

ULYSSES'S ODYSSEY

*Ulysses S. Grant's World Tour
at the Dawn of American Empire*

Louis L. Picone

Unedited Excerpt



Savas Beatie
California

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First edition, first printing

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025044421

ISBN: 978-1-61121-765-0 (hardcover)

ISBN: 978-1-61121-766-7 (ebook)

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Dedicated to my mom

Marie Picone (1940-2023)

Like Julia Grant, Mom traveled the world,
but nothing meant more to her than her family.

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Photos have been placed throughout the text for the convenience of the reader.

ABBREVIATIONS

USG	Ulysses S. Grant
JDG	Julia Dent Grant
JRY	John Russell Young
JRG	Jesse R. Grant (son)
<i>PUSG</i>	<i>Papers of Ulysses S. Grant</i>
TD	Ulysses Grant's Travel Diary
USGPL	Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library at Mississippi State University

Acknowledgments

Ulysses's *Odyssey* is my fourth book, and I love each of them. I enjoy everything about the writing process: the research, the discovery of new scholarship and historical connections, writing, ruminating, re-writing, discussing, traveling, and re-re-writing. Basically, I love the entire journey from idea to holding it in my hand. But this journey was special.

Ulysses's Odyssey took me longer to write than it took Grant to circumnavigate the globe (much longer, actually), and, like Grant's tour, each day was an adventure. Tagging along with Grant, Julia, and the rest of the wanderers, I recalled my own travels. As a youth, I backpacked through Europe where I gazed at the great art in the Louvre, drank (more than one) beer at the Hofbräuhaus, and walked the streets of Madrid. Married with children, just as Grant enjoyed time with his family, I traversed America and enjoyed wide-eyed wanderings in Portugal and Japan. In fact, many of the places Grant visited, I have as well: Cuba, Bangkok, Saigon, Russia, and Scandinavia, to name a few. Grant's inexhaustible wanderlust reminds me of the places on my bucket travel list I have yet to visit.

Personally, I identified with Grant. When Grant was in Italy, I wondered if my ancestors were among the crowds that greeted him. While Grant and Julia sought out places from their favorite literature, I enjoy searching for film locations from movies like *Rocky*, *The Godfather*, and *The Warriors*. But perhaps what connects us the most is that we're both state counters! Grant's jubilation at visiting his final state of Florida, reminded me of my joy when I stepped foot in my fiftieth, Michigan. A final similarity before beleaguering the point, we are both terrible at golf.

Just as Grant's travel buddies included Julia, his children, Borie, and Sheridan, my journey was not a solo tramp.

For research assistance and encouragement, thank you to Dr. Anne Marshall (Executive Director), Dr. Ryan Semmes (Director of Research), Eddie Rangel (Library and Museum Coordinator), and the entire staff at the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library and Museum in Starkville, Mississippi. Deep gratitude to Dr. Marshall and Dr. Semmes for previewing the manuscript and their kind words and invaluable feedback. To further appreciate their expertise and superb scholarship, I recommend Dr. Marshall's *Cassius Marcellus Clay: The Life of an Antislavery Slaveholder and the Paradox of American Reform* and Dr. Semmes's *Exporting Reconstruction: Ulysses S. Grant and a New Empire of Liberty*.

A special thanks to the first two people outside my family to read the rough draft: John Samson, board director for the Ulysses S. Grant Association, and Ben Kemp, Operations Manager from the U.S. Grant Cottage State Historic Site. Given their extensive expertise, their thoughtful remarks and gentle corrections meant the world to me. Note both Ben Kemp and Dr. Semmes also contributed to the Savas Beatie gem, *Grant at 200: Reconsidering the Life and Legacy of Ulysses S. Grant*.

A debt of gratitude is also due to several admired and respected historians who read a more polished version. Thank you, Brooks Simpson, one of the foremost scholars on Ulysses S. Grant and among the first to reevaluate his legacy that had been clouded by the Lost Cause ideology. I particularly recommend *Let Us Have Peace* and *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph over Adversity, 1822-1865*. With great appreciation to Troy Senik, with whom I shared a wonderful lunch and a special interest in Grover Cleveland. Troy's brilliant *A Man of Iron: The Turbulent Life and Improbable Presidency of Grover Cleveland* introduced a president of rugged honesty and uncompromising integrity to a new audience at a time that he is more relevant than ever. Thank you to Matthew Algeo whose delightful *Harry Truman's Excellent Adventure: The True Story of a Great American Road Trip* made me want to be a historian, and each book he writes continues to inspire, educate, and entertain me.

I am blessed to have high school history teachers in my family who were the first people to read the manuscript. My niece Mary Flood provided encouraging feedback, and my nephew Ben Runkel offered astute and insightful observations which made the book better. (And special thanks to my niece and Goddaughter Katrina for not complaining, at least to me, about Ben reading my book when he was supposed to be planning their wedding!)

For fabulous insights into specific aspects of Grant's epic and extensive travels, I appreciate Larry Horowitz, Executive Vice President, Historic Hotels of America and Historic Hotels Worldwide, for valuable information about the "Greatest

Banquet in American History” at Chicago’s Palmer House. To Kevin and Brendan Fitzsimons, historians on the Emerald Isle, thanks for their insider perspective of Grant’s fun-filled visit to their beautiful Ireland.

Of course, while I focus on un- or under-explored areas of Ulysses S. Grant’s life and legacy, my contributions would have been impossible if not for the giants on whose shoulders I stand. First and foremost, thanks to John Y. Simon without whose immense and invaluable Grant Papers, this book, nor countless others, would not have been possible. The accounts from those who travelled with Grant such as Young, Keating, and Farman, are immensely valuable, but fall short at understanding Grant’s perspective as the world unfolded before him. While Julia’s and Jesse’s memoirs partially fill that gap, it is within Grant’s Papers that we understand the trip and its significance in Grant’s own voice. While I regretfully never got the opportunity to meet Mr. Simon, I thank and appreciate his generous wife Harriet for the honor of speaking at the 2024 John Y. Simon Memorial Annual Grant Lecture, where, two years before it hit the shelves, I first spoke publicly about my book which was to become *Ulysses’s Odyssey*.

Thanks to those in the Grant community for their support and tireless work to preserve Grant’s legacy. Thanks to the staff at the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library and Museum, General Grant National Memorial (aka Grant’s Tomb), Grant Monument Association, Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site (St. Louis), U.S. Grant Cottage State Historic Site (Mount McGregor, New York), Ulysses S. Grant Association, Ulysses S. Grant Symposium, and the Kellerman Foundation for Historic Preservation.

For additional support within the wider historic, democracy, and academic communities, thank you to my fellow board members at the Grover Cleveland Presidential Library and Museum at his birthplace in Caldwell, New Jersey and the Grover Cleveland Birthplace Memorial Association; fellow advisory council members at More Perfect; history faculty at William Paterson University in Wayne, New Jersey; and the leaders of the White House Historical Association and Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

Of course, research and writing would be for naught, if not for such a wonderful publisher. Thank you to Managing Director Theodore P. Savas for welcoming me to the Savas Beatie family. As well, thanks to Sarah Keeney, Veronica Kane, Sarah Closson, and Ryan Quint for everything they did to make every page of the book better. For the cover, thanks to my wife and gifted graphic artist, Francesca. I just asked her to do a mock-up, but instead she exceeded my wildest expectations and perfectly captured the spirit of Grant’s Gilded Age epic adventure. The wonderful cover design for the book you hold in your hands is all hers.

Which leads me to the owner of those hands. Thanks to you, the reader, for joining me and Grant as we circumnavigated the globe. Not for a moment do I take your temporal, emotional, intellectual, and financial investment for granted. I hope you enjoy the trip!

As every author knows, writing takes a lot of time and a lot of attention. So even when not working on the book, Grant has not been far from my mind, which meant he frequently popped up in conversation with my family at unexpected times. Therefore, infinite gratitude goes to my wonderful wife Francesca and our extraordinary boys Vincent and Leonardo. Over the past few years, whether on the road or at the dinner table, thank you for welcoming Ulysses S. Grant into our Picone “Circle of Trust”: usually with curiosity, occasionally with indifference, rarely with hostility, but always with good humor. And while my mind spent a lot of time in faraway lands in the nineteenth century with a man I’ve grown to admire, my heart was always in New Jersey in the twenty-first century with the three people I love most.

Finally, a housekeeping note: While Grant had many admirable qualities, a perfect speller was not one of them. However, I felt it important for the reader to hear Grant’s own voice and read his own writing. As Grant once wrote, “In all my letters, and I write nearly every one myself, the trouble is that I make each letter so plain that people find out when I misspell a word or make any other mistake.”¹ I think he would have agreed with my choice.

1 *PUSG*, 29:322.

Introduction

In 2008, Barack Obama, son of a Kenyan father and Kansan mother, proclaimed in Germany, “I speak to you not as a candidate for President, but as a citizen—a proud citizen of the United States, and a fellow citizen of the world.”¹ Over two centuries earlier, Thomas Jefferson, who had lived in France and London before his presidency, likewise has been described as an “American Citizen of the world.”² However, the worldly credentials of Jefferson, Obama, and every other president pale in comparison to those of Ulysses S. Grant. He earned the honor of global citizen—a title he would have discouraged in favor of American citizen—after three years traveling with his wife Julia and literally circumnavigating the globe.

His friend Adam Badeau, who accompanied Grant for a portion of the adventure, said, “Grant was undoubtedly the greatest traveler that ever lived. Not of course, the greatest discoverer or explorer, though he was admitted to probably more secret and exclusive recesses and haunts than any other one man; but he also visited more countries and saw more people, from Kings down to lackeys and slaves, than anybody who ever journeyed on this earth before.”³

While much has been written of Grant’s military and public service, his epic adventure has been primarily sidelined in biographies and reduced to a pleasure

1 “Obama in Berlin: ‘The Burdens of Global Citizenship Continue to Bind Us Together,’” ABC News, July 24, 2008. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/Vote2008/story?id=5442292>.

2 “Franklin D. Roosevelt, Undelivered Address Prepared for Jefferson Day,” The American Presidency Project, accessed November 26, 2025. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/210105>.

3 Badeau, *Grant In Peace*, 297.



Ulysses S. Grant: victorious Civil War general, twice president, and, as his friend Adam Badeau said, "The greatest traveler that ever lived." *Library of Congress*

trip. One historian claimed, “Nothing he said or did was remarkable.”⁴ Another asked, “How was Grant affected by the experience? What did the Old World teach him?” His conclusion: “Not much.”⁵ In *Ulysses’s Odyssey*, I intend to make the case that almost *everything* about Grant’s tour was remarkable. Grant learned much, as Badeau added, “No man ever grew or expanded in mind and taste and character more continuously and conspicuously.”⁶ But he also had much to teach the world about America, republicanism, and a new type of leader not seen before.

His movements were tracked closely by the American press, in part thanks to a *New York Herald* reporter who tagged along. He received unprecedented worldwide honors, which Grant and the public accepted as both compliments and deference to America. Superlatives abounded with a similar gist: *Nothing like this has ever been seen before in history!*

Grant’s popularity grew to such enormity he was thrust back into a presidential race for an unprecedented third term. Had he won, not only would his trip have been of much greater interest, but his deep worldly knowledge certainly would have set the country on a different trajectory of Gilded Age foreign policy.

This book does not dwell on Grant’s heroic generalship or underrated presidency, nor his military strategy or political policy. It is about Grant the world traveler, citizen tourist, romantic wanderlust, daring adventurer, foreign diplomat, international peacemaker, and ambassador for the United States on the cusp of becoming a global economic, industrial, military, and political powerhouse. This is a story of Ulysses S. Grant’s tour around the world at the dawn of American Empire.

4 Young, *Around the World* (abridged), XVI.

5 Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 453.

6 Badeau, *Grant In Peace*, 153.

“The babe should be named Ulysses”

1822–1869

What compelled Ulysses S. Grant’s desire to see the world? It could be argued that the seeds were planted shortly after he was born, and the chubby baby was destined for adventure when his parents, Hannah Simpson and Jesse Grant, gave him his name.

A month after his April 27, 1822, birth, the family gathered for a naming ceremony. “Albert” and “Theodore” were suggested and promptly rejected. Jesse recalled that Hannah’s stepmother “was a great student of history and had an enthusiastic admiration for the ancient commander Ulysses; and she urged that the babe should be named Ulysses.”¹ It was hardly a name for a boy born in a one-room cottage in Point Pleasant, Ohio, on the banks of the Ohio River. Ulysses, *Odysseus* in Greek, was the hero of Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*. The mythical character traveled ten years through Southern Europe and Africa, encountering adventure and peril as he made his way home to his beloved Penelope. While “Hiram” was chosen for his first name, the boy preferred his more romantic and adventurous middle.

Before he was two, the family moved 20 miles to the new county seat, Georgetown, Ohio. He grew into somewhat of a horse whisperer. “Horses seemed to understand Ulysses,” his mother recalled.² He could tame the wildest steed and liked to stand on one foot on the horse’s back while riding the streets at full speed. But it was not just tricks that interested him. In the years before the railroad, the horse was the fastest means of transportation, and from an early age, Geoffrey

1 “General Grant in his Youth,” *Daily Evening Express* [Lancaster, PA], March 6, 1868.

2 Chernow, *Grant*, 844.

Perrett noted, Ulysses “was eager to discover what lay beyond Georgetown.”³ Even before he was a teenager, the entrepreneurial boy ran a transportation service and drove passengers in his two-horse carriage 45 miles to Cincinnati. Once he delivered his passengers, he checked into a hotel alone before returning home the next day. He expanded his service to Louisville, Kentucky, and 70 miles east to Chillicothe. Youthful travels also brought him to Wheeling, Virginia (West Virginia would not become a separate state until the Civil War). Intelligent and industrious, in 1836, Jesse enrolled his son in a private academy in Maysville, Kentucky. A financial panic forced Ulysses back to Georgetown the following year, but only after he enjoyed his first taste of life away from home.

Jesse was a prosperous tanner, but Ulysses was revolted by the work and told his father, “I’d like to be a farmer, or a down-the-river trader, or get an education.” Even though “soldier” was not on his list, Jesse enrolled Ulysses in the United States Military Academy at West Point for a free education. Ulysses later recalled, along with his father telling him to go, “There was another very strong inducement. I had always a great desire to travel.”⁴ In May 1839, the 17-year-old boarded a steamship in Ripley, Ohio. He cruised the twisting Ohio River for three days until he reached Pittsburgh. With several options available, Ulysses chose a canal boat to Harrisburg because it “gave a better opportunity of enjoying the fine scenery of Western Pennsylvania.” He gleefully added, “No mode of conveyance could be more pleasant.”⁵ A portage railroad carried the canal boats over the Allegheny Mountains. It was the first train he’d ever seen.

In Harrisburg, Ulysses boarded a passenger train for Philadelphia. Having seen his first railroad only days earlier, he now got his first experience riding one. Railroads were invented in England in 1797 and were instrumental in the Industrial Revolution. Thirty years later, the first railroad was introduced to the United States in Baltimore, but rapid development followed. By 1840, the year after Ulysses’s trip, a staggering 2,800 miles of tracks crisscrossed the country.⁶ Hurling forward at 18 miles an hour, an exhilarated Ulysses wrote, “I thought the perfection of rapid transit had been reached.” Stepping off the train in Philadelphia must have felt surreal for the young man. With approximately 90,000 residents, it was the fourth largest city in America (by comparison, Georgetown had about 500). A curious Ulysses set out to see as much as possible by, what would become his

3 Perrett, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 14.

4 USG, *Personal Memoirs*, 9.

5 *Ibid.*, 10.

6 “Chronology of America’s Freight Railroads,” Association of American Railroads (AAR), accessed December 22, 2023. <https://www.aar.org/chronology-of-americas-freight-railroads>.

signature mode in cities around the world, walking the streets. “[I] saw about every street in the city,” he recalled. He attended the theater and visited Girard College, a preparatory school under construction, founded by Stephen Girard, a French immigrant who arrived from Bordeaux on the eve of the American Revolution. Grant enjoyed Philadelphia so much he tarried five days, longer than he had planned. He passed through New Jersey to his next stop, New York City, America’s largest city, boasting a population of 300,000 people after a surge followed the completion of the Erie Canal. He did not stay as long as Philadelphia, but enough “to see the city very well.”⁷

While his family gave his wanderlust middle name, the United States military made it his first. Through a clerical error, his application listed his name as Ulysses Simpson Grant. Warned it was too late to change, Grant accepted their decision as he neither used Hiram nor liked his ridiculous initials, “HUG.” He was forevermore Ulysses. Adventure, if you will, was now his *first* name.

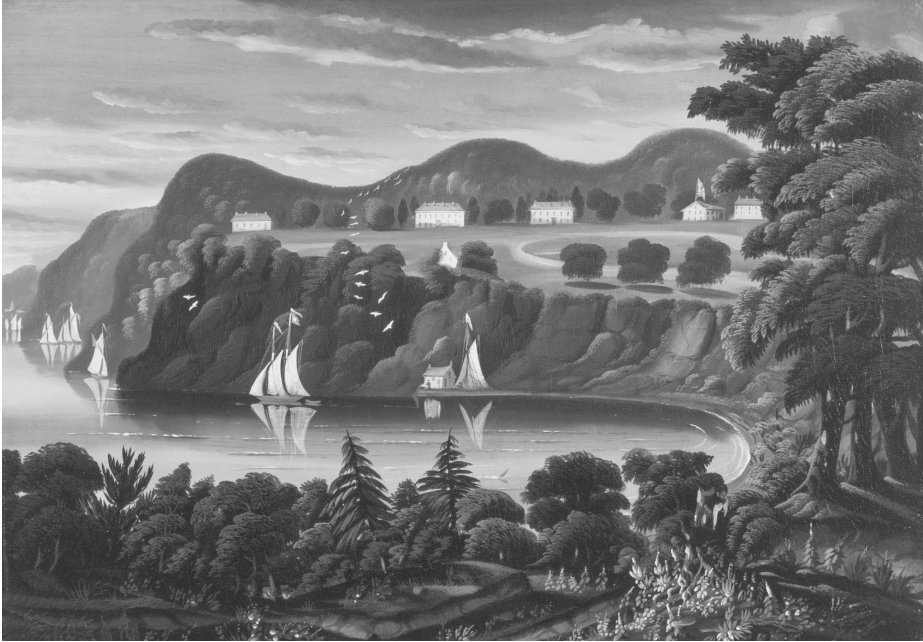
While military life did not enthrall Grant, the scenic campus on the banks of the Hudson River did. For the first of many times in his life, he believed there was no better place than where he was at that moment. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, “It is decidedly the most beautiful place that I have ever seen; here are hills and dales, rocks and river; all pleasant to look upon. From the window near I can see the Hudson; that far famed, that beautiful river with its bosom studded with hundreds of snow sails.” The scene made the perfect setting for a watercolor painting by the surprisingly talented cadet.⁸

After his 1843 graduation, Grant was stationed a thousand miles west at Jefferson Barracks in St. Louis. Founded in 1826 on land that was part of the Louisiana Purchase, Jefferson Barracks was established to oversee the westward expansion and protect white settlers and hostile Indians from each other.⁹ The journey, the longest of his young life, brought him through Indiana and Illinois before arriving at the Missouri military installation on September 30. In his 21 years, he had already visited an impressive nine states. However, in his memoirs, Grant neither recalled the journey nor his surroundings. Perhaps as an officer no longer master of his schedule, he had less time for sightseeing, but more likely it was because in St. Louis, another form of beauty captured his attention: His

7 USG, *Personal Memoirs*, 10.

8 “Ulysses S. Grant at West Point, 1839,” The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, September 2, 2014. <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/news/ulysses-s-grant-west-point-1839>.

9 “Historic Jefferson Barracks.” Missouri Civil War Museum, accessed December 22, 2023. <https://mcwm.org/our-story/jefferson-barracks>.



View of Hudson River at West Point by Thomas Chambers (ca. 1850). For the first of many times, a young Grant considered the scenery at his military academy the most beautiful he had ever seen. *Minneapolis Institute of Art*

classmate Fred Dent's sister, Julia. She loved reading books, listing among her favorites, Homer's *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*.

Their courtship did not last long before he was deployed in May 1844, to the Deep South. As he was on leave when his regiment departed, Grant was forced to travel alone and boarded a Mississippi River steamboat for New Orleans. The young idealist wrote Julia that his trip was "a pleasant one, on a pleasant boat, with pleasant Passengers . . . except that as we approached the South, the Musquitoes became troublesome." Stopping in Memphis for a day, he raced to "see as much as the place as possible," but lamented, "I went over the town fast enough to see nothing."¹⁰ The brief visit left him yearning to return someday.

He boarded a small boat from New Orleans to navigate the Red River. It was crowded with "*Black Legs*, or Gamblers, and some of them with very cut throat appearances." Nefarious passengers aside, Grant enjoyed the journey as he eloquently described, "The first hundred miles looks like a little deep and winding canal finding its way through a forrest so thickly set, and of such heavy foliage that

10 *PUSG*, 1:24.



Julia Dent Grant, theirs was an enduring love affair, and she was the only person to accompany Grant throughout his three-year world tour. *Marian S. Carson Collection at the Library of Congress*

the eye can not penetrate.” Despite the tranquility, danger abounded; “Aligators and other revolting looking things occupy the swamps in thousands.”¹¹ His destination was Camp Salubrity, 3 miles outside Natchitoches, Louisiana, and 50 miles from the border of the Republic of Texas. At the time, President John Tyler was pushing to annex Texas. Grant’s regiment was officially tasked with stopping American adventurers from entering Texas. But unofficially, his unit was to prove a menace to Mexico as the United States moved towards a war stance.

11 *PUSG*, 1:24-25.

Grant camped on a high ridge beside fresh spring water, surrounded by a pine forest “infested to an enormous degree with Ticks, Red bugs, and a little creeping thing looking like a Lizard.”¹² He humorously described the unknown critter, “This last vermin is singularly partial to society, and become so very intimate and sociable on a short acquaintance as to visit our tents, crawl into our beds &c. &c. Tis said they are very innocent but I dont like the looks of th[em]!” After building sturdy log cabins, “the winter was spent more agreeably than the summer.” In his memoirs written four decades later, Grant recalled, “I retain very agreeable recollections of my stay at Camp Salubrity, and of the acquaintances made there.”¹³ After President James K. Polk took office in March 1845, the prospect of war with Mexico loomed large. By September, Grant had relocated, first to New Orleans and then crossed the Gulf of Mexico to Corpus Christi, in the new state of Texas. While they waited for the war to come, Grant kept busy. In December, he escorted a train carrying money to pay soldiers stationed in San Antonio and Austin. Despite poor weather, Grant found the landscape captivating and wrote Julia, “The whole of the country is the most beautiful that I ever have seen.”¹⁴

Serving under General Zachary Taylor, Grant's regiment proceeded south to approach the Rio Grande across from the little village of Matamoras. They were in disputed territory, and their goal was to provoke Mexican soldiers to fire the first shots. On May 8, 1846, the war came for America, and Grant, at the Battle of Palo Alto. As Grant's unit drove deeper into enemy territory, Ron Chernow noted, “One senses the wanderlust of a young man who, having grown up in provincial Midwestern towns, now experienced a brand-new universe of sensations in Mexico.”¹⁵ While Grant criticized the Mexican-American War as “one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation,” he was enthralled with the country, especially Monterrey.¹⁶ In a letter to Julia, he gushed, “This is the most beautiful spot that it has been my fortune to see in the world.”¹⁷ Six months later, again Grant wrote Julia: “Jalapa is decidedly the most beautiful place I ever saw in my life.”¹⁸ In another missive in September 1847, Grant wrote, “Mexico [City] is one of the most beautiful cities in the world and being the capital no wonder

12 *PUSG*, 1:25.

13 *USG, Personal Memoirs*, 17.

14 *PUSG*, 1:67.

15 Grant, *My Dearest Julia*, xi.

16 *USG, Personal Memoirs*, 16.

17 *PUSG*, 1:115.

18 *PUSG*, 1:132.



While fighting in the Mexican-American War which Grant considered unjust, he appreciated the beauty of the countryside and, despite no mountain climbing experience, climbed Mount Popocatepetl. *Library of Congress*

that the Mexicans should have fought desperately to save it.” With an uncanny ability to appreciate his surroundings, Grant had an almost child-like sense of wonder and used superlatives liberally. West Point, Texas, Monterrey, Jalapa, and Mexico City were each, in turn, described by Grant as the “most beautiful” place he had ever seen.

After hostilities ceased and peace negotiations dragged on, Grant set out to see more of the beautiful country. In April 1848, he joined a group of officers—several of whom would become prominent Confederates, including Simon Buckner—to climb the picturesque Mount Popocatepetl. With no climbing experience, the 17,694-foot mountain, one of the tallest in North America, was an audacious undertaking. They stopped in the village of Ozumba for provisions, guides, and pack mules and set out the next day on horseback. The mules hugged the steep cliffs, and one lost its footing and fell, taking two sacks of barley with it. Assuming the poor beast had been “dashed to pieces,” Grant was shocked to find the barley cushioned the fall, and the fortunate mule survived. They spent their first night in the rain in an abandoned, roofless home, which Grant recalled a year later as “one of the most unpleasant I ever knew.”¹⁹ The following day, now on foot, they ascended above the snow line as a violent wind whipped white powder in their face until they were nearly blinded. “We plodded on for several hours through all these difficulties when all found that it was perfect madness to attempt to go farther, so we turned back when about 1000 feet below the Crater,” Grant conceded.²⁰ Grant returned to Ozumba and “concluded that we had got all the pleasure there was to be had out of mountain climbing.” Instead, he set out to see the Cacahuamilpa Caverns in the Valley of Cuernavaca. Grant described passing through Tierra Caliente as “a beautiful and strange sight to a Northerner. All seasons of the year you will find vegetation in full bloom. We passed some of the most beautiful sugar Plantations and finest buildings in the world.”²¹ Guides led them inside the dark caves by torchlight, where Grant was fascinated by the stalactites and stalagmites and “succession of chambers of great dimensions and great beauty.”²²

In his first time outside America, Grant demonstrated his core decency and compassion for the impoverished, and people of color, which would become a hallmark of his world tour. Recalling in his memoirs, “The Mexicans are a good people. They live on little and work hard. They suffer from the influence of the

19 USG, *Personal Memoirs*, 66.

20 PUSG, 1:132.

21 PUSG, 1:156.

22 USG, *Personal Memoirs*, 66.

Church, which, while I was in Mexico at least, was as bad as could be. The Mexicans were good soldiers, but badly commanded. The country is rich, and if the people could be assured a good government, they would prosper.”²³

After the war, Grant departed Mexico from Veracruz to his next deployment in the Gulf city of Pascagoula, Mississippi. But he was not there for long. Away from his beloved for four years, he requested leave to return to St. Louis and marry Julia. After their nuptials, they went on a three-month honeymoon to Ohio so that Julia could meet Grant’s family. Given their opposition to slavery, Grant’s parents did not attend the wedding as the Dents were slaveowners.

Grant did not return to Mississippi. While marriage did not dampen his wanderlust spirit, he had little say in the matter. Over the next four years, the Army relocated him several times to posts near the Canadian border. He spent a year in Sackets Harbor, New York, on Lake Ontario, and two years in Detroit, Michigan (his fourteenth of thirty states) before returning to Sackets Harbor for another year. During this time, the couple had their first child, Fred, in 1850. However, Julia split her time between Grant and her parents in St. Louis. While he missed his wife and son terribly, their absence did not stop him from traveling. In July 1851, Grant took a solo trip to Québec and Montréal and returned to his *alma mater*, West Point (“My trip has been a very pleasant one,” he wrote Julia).²⁴

The Polk administration ushered in the era of Manifest Destiny, an almost spiritual belief that it was America’s sacred duty to acquire territory and spread liberty (and, depending on who one asked, to spread slavery as well). Through the annexation of Texas, the Mexican-American War, and diplomatic efforts with Great Britain, over 800,000 square miles were added to the United States, extending the border west to the Pacific Ocean. Grant’s next assignment brought the regimental quartermaster to the Pacific Coast to protect the newly gained territory in the summer of 1852, leading to his most incredible adventure yet.

Since the California Gold Rush, young men had gone west. Without a railroad, most traversed the overland trail. The journey took several months and was fraught with danger. Some, like the tragic Donner Party, did not make it. Another route from the East Coast preferred by the army was by steamship to the Isthmus of Panama, cross west, and board another steamship to San Francisco. Some soldiers brought their families, but Grant warned Julia, “It is a dangerous experiment for the ladies to go to California.”²⁵ His caution proved fortuitous.

23 Young, *Around the World* (hereinafter JRY), 2:448.

24 *PUSG*, 1:219.

25 *PUSG*, 1:252.

Grant was stationed at Governors Island, off the southern tip of Manhattan, to prepare for the journey. On July 5, he boarded a passenger ship along with 700 soldiers. They steamed south without incident to Aspinwall (now Colón), Panama. Founded in 1850, the city marked the beginning of the Western Railroad. But two years later, the tracks only reached the Chagres River, where the group divided into two. The captain and the doctors proceeded to Gorgona, and Grant led about 300 troops and family members. They sailed on dugout canoes propelled by sparsely clothed natives to the town of Cruces. From there, it was a 25-mile journey by mule. But to Grant's dismay, the beasts were nowhere to be found. His contractor, an "impecunious American" named Duckworth, promised they would arrive soon. But after several days, Grant came to the terrifying realization they were on their own, without transportation or medical support. "Meanwhile, the cholera had broken out, and men were dying every hour," Grant recalled. After five days, he was finally able to purchase some overpriced mules from a native, enough for the luggage but not for people. Grant led the survivors through the muddy mule trail in unbearable heat. Many who drank from disease-ridden springs soon experienced telltale signs of cholera: fatigue, vomiting, diarrhea, and extreme thirst. Each day, Grant buried the dead in shallow graves along the path. By the time the wretched party emerged from the jungle and reached Panama City, about 100 people, or a third of the group, were dead. Meanwhile, the other group had already settled into the Pacific Mail steamship *The Golden Gate* to be joined by Grant's survivors. In the makeshift hospital, where those with cholera either recovered or died, they remained anchored for several weeks until it finally departed.²⁶ At a stop near Acapulco, Grant sent Julia a letter. Sparing the macabre details, he wrote, "The horrors of the road, in the rainy season, are beyond description."²⁷ Besides, they had other things to discuss. Only weeks earlier, she had their second child, Ulysses, Jr.

The Golden Gate arrived in San Francisco on August 17, 1852. As he had demonstrated in Mexico, Grant had an amazing capacity for compartmentalizing negative experiences to focus on the present. He wrote, "Our voyage on the Golden Gate has been a very pleasant one, only a little sea sickness. We are not atal croude[d], yet there are enough to make it pleasant."²⁸ Four years after gold was discovered, San Francisco swarmed with miners and others looking to get rich quick from various legal and illegal schemes. Grant was captivated: "Many of the real scenes in California life exceed in strangeness and interest any of the

26 Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 95.

27 *PUSG*, 1:252.

28 *PUSG*, 1:255.

mere products of the brain of the novelist.”²⁹ Grant was a man of competing urges—to see the world and to be with his family. He was happiest when he had both, but with his family 2,000 miles away, he could at least indulge his other passion. With a month to dally, he wrote Julia, “I devoted myself, as much as possible, to seeing Calafornia.”³⁰

Grant traveled to Benicia, about 15 miles northeast of San Francisco, to pick up supplies recovered from Panama. Next, he journeyed 100 miles inland to Stanislaus at the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains to visit Julia’s brother John, who operated a successful ferry business. But nothing compared to San Francisco, as he told Julia, “I consider that city the wonder of the world. It is a place of but a few years groth and contains a wealthy population of probably fifty thousand persons. It has been burned down three times and rebuilt each time better than before.” Grant studied the state’s resources and the potential of its land and people and determined, “From my little experience I think it a peculiarly favored country.”³¹

In early September, Grant took a steamer to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River, established in 1849 about 8 miles north of Portland. He immediately took to his new home and notified Julia, “I am very much pleased with Vancouver. This is about the best and most populous portion of Oregon.”³² After six months, his enthusiasm remained undiminished as he wrote, “There is not a more delightful place in the whole country and it has never been your fortune to witness any thing like such scenery.”³³ He encountered Native Americans, although his early letters reflected indifference. But when Julia warned him to be careful, he responded with a progressive and enlightened attitude, which would become a feature of his generalship, administration, and global travels: “Those about here are the most harmless people you ever saw. It is really my opinion that the whole race would be harmless and peaceable if they were not put upon by the whites.”³⁴

Grant was promoted to captain and, in January 1854, relocated to Fort Humboldt, California, 300 miles north of San Francisco. But a year and a half after he departed New York, desperate to see his family, including a son he had never met, he succumbed to depression. Julia’s letters were infrequent; Grant was lonely, bored, and had several financial setbacks from speculations gone awry.

29 USG, *Personal Memoirs*, 73.

30 *PUSG*, 1:266.

31 *PUSG*, 1:265.

32 *PUSG*, 1:267.

33 *PUSG*, 1:294.

34 *PUSG*, 1:296.

He also suffered from health problems and took to drinking, allegedly in excess. In April, he resigned from the army under dubious circumstances. Despite the dismal past few months, California had left an impression: The land of beauty and opportunity could be ideal, but only with his family by his side. He wrote, "I left the pacific coast very much attached to it, and with full expectation of making it my future home."³⁵ It was a dream he would hold on to. Years later, as Commanding General of the Union Army, he recalled, "I hoped, when the war was over, that I could live in California."³⁶

He observed a noticeable change in San Francisco after two years. He still found plenty of gambling houses and saloons, but "The city had become more staid and orderly."³⁷ He boarded the steamship *Sierra Nevada* on June 1. Twelve days later, they docked at Nicaragua, where he crossed east by river and land. Grant found it "as hot as the final resting place of the wicked," which is about as profane as he ever got.³⁸ Successfully avoiding cholera in Panama, Grant proved he was not immune and contracted malaria in Nicaragua.³⁹

Grant was happily reunited with Julia and their four children in St. Louis: Fred (born 1850); Ulysses, Jr, known by his nickname "Buck" (1852); Nellie (1855), and Jesse (1858). Out of the army and dedicated to being the provider, his urge to see the world grew dormant. Struggling in business and farming, he moved to Galena, Illinois, in 1860 to work in his father's leather goods store. Where he once traveled thousands of miles, his journeys now consisted of short treks to Kentucky, Wisconsin, and Iowa to visit his father's other stores or purchase hides for the tanneries. He pushed adventure into the recesses of his mind, but as fate would have it, it emerged in another form. After Abraham Lincoln's 1860 election, the formation of the Confederate States of America, and the firing on Fort Sumter, the Civil War began. America embarked on its most significant test. Grant was about to do the same.

After seven years of seemingly aimless struggle and failure, the war provided personal and political purpose. It also reignited his dormant thirst for adventure and travel. In April 1861, Grant joined the war effort as a civilian aide to the adjutant general's office to train volunteers. By June, he re-entered the military as colonel of the 21st Illinois Volunteers in Springfield. He could appreciate his

³⁵ USG, *Personal Memoirs*, 76.

³⁶ JRY, 2:446.

³⁷ USG, *Personal Memoirs*, 76.

³⁸ Chernow, *Grant*, 50.

³⁹ Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 107.

surroundings in these early days before he saw combat. Moving troops 50 miles west to Naples on the Illinois River, his sense of wonder returned. In a letter to Julia, he gushed that he had traveled through “one of the most beautiful countries in the world” while Jacksonville was “one of the prettiest towns with the tastiest houses that I ever saw.”⁴⁰

Soon, the horrors of war dominated his thoughts, and his appreciation for new places diminished. He traveled extensively throughout the South, including campaigns in Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia, Alabama, and Arkansas, but recorded few observations. As his victories brought national fame, Grant discovered an uncomfortable reality that he could no longer travel without drawing unwanted attention. In Philadelphia, an attempt to travel incognito was thwarted when he was mobbed by admirers. Retreating to his hotel, a desperate Grant asked the manager, “Can’t I go somewhere to eat a few oysters quietly?”⁴¹ He complained to Julia, “Have you read how I was mobbed in Phila[delphia]? It is a terrible bore to me that I cannot travel like a quiet citizen.”⁴²

When hostilities ceased, his ability to appreciate his surroundings returned. From General William Sherman’s North Carolina headquarters on April 25, 1865, “Raleigh is a very beautiful place. The grounds are large and filled with the most beautiful spreading oaks I ever saw.”⁴³

Despite four years of carnage, destruction, and death at an unprecedented scale, the United States had emerged stronger than before. Grant wrote, “What a spectacle it will be to see a country able to put down a rebellion able to put half a Million of soldiers in the field at one time . . . That nation, united, will have a strength which will enable it to dictate to all others, conform to justice and right.”⁴⁴ In *Rebirth of a Nation*, Jackson Lears described the process of “creative destruction” in which “a dynamic future best emerges from devastation.”⁴⁵ Ironically, Grant played a critical role in both sides of the process. By introducing the concept of “Total War,” such as Sherman’s famed “March to the Sea,” the South was devastated, and civilian property that supported the Confederate army became fair game. Through victory, Grant saved the Union, preserved republican

40 *PUSG*, 1:60.

41 With Grant’s stay another chapter was written in the hotel’s history alongside Abraham Lincoln who stayed as President-elect in 1861, the year after it opened. *PUSG*, 29:309; *Philadelphia Press*, December 16, 1879.

42 Berkin, *Civil War Wives*, 265.

43 Badeau, *Grant In Peace*, 31.

44 Grant, *My Dearest Julia*, 148.

45 Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation*, 2.

government, abolished slavery, and ushered in America's dynamic future. French writer Victor Hugo announced at the war's end, "America has become the guide among the nations."⁴⁶

While Grant had hoped to relocate to California after the war, his military success and promotion to Commanding General of the U.S. Army dashed his plans. He wrote, "Nothing ever fell over me like a wet blanket so much as my promotion to the Lt. Generalcy. As Junior Maj. Gen. in the regular Army, I thought my chances good for being placed in command of the Pacific Div. when the war closed. As Lt. Gn. all hope of that kind vanished."⁴⁷

Grant celebrated with a victory tour. While he had, of course, spent considerable time in the South, he now visited northern regions he had yet to see, including New England. In July 1865, he visited Boston and was greeted by an enthusiastic crowd. As Lincoln had been assassinated, Grant alone remained to receive the public's adulation and his reception was a sign of things to come. They stayed in the upscale Revere House and entertained by Gilmore's Brass Band, founded seven years earlier by Patrick Gilmore, who was born in Ireland and served in the Union Army.⁴⁸ In Maine, he received an honorary doctorate degree from Bowdoin College in Brunswick. The ceremony was hosted by General Joshua Chamberlain, a professor at Bowdoin who heroically commanded the 20th Maine at Little Round Top at Gettysburg. "I have tried to get Gen. Grant to speak," Chamberlain told the crowd, "but he says 'No', and when he says that word, he means it. Lee knows it means something."⁴⁹ It "was one of the pleasantest episodes" of his tour, Grant told a reporter.⁵⁰

Another gift in Brunswick was more unusual but perhaps no less appreciated. An admirer handed Grant a giant, foot-long cigar. "I hope you might enjoy a pleasant smoke," the old man said as Grant and everybody else laughed uproariously. In Portland and Augusta, he was mobbed by well-wishers who "commenced in indiscriminate hand-shaking" and did not relent until Grant stepped onto the train to depart. At every station along the way, crowds gathered. "The applause of the multitude was almost deafening," the *New York Herald* noted. Grant enjoyed the attention and greeted "Several ladies . . . with apparent cordiality." What Grant did not enjoy, however, were the calls to speak. Shy and reluctant around people

⁴⁶ Widmer, *Lincoln on the Verge*, 466.

⁴⁷ *PUSG*, 29:38.

⁴⁸ "General Grant in Boston," *Cleveland Daily Leader*, July 31, 1865. During the war Gilmore wrote the patriotic "When Johnny Comes Marching Home."

⁴⁹ White, *On Great Fields*, 244.

⁵⁰ "General Grant's Movements," *New York Herald*, August 8, 1865.

he did not know, he typically responded with a nod and a bow, or what reporters dubbed “his usual style.” His humility and lack of desire for attention endeared him all the more to the public.

In New Hampshire, they stayed at the first-class Alpine House in Gorham. Arriving late, he sat on “the piazzas of the hotel, smoking and viewing the beautiful scenery.” The next day, Julia recalled, they “took a lovely ride through the White Mountains in a great chariot.”⁵¹ If Grant was not counting states, residents of the states were counting him. A reporter noted, “The inhabitants of Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Vermont have not been permitted to lionize him on their own soil.”⁵² At least one state soon had cause to celebrate as the Grants took a special train on the Grand Trunk Railroad to Vermont. They stayed at the Island Pond Hotel, enjoying a “sumptuous dinner” while a cornet band “played many of their best airs.”⁵³

Grant continued north into Canada just as he had a decade earlier. The difference was profound: In 1852, he was alone and anonymous; now, he was with his family, and an adoring crowd followed his every move. Even outside of America, Grant received a hero’s welcome. In Québec, he stayed at the St. Louis Hotel and visited the Citadel. They continued to Montreal and Toronto, where crowds gathered at the station and “An impromptu hand-shaking took place.”⁵⁴ Just like in America, calls to speak were answered with “his usual style.”

Back in America, Grant visited Detroit, where a cheering throng lined the streets to welcome him back. He stayed at the luxurious Biddle House, where a reception was held. Like so many other stops, he was asked to say a few words. Perhaps the nostalgia of returning to his old home under such extraordinary circumstances softened his resistance. Forgoing his “usual style,” Grant delivered what may have been his most extended remarks of the tour: “Gentlemen, I bid all goodnight.”⁵⁵

End of Unedited Excerpt

51 Julia Dent Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (hereinafter JDG), 163.

52 “General Grant’s Movements,” *New York Herald*, August 8, 1865.

53 “Lt.-Gen. Grant in Vermont,” *St. Johnsbury Caledonian*, August 11, 1865.

54 “General Grant in Toronto,” *New York Herald*, August 10, 1865.

55 *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, August 22, 1865.