WHEN GRANT WAS PRESIDENT

On October 8, 1871 the great Chicago fire was started, according to legend, by Mrs. O’Leary’s cow who supposedly kicked over the lantern in the barn. By the following afternoon the blaze had claimed 250 lives. A third of the city was left homeless and property damage was estimated at about $200 million.

On the same day, almost to the hour that the Chicago fire broke out, a fire of more intensity broke out in the small town of Peshtigo, Wisconsin. Within one hour, the little town 240 miles north of Chicago was leveled. Although overshadowed by the Chicago fire, the Peshtigo fire ranks today as the costliest fire in human life in human history. More than 1,200 people died in the fire which consumed over 1.2 million acres of forest.

NEWS FROM THE GRANT BIRTHPLACE

by Loretta Fuhrman

Loretta Fuhrman is the curator of the Grant Birthplace which just recently held a ceremony to celebrate its official listing on the National Historic Register.

Our program was held here at the Grant Birthplace on October 17, 1998. Diane Zimmerman, President of Historic New Richmond, introduced everyone. Steve Gordon presented me with a signed certificate of recognition from the Governor of Ohio. Rose Vesper, our state representative presented Mary Campbell with a bouquet of red carnations for working so hard and long on the project. (Almost 31 years.) Rose presented Diane Zimmerman with a lovely framed document signed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and also by Rose herself. It was a lovely day. The sun was shining brightly and the temperature up in the seventies. We served coffee, tea and homemade cookies to everyone. There were about 50 to 60 people.

Historic New Richmond is starting up a new committee to oversee and help the Grant House in the future. Meetings are held at the Grant House once a month. We are writing up new bylaws and proposals as of now.

For further information about the Grant Birthplace contact Loretta at 1-800-283-8932.
The Grant House, built as one of the permanent winter quarters of Columbia Barracks, was originally built of logs with siding added in the 1870's. Grant did not live in this house but resided in a house nearer the river. He did however spend time in the house as it was regimental headquarters. The house was named for Grant when he visited the barracks after his world tour. It is now a museum.

Photos courtesy of James E. Richards

Grant House on Officer's Row, looking west, Ft., Vancouver, 31 Oct 1997.

Second floor balcony, rear, Grant House, showing restored exterior walls on left and original log walls on right, looking SW, 31 Oct 1997.
FROM THE BATTLEFIELD

Major General Grenville Dodge was a civil engineer from Council Bluffs, Iowa who offered his services to the Union during the Civil War. In the words of Ulysses S. Grant, Dodge was "a most capable soldier" and "an experienced railroad builder." During the war he improved supply lines in Tennessee and was instrumental in the Union's advance on Atlanta. After the war he directed the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. General Dodge related the following incidents from the Vicksburg Campaign in his Personal Recollections of President Abraham Lincoln, General Ulysses S. Grant, and General William T. Sherman, 1914.

As soon as Grant moved down the Mississippi, and placed his army on the levees, he had determined in his own mind that bold campaign to the south and rear of Vicksburg. Knowing he could not make it until the waters fell in April and May, he utilized the time and kept his troops busy in several plans for passing Vicksburg, or by using the Yazoo tributaries to make a landing to the north and east of Vicksburg. He had very little faith in these projects, although they tended to confuse the enemy and mislead them as to his real plan of campaign. He kept his own counsel as to his plan, knowing it would receive no support in Washington, but probably draw forth an order prohibiting it, and also receive criticism from all military sources, as the plan was an absolute violation of all the rules and practices of war, as it virtually placed his entire command at the mercy of the enemy, cutting loose from all the bases of support and supply, and that he must take with him all the rations and ammunition he would use in the campaign. Nevertheless, he never hesitated, though urged to abandon it by Sherman, and all of his ablest Generals. Grant says he was induced to adopt the plan first, on account of the political situation, which was threatening, the anti-war element hoping to carry the elections, and the Confederates were forcing our troops as far or further north than they were when the war commenced; that to abandon his campaign and return to Memphis, the nearest point from which he could make the campaign by land and have a base and railroad from it, would be very disheartening to the Government and the people.

Grant ran the batteries and landed his forces on the east side of the Mississippi, and faced the enemy with less men than they had, and in the entire campaign, when he planted himself in the rear of Vicksburg, had only 43,000 men while the enemy had 60,000*. In comparison as to boldness, the total ignoring of all former practices of warfare, the accepting of the probability of nine chances of failure to one of success, this campaign has never been approached in its originality and the wonderful grasp of its possibilities and great fighting success. Viewing it from this standpoint, it cannot be compared to any other known campaign. After Vicksburg the Confederacy was doomed, and Gettysburg coming at the same time, lifted the nation from the slough of despondency to the highest point of hope, enthusiasm, and certainty of success.

As soon as this campaign was over Grant wished to move immediately on Mobile, but that fatal policy that had formerly scattered a great army and relieved Grant of his command, was renewed here. He lay quiet, his great abilities unutilized, until the disaster at Chicamauga forced the Government to again use him to retrieve our misfortunes, and again snatch victory out of a threatening great disaster.

I will give you an object lesson which shows Grant's ideas of duty. While I was stationed at Corinth, looking after that flank of the army, Grant hammering away at Vicksburg, and Rosecrans pounding Bragg in Tennessee, it was necessary for me to be awake. I was in a dangerous position, and the enemy could have destroyed either campaign by establishing themselves in my position. I wrote Grant at Vicksburg that I thought with 12,000 men I had I could penetrate, by the Tennessee Valley, to the rear of Bragg and destroy his communications and supplies concentrated in that valley, and force him to retreat. I received no answer to my letter, and began to think I had made a fool of myself, and swore inwardly that it was the first and last time I would ever be caught in such a boat. A long time (to me) after the suggestion, General Oglesby, who was commanding that district, received a dispatch from General Grant instructing him to have Dodge carry out the movement suggested in his last letter, and that was all the order I received. I marched up the Tennessee Valley, destroying the railways and stores, which the Confederate Government estimated to be in value not less than $20,000,000. Of course Bragg threw before and behind me such forces as he could spare, so that the rumors which reached Corinth were generally that I was captured, whipped, etc. These reports were all fired into General Grant, and no doubt he became disgusted at them; but he finally wired in answer to them that; "If Dodge has accomplished what he started out to do we can afford to lose him." That settled the question; they sent Grant no more rumors. The enemy was distracted by the moving out from my
column of General Straight and his mounted force, who had been sent out upon his celebrated raid by General Rosecrans. Grant, in commenting on it afterwards, said to me that he knew the troops I had, and he had no doubt they would be heard from before they were captured or destroyed. I did not start out to fight but to destroy, and he thought the distraction of the movement of Straight would puzzle the enemy so much that I would be able to get out of harm’s way before they could concentrate any force on me which I could not whip.

General Grant, on July 27, 1863, at Vicksburg, wrote a letter to the War Department, asking for the promotion of four Brigadier-Generals to Major-Generals, and nine Colonels to Brigadier-Generals, as a reward for this campaign stating they had all rendered valuable service in the field, and would fill the places for which they were recommended well. Although I was not directly before Vicksburg, but had an independent command upon General Grant’s flank, he placed me at the head of the list. One would suppose that after such a great victory, such a recommendation would have received immediate attention, but it did not, and only one officer, Colonel John A. Rawlins, Grant’s Chief of Staff, received any promotion- he was made a Brigadier-General. And not for a long time- not until Generals Grant and Sherman made additional and urgent requests, were any promotions made. In my case, General Grant, when he was called to Washington by President Lincoln, made it a personal matter. Right after the Battle of the Wilderness he urged it again, but it was not until June, 1864, during the Atlanta campaign, that I received the promotion, when Lincoln wired Sherman that he had appointed me and relieved him from his trouble. I was a Brigadier General with a Corps command in the Atlanta campaign, which was very embarrassing, as there were Major-Generals in the same army commanding Divisions. President Lincoln, when he promoted me, paid me this very high compliment: “General Dodge has been more strongly recommended, and his promotion more persistently urged by his superior officers than any other man I have made a Major-General.”

Grant, McPherson (who commanded the Army of the Tennessee), and Sherman (who commanded the Military Division), all urged that I be promoted to a rank fitting my command, and this is the explanation of Lincoln’s dispatch. The fact is that after three years of war, the western army got very few promotions for its splendid work, and not until Grant was made Commander-in-Chief was he able to give to his subordinate commanders in that army the rank he said they were entitled to.

During 1863 General Lorenzo Thomas, the Adjutant-General, had visited the western armies and given officers authority to raise negro regiments at Corinth. I had officered and mustered in two regiments. Grant had not made known his views, although he gave every facility to officers recruiting these regiments, but on Aug. 9th, 1863, General Grant wired President Lincoln from Vicksburg as follows:

*General Thomas has gone again to the Mississippi Valley with a view of raising colored troops. I have no reason to doubt you are doing what you reasonably can upon the same subject. I believe it is a source which, if vigorously applied now, will soon close this conflict. It works double-in weakening the enemy and strengthening us. We were not fully ready for it until the river was open; now I think at least 100, 000 men ought to be placed along its shores, reliving all white troops to serve elsewhere.*

Right after the Vicksburg campaign General Grant proposed occupying the Rio Grande frontier, because the French had entered Mexico, and to use immediately the rest of his army to capture Mobile and move on Montgomery and Selma, Alabama, and perhaps Atlanta, Georgia, using the Alabama River from Mobile to supply his column; but again his great victorious army was scattered. Parke, with the Ninth Corps, was returned to East Tennessee, and Sherman, with the Fifteenth Corps, was started from Memphis to march along the Memphis & Charleston Railway to the Tennessee River, and up that river slowly, evidently for the purpose of being in position to aid Rosecrans in his campaign against Bragg.

*This figure is believed to be high for Confederate totals. For further evaluation consult The Campaign for Vicksburg by Edwin C. Bearss, Grant Moves South by Bruce Catton, The Web of Victory: Grant at Vicksburg by Earl Schenck Miers, and The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant.*
A SPIRITED ANECDOTE

by Donna Neralich

One of the most popular stories of the Civil War era is a clever anecdote in which Lincoln allegedly commented on the brand of whiskey that Grant drank. The story is often repeated in conversations and has been quoted in books and biographies from 1868 to the present.

Albert D. Richardson, noted 19th century writer and author of the 1868 biography, *A Personal History of Ulysses S. Grant*, was one of the first to relate the incident. According to Richardson, Lincoln responded to complaints of Grant's drinking by stating that Grant "has given us about all our successes, and if his whiskey does it, I should like to send a barrel of the same brand to every general in the field."

In an 1897 biography of Grant, James Grant Wilson attributed the following quotation to Lincoln: "I wish that all the generals would drink Grant's whiskey." Charles King, author of the 1914 biography, *The True Ulysses S. Grant*, referred to the remark as a "whimsical expression" by Lincoln.

Most recently the quotation appeared in the preface to the 1998 book, *Cigars, Whiskey and Winning: Leadership Lessons from General Ulysses S. Grant*, where the author, Al Kaltman, illustrated his title with descriptive excerpts related to each of the words – cigars, whiskey and winning.

Grant biographers are not the only writers who have quoted the story. Benjamin P. Thomas, a well-known Lincoln biographer, and Albert Bigelow Paine, friend and biographer of Mark Twain, have also included the anecdote in their writings.

Perhaps the most plausible account of the anecdote comes from Chaplain John Eaton in his 1907 book, *Grant, Lincoln and the Freedmen*. Eaton related that during the war when he met with the President to report his progress in employing the newly freed slaves, Lincoln asked him if he had heard about the raid on Washington. "Well," said Mr. Lincoln, "you know a raid in Washington is different from what you military men mean by a raid. With you it is an attack by the enemy, -- the capture of soldiers and supplies; with us it is an attack by our friends in Congress seeking to influence a change in policy. A company of Congressmen came to me to protest that Grant ought not to be retained as a commander of American citizens. I asked what was the trouble. They said he was not fit to command such men. I asked why, and they said he sometimes drank too much and was unfit for such a position. I then began to ask them if they knew what he drank, what brand of whiskey he used, telling them most seriously that I wished they would find out. They conferred with each other and concluded they could not tell what brand he used. I urged them to ascertain and let me know, for if it made fighting generals like Grant, I should like to get some of it for distribution."

The acclaimed historian, Bruce Catton, paraphrased Eaton's account in his 1960 book *Grant Moves South* and then made the following comment in a footnote: "Lincoln's remark about Grant's whiskey has come to be regarded as myth, apparently because similar stories have been told about other soldiers in earlier wars. Eaton, however, is accepted as a reliable source on other matters; the story
is precisely the sort of story Lincoln would tell; and this writer can see no good reason for doubting its authenticity."

Lincoln biographer Stephen B. Oates was one of the first to offer evidence supporting the apocryphal nature of the story. In his 1977 book, *With Malice Toward None*, Oates quoted Lincoln's telegrapher, Albert Chandler who apparently recollected Lincoln's reply to a gentleman inquiring about the veracity of the popular story. According to Chandler, Lincoln replied, "That would have been very good if I had said it; but I reckon it was charged to me to give it currency."

True or not, the story lives on - the important fact being that that Lincoln trusted Grant's abilities and ignored persistent rumors about his drinking.

Sources:
Wilson, James Grant. *General Grant*. New York, 1897.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site (White Haven)

Saturday, February 6, 1999- "Museum Collection Exhibition".

Ulysses S. Grant NHS possesses an interesting array of letters, archeological artifacts, and other items in its museum collection. Visit the site from 1:00-4:00 p.m. for a close up look at the collection, hosted by Ranger Karen Miller. For more information call (314) 842-3298.
ESTIMATES OF GENERAL GRANT

The following are excerpts from the second of two articles that appeared in the June, 1885 issue of Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly.

GENERAL GRANT’S PLACE IN HISTORY
by Richard B. Kimball

There are many who flatly deny that [Grant] is a great military commander. The tenor of the criticisms of his detractors has a wide range, and embraces much that is absurd and contradictory. Of course no one can deny to him certain achievements in the field. But we are told "It was all luck." "He blundered into it." "It was owing to the splendid officers under him." "He could have done nothing with Lee had he taken the matter at the start: after an army had been created and disciplined, Grant came in and reaped the laurels." "He greatly outnumbered Lee in all his battles. There was no generalship about it; pure stubbornness." "Butchery." Others less censorious mildly suggest that it cannot be that General Grant’s military fame rests on a perfectly solid foundation, since so much is said in disparagement of it.

Who are they who circulate such criticisms? What do the criticisms amount to?

To answer these questions, let us look at the situation of the country at the time the tremendous contest commenced between its two great divisions; divisions separated by what has been termed the color line – in other words, the line between the Slave States and the Free States. It was a war in support of paramount ideas. On one side... to preserve the Union. On the other, to preserve the institution of slavery... There was a party at the North, not large but noisy, which favored the proposition [that the South should be permitted to go in peace] rather than that the country should embark in war. Many of these still survive, and it is among this class that the detractors of General Grant are to be found.

The facts are simple and concise. From his colonelcy to brigadier-general, from brigadier-general to major-general, from the command of a regiment in 1861 to the command of the united Departments of the Ohio, the Cumberland, and the Tennessee, in 1863, his promotion came step by step, in natural sequence, as battle after battle was won and permanent success...
secured. These different encounters, from the first march on Paducah to the contest at Chattanooga, have become household words throughout the land. They made strong the heart of the nation, discouraged by unfortunate results elsewhere. For the great Southwest had been brought under control of the Union Armies, the Mississippi opened to New Orleans, the Confederacy cut in two and its strength broken beyond repairs.

General Grant's successive promotions could not be due to the lack of brave and competent military men in the field. At Chattanooga the officers under his command embraced such names as Sherman, Thomas, Hooker, Burnside, McPherson, Slocum, and many others. He had been placed at the head of this brilliant array of military talent because he had by his achievements earned the position. And he had earned it by the universal assent of his associates.

The campaign finished, General Grant received a commission as Lieutenant-general, and proceeded to Washington. In May, 1864, he commenced his campaign in Virginia. In April, 1865, General Lee surrendered. The end crowns the work. His four years of hard, unremitting service proved General Grant to be a commander of deliberate judgment, cool, prompt, tenacious, and undisturbed by surprises; at the same time quick in conception and rapid in execution. If he met with checks, he was never outgeneraled, never defeated.

In 1868 General Grant was elected President of the United States, and re-elected in 1872 to the same office. The heat and rancor of party strife, developed in a contest for control of the Government and its patronage, rather than in support of any individual, make it difficult to form correct judgments of recent Administrations. Grant certainly entered on the discharge of his duties with an earnest desire to serve the country. The affairs of state were in the main well conducted, and the National Debt reduced in regular installments. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution was adopted, the Alabama Claims disposed of, and the Northwestern Boundary Question settled. His motives were unquestionably pure, and his efforts in the right direction.

A new era of goodwill was inaugurated (since slowly but surely developed) when General Grant paroled the whole of Lee's army and allowed every man to go to his own home. It had its immediate practical development when, on General Lee's suggestion to General Grant that the horses of the cavalriymen were the private property of the soldier, Grant replied: "They are included in the terms of the surrender; but I will instruct my officers who receive the paroles to allow the men to retain their horses and take them home to work their little farms."

This circumstance did more to win back the South than a volume of codes and constitutions, and it demonstrated the noble qualities of General Grant as a man, just at the time when he had won his renown as the great Captain of the Age.
To the Editor of the Shoe and Leather Reporter

By the time I had secured the West Point appointment for my oldest son, I was forty-five years old, and had thus far, worked very hard. My next son, Simpson, three years and a half younger, was of feeble constitution, so that we did not expect he would ever be able to work at the tanning business; his health allowed, however, of his taking charge of the store for several years, and he died in September, 1861 at the early age of thirty-six. The two next were girls, and my next boy was but four years old. Our last was a female infant. So I could see but little prospect for help in my own family, and concluded to quit the tanning and engage in some lighter and less laborious business.

I then sold out and wound up my affairs, and after meeting all the expenses of the support and education of my increased family, I found myself worth eleven thousand dollars. But before I had disposed of my stock, I had, on more mature reflection, concluded I had better stick to what I was acquainted with, rather than engage in a new business of which I had no knowledge, and at which I might fail and lose what I had made. The business of the country was greatly depressed for the want of a currency, and the prices of farm products, in which the pay was so often tendered, were very low. I concluded, therefore, that I must try a different plan of operations; that I must venture more and make money faster, and abandon the barter system. You will excuse me if I here relate a little incident calculated to give you an idea of the bartering practice of the country, and how I treated it.

There was an old Englishman in the neighborhood by the name of Boler; he styled himself a poet, was occupied as a school teacher, and was very poor. He always signed his published productions “Back Woodsman”. About forty years ago he wrote me for leather for a pair of shoes. His letter was in rhyme, and was published in our village paper called the Castigator. It commenced:

Jesse R. Grant, beloved friend,

I cannot go, and therefore send
This little letter, and less news,
To let you know I'm out of shoes

I did not keep a copy, and have forgotten the rest of the poetry, but the author went on to say he wanted strong cow-hide, broad straps, bottoms six inches wide, and not such as were worn by the dandies; that cash was scarce with him, but he would pay in hides or grain. I knew that he had neither. I said:

Backwoodsman, Sir, my aged friend,
These lines in answer back I send,
To thank you for your rhyming letter,
Published in the “Castigator”.
The story of your worn out shoes
Is, to a tanner, no strange news;
We often hear that story told
By those whose feet are pinched with cold.
When they apply to get some leather,
To guard against the frosty weather;
That cash is scarce they oft complain,
And wish to meet their bills with grain;
Others, who wish to be supplied,
Will promise soon to bring a hide.
Such pay by us is greatly prized,
But is not always realized.
Now, one thing here I must relate,
As written in the Book of Fate’
As you’ve grown old, so you’ve grown poor,
As poets all have done before;
And yet no one of common sense
Will charge that fault to your expense,
Nor otherwise dispose the weight
Than charge it to a poet’s fate.
Dame Fate with me, though, need not flint
For I’m not poet enough to hurt.
The world, ‘tis said, owes all a living’
What can’t be bought, then, must be given,
And, though I have not much to spare,
I can at least give you a pair-
Or leather for a pair-of shoes,
That you may sally forth for news,
And when another pair you want,
Just send a not to -J. R. Grant

The backwoodsman called and got his leather, but I never saw the hides or grain.

To return to the narration of my business experience:
Our hearty thanks we humbly send,
To every customer and friend,
Who has stood by us to the end
With free goodwill;
And say, in future, we intend
To serve you still.
Now one thing more we have to say—
To those who owe, we want our pay;
then send it on without delay.
The full amount—
For still we have some debts to pay
On firm account.
Yours etc.  J. R. Grant
Covington, Ky, 1868

After twelve years of this partnership, and finding myself fifty-nine, within one year of the time I had proposed to retire, and now having two sons able to take charge of the business, one twenty-seven, the other eighteen, Mr. Collins also having two sons able to render him able assistance, we dissolved.

On the final winding up our business, we invoiced $100,000. I took the Ohio tannery, and Mr. Collins had the Galena store. A part of our advertisement of dissolution was as follows:

In eighteen hundred forty-one,
Our partnership was first begun;
We two then became as one,
To deal in leather;
Suited to every stage of weather,
Ere dry or rain;
But now the time has come to sever—
And we are twain.

E. A. Collins is still on hand,
And occupies his former stand,
In which he always held command,
To buy and sell;
As matters now are being planned,
May he do well.
J. R. Grant, the old “off wheel,”
Does yet a strong desire feel
To do some more,
Expect, then, within the field,
A brand new store.

LITTLE KNOWN FACTS

Ironically, although Grant had fifteen years in the regular military, his initial offer to serve in the Civil War was overlooked by the War Department. His letter was not found until after the war was over.