

Ulysses S. Grant



Above: White Haven, 1860; inset: Ulysses S. Grant, 1870
WHITE HAVEN—NPS/ULYSSES S. GRANT NHS; GRANT—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Exploring Grant's Legacy

Ulysses S. Grant is one of the most famous Americans of his era. As the commanding general of the US Army during the Civil War, he led the fight to preserve the Union. As 18th president (1869–77), he championed civil rights for African Americans. Grant's life and legacy are commemorated in many ways, at many places: Civil War battlefields like Shiloh and Vicksburg, the equestrian statue beside the US Capitol honoring his war-time heroism, and the solemn quiet of his New York City tomb.

But beyond these public roles, who was Ulysses S. Grant? Several characteristics defined the man and his character—loving devotion to his wife Julia and their four children, genuine affection for family and friends, keen sense of duty to country, and deep concern for humanity.

It is his legacy as a person that resonates so strongly at his White Haven home, now known as Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site.

From Slavery to Freedom

As a young officer, Grant visited White Haven, a plantation owned by “Colonel” Frederick Dent. Here, he met and courted Julia Dent. Ulysses and Julia lived at White Haven 1854–59 and raised their young family. Grant helped manage his father-in-law's plantation and its enslaved workers. Grant himself owned at least one enslaved man, William Jones. Times were tough during the Grant family's time at White Haven. Struggling through a weak economy, health problems, and even a frost-filled summer, the Grants fought poverty and hardship. They moved to Galena, Illinois, about a year before the outbreak of the Civil War.

Today White Haven is a national historic landmark and the centerpiece of this National Park Service site. It is a place where visitors may examine the lives of the Grant and Dent families and the enslaved people. For some, White Haven was a place of leisure, entertainment, and family. For others, it was a place of backbreaking labor, daily struggles, and longing for freedom. These people and their experiences are inseparable from White Haven's story and the story of a country enduring its most tumultuous times.



U. S. Grant



Julia D. Grant

Ulysses S. Grant in 1866, about the time he received the rank of General of the US Army, “conferred by Act of Congress, and the will of the President of the United States.”

Julia Dent Grant later recalled that this 1864 photograph “was taken by Brady in New York when I was on my first visit to N.Y. the spring that General Grant first came East.”

BOTH PHOTOS—LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



The Grant family ca. 1866: Ellen “Nellie,” Ulysses, Jesse, Fred, Julia, and Ulysses Jr. “Buck.”
NPS

White Haven: A Microcosm of National Issues

The issue of slavery strained relations in the White Haven household as it did throughout the nation. Grant was from Ohio, a free state where abolitionist and Underground Railroad activities flourished. Young Ulysses learned from his father, Jesse Grant, that slavery was morally wrong. Julia Dent was born and raised in the slave state of Missouri, where her father, Colonel Dent, taught her that slavery was the proper relationship between blacks and whites. Dent owned at least 30 enslaved African Americans, vital to his wealth, status, and the success of the plantation.

Nationally, tensions over the expansion of slavery drove a wedge between the slave states and the free states. When the Civil War came, Grant's support of the Union never wavered. Dent, while professing support for the Union, did not

believe the federal government should compel a state to remain in the Union. When Union authorities in St. Louis began requiring loyalty oaths, Dent refused to sign.

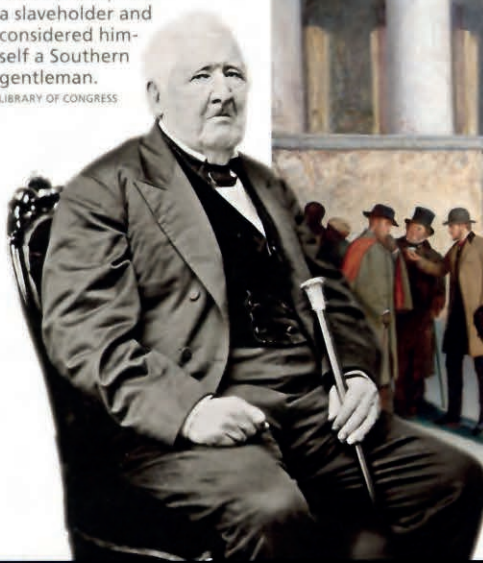
Julia was caught in the middle. She fully supported her husband's efforts to preserve the Union, and boldly declared “I am the most loyal of the loyal.” On the other hand, she had enjoyed a comfortable life made possible by enslaved labor. She felt strongly that the Dent slaves were “family,” content in their servitude. In later years, through the trials of war and Reconstruction, she learned to adapt to the radically new makeup of society.

White Haven's enslaved African Americans watched the unfolding drama with keen interest. Slavery remained legal in the border state of Missouri, and the

state was exempt from President Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Yet by early 1864, all the Dent slaves had illegally fled White Haven. A few, including Mary Robinson, stayed in the area, but little is known about these people's lives after slavery.

At White Haven you can experience the nation's division over slavery and its aftermath through one family's perspective. The same arguments that divided the Dents and Grants were repeated in homes throughout the country. They would lead to secession and civil war. They also led to a reunited nation and freedom for four million Americans held in legal bondage.

Colonel Dent, Julia's father, was a slaveholder and considered himself a Southern gentleman.
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Newspapers advertised the buying and selling of slaves in St. Louis.
NPS

The last slave auction on the steps of the Old Courthouse in St. Louis took place January 1, 1861. Painting by Thomas Satterwhite Noble, 1871.
MISSOURI HISTORICAL SOCIETY

St. Louis and White Haven

St. Louis was a flourishing city in the 1800s. From its 18th-century roots as a French colonial town, it had grown into a center for trade, culture, and military activity. By 1850 it was the eighth largest city in the United States. Extensive steamboat traffic on the Mississippi River, a steady flood of trappers, gold miners, and settlers heading west, a growing industrial presence, and the influx of German and Irish immigrants combined to make the Gateway City a bustling and diverse community.

White Haven, originally acquired by the Dents as a summer home in 1820, was far enough away for the family to escape the pollution and disease prevalent in the city, yet still close

enough so that they could enjoy all the thriving city had to offer. White Haven eventually became the Dents' main residence, though much of Colonel Dent's wealth and influence remained in St. Louis. He maintained many business connections there, and the markets for White Haven's farm goods were in the city.

Following Ulysses S. Grant's graduation from West Point, the army assigned him to the 4th Infantry Regiment, stationed at Jefferson Barracks, south of St. Louis. This large post was integral to the army's defense of the western frontier, and many officers later famous in the Civil War were posted there sometime during their careers. The



Ulysses and Julia Grant's Hardscrabble house, 1856. NPS

barracks also played a central role in the St. Louis social scene, as its officers attended parties and cotillions in the city and hosted many of their own events. Julia Dent was among the many upper class young ladies who attended these functions and enjoyed the company of the officers, including Lieutenant Grant, whom she met in 1844.

St. Louis, considered a southern city, played a key role early in the Civil War, and events there helped decide the fate of Missouri, a pivotal border slave state. Decisive action by Federal troops suppressed secessionist voices and kept St. Louis, and ultimately the state, in the Union. Colonel Dent, refusing to adapt to the changing times, isolated himself at White Haven.

Today, St. Louis is a large metropolitan area. The 10-acre historic site remains a small haven in the midst of suburban development and a place to experience 19th-century country life.



The bustling St. Louis riverfront in 1853, as portrayed by Frederick Hawkins Piercy, one of the many travelers who passed through the city on their way west. SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, HAROLD B. LEE LIBRARY, BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

A Slave Plantation



White Haven, President Grant's farm, as it appeared in the October 16, 1875, issue of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The White Haven property, about 850 acres, included cleared fields, orchards, large wooded areas, and hills cut by streams and creeks. A variety of grains, vegetables, fruits, and other crops were produced at White Haven and then taken to markets in the city. Cleared timber from the property was sold as firewood or to nearby coal mines as bracing for mine shafts.

Following Ulysses' resignation from the army in 1854, he returned to White Haven to become a farmer. Grant approached the venture with characteristic determination. He cut firewood to sell and worked in the fields, planting and sowing various crops while directing the work of the enslaved laborers. In 1856, wanting a home of his own, Grant built a log cabin about a half mile north of the

main house. The Grants named the cabin Hardscrabble. They lived there only briefly, though. When Julia's mother passed away, they moved back to the main house at Colonel Dent's request. Grant and neighboring farmers faced a number of challenges between 1854 and 1859. Unseasonably bad weather and a severe economic depression thwarted their efforts, and prolonged illness further hampered Grant. Having farmed only for a few years, he lacked the financial resources that enabled long-term farmers to survive these difficult times. In 1859 he was forced to abandon farming.

After the Civil War, Grant's responsibilities as general of the army and then president kept him in Washington, DC. He hired caretakers

to manage White Haven in his absence but continued to take great interest in the property. During this period, Grant fulfilled a long-held dream by shifting the farm's focus to breeding and raising horses. Even as president, Grant still found time to send explicit instructions to his caretakers about how he wanted the farm managed and the property developed.

Today, several historic structures remain as tangible links to farming at White Haven. The large horse stable, ice house, and chicken house were vital parts of the farm operation. The Hardscrabble cabin, another reflection of Grant's farming days, is next to the site at Anheuser-Busch's Grant's Farm.

Plan Your Visit

Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site is at 7400 Grant Rd., 0.3 miles off Gravois Rd. (MO Hwy 30).

Hours are 9 am to 5 pm daily; closed Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Admission is free.

The visitor center has an information desk, theater, exhibits, sales area, restrooms, and park offices. Exhibit panels are located near historic features.

House tours are free; get tickets at the visitor center.

Interpretive programs and children's activities are available year-round. Groups of 15 or more require reservations; please call 314-842-1867.

For weather delays or closures, call 314-842-1867.

For a full list of regulations, including firearms information, visit the park website.

Accessibility
We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. To find out more, ask

at the visitor center, call, or check the park website.

More Information
Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site
7400 Grant Rd.
St. Louis, MO 63123
314-842-1867
www.nps.gov/ulsg

Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Please visit www.nps.gov.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media.

GPO:2023-423-201/83092 Last updated 2016

National Park Foundation.
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

