How Ulysses S. Grant Received His Name

Grant was born to Jesse and Hannah Grant on April 27, 1822, their first child.

He was not named for the entire first month of his life.

Finally Jesse and Hannah went to visit Hannah’s father, stepmother and sisters in a nearby community for the purpose of naming the baby.

Various suggestions were made:

- Hannah wanted her firstborn to be named Albert
- A sister suggested Theodore
- Hannah’s father, John Simpson said “Hiram,” because it is “such a handsome name”
- Hannah’s stepmother had just finished reading *Telemachus* and was thrilled by its description of Greek heroes, particularly Odysseus and Penelope. The Latin (Roman) name for Odysseus is *Ulysses*. Odysseus (Ulysses) was the warrior hero of Homer’s epic poem, *The Odyssey*, spending ten years returning home after winning the Trojan War. Hannah’s stepmother wanted the baby named Ulysses
- Jesse Grant, Ulysses’ father, wanted to please his in-laws and would have deferred to them, but the names were all put in a hat and the name to be given the month old baby was drawn by one of Hannah’s sisters.
- The name that was drawn was “Ulysses.”
- Jesse, seeing the chance to “win points,” announced the child would be called “Hiram Ulysses.”
- Jesse proceeded to call him “My Ulysses” as he was proud of his son, frequently bragging about him to anyone who would listen.

This was not the end of the story of Grant’s name! Where did the “S.” come from?

Seventeen years after receiving the name Hiram Ulysses, it was time for Grant to make his way in the world. He told Jesse he did not want to work in the family tannery, so Jesse, ambitious for his son’s continued education, decided to request an appointment for him to the U. S. Military Academy (West Point)

- Jesse wrote to his congressman Thomas Hamer asking for an appointment for Ulysses
- Thomas Hamer, in a hurry and not able to recall the nominee’s exact name, somehow thought the middle name must be “Simpson,” and nominated “Ulysses S. Grant” to the Academy
- The officials at West Point told him no such person existed in their rolls of new cadets and if he wanted to enter, it must be under the name of Ulysses S. Grant. So Grant, seeing argument was futile, agreed that he was indeed “Ulysses S. Grant.”
• Thus his name at West Point was posted as “U.S. Grant,” giving the other cadets something to joke about. Their classmate was called “United States Grant,” and “Uncle Sam Grant.” Soon he became known by the nickname of “Sam.” Later, he rose to fame as “Unconditional Surrender” Grant.

• In later years, when corresponding with Julia prior to their marriage, he asked her to select a name starting with “S,” as he had no idea of what the “S.” might stand for.


NOTE: It has not been possible for the author of this website to determine with any accuracy just when the general public began using “Simpson” as Grant’s middle name. The earliest newspaper account using that name in the Chronicling America database is date March 30, 1864.