Early Years Through the Start of the Civil War, 1822-1861

Ulysses S. Grant Life Story Outline

by Frank Scaturro of the Grant Monument Association

A. Birth and Early Life

1. Birth

- Ulysses S. Grant was born in Point Pleasant, Clermont County, Ohio, on April 27, 1822.
- He was originally named Hiram Ulysses Grant.
- His parents were:
  a. Jesse Root Grant (1794-1873), who developed a successful tanning business. He was an outspoken, anti-slavery Whig who took a strong interest in politics.
  b. Hannah Simpson Grant (1798-1883), a strong, reserved, religious woman. Some observers believed that her son's strength of character and taciturnity were traits inherited from her.
- His brothers and sisters were:
  a. Samuel Simpson (1825-1861)
  b. Clara Rachel (1828-1865)
  c. Virginia Paine ("Jennie") (1832-1881)
  d. Orvil Lynch (1835-1881)
  e. Mary Frances (1839-1905)

2. Early Years to West Point

- In 1823 the family moved to Georgetown, Brown County, Ohio.
From 1836-1837 Grant attended the Maysville Seminary in Maysville, Kentucky.
From 1838-1839 he attended the Presbyterian Academy in Ripley Ohio.
He was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1839.
By this time, he had been signing his name as "Ulysses H. Grant."
Congressman Thomas Hamer, who had been acquainted with the Grant family, mistakenly listed Grant as "Ulysses S. Grant," probably assuming that his middle name was his mother's maiden name, Simpson. Grant pleas to correct this at West Point were not acknowledged.
Grant was generally an average student, but he excelled in mathematics and horsemanship.
He established a record for the high jump on horseback that would stand for 25 years.
He attended West Point with many other cadets who would become both Union and Confederate officers during the Civil War.
In the 1843, he graduated from West Point 21st in a class of 39 and was commissioned a Brevet Second Lieutenant in the 4th Infantry.

B. Early Military Life
1. From 1843-1844 he was stationed at Jefferson Barracks, near Saint Louis, Missouri.
   There he met Julia Boggs Dent, a sister of Frederick T. Dent (1820-1892), his roommate at West Point, at White Haven, her family's estate (also near Saint Louis) and the two began a courtship.
   Julia Dent, who was born in Saint Louis on January 26, 1826, was the daughter of "Colonel" Frederick Fayette Dent (1786-1873), a Missouri slaveowner with strong Southern sentiments, and Ellen Bray Wrenshall Dent (179?-1857)
   Before he was stationed at Camp Salubrity, Louisiana, in June of 1844, Grant and Julia Dent became engaged.

2. After the annexation of Texas in 1845, Grant's regiment was sent to Texas, and Grant was promoted to Second Lieutenant.

3. The Mexican War (1846-1848)
   Grant was opposed to the Mexican War, later calling it "one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation," but felt at the time he should serve under his flag rather than resign from the army.
   In later years, he devoted a good deal of statesmanship to Mexico, striving to keep their government free from foreign powers and improving relations between them and the United States. His concern from Mexico sprang largely from what he saw as the injustice of the Mexican War.
   He fought in every major battle of the war except Buena Vista.
a. Palo Alto (May 8, 1846)
b. Resaca de la Palma (May 9, 1846)
c. Monterrey (September 19-21, 1846) Here Grant undertook a dangerous volunteer mission to ride through the bullet-ridden streets for ammunition.
d. Vera Cruz (April 18, 1847)
e. Cerro Gordo (April 18, 1847)
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f. Churubusco (August 20, 1847)
g. Molino del Rey (September 8, 1847)
h. Chapultepec (September 12, 1847)
i. Mexico City (September 14, 1847)

Grant was given the Brevet (temporary) ranks of First Lieutenant and Captain respectively for his gallantry at Molino del Rey and the storming of Chapultepec.

The United States acquired two thirds of Mexico as a result of this war.

C. Marriage and Peacetime Army Career
1. Grant married Julia Dent in Saint Louis on August 22, 1848.

2. He was reassigned to duty at Madison Barracks in Sackets Harbor, New York (November 17, 1848), and his wife accompanied him.

3. In 1849, Grant was transferred to Detroit; he would be transferred back to Sackets Harbor in 1851.

4. Frederick Dent Grant was born to the Grants on May 30, 1850, in Saint Louis. He would himself become a Major General in the Army and was the second highest ranking man in the active service at the time of his death in 1912.

5. In 1852, Grant's regiment was ordered to the Pacific Coast, and Grant was stationed at Columbia Barracks in Fort Vancouver in the Oregon Territory.

Grant could not take his wife and young son with him on the dangerous trip through the Isthmus of Panama to the Pacific Coast.

Separated from his family, Grant was unhappy.

6. Ulysses S. Grant, Jr. (d.1929), was born on July 22, 1852, in Bethel, Ohio, but his father would not have the chance to meet him until he was over one and a half years old.

7. Grant was promoted to Captain on the death of a superior on August 5, 1853.

8. In January, 1854, he was stationed at Fort Humboldt, California. Unhappy and in poor health, he resigned from the army on April 11 and rejoined his family at White Haven.

While on the Pacific Coast, Grant found himself unhappy away from his family, unable to raise money, and ill.

Popular historical legend overlooks the broader picture and contends without sufficient evidence that Grant was forced to resign over drinking habits.

Evidence regarding Grant's habits during this time period is shaky, though evidence from later in his career does not support the notion that he was an alcoholic or habitual drinker. Regardless, historical myth, apparently unable to resist sensationalism, has cast Grant as a drunkard at the expense of accuracy. Perhaps the best exploration of the
drinking question is in Charles G. Ellington's *The Trial of U.S. Grant*, (1987), which dispels the popular myth.

**D. Family and Business Before the Start of the Civil War**

1. 1854-1861: Grant made numerous attempts to support his family, but suffered repeated setbacks and failures.

2. In 1855, the Grants moved to Wish-Ton-Wish, near Saint Louis, where they had a third child, Ellen ("Nellie") Wrenshall Grant (1855-1922).

3. In 1856, Grant built a modest house for his family and named it Hardscrabble. Their fourth child, Jesse Root Grant (d. 1934) was born there in 1858.

4. In 1858, Grant gave up farming and in 1859 entered the real estate business with his wife's cousin, Henry Boggs.

5. After having little success in real estate, Grant moved to Galena, Illinois, in 1860, and worked in his father's hardware and leather goods store.

Please return to the Students page in LibGuides for the other segments of Grant’s life history.

- [Grant During the Civil War, 1861-1865](#)
- [Grant as General-in-Chief, After the Civil War, 1865-1869](#)
- [Grant’s Presidency, 1869-1877](#)
- [Grant’s Later Years, 1877-1885](#)

Further reading: *Ulysses S. Grant Chronology*, at the *Ulysses S. Grant Association* website.

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