

Grant Cottage

FRIENDS OF GRANT COTTAGE NEWSLETTER

CHRONICLES

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SPRING 2023



STATE HISTORIC SITE

The Friends of the
Ulysses S. Grant
Cottage

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PRESIDENTIAL REPORT

Finally, we have completed the installation of the \$1.2 million Fire Suppression system in Grant Cottage. The state-of-the-art nitrogen gas misting system will prevent what we have always feared; that the 140-year-old wooden building would go up in smoke. Even before the prison closed in 2014, we had been raising money and lobbying New York state to set aside some money for this advanced sprinkler system, and now thanks to a very generous private donor can move forward.



However, due to the discovery of some asbestos during the installation, the project was delayed several weeks, and that's why the Cottage itself can't be open for tours until the middle of June. In the meantime, we will raise the flag, have some porch programming and offer special walking tours of Mt. McGregor.

We also have some good news from the federal government. Our US senators have recommended the Cottage for funding our proposed educational pavilion, and subject to a vote, we could get quite a bit of money in 2024. Keep your fingers crossed.

Tim Welch

President, Board of Trustees

NOTES FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

From My View

I started a mere month ago, with a love for the history of my native Adirondack Foothills in my heart and a desire to re-acclimate to my hometown area after many years of living in Connecticut. My father ingrained an interest in local history from an early age. On many a hot Sunday in summer, the Merrill family (four kids and two parents) braved the road ahead (without A/C!). We came to expect multiple stops along any journey (to the delight of my Dad) as those blue historical markers would appear. Despite the groans of “Not another one!!” from the backseat, my brothers and I developed an appreciation for the unique history of our area and country.

I come to Grant Cottage intent on the Mission to “interpret and promote the compelling story of The Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Landmark, to educate and inspire the widest possible audience.” I have already experienced the dedication of the Grant Cottage team – Ben Kemp, Colette Broestler, and Pat Porto, along with “honorary” staff and full-time Board Member Melissa Trombley-Prosch, who deliver on this Mission daily. And our outgoing Executive Director, Steve Porto, has given this “newbie” a roadmap for success. I am grateful to them all.

We have 11 terrific programs to broaden your knowledge of the slice of time from Grant’s lifetime and how it may relate to you today. We are actively moving forward with the plans to improve existing facilities in addition to launching Phase I of the Strategic Masterplan. The resulting improvements: added trails, better parking/ traffic flow, and a new breathtaking overlook and event gazebo will bring the top of Mt McGregor closer to its original mountain retreat feeling. We hope you will join us in this endeavor. Please share the Grant Cottage story with friends and family, plan a visit, and donate if able. We do this for and with you in mind.

I look forward to enjoying the 2023 season with you all and showcasing the best of Grant Cottage to the world. Plan your 2023 visit today!

Sincerely,

Beth J. Merrill

Executive Director



Meet Our New Board Members

Welcome Patrick Greene

Board Trustee Patrick Greene is an attorney with a commercial practice in Saratoga Springs. He joins the board after years of volunteer work as a tour guide at the Cottage. Patrick has bachelor’s and master’s degrees in history with a strong interest in 19th-century American history. He was a Division One athlete in college and served in the Peace Corps in Guatemala. He has served as a board member on the Saratoga County IDA and serves on the board of the Upstate New York Chapter of the Amateur Wrestling Hall of Fame. Patrick is married with two adult children and lives in Malta.



Welcome Jonah Cohen

Board Trustee Jonah Cohen was raised in Wilton, NY, and graduated from Skidmore College in 2020 with a degree in history and a focus on the Civil War-era United States. He now lives in Saratoga Springs and does communications for Congressman Paul Tonko.



What is Jonah’s favorite Grant quote?

“I know only two tunes. One of them is ‘Yankee Doodle’ and the other isn’t.” ~ Ulysses S. Grant



Hike into History!

Site Now Open

Visit us this season to learn more about Ulysses S. Grant's legacy.



Memorial Day weekend • Friday - Monday
Open on Monday, May 29th

June 1 - late June • Thursday-Sunday

late June - October • Wednesday-Sunday
Open on Tuesday, July 4th & Monday, Sept. 4th



COTTAGE IS TEMPORARILY CLOSED FOR PRESERVATION CONSTRUCTION
Cottage tours will resume June 17

Visit our website for the most up-to-date information.

Book a guided Mt. McGregor Hidden History Tour*, enjoy the Gift Shop, Visitor Center exhibits, outdoor interpretive panels, view from the observation binoculars, walking path to the Overlook, and free self-guided audio grounds tour.

**Mt. McGregor Hidden History Tours involve continuous hiking over varied terrain for approximately 1 mile and are available to book now at grantcottage.org. This offering is not suitable for those with limited mobility or other conditions that may limit moderately strenuous physical activity. Adequate footwear and clothing. (We recommend insect and sun repellents for safety and enjoyment purposes.)*



Of Rings and Love...

By Melissa Trombley-Prosch, Friends of Grant Cottage Site Historian

Brevet Second Lieutenant U.S. Grant wrote a letter to close family friend Mrs. George Bailey that he had a secret on June 6, 1844. The letter was written shortly after he arrived at Camp Salubrity in Louisiana. He first noted that “My trip to this place ‘forty days’ journey into the wilderness’ was marked with no incident, Save one.” He went on to note that only one was worth relating, “...and that one is laughable curious, important, surprising & c. & c. but I cant tell it now. It is for the present a secret but I will tell it to you some time. You must not guess what it is for you will go wrong.”



Brevet Second Lieutenant Grant c. 1844 with his ring

Grant’s secret? He was engaged! He had proposed to Julia Boggs Dent while on leave (May 1 to 20, 1844), before his deployment from Jefferson Barracks, Missouri to Camp Salubrity. Grant had met his eighteen-year-old

fiancée as a result of his friendship with her brother Frederick Dent who had also been his roommate in their senior year at West Point. Following their graduation in 1843, Dent was assigned to the 6th U.S. Infantry and Grant to the 4th Infantry assigned to Jefferson Barracks (he reported for duty there on September 30, 1843) which was near Dent’s family home at White Haven, Missouri. As a result of Dent’s invitation to Grant to visit his family there, Grant met Julia and soon fell in love.

In a letter written to Julia in late July 1844, Grant reflected on his feelings for Julia, “Many a pleasant hour have I spent at Camp Salubrity thinking over my last visit to Mo. and its results. Never before was I satisfied that my love for you was returned, but you then assured me that it was.” Before leaving, Grant gave Julia something precious to him and a symbol of his commitment to her, his West Point ring. In the postscript of the same letter he noted, “...Recollect when you write to seal it with the ring I used to wear: I am anxious to see an impression of it once more.” A few days later, Grant wrote to Julia, “...And to think too that while I am writing this the ring I used to wear is on your hand – Parting with

that ring Julia was the strongest evidence I would have given you (that is – in the way of a present) of the depth and sincerity of my love for you... – Most Truly and Devotedly Your Lover Ulysses.”

While on leave (April 1 to May 5, 1845), and upon his return to White Haven, Grant formally asked Julia’s parents for their permission to marry Julia, and consent was given. It is shortly after this visit that Grant mentions his own engagement gift from Julia in a letter to her, “I very often look at the name in the ring I wear and think how much I would like to see again the one who gave it to me.” Grant would wear this ring throughout the rest of his life – with two known exceptions.

Grant, now promoted to second lieutenant, had hoped for an engagement of sixteen or seventeen months. It was not to be. The Mexican War (April 25, 1846, to February 2, 1848) made it impossible for the couple to reunite and marry until Grant’s return to the U.S. on July 23, 1848. While Grant was on leave, the couple wasted no time in arranging their wedding which took place on the evening of August 22, 1848 (175 years ago) in the candlelit parlor of the Dents’ St. Louis home. The young couple settled happily into military life at Sackets Harbor and Detroit, and their first child Frederick Dent Grant was born on May 30, 1850. This brings us to the time of the dilemma of the lost ring...

From May into August 1851, Julia took baby Frederick (referred to as ‘Brink’ by his proud father in his letters) for an extended visit to, first her in-laws in Bethel, Ohio, and then on to her parents in St. Louis. On Wednesday, May 21, 1851, Grant wrote from Detroit to Julia in Bethel, “Last Sunday night, at Church, I lost the ring you gave me so long ago off my finger and could not find it. I am in hopes the sexton will find it and give it to me by next Sunday. It distresses me very much to think it is gone and at first I had the notion not to tell you of it but to get one just like it, with your name on it, and wear that.”

This ring story ended happily with Grant noting in a July 27 letter to Julia, “...I found your ring the other day. I supposed in taking my handkerchief out of my pocket the ring slipped off and it has laid there ever since, and although I have worn the coat a great deel, and had my hand in the pocket a hundred times, since, I never found the ring until a f[ew] days ago.”

U.S. and Julia would be separated for a second time when

the 4th Infantry was assigned to the Pacific Coast in 1852. Grant departed on July 5th, and his second son Ulysses S. Grant, Jr. was born on July 22nd. The separation (July 1852 to Summer 1854 when he resigned from the Army) was emotionally very difficult for then Brevet Captain Grant, but I would like to believe the physical presence of his simple gold band engraved with Julia's name gave him some measure of comfort.



Julia, Frederick and Ulysses, Jr. (1854)

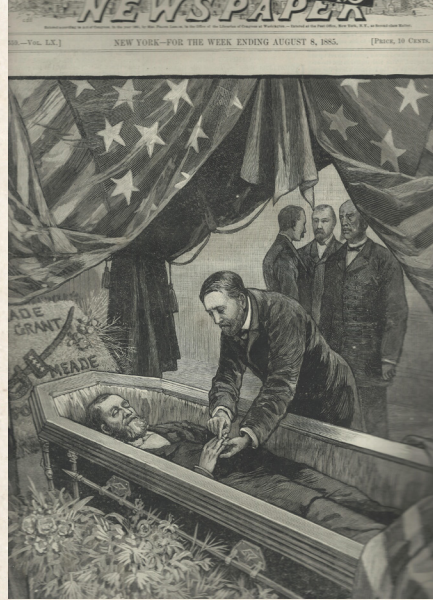
of the Civil War in 1861) ended Grant's dream of becoming a well-to-do farmer. The Grant family moved to Galena, Illinois in an effort at a fresh start in 1860. The Civil War led to the resumption of Grant's military career (1861 to 1865 and 1865 to 1868), followed by two terms as U.S. President (1869 to 1877) and a world tour (1877 to 1879) with Julia. Upon their return, they settled into a comfortable life in New York City (and vacations at their cottage in Long Branch, N.J.) with their children and grandchildren.

Within this article, you will see photos of Grant wearing his treasured ring throughout this time up until his terminal illness (1884 to July 1885). In May of 1883, Grant estimated his weight at 'a little ahead of 200 pounds'. His undertakers estimated his weight at less than 100 pounds at the time of his death, making it impossible to keep his precious ring on his hand. It was found in his pocket (forty years from the time he received it) by the family along with a poignant letter to Julia (dated June 29, 1885) and two locks of hair. His eldest son, Frederick, placed his father's band again on his finger – a moment captured in time on the

Upon his return, their life together resumed – Grant took up farming, two more children were born to the couple and their family life flourished. Illness and the impact of the Panic of 1857 (the first worldwide economic crisis from which the U.S. economy did not fully recover until the onset



U.S. Commanding General Grant with his ring



August 8, 1885 Frank Leslie's cover depicting Frederick placing his father's ring on his hand

cover of the August 8, 1885 edition of Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper – and later laid to rest with the General in his granite sarcophagus within his tomb at Riverside Park in Manhattan. To date, I have not been able to confirm Grant's West Point ring's current location.



Photo of Grant and Julia at the Cottage in 1885 documents signs of his weight loss (note wrists)



Grant wearing his ring c. 1882

Note: I have left Grant's spelling & punctuation as I found it as I feel it gives a personal and charming touch to his writing.

OPERATIONS MANAGER REPORT

We are excited to invite visitors back for the 2023 season and showcase our new interpretive panels and a family-friendly scavenger hunt. In addition to our variety of engaging tour experiences, we are excited to offer a great schedule of programs on a wide variety of subjects. It is an exciting time as we begin plans for the future of the historic site, and your support is as crucial as ever as we move forward on some significant site improvement projects. One of the ways to help us provide great experiences for our visitors is to join the Grant Cottage volunteer team. There are many volunteer opportunities at the site and shift flexibility for those with limited time availability. Find out what has kept many of our volunteers coming back each year. Discover a fun and fulfilling experience in a beautiful setting that provides the public with an educational and meaningful time. For more information, contact Ben Kemp at ben@grantcottage.org or fill out a volunteer application on our website. We hope to see you in 2023!

Sincerely,
Ben Kemp
Operations Manager



Volunteers are the heart of our organization and help us tell the story of Grant's time at Mt. McGregor.

Learn more about the many volunteer opportunities available at grantcottage.org/volunteer.

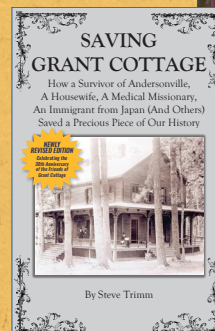
Thank you, Grant Cottage Volunteers!



Congratulations to the 2022 Lorraine Westcott Friend of Grant Cottage Memorial Award recipient Steve Trimm!

Steve Trimm has been a staunch supporter of The Friends for almost two decades, has donated countless hours of his time to educating the public on the non-profit's behalf, and published two books whose profits benefit The Friends, *Saving Grant Cottage: How a Survivor of Andersonville, A Housewife, A Medical Missionary, An Immigrant from Japan (And Others) Saved a Precious Piece of Our History* and *General Grant's Supporting Players*. As a living historian he has given over 100 presentations across the Northeast and developed over 60 scripts pertaining to Grant and Grant Cottage.

Don't miss Steve (right) in the program *A Visit with General and Mrs. Grant* as he and 'Mrs. Grant' share anecdotes and stories in celebration of their 175th wedding anniversary year. Join the Grants as they celebrate their 34th wedding anniversary together in Gilded-Aged Saratoga. **Sunday, August 6th, at 4:30PM.**



2023 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Literary Landmark Author Series

The Literary Landmark Author Series returns this year on July 23rd with Dr. Chris Mackowski presenting *The Rise of Grant: A String of Contingencies* and on September 23rd for *Grant's Underappreciated Peace Legacy* with presenter Frank Scaturro.

Unexpected Bravery- Women and Children of the Civil War

Saturday, June 10th at 4:30 PM

The History Behind Juneteenth

Monday, June 19th at 1:00 PM

Confederate General James Longstreet Remembers his Friend Ulysses S. Grant

Sunday, July 2nd at 1:00 PM



The Magical Feats of Maxwell Treat

Sunday, July 9th at 1:00 PM & 2:00 PM

A Visit with General and Mrs. Grant

Sunday, August 6th at 4:30 PM

Confederate General James Longstreet Remembers his Friend Ulysses S. Grant

Sunday, July 2nd at 1:00 PM

Man of Many Worlds- The Amazing Life of Colonel Joseph Louis Cook/ Atayataglonghta

Saturday, August 26th at 4:30 PM



FROM THE TREASURER'S DESK

Even in the best of times, visitor admissions only cover a fraction of our costs. This season especially, we will be challenged in covering our operating expenses due to our late opening while we complete the work on our state-of-the-art fire suppression system. Therefore contributions, memberships, and sponsorships from people like you are needed and appreciated even more than usual this year. If you know of a potential donor, please, let us know. Have you thought of including the Friends in your will? If you've any questions, please feel free to contact me at: treasurer@grantcottage.org



Mike Lesser

Mike Lesser, Treasurer of the Board



The Friends of the Ulysses S. Grant Cottage

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State Historic Site



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Make your Donation to support Grant Cottage today by mailing the attached form to PO Box 2294, Wilton, NY 12831 or by going to grantcottage.org/take-action

The Friends of the Ulysses S. Grant Cottage is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that manages the daily operations and programming at Grant Cottage. Generous support from Grant fans like you helps us keep history alive as we tell the story of Ulysses S. Grant's time on Mt. McGregor.