

Ulysses S. Grant

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site
7400 Grant Road
St. Louis, MO 63123



Hardscrabble



Introduction

When Ulysses S. Grant resigned from the military in 1854, he longed to spend time with his wife Julia and their young children. Since the army no longer provided him an income, he planned to support his family by farming at White Haven. Cultivating the 80 acres given to the Grants as a wedding gift, Ulysses also managed the land of his father-in-law, Colonel Frederick Dent. Grant planted crops of potatoes and wheat, corded wood, harvested fruit from the orchards, and tended a vegetable garden. Enslaved laborers did most of the work around the property alongside Grant. He was so dedicated to this future that he commented to a friend, “whoever hears of me in ten years will hear of a well-to-do old Missouri farmer.”

The House that Grant Built

Establishing himself as an independent farmer included the construction of his own house. Grant selected an elevated location about 100 feet from the road (the site of present-day St. Paul Churchyard) and close to his crops. In the fall of 1855, he began cutting, hewing, and notching logs for the cabin. Accustomed to the relative finery of Wish-ton-Wish, the stone home built by her brother Louis Dent, Julia lamented Ulysses’ decision to build a log cabin, not even “a neat frame house.” The next spring and summer, he set about digging a cellar and setting the stones for the foundation; neighbors and enslaved laborers then assisted in the house raising. Grant completed much of the work himself, shingling the roof, building the stairs, and laying the floors.



Hardscrabble in an 1891 photo by Edward Joy. (Reprinted from Reminiscences By Personal Friends of U.S. Grant and the History of Grant’s Cabin, compiled by Jas. L. Post.)

Hardscrabble

The cabin was divided into four rooms, two upstairs and two downstairs, with a hall running between them on both floors. Julia did her best to decorate the place, but even her standards of refinement could not conceal its rustic nature. Julia recalled that it was “so crude and homely I did not like it at all,

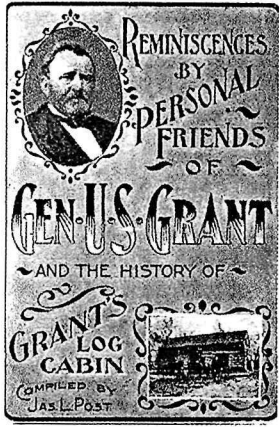
but I did not say so. I got out all my pretty covers, baskets, books, etc., and tried to make it look home-like and comfortable, but this was hard to do. The little house looked so unattractive that we facetiously decided to call it Hardscrabble.”

A Brief Residence

Even though Hardscrabble was the first house that the Grants ever owned, they lived there for only a short time. Julia remembered moving in during September 1856, and living there only three months. At the request of her father, Julia and Ulysses returned to White Haven when her mother died in January 1857. The little cabin never again served as the Grants’ domicile.

After the Grants vacated Hardscrabble the building acquired a history of its own. Due to its association with the famous general and president, it was dismantled and moved three times, until it was finally located on the property of present day Grant’s Farm, which is owned and operated by Anheuser-Busch, and adjacent to Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site.

**The History of
Hardscrabble
1855 - 1885**



Fall 1855

Grant prepares logs for building the cabin.

Summer 1856

Grant sets the foundation and builds the house.

September 1856

The Grants move into Hardscrabble.

January 1857

The Grants move out of Hardscrabble.

August 23, 1859

Frederick Dent, who retained legal title to Hardscrabble but is acting for Grant, sells the farm to Joseph W. White for \$7,200.

February 12, 1863

Joseph White defaults on his payments and Julia regains title to her land and property.

April 20, 1863

Julia leases out the farm; after a payment dispute, the Grants win the resultant legal battle which reached the Missouri Supreme Court in 1868.

May 17, 1884

Grant mortgages his entire property to William Vanderbilt in order to cover a loan of \$150,000.

April 15, 1885

Grant formally conveys the property in St. Louis to Vanderbilt.

**The History of
Hardscrabble
1888 - present**

1888

Luther H. Conn purchases the farm.

December 2, 1889

Luther Conn sells 132 acres to nurseryman Henry J. Weber for \$10,175, but retains the rights to sell the cabin separately.

1891

Conn sells the cabin for \$5,000 to Edward and Justin Joy, two real estate developers. They carefully number each log, disassemble the structure, and rebuild it in Old Orchard, part of nearby Webster Groves, Missouri.

March 1903

C.F. Blanke buys the cabin for \$8,000 and uses it to attract crowds to his company's coffee display at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair in Forest Park. Blanke intends for the cabin to remain permanently in Forest Park, but fails to reach an agreement with city authorities concerning maintenance of the structure.

1907

August A. Busch purchases Hardscrabble and rebuilds it upon his vast estate, which encompasses over 280 acres of the land once owned by Grant. The cabin, situated about one mile from its original site, remains there today.

1946

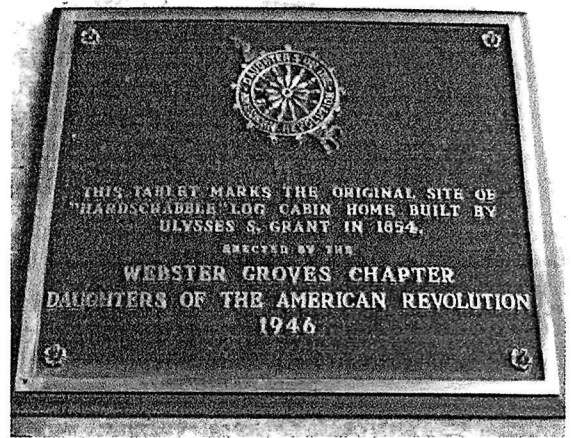
The Webster Groves Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution erects a place marker in St. Paul Churchyard at the original location of Grant's Cabin.

1977

Anheuser-Busch restores the cabin, replacing rotted wood and other structural elements, and rebuilding it to its present-day appearance.

April 27, 2007

An anonymous donor provides funds for the Webster Groves Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to replace the deteriorated limestone marker with a new one, rededicating it on the 185th anniversary of Grant's birthday.



Further Reading

Grant, Julia Dent. *The Personal Memoirs of Julia Dent Grant (Mrs. Ulysses S. Grant)*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975.

Post, James Louis. *Reminiscences by Personal Friends of General Grant and the History of Grant's Log Cabin*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 2009 (reprint).

Stevens, Walter B. *Grant in St. Louis*. St. Louis: The Franklin Club, 1916.