

HIS FINAL CHARGE:

U.S. Grant's Last Days on Mount McGregor, just a few miles from Lake George

By Mirror Staff

Ulysses S. Grant died in Saratoga County in 1885, on July 23 - the day we happened to visit the Grant Cottage last week, for the first time.

With his family, the Union Army's Commanding General and the 18th president of the United States had leased a cottage on Mt. McGregor because his doctors thought the mountain air would be beneficial.

Grant agreed, noting, "I am exceedingly pleased with this delightful mountain air." Later he wrote, "The atmosphere here enables me to live in comparative comfort while I am being treated or while nature is taking its course with my disease." When he fell terminally ill with throat cancer, Grant lacked the means to support his wife and children. His wish, among his last, was to finish his memoirs, a necessity if he was to provide for his family after his death, given that a business partner had absconded with all his savings. It was a wish he fulfilled at Mt. McGregor.

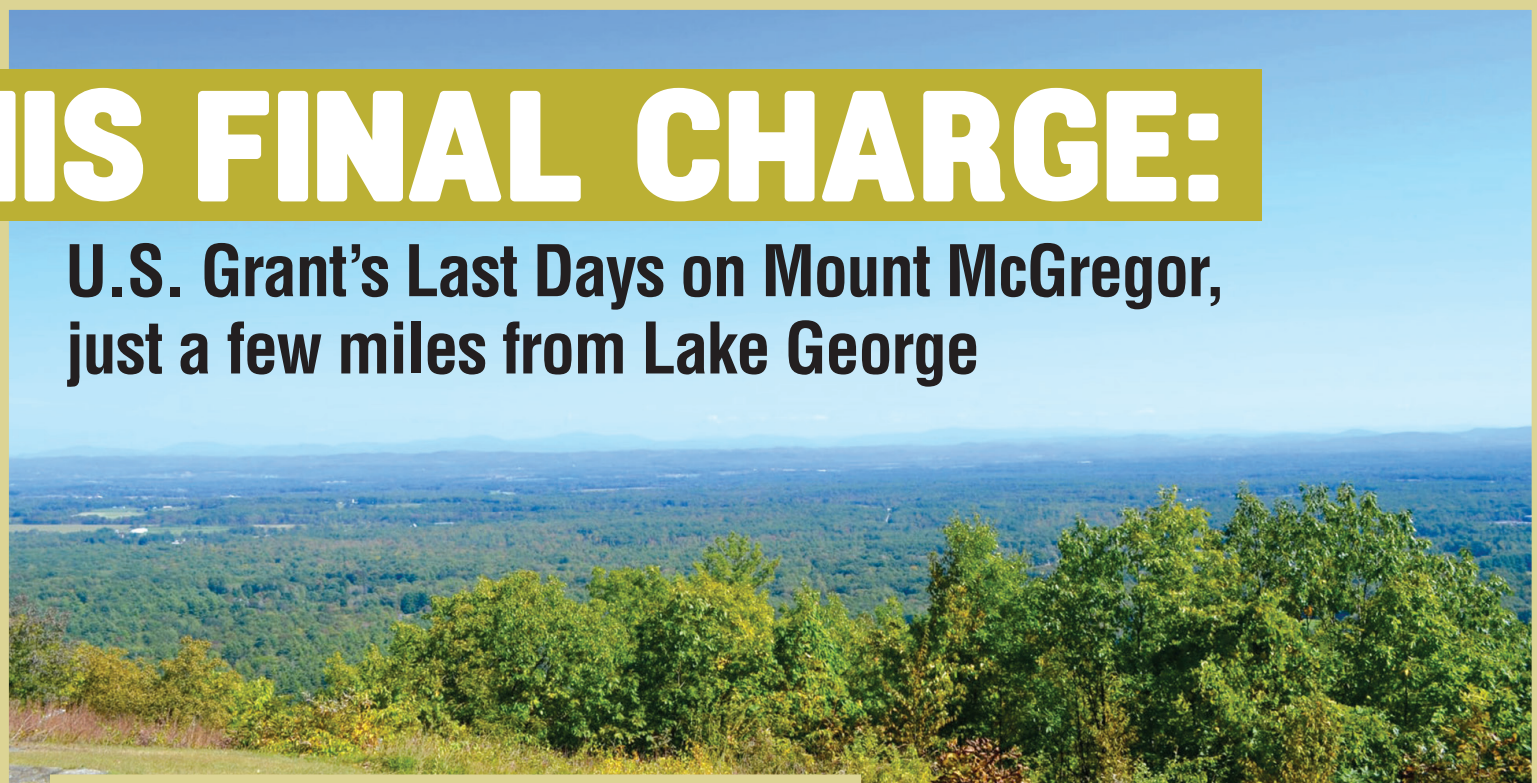
Doctors told him that he did not have long to live, so a tenacious Grant kept writing and revising, finishing the manuscript just days before his death. Our guide during our tour of the cottage, now a New York-owned State Historic Site, was none other than Lake George resident and sometime Steamboat Company pilot Tom Currie, who showed us the black silk top hat that Grant wore when he sat writing on the porch, dressed as if he were sitting for a formal portrait.

"Day after day, Grant wrote with the same determination that he had brought to his successful campaigns during the Civil War. The effort provided a final victory after death," said Currie.

His memoirs brought wealth to his widow and to Mark Twain, who bought the finished manuscript for \$450,000, said Currie.

(Julia Grant spent a bit of that fortune here on Lake George, becoming a frequent guest of the Fort William Henry hotel.)

Grant's two volume "Memoirs"



Clockwise: Mathew Brady's portrait of Grant, 1870-1880; The view from Mount McGregor; Tom Currie, a Lake George resident who volunteers as a guide at Grant Cottage; Grant's death bed; Grant Cottage, originally part of a sanitarium.

is now considered one of the outstanding, and least expected, masterpieces of American literature.

In its honor, the Grant Cottage has been named a New York State Literary Landmark by United for Libraries and the Empire State Center for the Book. Literary Landmark status is granted to community locations associated with a literary figure.

The cottage and its furnishings, by the way, are original; nothing has been altered since Grant died and the family packed up their belongings and returned to New York.

In addition to Grant's top hat, Tom Currie showed us items that once belonged to the Grant family, including a cribbage board and chess set. Of particular interest is a note written by Grant when he could

no longer talk, inviting his son to join him in a game of cards.

Some of the more poignant notes are framed. He teased the doctor, suggesting that he should save the notes for his own memoirs. A fan on the table is one of the few mementos saved from Grant's tour around the world, when he received gifts from the Emperor of Japan and many others; more are preserved in the Smithsonian. Also: the bottle of liquid cocaine Grant drank as a salve, various 19th century medical devices (not for the squeamish); the leather chair where he slept; the bed in which he died.

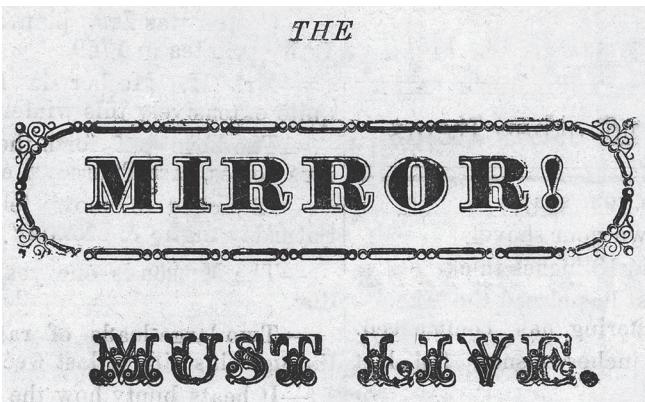
According to Currie, the

embalmers worked on the dining room table. When the job was done, they placed his body in an iced coffin until the funeral, held August 4.

Two of the tributes, made from partially dried flowers dipped in wax, are on display in the dining room. "Everlasting Flowers," as they were known, were a customary feature of Victorian-era mourning ceremonies. Few, however, survive. Grant's are among the few.

Before or after a tour of the cottage, one should not pass up the chance to walk to the high point

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