taken on July 19, 1885, just four days before his death. It is the last-known photograph taken of the most-photographed man of the nineteenth century.

Grant Cottage Collection

The Myth of Grant's Silence

Introduction | *Chris Mackowski*

On May 4, 1864, Ulysses S. Grant led Federal forces across the Rapidan River in central Virginia in an attempt to bring Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia to heel once and for all. He vowed there would be "no turning back," and he stayed true to his word. On May 5, the two armies clashed in the Wilderness, but rather than withdraw when a decisive tactical victory seemed unlikely, Grant maneuvered around Lee's position. Fighting resumed immediately outside Spotsylvania Court House. After two weeks there, Grant maneuvered around Lee again, shifting the fight to the banks of the North Anna River. And from there, on to Totopotomoy Creek and Bethesda Church and Cold Harbor.

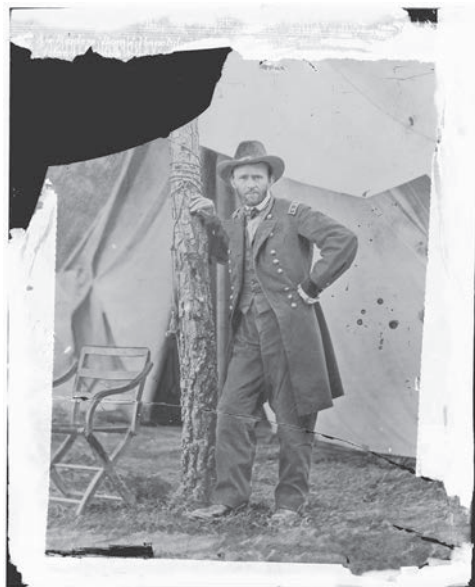
Lee's failure to strike a blow at North Anna, coupled with a series of successes through June 1, led Grant to believe he needed just one more strong assault to break his foe. "Lee's army is really whipped," he wrote to Washington following the fight at North Anna. "The prisoners we now take show it, and the action of his army shows it unmistakably."¹

And so it was, on the morning of June 3, 1864, Grant launched a series of attacks against heavily fortified Confederate positions at Cold Harbor. As the story goes, he lost as many as 6,000 men in a half an hour as the result of a single fruitless charge. In reality, he lost closer to 3,500 men over the course of the entire day, all along the line, not just during the morning's charge, but the inflated casualty figure remains a central lynchpin in anti-Grant mythology.²

"I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made, ..."

1 *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), Series 1, vol. 36, Part 3, 206.

2 Gordon Rhea offers an excellent breakdown and analysis of Federal and Confederate losses at Cold Harbor. "When viewed in the war's larger context, the June 3 attack falls short of its popular reputation for slaughter," he concludes. Gordon Rhea, *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 385–86.



A photo of Grant at Cold Harbor has become one of the most iconic images of the war, just as his comment about regretting the last Union charge at Cold Harbor has become one of the most iconic lines from the battle. That last charge was used by Grant's Lost Cause critics to tatter his reputation.

Library of Congress

Grant famously wrote in his *Personal Memoirs*. “[N]o advantage whatever was gained to compensate for the heavy loss we sustained.”³

It's an oft-quoted line, in part because Grant did not write much about Cold Harbor, despite the staggering losses. Historians have tended to accept his relative silence about the incident as tacit acknowledgment that he made a mistake, and Lost Cause mythologizers have exploited such silences to vilify him as “Grant the Butcher.” It's worth noting, however, that Robert E. Lee lost a similar number of men during Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg—some 6,555 men—as Grant did in total at Cold Harbor. In Lee's case, that amounted to a decisive defeat, while Grant was able to maintain his strategic momentum by changing tactics after the battle.⁴ But rather than condemn “Lee the Butcher,” the same Southern partisans who butchered Grant's reputation romanticized Lee's, holding up his casualties as examples of Southern manly virtue. Writing more about Cold Harbor certainly would not have spared Grant from his Lost Cause critics, who had a vested interest in besmirching him no matter what, but Grant's omissions have, at times, been devastating to his historical reputation because they have given his detractors further space to control the narrative right up through the twentieth century.

It's easy to make assumptions about Grant's relative silence on Cold Harbor because it fits neatly in line with widely known stories of his stoicism in times of

3 Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1885–1886), 2:276, hereafter cited as *PMUSG*.

4 For a breakdown of Lee's numbers on July 3 during Pickett's Charge, see “Pickett's Charge: That July Afternoon in 1863,” American Battlefield Trust, accessed 31 January 2022, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/picketts-charge>.

calamity. Think of Grant in the rain after the first disastrous day at Shiloh, ready to “Lick ‘em tomorrow.” Or his quiet whittling under a tree on that awful first day in the Wilderness. Or the quiet attentiveness he gave Ferdinand Ward when his business partner first hinted at the financial trouble their investment firm was facing. “[T]he general was always silent, Mrs. Grant,” William T. Sherman once reminded Grant’s wife, Julia, during the winter of Grant’s final illness. “Even at the worst times of strain, during the war, I used to go to see him at his headquarters, and he would sit perfectly still”⁵

Furthermore, there is Grant’s well-documented reticence for public speaking. Ronald C. White’s essay in this volume, for example, offers several accounts where Grant makes a quick greeting but then turns the spotlight over to a friend or colleague “to tell you how happy I am to be with you.”⁶

Robert Underwood Johnson, an editor with *Century Magazine* tasked with convincing Grant to write about his wartime experiences, referred to “The myth of his [Grant’s] silence.”⁷ Grant’s silence was very much a part of the great man’s public persona, but as Johnson found out when he met Grant for the first time, in June 1884, “the impressions I had of his personality and character had been at second hand, and were, as it proved, for the most part erroneous.” Johnson admitted Grant was “a much misrepresented man.”

What was, to Johnson, a discovery was something well known to Grant’s intimates. “We considered him more than commonly talkative,” said Brig. Gen. William Hillyer, once a member of Grant’s wartime staff, speaking to a newspaper reporter around the time of Grant’s inauguration as president. “So he is now: he won’t talk for effect, nor before strangers freely. This reticence of Grant, so much talked of, is partly discrimination and partly the form of an old bashfulness he had when a boy. Anybody whom he knows can hear him speak at any time.”⁸ Johnson’s diligent work with Grant would earn him this privilege.

It fell to Johnson to mentor Grant in what the editor described as “the untried field of authorship”—a series of battle articles for *Century* that would eventually lead to the memoirs. Grant first tried, and struggled, with an account of the battle of Shiloh. It was “dry,” Johnson privately noted, and suffered from “the blight of the deadly official report.” As Johnson later explained, “The General, of course, did

5 Charles Bracelen Flood, *Grant’s Final Victory: Ulysses S. Grant’s Heroic Last Year* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2011), 120-21.

6 See page 14 in this volume.

7 This and all quotes from Johnson come from Robert Underwood Johnson, *Remembered Yesterdays* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1923), 210-15.

8 Edward Chauncey Marshall, *The Ancestry of General Grant, and Their Contemporaries* (New York: Sheldon & Co., 1869), 77-8.



Grant's memoirs would become one of the most important documents in the war of words that veterans engaged in—often viciously—into the twentieth century that shaped future generations' understanding of the Civil War. Grant Cottage displays some of the writing tools used by Grant and his editing team.

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not realize the requirements of a popular publication on the war, and it was for me to help him turn this new disaster of Shiloh into a signal success.”

His follow-up discussion with Grant proved especially illuminating. “General Grant, instead of being a ‘silent man’[,] was positively loquacious . . .”

Johnson marveled. “He spoke rapidly and long . . . and in the frankest manner” and, Johnson importantly added, Grant exhibited “no cocksureness, no desire to make a perfect record or to live up to a later reputation.”

In conversation, Grant “revealed the human side of his experience,” and it was this approach Johnson urged him to take with his writing: “such a talk as he would make to friends after dinner.” Grant grasped the idea at once and set to work on a revision that worked admirably. “I am positively enjoying the work,” Grant admitted, a bit surprised.

If we can eavesdrop on the outskirts of these interactions for a moment, we gain important clues into Grant's silences and the limits of our ability to assume anything from them. As Johnson discovered, Grant had plenty to say but just needed to figure out the best way to say it for his audience. Grant had never thought of himself as a “writer” before and so felt intimidated by the very idea. Once he got past that mystification, though, he discovered he wasn't nearly the stranger to the pen he initially thought he was. “I have been very much employed in writing,” he one day wrote to former staff officer Adam Badeau:

As a soldier I wrote my own orders, directions and reports. They were not edited nor assistance rendered. As President I wrote every official document, I believe, bearing my name. . . . All these have been published and widely circulated. The public has become accustomed to them and know my style of writing. They know that it is not even an attempt to imitate either a literary or clas[s]ical style and that it is just what it is pure and simple and nothing else. If I succeed in telling my story so that others can see, as I do, what I attempt to sh[o]w, I will be satisfied. The

reader must also be satisfied . . . for he knew from the begin[n]ing just what to expect.⁹

By the time Grant got around to writing about the Overland Campaign in his memoirs, he was in his last weeks of life. Fighting excruciating pain from throat cancer—not to mention the mind-addling effects of painkillers and exhaustion—his attempt to finish the second volume of his memoirs represents a Herculean effort. All three of his sons were aiding him by that point, as well as stenographer Noble Dawson.

“If I could have two weeks of strength I could improve it very much,” he wrote to his publisher, Mark Twain, around June 30, 1885. “As I am, however, it will have to go about as it is, with verifications and corrections by the boys, and by suggestions which will enable me to make a point clear here and there.”¹⁰

As it would happen, Grant would get three weeks, not two. He would die on July 23, 1885. The clock was ticking.

Grant was satisfied with most of what he had written concerning the last year of the war. “It seemed to me that I got the campaign about Petersburg, and the move to Appomattox pretty good on the last attempt,” he told his son Fred, who worked as his primary editorial assistant.¹¹ Grant was also pleased with the Wilderness. He was less pleased, though, with the rest of the Overland Campaign. “I should change Spotts if I was able,” he told Fred in early July, “and could improve N. An[n]a and Cold Harbor.”¹²

But he was *not* able, of course. The clock was ticking loudly by that point.

“If I could read it [the manuscript] over myself many little matters of anecdote and incident would suggest themselves to me,” he had told Twain.¹³ And indeed, his daughters-in-law read the manuscript back to him in the afternoons and evenings even as his sons and Dawson continued with their editing and fact-checking. “Tell Mr. Dawson to punctuate,” he added.¹⁴

9 John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 32 vols. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967–2012), 31:355–56, hereafter cited as *PUSG*. (Brackets omitted for content that is not in Grant’s hand.) “The last two sentences of this paragraph add up to excellent advice for any budding writer,” points out historian Bruce Catton in “U.S. Grant: Man of Letters,” *American Heritage* (June 1968), No. 4, 19:98.

10 *PUSG*, 31:391.

11 *PUSG*, 31:411.

12 *Ibid.*

13 *Ibid.*, 31:390.

14 *Ibid.*, 31:411.



“As a soldier I wrote my own orders, directions and reports,” Grant said. That daily practice helped him develop a clear, concise voice as a writer, although he never fully realized its impact until he was nearly done writing his memoirs.

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Grant was generally unable to speak by this point because his throat cancer had ravaged his voice and sapped his strength so badly. He held conversations and passed out instructions by writing on slips of paper. His scrawlings show a dozen aspects of the book all competing for his attention:

- “We will consider whether [or] not to leave out the appendix.”
- “Is that entitled ‘preface’ or ‘introduction’?”
- “What are you engaged at now?”
- “Does what I have written fit the case.”
- “Are you reviewing or copying?”
- “I think I am a little mixed in my statement”
- Mentions of Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Generals Sherman, Burnside, Longstreet.
- “Have I left out many points.” (a question without a question mark—no wonder he needed Dawson to punctuate)¹⁵

“I begin to feel anxious about the review of the second volume,” he admitted around July 10. “There may be more difficulty in placing all the parts than we think. It has been written in a very detached way.”¹⁶

It is no wonder, in this maelstrom of edits, that Grant did not have time to do all he wished, although he tried mightily. Even as Twain sent him printed galley proofs of volume one, Grant kept making handwritten corrections on the sheets. Twain fretted that the editing on the first volume would prohibit Grant from finishing the second.

15 The bulleted examples all come from *PUSG*, 31:411.

16 *Ibid.*, 31:426.

"I would have more hope of satisfying the expectation of the public if I could have allowed myself more time," Grant admitted in his introduction to the memoirs.¹⁷

Imagine: If he'd had more time, what more might he have said?

As someone who has been telling the story of the Overland Campaign for nearly two decades, on the battlefield and in writing, this notion tantalizes me. "*I should change Spotts if I was able, and could improve N. Anna and Cold Harbor.*" How would Grant have retold those stories? What changes would he have made? What was he feeling at the time? What did he *really* think about that last charge at Cold Harbor? He always regretted it, he said, but we students of the Civil War have always regretted he didn't say more.

Had he the time, what else did Grant wish he could improve, change, expand upon, or illuminate? What other anecdotes and incidents would have suggested themselves to him? What else might he have told us?

Consider how such first-person revelations might have altered our understanding of Grant or changed the way history has remembered him. Remember, Johnson's second-hand impressions of Grant had proven erroneous. How erroneous are our own impressions of Grant in the absence of his own testimony and in the face of hostile Lost Cause critics?

For three-quarters of a century after Grant's death, historians complained about an "almost complete lack" of Grant resources to look at: no compiled letters, no journals, no collected works. Just the memoir. Grant wrote "as little as possible," one of them grouched.¹⁸ There was, in a sense, a documentary "silence" from Grant keeping in line with the in-person "myth of his silence," as Johnson called it.

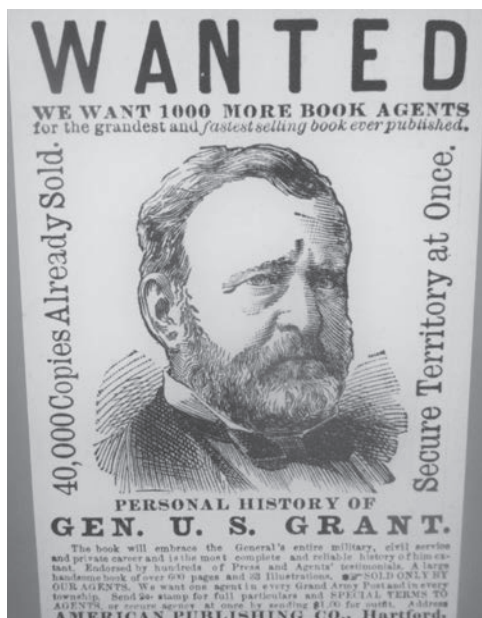
This speaks to one of the great paradoxes of Grant's legacy. His memoirs, which have never gone out of print, consisted of 291,000 words over 1,231 pages in two volumes. Recent annotated editions have shed additional light on the text. Beyond Grant's masterwork, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, edited under the auspices of the Ulysses S. Grant Association and published by Southern Illinois University Press, fill thirty-two volumes, and his written orders from the war are sprinkled throughout the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*.

Grant really wasn't all that silent after all, even if he didn't get the chance to say quite everything he wanted to.

Grant's silences, then, were both real and imagined—this is the true "myth of his silence." Lost Causers have exploited those silences, and historians have often made

17 *PMUSG*, 1:8.

18 See John Y. Simon's introduction to the *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant's* first volume for the story of the dearth, and then plenitude, of Grant documents. *PUSG*, 1:xxviii.



Grant's publisher, Mark Twain, was convinced America—and history—wanted to hear what Grant had to say. “[H]ere was a book that was morally bound to sell several hundred thousand copies in its first year of publication . . .” Twain predicted. He nonetheless hedged his bets by selling Grant's memoirs by subscription.

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wholly inadequate assumptions about them. But Grant's silences contain a rich landscape of unexpressed ideas, untold stories, and unshared insights that Grant sought to articulate to, literally, his dying day during a time when he hardly had any cancer-ravaged voice left at all.

In this collection of essays, we

hope to fill in some of the long-standing gaps in Grant historiography, offering our own illuminations of his life and legacy. In doing so, we cannot speak for Grant, but we can draw on this new wealth of documentary richness to offer a fuller, fairer, and more balanced view of this so-called “silent man.”

Ronald C. White offers the fullest-yet examination of the impact of Methodism on Grant, from his boyhood along the Ohio River through his final days on Mount McGregor.

Ulysses Grant Dietz offers some “insider's” insights about Grant's family life. Dietz is the youngest surviving great-great-grandchild—out of forty-one—of Ulysses and Julia Grant. The legendary general and president is a familiar figure to everyone in the family, but also a stranger from long-ago who still casts a long shadow.

Curt Fields also shares a unique perspective in his essay. As a living historian, Fields has walked in Grant's shoes in a way few other historians have, bringing Grant to life through first-person portrayals. Exploring Grant's life in such a unique way has given Fields unique insights that he shares in his essay.

As advocates of the idea that places can offer us important insights into the people who live in and occupy those places, we have pieces from Nick Sacco at the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site in St. Louis, Missouri, and Ben Kemp of the Ulysses S. Grant Cottage National Historic Landmark in Mt. McGregor, New York. In St. Louis, Grant and his wife lived in a home called White Haven, which

became the centerpiece of a small national park in 1989. At Mt. McGregor, Grant spent the last six weeks of his life completing his memoirs. A state historic site for decades, Grant Cottage was designated as a National Historic Landmark in 2021.

Grant's Tomb, meanwhile, despite being a national park since 1959, fell victim to desecration and neglect until its restoration during the 1990s. Frank Scaturro, my co-editor, was instrumental in that restoration and shares some of his insights as he explores the Tomb's history.

John F. Marszalek recounts Grant's time at West Point, a formative period in Grant's life. "A military life had no charms for me, and I had not the faintest idea of staying in the army even if I should be graduated, which I did not expect," Grant wrote in his memoirs.¹⁹ As Marszalek recounts, Grant's West Point experience gave the young man a sense of direction.

Few have imagined Grant would attain military greatness. Timothy Smith argues that Grant had an intuitive grasp of how to conduct effective warfare at a time when technology, tactics, and politics were changing all the traditional rules. Grant, in effect, presaged the principles outlined by the great military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, whose German writings had not yet made the rounds in English.

For all the intuitive skill, Grant's military success was hardly inevitable. In reality, the so-called "Rise of Grant" consisted of a string of contingencies. In a later essay in this volume, I argue that examining the many ways things could have turned out differently can help us better appreciate exactly what Grant accomplished on the battlefield.

General Grant had a very human side, too, though. As Joan Waugh's essay points out, his sense of humanity sat at the center of his efforts to bring about peace following the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox. Lincoln and Grant were very much in *simpatico* about malice toward none and charity for all.

Following the Civil War, Grant made his shift into politics. It was not a natural transition, says Charles W. Calhoun, although it became practically inevitable. In a time of postwar tumult, Grant became an "adept politician and a civilian leader of great consequence," Calhoun contends.

Two additional essays look at specific components of Grant's political life. Alvin S. Felzenberg looks closely at Grant's significant contributions to civil rights—efforts that rank Grant with Lincoln and Lyndon B. Johnson as the most important civil rights presidents in American history. Grant, of late, has been getting more recognition for those efforts; Felzenberg rightly argues that Grant can't get too much.

Meanwhile, Ryan P. Semmes looks at Grant's many foreign policy achievements. Grant's philosophy for foreign relations, Semmes points out, stemmed directly from the same philosophy that guided the president's Reconstruction policies. However, as Semmes notes, international concerns and other roadblocks prevented Grant from exporting republicanism even as he successfully resolved disputes with European powers.

For decades, Frank J. Scaturro has advocated a fuller reexamination of Grant's entire presidency. Grant belongs as a rightful member of the pantheon of presidential greats, his essay argues, but his ascension will only happen when we can overcome generations of built-up confirmation bias.

As the man who won the Civil War and then spent eight consequential years in the White House, Grant traced a trajectory from humble beginnings to the heights of fame. Gary Gallagher traces Grant's trajectory since, from Union hero to corrupt drunk butcher to the current new appreciation Grant is enjoying.

Like other Grant mythology—corruption, drunkenness, callous butchery—Grant's silence is a story of complexity and nuance. That he has often been reduced to such bullet points, though, probably would not have surprised Grant, even if it would have disappointed him. He also understood the power of myth. "Wars produce many stories of fiction, some of which are told until they are believed to be true," he wrote in his memoir.²⁰ Pound the drum often enough and loud enough, and even that one note will start to sound like a song. He had waded through enough partisan political battles and dealt with enough unreconstructed rebels to know there would be an audience for that kind of music.

That didn't keep Grant, ever an optimist, from hoping for more. "I would like to see truthful history written," he said. "Such history will do full credit to the courage, endurance and soldierly ability of the American citizen, no matter what section of the country he hailed from, or in what ranks he fought."²¹

The Civil War and Reconstruction combine to form the most complicated and important period of American history. As the man who won that war and then presided over the Union he saved, Grant deserves better than reductionism and misrepresentation (not to mention outright vilification). Doing justice to his story is part of doing justice to such a formative and misunderstood period.

As he hits his 200th birthday, we are pleased to do our part to fill in some of the silences of Grant's story in a way that helps tell the truthful history.

Imagine what he would say.

20 Ibid., 2:488.

21 Ibid., 1:170.

U.S. Grant: The Reluctant Cadet at West Point

Chapter One | *John F. Marszalek*

Of all the stories passed o'er I'll say,
You can believe as few or as many as you may.
Perhaps he did things both foolish and thin,
But it's foolish to believe all that's told of him.¹

He was never thought of as a West Point possibility. He was a short and pudgy seventeen-year-old who never felt called to the military. His father, Jesse, brought up the idea of the young man going to West Point, mainly because it would cost the father nothing, and the son would either become an army officer or complete his course work and join the engineers who were rebuilding the nation.

Hiram Ulysses Grant never seemed to want to do anything that smacked of the military, and he always seemed to stay in the background when the corps assigned cadets to leadership posts at West Point. Before he went to the Military Academy, his father wanted him to join in the leather tanning industry, but the young man hated the sounds and smells of the tannery, so he found ways to avoid that work.²

The Grant family came from Connecticut Yankee stock, by way of Scotland, a distant relative having commanded a part of the Scottish army in a major battle in 1333.³ In his famous memoirs, Grant wrote that “My family is American, and has been for generations, in all its branches, direct and collateral.”⁴

1 Adrian Hilt, *The Grant Poem* (New York: Nassau Publishing Co., 1886), 37.

2 Ron Chernow, *Grant* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 15.

3 James F. Boyd, *Military and Civilian Life of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant* (Philadelphia: P.W. Ziegler & Co., 1885), 17.

4 Ulysses S. Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant: The Complete Annotated Edition*, John F. Marszalek with David S. Nolen & Louie P. Gallo, eds. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 5, hereafter cited as *PMUSG-Annotated*.

The first relative to reach what was to become New England was Matthew Grant, who settled there in 1630. A grandfather, who was called Noah, fought in the Revolutionary War and eventually settled in Deerfield, Ohio, in 1799 with his wife and seven children.⁵

One of these children, born in 1794, was Ulysses Grant's father, Jesse. Tragically, when Jesse was but eleven years old, his mother died, and his father sent him to live with the family of George Tod, who would later become an Ohio Supreme Court justice. Tod and his wife gave Jesse the home he needed, and when he was sixteen, Jesse became a tanner, working for his half-brother, Peter, in Kentucky. He then resided with the family of Owen Brown, whose son, John, later became the famous Kansas abolitionist. Jesse was greatly influenced by Brown, and he always said that he moved to anti-slavery Point Pleasant, Ohio, because of Brown's abolitionist influence. And so, in 1820, Jesse Grant took residence as a tanner some 25 miles southeast of Cincinnati on the Ohio River, near where Big Indian Creek poured into that body of water.⁶

Jesse Grant was an ambitious man and determined to make a success in the world. Already 26 years old, he decided that he had better find a wife and begin a family and business. He encountered the family of John and Sarah Simpson, who lived some ten miles away on land purchased from Jesse's boss, Thomas Page. Jesse regularly traveled to the region to get hides for the business, spending time in the process with one of the Simpson children, Hannah, and her mother. The latter was a voracious reader and loaned Jesse books. Over time, Jesse began to see Hannah as a possible wife, and after a whirlwind courtship of several months, they were married on June 24, 1821.⁷

Hannah, who was twenty-two years old when she first met Jesse, was a devout Methodist.⁸ The couple settled into a happy relationship, he reaching out to practice local politics and she growing ever more tied to her local church. She was no beauty, and he was not handsome, but their marriage was stable. He held on to his anti-slavery views and even wrote pieces for a local anti-slavery newspaper, the *Castigator*.⁹ She was popular in the neighborhood, but he was considered a blowhard and not particularly well liked as a result.

5 Ibid., 5-7.

6 Michael Yockelson, *Grant: Savior of the Union* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 1-2.

7 Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph over Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 2.

8 Ronald C. White, *American Ulysses, A Life of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Random House 2016), 19-20.

9 Yockelson, 2-3.

The Ulysses S. Grant Birthplace in Point Pleasant, Ohio, open seasonally, is operated by the Ohio History Connection. A small commemorative district and memorial bridge all overlook the Ohio River.

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Then what both Jesse and Hannah wanted, happened. Hannah had their first child on April 27, 1822, a large baby of some eleven pounds. The marriage of Jesse and Hannah was solidified with this birth and, although Jesse remained loud and Hannah stayed as quiet as ever, their lives changed fundamentally. Even the matter of Ulysses S. Grant's first name was not simple. The family met a month

after the birth to decide what the new baby's first name should be. Hannah wanted to name him Albert, after Democratic-Republican politician and diplomat Albert Gallatin. Another relative suggested Theodore; a grandfather liked Hiram; and his step-grandmother chose Ulysses. To solve the disagreement, the family put all the names on slips of paper, tossed them into a hat, and finally the name "Hiram" was chosen with "Ulysses" next in line. And so, the firstborn came to be called Hiram Ulysses Grant.¹⁰ This new child would be joined by five other children: Samuel Simpson, Clara Rachel, Virginia Paine, Orvil Lynch, and Mary Frances. Ulysses never grew close to any of these siblings, but they certainly filled the small two-story brick house, which Jesse added to as the children were born.¹¹ This, their second house in Georgetown, was where Grant lived during his early years.

It was in Georgetown, where Jesse moved his family one year after the arrival of his firstborn, that Ulysses grew up and developed his talent with horses. When he was only around two or three years old, he would sneak into the stables by himself and walk around the horses and through their legs. The neighbors saw what was happening and told his mother that she should stop such activity immediately because the boy might be trampled or kicked. Hannah listened politely and then

¹⁰ Boyd, 20.

¹¹ William Conant Church, *Ulysses S. Grant and the Period of National Preservation and Reconstruction* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), 9.

said softly: "Horses seem to understand Ulysses." By the time he was seventeen, he was doing a full man's work, and the neighbors seemed ready to allow him to share the stalls with the horses.¹²

A few years after Ulysses was born, Jesse took the youngster into town so he could see a parade. A resident of the town asked Jesse if he could put a gun near the two-year-old to see the effect of a shot on the toddler's ears. Jesse pointed out that his baby had never even seen a gun or a pistol before, but he agreed anyway to the firing of a weapon near the child's ear. The villager put the baby's fingers around the gun's trigger, and the child was told to pull. The gun went off with a huge bang, but Ulysses did not flinch. The villagers insisted, ever after, that this experience proved Ulysses was going to be a soldier.¹³

There was also another event that happened to the young man some years later that influenced him for the rest of his life. When he was no older than eight years old, his father sent him to purchase a horse that the father liked and Ulysses just had to have. The issue in debate proved to be the cost of the animal. The boy wanted to pay whatever it took, while Jesse insisted on a lower amount. Report of the cost varied depending on what people later said, but Jesse told his young son to offer the farm neighbor something like \$20. If the neighbor refused that amount, then Ulysses should offer \$22.50. If that was still not acceptable to the neighbor, Jesse told Ulysses to offer \$25.

Ulysses hurried to the nearby farm and, always ready to tell the truth, he answered neighbor Ralston's inquiry about how much Ulysses should offer for the horse. Ulysses repeated what his father had told him: \$20 dollars at first, but if that was not enough, he should raise it to \$22.50. Finally, rather than not get the horse at all, he should offer \$25. Needless to say, the neighbor smiled and insisted on \$25. For the rest of his life, Ulysses had to live with the embarrassment of what a bad bargainer he was. Neighborhood boys never forgave him for his naivete.¹⁴

Most of the time, the young Grant kept to himself and his horses, a familiar figure around Georgetown who otherwise showed no particular talents. He was considered slow, yet people in the area seemed to like him. He had no bad habits that anyone knew about. He was loved by the young boys of the town because

12 Frank H. Jones, *An Address Delivered by Frank H. Jones Before the Chicago Historical Society at the Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of General Ulysses S. Grant* (Chicago: R. R. Donnelly and Sons, 1922), 7-8.

13 J. B. McClure, *Stories, Sketches and Speeches of General Grant at Home and Abroad, in Peace and in War* (Chicago: Rhodes and McClure, 1879), 17-18.

14 *PMUSG-Annotated*, 14-15. The most detailed discussion of what life at West Point was like before the Civil War is James L. Morrison, Jr., *"The Best School in the World": West Point, the Pre-Civil War Years, 1833-1866* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1986).

Grant's Boyhood Home is one of several Grant-related sites preserved in Georgetown, Ohio. The structure that served as Jesse Grant's tannery, across the street, also stands, as does Grant's Schoolhouse. The Boyhood Home and Schoolhouse are open seasonally, and the tannery is being developed for public visits. Georgetown also features two Grant statues.

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he went out of his way to protect them.¹⁵ Whenever he was getting ready to say something funny, his eyes twinkled, and when he walked, his lack of rhythm and musical ability prevented him from walking smoothly. He slouched along rather than pushed forward.¹⁶

Jesse had great admiration for his firstborn son and hoped that Ulysses would follow in his footsteps in the tanning factory. The son hated tanning and would rather do anything except work at that trade. He told his father that he would stay at the tannery until he was 21 years old, but, after that, he would never step inside the building again. He hated grinding bark to produce the tannic acid it provided for the factory. The “beam room” was a particularly distasteful place for him because he hated to see the animal hides being stretched over the building’s beams and the flesh scraped off the hide.¹⁷ Instead of tanning, he took over all the horse-driven activities near his home and factory as soon as he could handle the plow. Soon after that, Jesse allowed his son to travel around the area and represent the family business. Grant remained more satisfied driving horses than working in the tannery.

Jesse remained proud of all that his son could do, but he still wished for more. Unlike him, his son was quiet and, other than manage the horses, he was not willing to reach out into the community. Jesse was a lenient father, though, and he saw Ulysses as close to perfect. Jesse could, for example, ensure the best education

15 Louis A. Coolidge, *Ulysses S. Grant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 16.

16 Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 14-16.

17 H.W. Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 7-8; Albert D. Richardson, *A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant* (Washington, D.C.: The National Tribune, 1898), 51, 63.

his son might receive in that region, but Jesse had even bigger ambitions than that.¹⁸

The son of the town doctor and a friend of the Grant family, one G. Bartlett Bailey, received an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1837 through the nomination of pro-slavery Congressman Thomas L. Hamer. Unfortunately, Bailey failed academically. He was then re-nominated by Hamer in July 1838, but he failed again in three months. Bailey's father and mother tried to keep the shame of the failure a secret, but Jesse, being the busybody that he was, found out immediately and tried to get the appointment for his son. He wrote to anti-slavery Senator Thomas Morris, but the only available opportunity for West Point was in the office of Jesse's longtime opponent congressman, Thomas Hamer. So Jesse swallowed his pride, wrote to Hamer, and luckily got the appointment for Ulysses, although there would yet be complications.¹⁹

And so, in 1838, Jesse sprang some news on his son. "I believe you are going to receive the [Bailey's] appointment," Jesse told Ulys. "What appointment?" the son responded. "To West Point," Jesse said. "I have applied for it." "But I won't go!" Ulysses said. But then, as the young man remembered it, Jesse "said he thought I would, *and I thought so too, if he did.*"²⁰

And thus, the young Grant, thanks to his father's persistence and his willingness to humble himself before his old enemy Thomas Hamer, was able to get him into the United States Military Academy. But first, he had to travel there, and it was a long trip from Georgetown, his hometown, to West Point, New York. As it turned out, Grant saw the trip as a great opportunity. It gave him the chance to see places in the United States he had never seen before.

The day for his departure was set at May 15, 1839.²¹ He found that he had nearly \$100 in savings in his pocket, so he bought himself new clothes and shoes. Still looking like a hick, he first took the stagecoach, receiving a cold goodbye from his mother. When he had the coach stop at the Bailey house, Mrs. Bailey cried over his departure. Ulysses was taken aback and responded quizzically, "Why, Mrs. Bailey, my own mother didn't cry!"²² Meanwhile, Hannah said nothing further. After all, she was carrying another baby, soon to be born.

18 William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant: Politician* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1935), 5-6, 9.

19 John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 32 vols. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-2012), 1:3n-4n, hereafter cited as *PUSG*.

20 Lloyd Lewis, *Captain Sam Grant* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 56.

21 Elbridge S. Brooks, *The True Story of U.S. Grant* (Boston: Lothrop Publishing Company, 1897), 40.

22 Hamlin Garland, *Ulysses S. Grant: His Life and Character* (Doubleday & McClure Co., 1898), 30.

From Ripley, Ohio, Ulysses took a boat on the Ohio River to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There he moved to a canal boat and the railroad to visit his mother's relatives in Philadelphia, where he stayed for five days. After reaching New York, he floated up the Hudson River to West Point.²³ "I had always a great desire to travel," he exclaimed enthusiastically.²⁴

Grant registered at Roe's Hotel near West Point as "U. H. Grant" and signed his name when reporting to Adjutant George Waggaman on May 29, 1839, as "Ulysses Hiram Grant."²⁵ He deposited what was left of his money—\$48. An immediate problem arose. Waggaman or his clerk listed him on the official Army roll as U.S. Grant, even though he had signed in as Ulysses Hiram Grant. For the adjutant, seeing Grant's signature, there was no place at the Academy for an incoming cadet who went by a different name. Congressman Hamer had incorrectly assumed that his middle name was his mother's maiden name, Simpson. He could either take the full name as it was listed in the official book or go home and correct it all. He did not hesitate. He became Ulysses S. Grant, a title he carried for the rest of his life.²⁶ He easily passed the preliminary examination. He entered West Point on July 1, 1839. He was not impressive. He was a seventeen-year-old with small feet, small hands, and difficulty in marching.²⁷

It did not take Grant long to fit into the Corps of Cadets. Upperclassmen yelled insulting names at him and the other newly arrived cadets. When he arrived at the Post headquarters, cadet corporals jumped all over him, telling him, for example, that he must always stand perfectly erect. Then someone asked him an innocent question. When he moved to answer it, he was insulted even more and told to keep looking forward no matter what. The insults just kept coming. What a shock!

Once he was repeatedly told precisely how he was to stand, he was sent to the quartermaster and issued all the supplies he would need for sleeping in his tent and keeping his surroundings clean. All this equipment was to be placed on his broom, and he was to carry it all through the West Point reservation to North Hall. After Grant was moved into barracks with other cadets in late August 1839, he was made to share a dim room with another cadet, Rufus Ingalls. It was an awful introduction to cadet life. He and all the new cadets were shaken.

23 Lewis, 59-61.

24 Garland, 31; Brands, 9.

25 Lawrence A. Frost, *U.S. Grant Album* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1966), 16; *PUSG*, 1:4*n*, 364.

26 Garland, 31-32.

27 Edward Howland, *Grant, as a Soldier and Statesman* (Hartford: J. B. Burr & Company, 1868), 20.

While all this was going on, cadets who had experienced just such belittlement only a short while ago continued to insult the new cadets. They then read names off the bulletin board, quickly thinking of nicknames to go with a cadet's initials. "U.S. Grant" was a particular butt of harassment. William Tecumseh Sherman, already in the first class and set to graduate in 1840, would note years later how he and other cadets had a field day with Grant's name. He must be "United States Grant," one cadet said, and another suggested a relationship to the famous American symbol, "Uncle Sam Grant." Or was he simply "Sam Grant?"²⁸ And so it was. For the rest of his life, Grant was "Sam" to his friend Sherman and all the other former cadets. Sherman later became one of Grant's favorite commanders and closest friends.²⁹

One of the worst things about West Point, after Ulysses entered the cadets' barracks on August 28, was his discovery of just how awful the food was. Breakfast was usually hashed beef, while dinner was too often mutton, which the cadets met with loud "baa's" when it appeared on their plates. Forks had been washed so often that they actually smelled.³⁰ No matter the time of the week, the food was the subject of a variety of complaints from the cadets. One such individual said that his coffee the night before tasted like soapsuds, and he simply could not drink it. Ironically, despite their dislike of the food, the cadets complained that they just did not have enough time to finish their meals before they were rushed away from the mess hall.³¹

The way they were able to get some edible food was to sneak it from the mess hall at noon, mix it well, and create late-night hash over the open fire in their rooms. Hash gatherings took place regularly, and some of the cadets gained great reputations because of their cooking skills around the fireplace.

The amount of sleep the cadets received was also a cause for complaint. At 5 a.m. in the summer and 6 a.m. in the winter, drums would start banging away, tearing the cadets from their dreams and forcing them to march all over the military reservation, often on an empty stomach.³² The first streaks of daylight forced the cadets to get up and do sadistic exercises, study in the dim light, and suffer chronic tiredness. Even on Sunday, they had to march to church, which

28 Garland, 42.

29 John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

30 Lovell Coombs, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 27-28.

31 Theodore J. Crackel, *West Point: A Bicentennial History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 122.

32 Henry C. Deming, *The Life of Ulysses S. Grant, General United States Army* (Hartford, CT: S.S. Scranton and Company, 1868), 31-32.

was Episcopal, not the Methodist denomination he had experienced at home. Grant had to sit erectly through a number of boring sermons.

There was, in fact, little time during the day for cadets to relax. After reveille had sounded at 5 a.m., the cadets had to pack in some study time and inspection of their rooms. At 7 a.m., the bugle sounded for breakfast, and during the summer, there was even a parade. Dinner call came at 1 p.m., after which there was a variety of class recitations, study, and drawing. Another parade, dinner, more study, and then at 10 p.m., it was time for bed. The next morning, it began all over again.³³ One time, Grant was talked into going to Benny Havens, the after-hours cadet drinking and gathering place. In fact, though, he did that only once during all the time he was at West Point.³⁴

The little time Grant used to study meant he was never anywhere near the top of his class. He was good at math and engineering, but he was a terrible student in French. Yet he always seemed to hold his place in rank. The total number of cadets at the Point at that time was around 235, and Grant's place on the conduct roll over his four years was 147, 144, 157, and 156. One of his professors even said, "[T]he smartest man in the class is little Grant."³⁵ During his last six months at West Point, he developed a terrible cough, and his weight shrunk to one hundred seventeen pounds. He was not the same height as when he first entered the Point, either, growing some six inches. Several uncles had died from consumption (tuberculosis), so many people worried about him. But he survived.³⁶

The one thing that helped break up the monotony at West Point, and it was not much, was the presence of cadets from all over the nation. Grant became friends with William Benjamin Franklin, who was the number-one graduate in the class of 1843. Others like Isaac F. Quimby, William F. Reynolds, James A. Hardie, Rufus Ingalls, and Grant's later brother-in-law, Frederick T. Dent, also became friends. In classes above and below Grant were William T. Sherman, James (Pete) Longstreet, and even George B. McClellan.³⁷ Grant also became friends with Simon Bolivar Buckner, Stonewall Jackson, and George E. Pickett.³⁸ A man whom Grant also came to know well was George Deshon, who later became a Catholic

33 Coombs, 26-27.

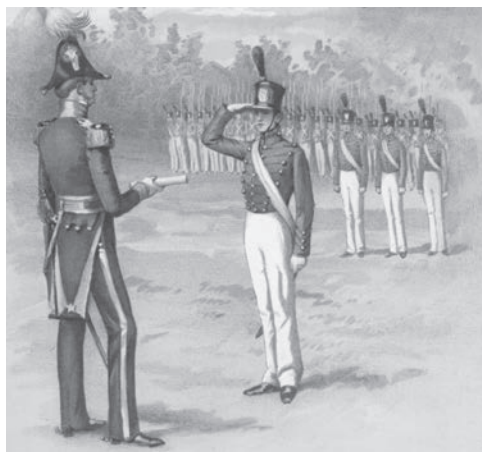
34 Thomas J. Fleming, *West Point: The Men and Times of the United States Military Academy* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1969), 103.

35 Church, 15-16, 18.

36 Chernow, 26.

37 Herman Dieck, *The Most Complete and Authentic History of the Life and Public Services of General U.S. Grant, "The Napoleon of America"* (Philadelphia: Thayer, Merriam & Co., 1885), 59-60, 62, 105, 271-73, 627, 741-42.

38 Josiah Bunting III, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Times Books, 2004), 15.



Grant was, by his own admission, an unenthusiastic cadet but nonetheless dutiful.

Library of Congress

priest.³⁹ Visits by Winfield Scott and Martin Van Buren were also welcomed.

Friendships aside, Grant still had to show the other cadets that, though small, he was tough. Early in his West Point career, while participating in a marching drill,

Grant found himself face to face with a huge cadet named Jack Lindsay, the son of an army officer. The classman thought he had the right to push the diminutive Grant out of line. Taken aback, Grant told Lindsay not to do that again. Lindsay just laughed and once again pushed Grant. This time, Grant decked his tormentor. From that point on, Grant had no problems with Lindsay or any other cadet.⁴⁰ But the fact was he still had no sense of rhythm, so he always seemed out of step and was thus the butt of other cadets' harassment. As Grant himself told it: "I know two songs, one is 'Yankee Doodle' and the other is not!"⁴¹

Another difficulty for the West Point cadets was being called up to a blackboard during class and forced to explain a problem they were to master either the night before or that morning. Just before class one day, another cadet brought in a huge pocket watch, some four inches in diameter, to show to the other cadets. Just as the teacher, in this case Zealous B. Tower, walked in, Grant stuffed the watch out of sight in his uniform. Immediately Grant and several other cadets were called up to the blackboard. Then it happened: the watch started bonging. Grant, however, continued his recitation. Tower shut the door and searched the entire classroom for the noise. He never found the watch, while Grant simply kept talking until the watch stopped bonging. Grant and his nerves of steel became the talk of West Point.⁴²

39 Frank A. Burr, *A New, Original and Authentic Record of the Life and Deeds of General U.S. Grant* (St. Paul, MN: Empyreal Publishing House, 1885), 80.

40 Fleming, 102.

41 Joan Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 22.

42 Fleming, 105-06.

Grant is pictured here with his West Point friend Alexander Hays. Hays, later known as “the Fighting Elleck,” would be killed serving under Grant at the 1864 battle of the Wilderness.

Library of Congress



Having a particularly significant influence on Grant and the other cadets was Dennis Hart Mahan, a professor of engineering from 1830 to 1871. He was the only professor at the Point to ever include any study of strategy in his course. William H. C. Bartlett, philosophy, and Albert E. Church, mathematics, were other well-known faculty members.⁴³ Robert

W. Weir was a professor of art and painter of the Hudson River School. Grant painted some pictures in Weir's class that have survived, in which he demonstrated his artistic ability.⁴⁴

Grant loved Commandant Charles F. Smith and looked to him as a West Point leader and someone who fairly applied discipline on the cadets. When Grant served with Smith during the Civil War, he was thrilled.⁴⁵

Grant spent most of his time at West Point reading novels, a fact he even admitted in his memoirs. In keeping with his West Point training, however, he indicated that most of the reading was “frivolous,” the term the West Point faculty used for popular novels. He insisted, however, that he read good books, those written by writers like Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Sir Walter Scott, and James Fenimore Cooper. “In the midst of conflict, the hero wants to be a peacemaker,” he drew from Scott. How foretelling that insight was for the young cadet.⁴⁶

The rule at West Point was that no one could leave the reservation for the first two years that he was part of the corps. At that time, after getting ready for the third year, cadets were allowed to go home for a several-week furlough. During the time Grant was at West Point, his mother and father had moved to Bethel,

43 Crackel, 124-25.

44 White, 37-38.

45 Fleming, 103.

46 White, 34-37.

closer to Cincinnati than Georgetown was. When he arrived at the new home, his mother gave him a quick look and said to him: "Ulysses, you've grown much straighter!" "Yes," he responded with pride, "that was the first thing they taught me."⁴⁷ He had a wonderful time in his familiar haunts, visiting old friends and places from his youth. "This I enjoyed beyond any other period of my life," he later recalled.⁴⁸

When he returned for his last two years, he kept his grades steady, and he enjoyed the fact that West Point now had twelve horses for the cadets to ride. Superintendent Richard Delafield had urged the secretary of war to send these animals to West Point, and in 1840, Delafield had brought in thirty more.⁴⁹ By this time, Grant was known as the best rider in the corps. In fact, he even set a record that no one matched for over a quarter century. It happened on one of the final days in June of 1843. Cadets and their guests and faculty had come together in the riding hall, one of the largest buildings on the campus. Superintendent Delafield, the academic board, and a number of visitors watched in awe. All the cadets formed a line in the middle of the hall, and Sergeant Henry Hershberger, the riding master, raised the bar so that it was higher than a man's head (no one knew how high it was for sure). He yelled out: "Cadet Grant." Suddenly, a slightly built rider thundered out on the academy's fiercest horse, a chestnut-sorrel named York, who was seventeen hands high. Grant sped to the end of the hall, turned around, and came galloping forward toward the high bar. The crowd gasped when Grant and York cleared the bar. The audience quickly realized no one else could make that high a jump, and those watching exploded in applause. "Very well done, sir!" Hershberger yelled out. Everyone realized Grant had just demonstrated to everyone there that he was the best horseman at West Point.⁵⁰

Years later, just a couple of months before Grant's death in 1885, then-General James B. Fry, an observer of this great jump, asked the dying general if he had ever seen Hershberger again. "Oh yes, I have heard of him since the war," Grant replied. "He was at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, old and poor, and I sent him a check for fifty dollars."⁵¹

When the time came, Grant left West Point with more money in his pocket than he had arrived with. Proud of his new uniform, he was showing it off in

47 Ulysses S. Grant III, *Ulysses S. Grant: Warrior and Statesman* (New York: William Morrow Company, 1969), 27.

48 *PMUSG-Annotated*, 23.

49 Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 135; Fleming, 104.

50 Frost, 19; White, 43.

51 Nicholas Smith, *Grant, The Man of Mystery* (Milwaukee: The Young Churchman Co., 1909), 29.

Ulysses S. Grant, brevet second lieutenant, summer 1843, following his West Point graduation.

National Portrait Gallery



Cincinnati when a dirty street boy yelled out at him: “Soldier! will you work? No, sir—ree; I’ll sell my shirt first!!” Then, at home in Bethel, a drunken stableman dressed up in pantaloons with white cotton sheeting along the seams that looked like Grant’s new uniform. The stableman paraded in the street before Grant’s house, trying to imitate the new soldier.⁵² Grant was now a brevet second lieutenant making all of \$779 a year.⁵³ But the fact was that he could not even celebrate his new uniform.

People remembered much about Ulysses S. Grant when he later became famous, and needless to say, most of the remembrances were favorable. Still, not even his classmates or best friends ever thought he would become the famous person he turned out to be, the great general and important president.⁵⁴

In fact, said one later biographer, “The American masses seem to have felt that Grant was just like them; his triumphs could have been theirs, too, if the mantle of command had just happened to fall upon them.”⁵⁵

52 *PMUSG-Annotated*, 25.

53 Bruce Catton, *U.S. Grant and the American Military Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1954), 21.

54 Henry Coppée, *Life and Services of Gen. U.S. Grant* (New York: Richardson and Company, 1868), 22.

55 Lloyd Lewis, *Letters from Lloyd Lewis* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 21.